

Iran's Intelligence Minister Esmail Khatib Says the Country's Nuclear Enrichment Progress Is Irreversible, Warning That Enemies Are Pressuring Tehran to "Surrender" But Will Not Succeed

# IRAN NEWS

Commander of the Iranian Army's Air Defense Force Says the Country's Air Defense Command, as the Front Line of Defense of Iran, Is at Its Highest Level of Combat Capability and Defense Readiness in Any Situation

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## Iran, Russia Ink \$25b Deal to Construct Nuclear Power Plants



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran and Russia have signed a \$25 billion agreement for the construction of four nuclear power plants as part of a long-term partnership deal aimed at consolidating ties between Tehran and Moscow in various fields.

The executive agreement was signed in Moscow on Friday between Iran Hormoz Company and Russia's Rosatom Project Company for the construction and establishment of four advanced third-generation nuclear power plant units in the coastal town of Sirik in the southern province of Hormozgan.

Nasser Mansour Shariflou, representing Iran Hormoz Company on behalf of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI), and Dmitry Shiganov, representing REP Company, a subsidiary of the state-owned Rosatom, inked the 25-billion-dollar deal in the presence of Kazem Jalali, Iran's ambassador to Russia.

The mega project, which is to be implemented in the Kuhestak district of Sirik region in Hormozgan Province on a 500-hectare plot of land, will have the capacity to produce a total of 5,020 megawatts of nuclear power.

In the signing ceremony, it was announced that the agreement was inked between the two friendly countries, the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Russian Federation, to develop joint cooperation in the peaceful use of nuclear energy.

## Return of Foreign Troops to Afghanistan Threatens Regional Peace



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi says the two-decade U.S. war is behind Afghanistan's current crises, warning that the return of foreign troops to the country "threatens the region's peace and security".

Araqchi made the remarks at a meeting with Chinese, Pakistani, and Russian foreign ministers on Afghanistan.

"The United States' intervention and its two decades of military presence in Afghanistan have brought nothing but disaster and insecurity," he said, adding that the U.S. war has left "countless" victims and fueled terrorism, drug production, corruption, poverty, and displacement in the country.

Referring to the chaotic U.S. withdrawal in 2021, the minister said that it left Afghanistan and its neighbors to face the consequences of the war alone.

"The United States and NATO are responsible for many of the challenges that Afghanistan and the region are facing today," he stressed.

Iran's top diplomat emphasized that Iran firmly rejects any form of foreign political or military intervention in Afghanistan, and any attempts to exploit the country's problems to achieve "geopolitical goals".

"The re-establishment of foreign military bases inside or around Afghanistan would violate its sovereignty, pose a threat to regional peace and security, and fuel extremism and instability," he stated.

## Iran Rejected Unreasonable European Conditions to Avert Snapback

TEHRAN - Iran rejected "unreasonable" European demands in recent talks aimed at averting activation of the UN "snapback" mechanism, Supreme National Security Council Secretary Ali Larijani has said.

Speaking in an interview with Iran's national broadcaster IRIB, Larijani said Tehran had accepted many of the Europeans' conditions to remove excuses for them, but resisted proposals it deemed unacceptable.

"The Europeans proposed conditions that no rational person would agree to," Larijani said, adding Tehran "stood firm" against them.

He explained that Britain, France, and Germany—signatories to the 2015 nuclear deal—had demanded a "new design" for cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in exchange for withdrawing their request to trigger the snapback mechanism. The so-called snapback process, invoked on August 28, will automatically reimpose all UN sanctions against Iran by September 28 unless a new arrangement is reached.

Larijani said the European demand was directly linked to the US-Israeli aggression against Iran in June. "They told us that if you redesign cooperation with the IAEA, we will withdraw the snapback request. This meant we had to set up an entirely new system because nuclear centers were bombed," he said.

This was the first time in history that nuclear facilities had come under military attack which drew no response from the IAEA director general, the Board of Governors or the UN Security Council.

The Israeli regime's June 13 terrorist assault, which continued for 12 days, was later accompanied by unlawful US airstrikes on three nuclear facilities under the supervision of the UN nuclear agency.

