

Deputy Foreign Minister Kazem Gharibabadi Rejected the French President's Claim that the Iranian Foreign Minister's View and Proposal Lack Domestic Support, and Said FM's Proposal Represents the View of the System of the Country and Enjoys Domestic Consensus

IRAN NEWS

An Aide to the Foreign Minister said that Britain, France, and Germany Are Trying to Raise Tensions by Triggering the Snapback Mechanism That Immediately Reinstates All Previously Lifted UN Security Council Sanctions Against Iran

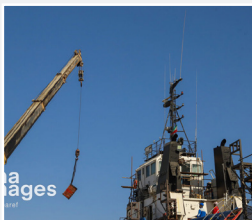
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Industry Ministry Urged to Clarify Allegations of Israeli Goods Being Sold in Iran



TEHRAN - The head of Iran's Intifada and Quds Day Headquarters has said that questions regarding the possible sale of Israeli products in Iran should be directed to the Ministry of Industry, Mine and Trade, as it is the competent authority to provide accurate lists of companies and their ownership structures.

Ramazan Sharif made the remarks in an interview with IRNA following discussions raised by certain individuals and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) about the possibility of Israeli-linked goods being sold in the Islamic Republic or profits from these goods being transferred to Israel.

According to Sharif, Iranian NGOs have repeatedly publicized lists of companies associated with Israel, including those operating under cover names in Iran. "People and traders are largely aware of these companies, and avoiding their goods has become something of a public practice. As far as we know, this is being observed—unless, through deceptive multi-layered arrangements, a company can be traced back to the Zionist regime," he said.

Sharif emphasized that identifying and announcing such companies is a responsibility that falls to the Ministry of Industry. "These companies often operate under Arab-sounding names, but their real ownership or significant shares belong to the Zionist regime," he stated.

He contrasted Iran's approach with that of some neighboring countries, saying that while certain governments outwardly ban the sale of Israeli goods, in practice their trade ties with Israel remain intact. "Because many of these governments lack strong popular legitimacy and fear Zionist influence against them, they pay lip service to bans but maintain commercial relations," he added.

Iran Requires \$500b Investment to Complete High-Return Projects



TEHRAN - The head of Iran's Organization for Investment and Economic and Technical Assistance has announced that between \$400 and \$500 billion in financing is required to complete major projects with significant foreign exchange returns.

Speaking at a meeting with investors, Deputy Minister of Economy Mehdi Heidari emphasized that attracting private sector investment is the only effective solution to address imbalances across critical sectors. He stated that while demand for water, electricity, and soon natural gas continues to grow due to population increases, limited public funding and chronic budget deficits have left essential infrastructure projects unfinished, with completion times averaging more than 20 years.

"This year has been designated as the year of investment," Heidari said. "The outcome of our discussions must be tangible progress for the country and solutions to its challenges."

Heidari stressed that the Ministry of Economy is focused on facilitating investment and that the private sector must take the lead, as the government lacks the capacity for further capital spending. He also noted that attracting investors requires innovative methods and a business-oriented approach.

Iran Condemns E3's Move to Snapback UN Sanctions



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran has condemned as "unlawful, unjustified and provocative" the European attempt to restore United Nations sanctions under the so-called snapback mechanism.

The reaction came after the UN Security Council on Friday voted against a draft resolution that would have permanently lifted sanctions linked to Iran's nuclear program.

Nine members opposed the measure, while Russia, China, Pakistan, and Algeria backed it, and two abstained. As a result, the UN sanctions against Iran will be re-imposed by September 28 if no agreement is reached.

In a statement, the Iranian Foreign Ministry said the move amounted to "an unlawful, unjustified and provocative act" that undermines ongoing diplomatic processes.

The Ministry said, "The destructive actions by three European countries (Britain, France and Germany) to reinstate the annulled UN Security Council resolutions come at a time when Iran's safeguarded nuclear facilities were attacked and damaged by the Israeli regime and the United States."

It said these attacks violate the UN Charter, endanger international peace and security, and severely undermine the foundations of the non-proliferation regime.

The Ministry added that, "The three European countries not only declined to condemn these aggressive actions by Israel and the United States but also perpetrated a dual violation by abusing the JCPOA dispute resolution mechanism."

The statement outlined five points, noting that the European action completes the process of reviving canceled resolutions and "seriously weakens" diplomacy.

The ministry highlighted that the full responsibility for the consequences lies with the United States and the E3, which "misrepresented facts, made unfounded allegations, and pressured some non-permanent Council members."

The measure lacked consensus and went ahead despite strong opposition from several Council members, damaging both the credibility of the body and the non-proliferation regime, noted the statement.

Iran's nuclear program is peaceful and reflects the will of its people to pursue scientific and technological progress, noted the ministry, adding that Tehran will defend its rights, including through diplomacy, while "reserving the right to respond to any unlawful measures."

Finally, it urged all responsible members of the international community to reject the European action and avoid granting it legitimacy.

Iran has long argued that the E3 had no legal standing to invoke snapback, given their own violations of the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) following the US withdrawal in 2018. Tehran notes that it only reduced its nuclear commitments in response to that breach.

On Friday, Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi held a phone conversation with Rafael Grossi, head of the International Atomic Energy Agency.

The two discussed the status of Iran's cooperation with the agency, the snapback dispute, and the Council's deliberations.

Araqchi criticized the "politicized atmosphere" in the IAEA Board of Governors' sessions, insisting that Iran's cooperation with the agency remains "purely technical and within the framework of international regulations."

He stressed that as a responsible nation, Iran has consistently pursued diplomacy and technical cooperation to resolve nuclear issues but "will not accept unfair political measures and pressure that could fuel further tensions."

The conversation came as Iran and the IAEA had signed a new cooperation agreement on September 9.

The agreement with the IAEA followed a suspension of cooperation after Israeli-American attacks on Iranian nuclear facilities in June. That suspension had been mandated by the Iranian Parliament in protest at an anti-Iran resolution passed by the agency's Board of Governors, which the Israeli regime used as a pretext to launch its US-backed aggression against Iran.

Tehran had already warned that the implementation of the new agreement hinged on stopping the so-called snapback mechanism.

When the Trigger Dropped, a New Season Began

The adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 1929 on June 9, 2010, which imposed unprecedented and comprehensive sanctions against Iran, targeted a country that at the time was under peak international pressure. These sanctions subjected Iran's economy to its most severe test. Yet every crisis also carries the seeds of opportunity for transformation and reconstruction. The way forward for Iran lies not in isolation, but in adopting a smart, multi-dimensional strategy focused on "economic resilience," "active diplomacy," and "strengthening domestic cohesion."

Sanctions inevitably deliver an initial shock to the economy, but the response to this shock can lay the foundations of a stronger, more resilient economic system.

Sanctions act as a form of compulsory "trade protection," shielding domestic industries from foreign competition. Iran can seize this opportunity by making targeted investments in sectors where it enjoys comparative advantages—such as generic pharmaceuticals, petrochemical products, nanotechnology, and biotechnology. Supporting startups and knowledge-based companies can ignite engines of innovation and job creation.

Today's world has turned into multipolar economic blocs. The Islamic Republic of Iran can further reduce its dependence on the West by strengthening bilateral and multilateral trade agreements with regional powers and neighbors (such as Eurasia, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the Eurasian Economic Union, and the BRICS group). Expanding north-south and east-west transit corridors could make Iran an undeniable commercial hub.

Although these have been long-term goals, sanctions highlight their inevitability. Investment in tourism (historical, cultural, and ecotourism), advanced agriculture, and processing industries can generate new sources of income and reduce the economy's vulnerability.

It must be acknowledged that diplomacy is the most effective weapon for neutralizing sanctions. Continued constructive and controversy-free cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to demonstrate the peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear program is vital. This will enhance Iran's moral and legal legitimacy and attract more allies. The Islamic Republic's intelligent vision must convey its rightful narrative more effectively to the world. Promoting scientific, cultural, and peace-oriented achievements can balance Iran's image in global media and prepare public opinion for changes in hostile policies.

The legal challenge of confronting unilateral and illegal sanctions in international courts, such as the International Court of Justice, can not only weaken these sanctions but also raise the political costs for their enforcers.

Another crucial lever for the system in this confrontation is domestic stability, which is the key to resisting external pressures.

It must be recognized that during sanctions, economic impacts disproportionately affect the lower-income strata of society, reducing resilience. The government must protect the most vulnerable through strong social safety nets, targeted subsidies, and inflation control, thereby preserving social cohesion.

Sanctions limit national resources. Therefore, the optimal use of these resources requires decisive action against corruption and improved economic governance. Transparency in managing national revenues increases public trust and economic efficiency.

Iran's greatest asset is its educated, young, creative society committed to national sovereignty. Investment in education, research, and healthcare not only guarantees the country's long-term resilience but also nurtures the next generation of leaders, inventors, and entrepreneurs who can turn challenges into opportunities.

With intelligent understanding, Resolution 1929 was not—and is not—an end, but rather a historical turning point and a step up. History has shown that Iran and Iranians possess an astonishing ability to adapt and overcome challenges.

The way out of this tight corner is neither surrender to pressure nor retreat into isolation, but rather the pursuit of an active and intelligent strategy built on three pillars:

- Strengthening the foundations of the domestic economy,
- Smart engagement with the world,
- Preserving social cohesion.

With this outlook, Iran can not only overcome the pressure of sanctions but also build a more diversified, resilient, and advanced economy for the future. The path is not easy, but with national determination and the use of collective wisdom, it is certainly achievable. At the same time, one cannot overlook those responsible for these conditions, nor leave unchallenged the intrigue and conspiracy woven in hidden chambers of thought.

The enemy's "fifth column" in any country acts as a driver aligned with the adversary, and naturally, intelligent confrontation, along with clarifying and enlightening public opinion about the future, will herald a more unified tomorrow and lasting cohesion.



Byt Hamid Reza Naghashian

Iran Says UNSC Damages Diplomacy After Voting Against Sanctions Relief

TEHRAN - Iran's envoy says the United Nations Security Council's decision not to permanently lift sanctions on Iran undermines the world body, disrupts diplomacy and endangers the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

Iran's ambassador and permanent representative to the United Nations, Amir Saied Iravani made the remark on Friday after the 15-member Security Council voted against a resolution that sought to block the re-imposition of deep economic sanctions on Tehran over its peaceful nuclear program.

He said Iran sees no obligation to implement the Security Council's "hasty, unnecessary and illegal" move.

The responsibility for the decision's dire consequences fully rests with the United States, Britain, France and Germany, the three European signatories to the 2015 nuclear agreement – formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), he added.

The envoy emphasized that the US and European troika leveled alleged accusations against Iran while enabling the criminal attacks of the Israeli regime on the Islamic Republic's nuclear facilities, which were monitored under the comprehensive safeguard agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

"Iran's nuclear program will never be destroyed by a bomb, halted by sanctions and diverted from its peaceful path," Iravani emphasized.

"The door to diplomacy is not closed. However, it will be Iran, not its enemies, that decides with whom and on what basis to engage," he pointed out.

China and Russia have both rejected the Europeans' bid to reimpose UN sanctions on Iran. In a joint statement, the two countries, which are parties to the 2015 Iran nuclear deal, officially announce that they consider the 'snapback' of UN sanctions against Iran as 'illegal and invalid', and that they will not abide by them



IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

The two said they will continue to do business with Iran as usual, regardless of UN sanctions.

China's UN Ambassador Fu Cong said the attempt to trigger snapback was "detrimental to the diplomatic effort towards an early resumption of talks, and may even bring about catastrophic consequences that are impossible to foresee and forfeit years of diplomatic efforts in one stroke."

He said, "China maintains that hastily pushing for a vote on the draft resolution might exacerbate confrontation further and is not conducive to the resolution of the issue."

Calling for restraint and diplomacy, the Chinese envoy said he doubted "whether the E3 have the right to invoke the snapback mechanism."

The United Nations Security Council has voted against permanently lifting economic sanctions on Iran over its peaceful nuclear program.

The 15-member Council on Friday did not adopt the draft resolution drafted by South Korea, as its president, after nine member states voted against it, meaning re-imposing European sanctions by September 28 if no major deal is reached beforehand.

Russia, China, Pakistan and Algeria voted in favor of the draft text while two abstained.

On August 28, Britain, France and Germany – signatories to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) – notified the UN Security Council that they had invoked the so-called snapback mechanism, a 30-day process to restore all UN sanctions against Iran.

Iran rejected the illegitimate move by the European troika, given the US's unilateral withdrawal from the JCPOA and the trio's alignment with unlawful sanctions against Iran instead of fulfilling their own commitments.