Larijani said Iran was prepared, "if security and safety conditions allow," to permit inspections of nuclear centers with precautions. He said a deal reached in Cairo with the IAEA on September 9 was "broadly acceptable," but that European states nonetheless did not withdraw their snapback move.

He said Russia had proposed a six-month delay in activating snapback to allow negotiations; Tehran accepted. He said the Europeans proposed other conditions, including talks with the United States.

"It is interesting that Europe's condition was for us to negotiate with America. That shows the actual weight of these countries," Larijani pointed out.

Iran, he said, was willing to negotiate in a 5+1 format that could include the US, but the Europeans declined and said the matter would be taken to the UN Security Council.

He added that Washington's insistence was not only on reviving nuclear talks but also on expanding them to cover Iran's missile program.

"If you say negotiation must end with what they want, no sensible person will accept it," he said, adding Iran would firmly oppose attempts to curb its missile capability.



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Larijani recalled that under the 2015 deal, Iran was permitted to enrich uranium up to 3.5 percent and, for the Tehran reactor, up to 20 percent.

"Those who had signed the previous agreement suddenly said we should not have any enrichment at all," he said, pointing to another condition set by the countries that failed on their part to adhere to their commitments under the deal in the first place.

Larijani stressed that the US and its allies had specifically demanded Iran cut the range of its missiles to below 500 kilometers.

"This condition means they want to take away the only significant defensive or deterrent capability we have. Naturally, Iran will resist such a condition and not only resist but respond strongly," he said.

He clarified that Iran is not opposed to negotiations in principle. "The problem is not sitting down to talk. No one is against dialogue. But if you say the outcome must only be what they want, no rational person will accept such a negotiation," Larijani

argued.

On the consequences of a snapback, Larijani said any change would be largely in the field of sanctions and that "95%" of sanctions were already in place, with the remaining 5% being of limited practical effect. He rejected the notion that the mechanism would legitimize military action against Iran, noting UN resolutions make "no reference" to authorizing force.

Larijani said Tehran had taken steps to insulate the economy and would use "special mechanisms" in a crisis to prevent pressure from being passed on to people's livelihoods, limiting immediate market turmoil.

He further noted that the snapback mechanism cannot justify military action against Iran. "This mechanism absolutely does not legitimize military operations because none of these resolutions make any reference to military action," he said.

He acknowledged, however, that some countries, especially the United States, might disregard legal constraints as they had done previously, including in the June war.

Larijani said Iran would maintain and strengthen its military readiness and deterrence, noting post-war evaluations had identified weaknesses to be fixed and strengths to be built upon.

"After the war, we carried out evaluations to see where our strengths and weaknesses were. We reinforced the strengths and compensated for the weaknesses. Today, the armed forces enjoy a good deterrent power, and progress in this area is going well," he said.

Larijani reiterated that while Iran has been open to dialogue, it cannot accept conditions that undermine its defense or deny it nuclear rights recognized in past agreements.

"We have tried every path," he said. "But if they insist on unreasonable demands, such as restricting our missile program or banning enrichment, then we must stand against them."

## E3's Snapback Move Will Damage Europe's Int'l Credibility

TEHRAN - The Iranian foreign minister says the "politically destructive" move by Britain, France, and Germany to reinstate UN sanctions against the Islamic Republic will inflict "irreparable damage" on Europe's international standing and credibility, urging the trio to change course.

In an opinion piece published by The Jakarta Post, Abbas Araqchi said the European signatories to the 2015 nuclear deal severely compromised Europe's international position by invoking the so-called snapback mechanism, a 30-day process to restore all anti-Iran sanctions lifted under the US-abandoned Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

"In this venture, the three European states will not only fail to achieve their objectives but will also find themselves excluded from future diplomatic processes," he added.

"If this brief window of opportunity to alter course is squandered, the consequences will be grave and far-reaching for both West Asia and the international system. Such consequences will undermine the integrity and credibility of international agreements and destabilize the foundations of collective security."

The top Iranian diplomat also noted that the three European countries failed to uphold their own commitments under the JCPOA and thus their snapback measure lacks legal and legitimate foundations.