Iran and Armenia Sign Postal Cooperation Agreement

TEHRAN (IRNA) - The national postal companies of Iran and Armenia have signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to expand cooperation in postal services, improve logistics, boost e-commerce, and increase the volume of exchanges between the two countries.

According to the Ministry of Information and Communications Technology, the agreement was signed on Thursday evening by Mohammad Ahmadi, CEO of Iran's National Post Company, and Shushan Aleksanyan, CEO of Armenia Post, on the sidelines of the 28th Universal Postal Union (UPU) Congress.

The MoU aims to strengthen and develop postal cooperation within the framework of the social and economic development programs of both nations.

Iran-Romania Trade Faces Decline Despite 2024 Growth



TEHRAN - According to a report by the International Affairs Department of Iran's Chamber of Commerce, while trade between Iran and Romania grew by 10 percent in 2024, Iran's exports to Romania have fallen by 28 percent and imports from Romania have dropped by 48 percent over the past three years.

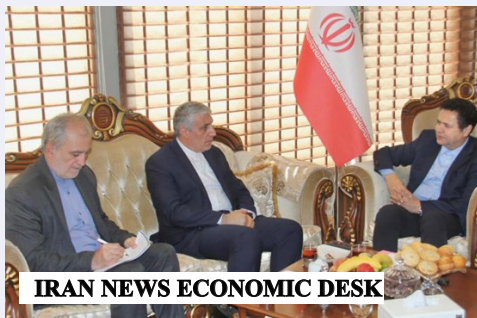
The report notes that total trade between the two countries in 2024 reached around \$700 million, marking a year-on-year increase largely driven by Iran's rising demand for Romanian grain and machinery.

Romania, as a member of the European Union and a gateway to Eastern European markets, has the potential to serve as a strategic trading partner for Iran. However, despite opportunities in energy, agriculture, food industries, and engineering services, trade figures indicate a concerning downward trend. This decline comes at a time when Romania's overall foreign trade with the rest of the world has remained stable or even grown.

The data shows that Romania's imports from Iran decreased by 28 percent over the past three years, even as Romania's global imports continued to rise. Iran's share of Romania's import market fell from 0.057 percent in 2022 to 0.04 percent in 2024, reflecting a weakening position for Iran.

Meanwhile, Romanian exports to Iran dropped by more than 48 percent during the same period. In contrast, Romania's total exports to global markets remained steady, ranging between \$96 billion and \$100 billion. The report attributes the decline to falling demand in Iran for Romanian goods as well as structural barriers affecting bilateral trade.

Strategic Steps in Iran-Azerbaijan Joint Projects



TEHRAN - The Vice President of Iran Chamber of Commerce has announced that the launch of a joint logistics hub and the construction of an Iran-Azerbaijan industrial park remain among the key resolutions of the Joint Economic Commission and presidential agreements between the two countries, awaiting implementation.

According to Iran Chamber Online, Hossein Pirmoazen made the remarks on Thursday, September 17, during a meeting with Iran's ambassador to Baku. He emphasized that the establishment of a logistics terminal and a joint industrial zone in the Bilesavar Free Trade-Industrial Zone was among the commitments made during the Iranian president's recent visit to Azerbaijan. Pirmoazen noted that while Azerbaijan demonstrates strong expertise in negotiations and drafting agreements, the country moves cautiously and at a slower pace in implementing joint projects, requiring persistent follow-up.

Highlighting the call by Ardabil provincial officials for completing infrastructure in the free trade-industrial zone, Pirmoazen underlined that tax exemptions, easier import and export processes, investment security, and access to international markets make the creation of a joint industrial park essential to meet investment and business demands in the region.

"The value of bilateral commissions lies in their commitments and resolutions," Pirmoazen stated. "These two projects have been part of the Joint Commission's agreements for years, but challenges such as tensions between Azerbaijan and Armenia have stalled their implementation. With the recent presidential visit to Baku and improved bilateral relations, the time has come to push forward with determination."

Pirmoazen suggested that the industrial park could be built on lands equally allocated by both countries—50% in Iran and 50% in Azerbaijan—adding that Ardabil province is fully prepared to provide all necessary infrastructure, including water, electricity, and gas, with professional expertise.

He also described the planned Ardabil-Baku railway connection as a milestone for boosting agricultural exports from the region. "This rail link can ease exports to Russia and significantly cut transportation costs. Beyond economic benefits, it can also strengthen regional international cooperation," he noted.

Non-Oil Exports Grow 12% Under Current Gov't



TEHRAN - Trade diplomacy under Iran's 14th administration has opened new opportunities for exporters and importers, leading to a 12% rise in non-oil exports and a 1% drop in imports, according to the Ministry of Industry, Mine, and Trade.

Official figures show that non-oil exports climbed from \$50 billion to \$56 billion during the first year of the current administration, starting from July of last year. Petrochemical and oil-based industries accounted for the largest share with \$27.2 billion, followed by the mining and mineral industries at \$13.5 billion. Industrial goods contributed \$8.8 billion, while agriculture products added \$6.1 billion.

A four-year review of trade trends indicates that imports rose from \$56 billion in July 2021 to \$62 billion by July 2025. However, during the past year, imports fell from \$64 billion to \$62 billion, marking a slight decline under the 14th administration.

Analysis of mineral and steel-chain exports reveals that 23 million tons were exported last year due to production imbalances, preventing completion of the value chain and eliminating a potential \$4 billion boost in exports. The total value of metal products sold domestically exceeds \$35 billion, generating \$14 billion in non-oil exports and reducing the country's reliance on imports of raw materials for other industries.

The Ministry of Industry, Mine, and Trade, along with the Trade Promotion Organization of Iran, has shifted from a passive to a proactive and strategic trade diplomacy approach. Expanding ties with neighboring countries and implementing trade agreements with the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) and BRICS have paved the way for broader export opportunities.

The EAEU—comprising Belarus, Kazakhstan, Russia, Kyrgyzstan, and Armenia—was founded in 2014. Iran's free trade agreement with the bloc took effect in May this year, eliminating tariffs on about 87% of goods exchanged between Iran and the five member states. The deal is expected to stimulate foreign trade, lower customs and export costs in agriculture, industrial goods, and energy, attract investment, and

enhance the competitiveness of Iranian products.