He further cited the unilateral US withdrawal in 2018 and the Europeans' subsequent alignment with Washington's unlawful sanctions as events that compelled Tehran to take lawful remedial steps under the JCPOA.

Meanwhile, Araqchi censured the three European countries for supporting the unlawful US strikes against Iran's peaceful nuclear facilities back in June.

He asserted Iran's inalienable right to the peaceful use of nuclear energy and expressed the country's readiness to engage in constructive and meaningful dialogue on the matter.



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"Iran has consistently demonstrated, with the utmost restraint, its enduring commitment to resolving issues related to its peaceful nuclear activities through diplomacy and negotiation, with the aim of achieving a new and equitable agreement," he said.

"Such an agreement must, with full respect for Iran's sovereignty and the rights of the Iranian people, within the framework of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), address all mutual concerns, including the unjust sanctions that have targeted the livelihood and welfare of the Iranian nation."

Additionally in his article, Araqchi referred to the Egypt-mediated agreement signed between Iran and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) earlier this month.

He said the deal constitutes yet another chapter in Iran's diplomatic efforts to resolve matters related to its peaceful nuclear activities.

The accord "shall remain valid only so long as no hostile actions are undertaken against Iran, including the reinstatement of annulled Security Council resolutions. Otherwise, Iran shall deem its practical commitments nullified," he warned.

Moreover, the Iranian foreign minister underscored the need for unity among Islamic countries in undertaking a comprehensive struggle against Israel as the regime expands its crimes in West Asia.

He also condemned the passivity of international institutions in the face of the Zionist regime's repeated violations of international law.

Israel's recent acts of aggression against five Arab countries, Palestine, Lebanon, Syria, Qatar and Yemen, have once again laid bare the regime's "savagery and expansionist nature in pursuit of its long-standing dream of 'seizing all the lands between the Nile and Euphrates'", he wrote.

## A Different but Ineffective United Nations

This year in New York, the structure and overall format of the speeches at the United Nations General Assembly were different. If we pay attention to the content of this year's speeches, especially those related to major global conflicts—particularly Palestine and Ukraine—we can observe notable differences.

In fact, this difference was not only in the form but also in the nature of the messages and diplomatic tactics.

The intensification of the discourse on bloc alignment and the multipolarization of the world this year made the confrontation between the blocs of power more explicit.

Iran, Turkey, Indonesia, Chile, Colombia, and others condemned the behavior of the United States and the Zionist regime, accusing them of genocide in Gaza, attacks on countries, and the killing of children, women, and civilians.

The West (led by the United States and Europe) emphasized preserving the rules-based international order, condemning Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and supporting Ukraine.

Russia and China strongly referred to being "pressured by the West," to "security threats," and to the need to move toward a "fairer and more multipolar world order." They accused the West of "hypocrisy."

The Non-Aligned Movement and developing countries had a louder voice. They demanded greater attention to issues such as food security, climate change, international debt, and inequality and declared that they do not want to become victims of the rivalry of the great powers. The main message of many of them was: "This war (Ukraine) is not our problem, but its consequences—such as rising grain and energy prices—have affected us."

Although condemnation of war remained strong, there were also noticeable differences in tone and tactics.

The speech of Russia's representative, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, was more defensive and focused on justifying Russia's actions based on "NATO threats." He sought to accuse the West of undermining peace throughout the world and emphasized Russia's determination to continue supporting Ukraine. Yet, an underlying tone often conveyed concern about "war fatigue," the need to find long-term diplomatic solutions, and an emphasis on global peace.

Countries such as Turkey, India, and Brazil emphasized the necessity of achieving "immediate peace" and of restoring the role of diplomacy in achieving peace, without necessarily blaming one side entirely.

Some topics that had been more marginal in previous years became central this year. For the first time, the risks and opportunities of artificial intelligence were widely discussed by world leaders, who called for the creation of international regulatory frameworks.

Thus, it can be clearly stated that this year's speeches were "different," not in their format but in their content and geopolitical context. This difference can be summed up in the statement that the world has become more multipolar than ever before, and the United Nations General Assembly reflected the emergence of these divides.

While the great powers insisted on their own positions, the voices of the Third World countries, which called for solutions to their urgent livelihood crises, were heard more loudly and more seriously than before. This shows that global priorities are changing and that traditional diplomacy is under new pressure.

## Iran Urges UN Chief to Take Action Against U.S. Over Restrictions on Iranian Delegation



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's ambassador and permanent representative to the United Nations has urged the UN chief to take "appropriate" measures, as the United States, the host country of the UN Headquarters, imposed restrictions against the high-ranking Iranian delegation in violation of its obligations.

Amir Saied Iravani made the remarks in a letter to UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres after the US imposed "illegal" restrictions on the freedom of movement of the Iranian delegation's members, including President Masoud Pezeshkian and Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi, who travelled to New York to participate in the 80th Session of the UN General Assembly.



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## Iran Ready to Expand Cooperation With Azerbaijan

TEHRAN - Minister of Energy said there are vast opportunities to strengthen relations between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Republic of Azerbaijan, emphasizing that both sides should take full advantage of these capacities.

According to the Ministry of Energy, Abbas Aliabadi made the remarks during a meeting with Shahin Mustafayev, Azerbaijan's Deputy Prime Minister, highlighting the long history of relations between the two nations. He noted that Iran and Azerbaijan share cultural and social ties, which provide a solid foundation for expanding cooperation in various fields.

Aliabadi stressed that the sense of brotherhood between the Iranian and Azerbaijani peoples is a valuable asset for advancing joint projects. He added that Iran has strong capabilities in power plant development and transmission line projects, with new facilities being inaugurated every week. "We are ready to share these capacities with our neighbors," he said.

## Qom Private Sector Ready for Barter Trade With Pakistani Businesses



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TEHRAN - The private sector of Qom has expressed readiness to launch barter trade projects with Pakistani businesses, a move aimed at reducing reliance on the U.S. dollar and strengthening bilateral commercial ties.

During a meeting between Mohammad Nopoush, Vice President of the Qom Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture, and Muhammad Mudassir Tipu, Pakistan's Ambassador to Iran, Iranian representatives highlighted both the opportunities and challenges facing trade relations.

Nopoush pointed to the long history of friendly relations between Iran and Pakistan, stressing that the potential for expanding cooperation remains high. He invited Pakistani business leaders to visit the Qom Chamber directly to hold talks with local entrepreneurs.

He emphasized that barter trade could provide a practical alternative to dollar-based transactions. However, he also voiced concerns about delays in visa issuance by the Pakistani Embassy, noting that such obstacles had previously hindered opportunities—such as participation in last year's construction exhibition in Karachi.

Heidar Shahnaazzadeh, head of the Coordinating Council of Qom Chamber Commissions, underscored the province's full production capacity—from raw materials to finished goods. He urged that future Pakistani trade delegations to Qom include representatives from all three segments: raw materials, intermediate goods, and final products. According to him, broader cooperation could lead to long-term markets supported by technology transfer, raw material supply, and export growth, provided that banking, customs, and transportation issues are also addressed.

Ambassador Tipu, on his first official visit to Qom, said he was impressed by the scale and quality of the province's industrial and economic capacities, which he described as exceeding expectations. He assured Iranian representatives that the embassy would work to simplify visa procedures for economic actors from Qom, allowing for faster trade exchanges.

The ambassador praised Qom's manufacturing strengths, particularly in home appliances and electronics, and noted that the province's products are competitive internationally. "Professionalism, precision, and quality are evident in your products," he said, adding that such attributes could serve as a strong foundation for future cooperation.

He further emphasized the importance of direct business-to-business contacts, stating that closer ties between Pakistani traders and the Qom Chamber would accelerate collaboration.

Concluding the session, Tipu stated that Qom could become a key hub for Iran-Pakistan trade and stressed that existing economic potential should be leveraged to elevate bilateral relations to a strategic level.

## Iran, EAEU Sign Roadmap for Cooperation in Moscow



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TEHRAN - Iran and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) signed a three-year roadmap for future cooperation at the conclusion of the first joint committee meeting on the implementation of the Free Trade Agreement in Moscow.