A roadmap has been drafted to facilitate implementation, covering mechanisms for problem-solving, harmonization of trade rules, logistics improvements, mutual recognition of standards, joint trade information platforms, and dispute resolution systems.

The Trade Promotion Organization has held awareness seminars on the agreement in 15 provinces, briefing thousands of traders. Official statistics show that Iran's exports to EAEU countries rose by 22% in the first four months of this year compared to the same period last year, reaching \$532 million.

Meanwhile, Iran's export basket has become more diversified, with a greater share of higher value-added goods driven by expanded production and investment in mining and general industries.

Key measures in the trade sector also include reviving the Supreme Council for Non-Oil Export Development, drafting a national industrial strategy, enhancing value chains, strengthening standardization processes, and issuing new banking guarantees to raise trade credit limits. The government has also approved new regulations for organizing and monitoring border trade activities such as small-scale trading and maritime exchanges.

Reviving the council is expected to address barriers, reduce bureaucratic hurdles, focus on private sector challenges, and provide stronger support to exporters. With its significant role in economic policymaking, the council is positioned to help shape trade policy, facilitate the implementation of agreements such as those with the EAEU and BRICS, and expand cooperation with neighboring markets.

The Ministry of Economic Affairs and Finance, along with the Central Bank, is also expected to play a critical role by managing foreign currency allocations to ease trade difficulties faced by exporters and importers.

Private Sector Urged to Strengthen Role in Supplying Food Industries to Neighboring Markets

TEHRAN - The head of the Food Industry Commission of Iran's Chamber of Commerce has called on the private sector to play a more active role in meeting the demand for food products in neighboring countries. He emphasized that provinces like Kerman, with their diverse resources in agriculture, mining, carpet weaving, and other sectors, possess unique advantages that can be leveraged for regional trade.

Speaking at a meeting with the Industry Commission of the Kerman Chamber of Commerce, Rashid Azizpour highlighted macroeconomic indicators in agriculture and processing industries, stressing the importance of private investment in these sectors. "Private sector actors, especially in the food industry, have already stepped forward," he said, noting that their participation provides a platform for Iran to expand its share in the food markets of neighboring states.

Azizpour also underlined the structural work of the Food Industry Commission, which follows issues such as currency obligations, training programs, and greater attention to artificial intelligence in food industry applications. He pointed out that food industry commissions have already been established in four provincial chambers and suggested that Kerman could also benefit from creating its own specialized body to systematically address challenges and opportunities.

During the meeting, Majid Hojjat Nowghi, head of the Kerman Chamber's office in Rafsanjan, drew attention to the underdeveloped agricultural value chain in the province. "This chain has been poorly managed," he said, "but with support from the national Food Industry Commission and the cooperation of private food industry actors, Kerman's agricultural products could reach their full potential."

Nowghi highlighted the effects of climate change on agricultural output, calling for stronger training programs for farmers and food industry stakeholders. He stressed the urgent need to create value-added chains in agriculture and proposed that the national Food Industry Commission play a leading role.

Projecting a harvest of 70,000 tons of pistachios in Rafsanjan this season, with an estimated \$500 million in foreign exchange earnings for the country, Nowghi noted that such revenues must be managed responsibly. "These are intergenerational resources," he said, "and



the Food Industry Commission can ensure that they are optimally utilized."

He also referred to the province's production of strategic crops such as dates, pistachios, and citrus fruits. However, he cautioned that exports face significant obstacles, including currency obligations, administrative bureaucracy, and sudden policy changes. "The issue of foreign exchange commitments has been raised repeatedly, but the Central Bank has yet to take serious action," he argued. He added that the imposition of a one-percent customs tariff on water-intensive crops has increased costs for farmers and producers, further complicating their efforts.

The meeting also featured comments from Mozaffar Mohammadi, head of the Import and Domestic Trade Commission of the Kerman Chamber. He stressed that Kerman is one of Iran's largest producers of food products, many of which are export-oriented. Despite this, producers and exporters face mounting challenges. "Issues such as currency commitments and logistics have not improved but have worsened over time," he said. Mohammadi pointed to frequent regulatory changes and dollar fluctuations as major obstacles for both producers and exporters in Kerman and across the country.

He criticized the Central Bank's continued insistence on enforcing foreign exchange commitments despite Iran's negative economic balance. "On paper it may sound good, but in practice it is damaging," he said. According to Mohammadi, the current enforcement has forced many established exporters out of the market. He further noted that Iran's absence from the World Trade Organization (WTO) and trade tariff barriers add to the difficulties faced by the country's exporters. He urged the Food Industry Commission to pursue these issues more aggressively at the national level.

The session concluded with a review of several other issues, including the creation of food processing industries in southern Kerman, training programs in branding, modernization and support for local food industries, financial facilities for producers, adoption of modern marketing techniques, encouragement of healthy competition to improve product quality, and closer coordination with national associations to strengthen agricultural value chains.

Iran–Vietnam Economic Ties Enter New Phase of Development



TEHRAN - A senior official from Iran's Ministry of Industry, Mine and Trade highlighted the friendly relations between Iran and Vietnam, stressing the need to further expand bilateral cooperation, and announced that efforts are underway to establish a direct flight between the two countries.

Farshad Moqimi, speaking at the ceremony marking the 80th anniversary of Vietnam's independence and National Day, underlined the importance of raising the level of economic and trade relations in line with existing capacities, adding that Iran–Vietnam ties are entering a new phase.

Moqimi described the strategy of expanding relations with neighboring and Asian countries as a new identity in Iran's foreign policy discourse. He emphasized that the Islamic Republic of Iran attaches special importance to its relations with ASEAN, one of the most successful regional organizations in Southeast Asia, in which Vietnam is an active member.

Stressing the need to strengthen genuine multilateralism in today's international environment, he said: "We believe that in the current international order, where some major powers seek to impose their will on others by disregarding international laws and regulations, it is necessary to uphold recognized international principles and strengthen the path of true multilateralism. We are confident that ASEAN, as a successful bloc in the Global South, will play a prominent role in this regard."

Referring to high-level visits between Iranian and Vietnamese officials and nine rounds of the Joint Economic Commission held so far, the deputy minister described bilateral economic relations as growing. He added that preparations are underway for the 10th Joint Commission meeting in Vietnam, expressing hope that it will take place soon.

Iran, Russia Explore Creation of Joint Aviation Company



TEHRAN - The Grozny International Airport in Russia's Chechen Republic announced that during a recent visit of a Russian delegation to Tehran, discussions were held on establishing a joint Iranian-Russian aviation company, as well as launching new flight routes from Grozny to Tehran and onward to third countries.

According to Russian media reports on Friday, the delegation was headed by the Director General of Grozny International Airport and included representatives from various Russian aviation and tourism agencies. The group's agenda focused on strengthening aviation ties with Iran and exploring new opportunities for bilateral and transit cooperation.

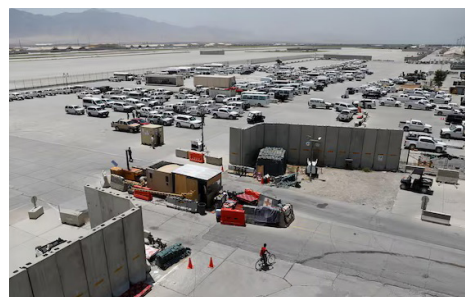
While in Tehran, the Russian delegation met with executives of Mahan Air, which had previously operated direct weekly flights to Grozny. Talks centered on resuming regular Tehran–Grozny services and creating transit connections for passengers traveling through Tehran to destinations such as China, Saudi Arabia, Thailand, Vietnam, India, and other countries. The two sides also discussed the possibility of launching direct flights from Grozny to countries within the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).

A key highlight of the negotiations was Russia's proposal to establish a joint aviation company with Iran. The envisioned entity would oversee comprehensive aircraft operations and maintenance while also providing training programs for aviation personnel, including pilot instruction and flight services training.

Tourism development was another major theme of the talks. An Iranian tourism company presented Russia's delegation with an overview of Iran's rich cultural and historical attractions, including sites listed on the UNESCO World Heritage roster.

U.S. in Talks With Taliban on Re-Establishing Counterterrorism Forces to Afghan Base

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - The United States is in discussions with the Taliban about re-establishing a small U.S. military presence at Afghanistan's Bagram air base as a launch point for counterterrorism operations, the Wall Street Journal reported on Friday, citing people with knowledge of the negotiations. The Journal, citing a U.S. official, also reported that the talks - headed by Special Envoy for hostage response Adam Boehler - include a potential prisoner exchange, a possible economic deal and a security component.



France Warns Mayors Against Flying Palestinian Flags



PARIS (Dispatches) - As France prepares to recognize Palestinian statehood at the UN General Assembly next week, the French interior ministry on Friday ordered prefects to oppose the display of Palestinian flags on town halls and other public buildings to protect "the principle of neutrality". Several opposition politicians from the left have denounced the order.

France's interior ministry has ordered prefects to oppose the display of Palestinian flags on town halls and other public buildings next week when Paris is set to formally recognise the Palestinian state.

"The principle of neutrality in public service prohibits such displays," the interior ministry said in a telegram, a copy of which was seen by AFP on Friday. Any decisions by mayors to fly the Palestinian flag should be referred to courts, the interior ministry said.

Israel's war on Gaza is a hot-button issue in France, and it is not uncommon to see flags hanging out of windows in Paris and elsewhere.

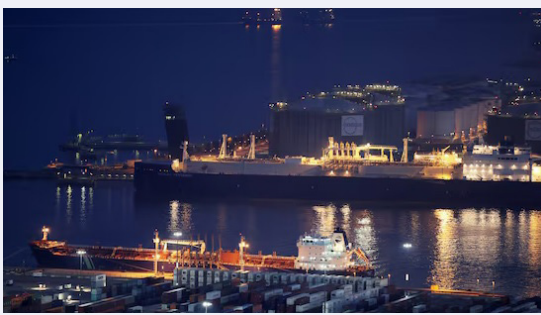
Several French mayors have already announced their intention to display the Palestinian flag on their town halls next week.

On Monday, France is set to formally recognise Palestine's statehood at the United Nations General Assembly.

The warning from the interior ministry came after Socialist leader Olivier Faure called for the Palestinian flag to be flown on town halls on Monday, when Jewish worshippers also celebrate the Rosh Hashanah holiday, the Jewish New Year.

However, the interior ministry said any such display would amount to "taking sides in an international conflict".

EU Aims to Bring Forward Russian LNG Import Ban



BRUSSELS (Dispatches) - The European Union plans to ban Russian LNG imports into the bloc a year earlier than envisaged as part of a 19th package of sanctions against Moscow, EU officials said on Friday, a change that follows pressure from U.S. President Donald Trump.

"The revenues from fossil fuels sustain Russia's war economy. We want to cut these revenues," said European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, as she announced the proposal, which requires unanimous approval from EU governments.

"So we are banning imports of Russian LNG into European markets. It is time to turn off the tap," von der Leyen said.

An EU sanctions proposal kicks off intense discussions among the 27-member countries to reach an agreement. Russia-friendly governments in Hungary and Slovakia have held up previous packages before a compromise was finally reached.

Kaja Kallas, the EU's foreign policy chief, said on X that the new proposal aimed "to speed up the phase-out of Russian liquefied natural gas (to be complete) by 1 Jan 2027".

The EU had previously planned a phase-out by January 1, 2028, but Trump has repeatedly urged the bloc to end Russian energy purchases faster before he does anything further to pressure Moscow.

Beyond LNG, or liquefied natural gas, the proposed sanctions would also target more of Russia's shadow tanker fleet and cryptocurrency.

Von der Leyen and Kallas did not give full details of the new package, but officials said it would also target Russian and central Asian banks, Chinese refineries and special economic zones, a customs loophole used by Moscow to import dual-use goods for its military.

Russian Fighter Jets Enter NATO Member Estonia's Airspace



PARIS (Dispatches) - Three Russian military jets violated NATO member Estonia's airspace for 12 minutes in an "unprecedentedly brazen" incursion, the country's foreign ministry said Friday. Estonia is set to request urgent NATO talks over the incident, which the EU's top diplomat Kaja Kallas called an "extremely dangerous provocation".

Estonia summoned a Russian diplomat to protest after three Russian fighter aircraft entered its airspace without permission Friday and stayed there for 12 minutes, the foreign ministry said, just over a week after NATO planes downed Russian drones over Poland and heightened fears of a spillover from the war in Ukraine.

Foreign Minister Margus Tsakhna said that Russia violated Estonian airspace four times this year "but today's incursion, involving three fighter aircraft entering our airspace, is unprecedentedly brazen".

Russian officials did not immediately comment on the incident. Estonia will request urgent NATO talks over the violation of its airspace, the Baltic nation's prime minister said on Friday.

"Such violation is totally unacceptable. The Government of Estonia has decided to request NATO Article 4 consultations," Kristen Michal said on X.

Under Article 4, a NATO member can convene urgent talks when it feels its "territorial integrity, political independence or security" are at risk.

The Russian MIG-31 fighters entered Estonian airspace in the area of Vaindloo Island, which is a small island located in the Gulf of Finland in the Baltic Sea, the Estonian military said in a separate statement.

The aircraft did not have flight plans and their transponders were turned off, the statement said, nor were the aircraft in two-way radio communication with Estonian air traffic services.

Italian Air Force F-35 fighter jets, currently deployed as part of the NATO Baltic Air Policing Mission, responded to the incident, according to the statement.

"Russia's increasingly extensive testing of boundaries and growing aggressiveness must be met with a swift increase in political and economic pressure," Tsakhna, the foreign minister, said.

The Russian chargé d'affaires was summoned and given a protest note, a ministry statement said. Meanwhile the Polish Border Guards on Friday said two Russian fighter jets violated the safety zone of the Petrobaltic drilling platform in the Baltic Sea and the country's armed forces and other services had been notified.

A NATO spokesperson said the military alliance had scrambled aircraft to intercept Russian jets violating Estonian airspace,

accusing Moscow of "reckless behaviour".

"Earlier today, Russian jets violated Estonian airspace. NATO responded immediately and intercepted the Russian aircraft," alliance spokesperson Allison Hart posted on X.

"This is yet another example of reckless Russian behaviour and NATO's ability to respond."

France, which has a battalion, including fighter jets, based in Estonia, called Russian warplane incursions into the Baltic states a blatant violation of international law.

"This incursion into Estonia is unprecedented for more than 20 years," the foreign ministry said in a statement.

The EU's top diplomat Kaja Kallas accused Moscow of an "extremely dangerous provocation" shortly after Estonia announced the violation of its airspace.

Kallas, a former Estonian prime minister, warned on X that the latest Russian violation on NATO's eastern rim "further escalates tensions in the region", adding that the EU "stands in full solidarity" with Estonia.

"This marks the third such violation of EU airspace in days and further escalates tensions in the region," Kallas said. "We will continue to support our member states in strengthening their defences with European resources. Putin is testing the West's resolve. We must not show weakness."

Friday's incident came just over a week after Poland shot down Russian drones that violated its airspace.

Russia's violation of Poland's airspace was the most serious cross-border incident into a NATO member country since the war in Ukraine began with Russia's all-out invasion in February 2022. Other alliance countries have reported similar incursions and drone crashes on their territory.

The airspace violation comes three days after Russian and Belarusian military forces ended joint military exercises, called Zapad 2025.

The developments have increasingly rattled European governments as US-led efforts to stop the war in Ukraine have come to nothing.

Earlier Friday, the head of Britain's foreign intelligence agency said there is "absolutely no evidence" that Russia's President Vladimir Putin wants to negotiate peace in Ukraine.

Richard Moore, chief of the Secret Intelligence Service, or MI6 as it is more commonly known, said Putin was "stringing us along".

UN Chief Says World Should Not Be Intimidated By Israel

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres told AFP the world should not be "intimidated" by Israel and its creeping annexation of the occupied West Bank.

In an interview at UN headquarters in New York, he also called for more ambitious climate action saying that efforts to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels were at risk of "collapsing".

Guterres spoke to AFP ahead of the UN's signature high-level week at which 10 countries will recognise a Palestinian state, according to France—over fierce Israeli objections.

The meeting of more than 140 heads of state and government, which paralyzes a corner of Manhattan for a week each year, will likely be dominated by the future of the Palestinians and the war in Gaza.

Israel has reportedly threatened to annex the West Bank if Western nations press ahead with the recognition plan at the UN gathering.

But Guterres said, "We should not feel intimidated by the risk of retaliation."

"With or without doing what we are doing, these actions would go on and at least there is a chance to mobilise international community to put pressure for them not to happen," he said.

"What we are witnessing in Gaza is horrendous," Guterres said as Israel threatened "unprecedented force" in its ongoing assault on Gaza City.

"It is the worst level of death and destruction that I've seen my time as Secretary-General, probably my life and the suffering of the Palestinian people cannot be described—famine, total lack of effective health care, people living without adequate shelters in huge concentration areas," he said.

Israel's far-right Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich has called for annexation of swaths of the West Bank with an aim to "bury the idea of a Palestinian state" after several countries joined the French push on statehood.

But Israel's staunch ally the United States has held back from any criticism of the war in Gaza or vows to annex the West Bank—and exoriated its allies who



have vowed to recognise a Palestinian state.

Also on the agenda will be efforts to combat climate change which Guterres warned are floundering.

Guterres said efforts to cap climate warming at 1.5 Celsius above pre-industrial levels were in trouble.

The climate goals for 2035 of the countries that signed the Paris Agreement, also known as Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), were initially expected to be submitted several months ago.

However, uncertainties related to geopolitical tensions and trade rivalries have slowed the process.

"We are on the verge of this objective collapsing," he told AFP. "We absolutely need countries to come... with climate action plans that are fully aligned with 1.5 degrees (Celsius), that cover the whole of their economies and the whole of their greenhouse gas emissions," he said.

"It is essential that we have a drastic reduction of emissions in the next few years if you want to keep the 1.5 degrees Celsius limit alive."

Less than two months before COP30 climate meeting in Brazil, dozens of countries have been slow to announce their plans—particularly China and the European Union, powers considered pivotal for the future of climate diplomacy.

Efforts to combat the impact of man-made global warming have taken a backseat to myriad crises in recent years that have included the coronavirus pandemic and several wars, with Guterres seeking to reignite the issue.

The UN hopes that the climate summit co-chaired Wednesday in New York by Guterres and Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva will be an opportunity to breathe life into efforts ahead of COP30.

Guterres said he was concerned that Nationally Determined Contributions, or national climate action plans, may not ultimately support the goal of limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels.

"It's not a matter to panic. It's a matter to be determined, to put all pressure for countries."

Containing global warming to 1.5C compared to the pre-industrial era 1850-1900 is the most ambitious goal of the 2015 Paris Agreement. But many scientists agree that this threshold will most likely be reached before the end of this decade, as the planet continues to burn more and more oil, gas, and coal.

The climate is already on average 1.4C warmer today, according to current estimates from the European observatory Copernicus.

Ukrainian Forces Inflict Heavy Losses on Russia in Counteroffensive

KYIV (Dispatches) - Ukrainian troops pressed on with a frontline counteroffensive around two cities in the east of the country, with President Volodymyr Zelenskyy saying heavy losses were being inflicted on Russian forces.

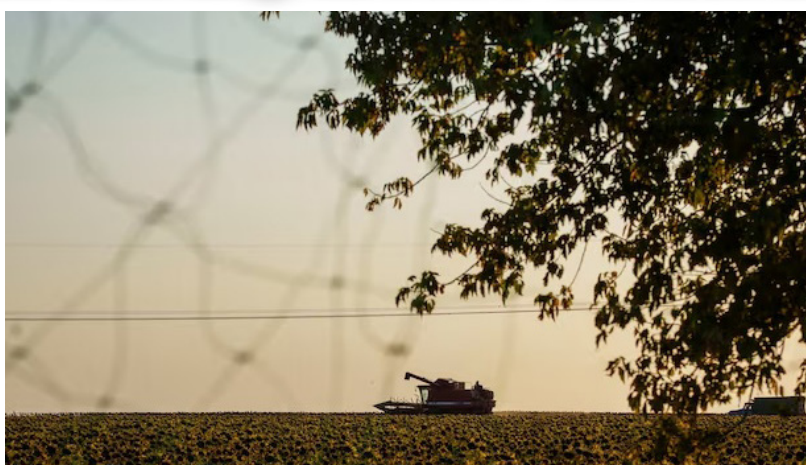
Russia said its forces had captured two new villages in their slow advance through Ukraine's east and south, but its Defense Ministry made no reference to the Ukrainian drive near the towns of Pokrovsk and Dobropillia.

Zelenskyy, in his nightly video address, said the counteroffensive had disrupted Russian plans in their longstanding objective of seizing the logistics center of Pokrovsk.

"It was there that one of the most important directions of the Russian offensive was located, and they were unable to launch a full-fledged offensive there. Our military is destroying their forces," Zelenskyy said.

"The Russians have suffered significant losses, and the 'exchange fund' for our country has been significantly replenished - every day more Russian prisoners are being taken."

Ukraine's top commander, Oleksandr Syrskyi, wrote on Telegram that his forces



had advanced from three to seven km (two to four miles) through Russian defences.

In his video address, Zelenskyy also said Ukrainian forces were holding their positions around Kupiansk -- an area of Ukraine's northeastern Kharkiv region that has been subject to Russian assaults for months.

On Thursday, Zelenskyy said Ukrainian forces had recaptured seven settlements and 160 square km (62 sq miles) around Pokrovsk and Dobropillia since the operation began. Another nine settlements had been "cleared" of enemy forces.

The Donetsk region, which is only partially occupied by Russia but which Moscow wants Kyiv to abandon before any peace settlement, remains the site of the most intense fighting.

Russia's Defence Ministry said its forces had seized two more localities -- Muravka, southwest of Pokrovsk, and Novoivanivka, further southwest in the Zaporizhzhia region.

The general staff of Ukraine's military listed Muravka as one of several settlements where its forces had halted 87 attacks near Pokrovsk.



Europe Takes Laver Cup Lead as Alcaraz Waits in Wings

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - World number one Carlos Alcaraz says he's rested and recharged after his U.S. Open triumph and looking forward to contributing to Team Europe's bid to retain the Laver Cup.

The Spaniard will ease into the competition between Team Europe and Team World when he anchors the Friday night session playing doubles alongside Czech Jakub Mensik against a Team World US duo of Taylor Fritz and Alex Michelsen.

"I have battery enough just to pull off good things here in the Laver Cup," Alcaraz said.

And Team Europe were off to a quick start thanks to victories for Casper Ruud and Mensik in the first two singles matches at Chase Center, home of the NBA's Golden State Warriors.

Norway's Ruud got Europe off the mark with a 6-4, 7-6 (7/4) victory over big-serving American Reilly Opelka.

Ruud claimed his fifth victory in as many matches against Opelka and took his Laver Cup singles record to 4-1.

"I was in the same position last year and lost the opening match so it's good to get some revenge and begin strong for Europe," Ruud said.

Mensik then survived a late hiccup to beat Michelsen 6-1, 6-7 (3/7) 10-8.

The Czech was broken as he served for the match in the ninth game of the second set. But after dropping the second-set tiebreaker he regrouped to win the 10-point match tiebreaker.

That meant Laver Cup newcomer Joao Fonseca of Brazil would be chasing Team World's first point when he faced Italian Flavio Cobolli in the night session opener.

At 19, Fonseca will be the youngest player to compete in the Laver Cup.

Europe have won five of the first seven editions, although Team World triumphed the last time the competition co-created by Swiss great Roger Federer was held in North America, in Vancouver in 2023.

There have been a few changes since Alcaraz sealed Europe's win in Berlin last year. France's Yannick Noah has taken over from Bjorn Borg as captain of Team Europe while American Andre Agassi is the new captain of Team World, succeeding John McEnroe.

Friday's matches are worth one point apiece. Saturday's schedule also features three singles and one doubles match, all worth two points apiece.

Sunday's schedule opens with doubles, followed by three singles as required -- all worth three points.

The first team to reach 13 points claims the cup.

Italy Overcome Ukraine to Reach Billie Jean King Cup Final

SHENZHEN (Dispatches) - Holders Italy fought back from the brink to beat Ukraine 2-1 and return to the Billie Jean King Cup final, with Jasmine Paolini battling past Elina Svitolina to level the tie before partnering Sara Errani to seal a decisive doubles win.

Victory at the Shenzhen Bay Sports Centre Arena helped the Italians become the first team to reach three successive finals in the elite women's team competition since the Czech Republic won three straight titles from 2014-16.

Paolini and Errani secured the tie by beating the Ukrainian pair of Marta Kostyuk and Lyudmyla Kichenok 6-2 6-3 to draw loud applause from the sizeable crowd of Italian fans who remained in their seats until close to midnight in southeastern China.

"Today the crowd was amazing. We had the support of all these guys, the Italian fans. We enjoyed a lot playing in this competition," said Errani, who joined the fans in chanting the traditional rallying cry of "Jia You" - literally "add oil".

"It was a tough day for Jasmine. She's doing an incredible job. It's not easy to play doubles after a tough singles match but she's so strong.

"I'm really happy to have her as my doubles partner."

Former world number three Svitolina earlier squandered the chance to hand her country an unassailable 2-0 lead in the tie and the opportunity to fight for their maiden trophy on Sunday after she went down 3-6 6-4 6-4 to an inspired Paolini.



The 31-year-old broke Paolini in the third game of their contest with some aggressive hitting from the baseline and took the opening set with a sizzling backhand winner to leave five-times champions Italy on the ropes.

Paolini responded by breaking early in the second set but Svitolina took control from there and was a point away from a 5-2 advantage, before losing her way again with a flurry of uncharacteristic errors to surrender the set.

Having levelled the clash, Paolini fought fiercely to hold in an eight-deuce game early in the decider and went ahead 4-2 before Svitolina clawed her way back, but the determined Italian would not be denied as she raised her level again to prevail.

The tie-levelling victory came after Ukraine's Kostyuk took apart Elisabetta Cocciaretto 6-2 6-3, leaving world number eight Paolini needing a first victory over Svitolina in their third meeting to keep her team alive.

Paolini, who won Olympic gold partnering Errani in Paris last year and the French Open doubles title in June, said that she was confident heading into the deciding contest despite playing for two hours and 25 minutes.

"We've been playing doubles together for the last two years, more or less every tournament," Paolini said.

Brazil's Bonfim Takes First Global Gold in Tokyo 20km Walk

TOKYO (Dispatches) - Brazil's Caio Bonfim blazed to his first world title in the 20 kilometre walk on Saturday after a time penalty for world record holder Toshikazu Yamanishi opened up the race in the closing stages.

Crossing the line in one hour, 18 minutes and 35 seconds, 34-year-old Bonfim picked up his second medal of the world championships after a silver in the 35km last week.

China's Wang Zhaozhao won silver in 1:18.43, while Spain's Paul McGrath trailed by two seconds to take bronze.

Competing in his eighth world championships, Bonfim took the lead from McGrath inside the last two kms and held on to earn Brazil its first global title in men's race walking.

Meanwhile Maria Perez collected her second gold medal of the world championships in the 20 kilometre walk on Saturday to secure an unprecedented double-double after also successfully defending her 35km title last week.



The 29-year-old Spaniard slapped her singlet in delight as she crossed the line in one hour, 25 minutes and 54 seconds, a comfortable 12 seconds ahead of Mexico's Alegna Gonzalez in second place.

It was a redeeming moment for Perez, who had missed out on an Olympic medal by eight seconds at the same National Stadium in 2021.

"I am the happiest woman in the world," Perez said. "I did not come here today to make history in women's sport. I just came to improve myself and not to focus on the time.

"Last time in Japan, I left with a bitter-sweet taste. I am leaving happy now," said Perez, who also did the walk double in Budapest two years ago.

To the delight of the roaring crowd, Nanako Fujii just held off charging Ecuadorian Paula Milena Torres at the line to finish third and secure Japan a first global medal in the women's walk events.

Tabilo, Nakashima Triumph in Chengdu



LONDON (Dispatches) - Chilean qualifier Alejandro Tabilo advanced to the quarterfinals at the Chengdu Open by cruising past Italian No. 2 seed Luciano Darderi 6-4, 6-3 in China.

Tabilo, who's fallen outside the top 100 in the world rankings after rising as high as No. 19, smashed 12 aces with only one double fault, went 4-for-4 saving break points and converted both his opportunities to break Darderi's serve.

Another big winner was No. 4 seed Brandon Nakashima, who ousted defending champion Juncheng Shang of China 7-5, 6-3. Nakashima will meet fellow American Marcos Giron in the next round after Giron eliminated No. 8 seed Lorenzo Sonego of Italy 6-4, 6-4. Tabilo will face Aussie Christopher O'Connell, a 6-2, 6-4 victor over China's Yi Zhou.

Elsewhere in China, Sebastian Korda sent a whopping 20 aces past Australia's Adam Walton in a 7-5, 6-3 victory in the Round of 32.

The full Round of 16 is now set after Friday's action, which also saw 2024 runner-up Zhizhen Zhang get past Yunchaokete Bu 6-7 (2), 6-4, 7-6 (3) in an all-Chinese showdown.

Australian qualifier Rinky Hijikata upset No. 5 seed Camilo Ugo Carabelli of Argentina 7-6 (2), 6-4. Other winners included Frenchmen Arthur Cazaux and Valentin Royer and Australia's Aleksandar Vukic.

Arsenal Will Learn From Lewis-Skelly's Haaland Taunt



LONDON (Dispatches) - Mikel Arteta expects Arsenal to learn from Myles Lewis-Skelly's provocative celebration against Manchester City last season when the title rivals clash at the Emirates Stadium.

Arsenal defender Lewis-Skelly mocked City striker Erling Haaland by coping his zen goal celebration after scoring in the Gunners' 5-1 rout of Pep Guardiola's side in February.

With Arsenal falling just short in title fights with City in 2023 and 2024, the rivalry between the clubs has grown increasingly acrimonious.

Haaland had taunted Arsenal boss Arteta by urging him to "stay humble" following a stormy 2-2 draw at the Etihad Stadium earlier last season.

Teenager Lewis-Skelly, who has not started a game for Arsenal this season, was criticised for his inflammatory celebration.

Asked if he had spoken to his players about their goal celebrations ahead of Sunday's showdown, Arteta told reporters: "Well that was done, and that's part of it.

"There have been a lot of celebrations or non-celebrations in the past from a lot of teams. The experience is to learn and grow as well and we certainly learnt from that."

Arsenal were without Bukayo Saka, Martin Odegaard, and Ben White for their midweek Champions League win against Athletic Bilbao in Spain.

Arteta hinted Arsenal could face City without the trio after revealing they are yet to train this week.

"If there is a chance it will be after tomorrow's session because they haven't done anything yet. We will have more information tomorrow," he said.

"Everything has been modified so far for them. There are still a few things to clear and we'll have more information on whether they are part of the squad or if they have a chance to be part of the squad."

Arsenal striker Viktor Gyokeres is expected to be available after needing stitches for a head injury sustained following a clash of heads with team-mate Gabriel Magalhães.

Meanwhile, Arteta insisted the sudden departure of one of his key allies following a boardroom reshuffle would not affect his relationship with the club.