According to IRNA, at the EAEU headquarters in Moscow, the document was signed on Wednesday, September 24, 2025, by Iran's Minister of Industry, Mine and Trade, Seyed Mohammad Atabak, and EAEU Trade Minister Andrey Slepnev.

Speaking to reporters after the signing, Atabak said the roadmap outlines the overall framework for upcoming trade and economic cooperation between Iran and the five EAEU member states.

Joined at the press conference by Slepnev and Iran's ambassador to Russia, Atabak noted that the meeting reviewed both past cooperation and future prospects. Sixteen subcommittees presented their reports during the session.

Atabak explained that the roadmap for 2025-2028 sets conditions to improve the implementation of the Free Trade Agreement and boost bilateral commercial ties. He added that the agreement is expected to enhance cooperation in key areas such as infrastructure, logistics, road and maritime transport, customs procedures, halal trade, and digital commerce.

Slepnev highlighted that since the Free Trade Agreement came into effect on May 14, 2025, trade volumes between Iran and the EAEU have grown by around 16% compared with the same period last year. He expressed hope that this upward trend will continue through the end of the year.

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## 28th ELECOMP Exhibition Opens in Tehran

TEHRAN - The 28th International Exhibition of Electronics, Computers, and E-Commerce (ELECOMP) opened today, Thursday, at the Tehran International Permanent Fairground and will continue through Sunday.

According to IRNA, during the four-day event, the exhibition will be open daily from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., welcoming technology professionals, enthusiasts, and investors. Entry is also open to the general public, offering access to the latest achievements in the country's information and communications technology sector.

This year's ELECOMP hosts hundreds of domestic companies alongside 18 international exhibitors, showcasing their newest products, services, and innovations across fields ranging from artificial intelligence and blockchain to big data, advanced hardware, and specialized software.

Featured Sections and Highlights: ELECOM Stars: Spotlighting startups and new businesses, with networking opportunities; ELECOM Games: Presenting the latest digital games and entertainment platforms; ELECOM Talks: Hosting expert panels, workshops, and knowledge-sharing sessions; and AI Pavilion: For the first time, dedicated booths and panels on cutting-edge technologies in machine learning and natural language processing.

Among this year's innovations is a chatbot guide designed to help visitors quickly access exhibitor information, booth locations, and side events.

On the sidelines of the Minister of Communications emphasized the government's legal obligation under the Seventh Development Plan, stating that Iran must raise the digital economy's share of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to 10 percent.

Speaking to reporters during his visit to the opening of the 28th ELECOMP exhibition, Minister Sattar Hashemi noted that the core of the digital economy lies in software and knowledge-based services. He added that relying on domestic expertise will minimize the impact of external pressures such as the so-called "trigger mechanism" on the sector's growth.

Hashemi explained that hardware infrastructure falls into two categories: one produced domestically without major challenges, and another dependent on technology-owning countries. "In the latter case, necessary measures have been taken to mitigate the potential impact of the trigger mechanism, and efforts are ongoing," he said.

The minister referred to the Supreme Leader's emphasis on building a "strong Iran," stressing that knowledge-based and technology-driven companies play a central role in delivering high-quality services to the public.

"Experience has shown that relying on these capacities gives meaning to the concept of a resilient economy," Hashemi said. "Despite undeniable restrictions in

recent years, the determination of youth and elites has created significant new capacities."

Highlighting ELECOMP's role, he added: "This event hosts more than 500 domestic technology companies along with several international firms. Their presence marks an important and positive development for the country. We will continue this path with determination—it is not only our legal duty but also our belief, and our young people have proven capable of achieving great things that were unimaginable just a few years ago."

Hashemi pointed to progress in the eSIM project, explaining that several operators have entered the field in a timely manner. "Some operators have already begun registering users, and the Communications Regulatory Authority is actively pursuing this service so it will soon be available to the public," he said. "We must pursue modern technologies with determination, and we are confident that Iranian youth will succeed on this path."

He also addressed the forthcoming September Internet Quality Report, noting that a system has been developed to provide information by operator, province, and city.

Hashemi emphasized that the ministry has taken active steps across all areas of the digital economy. "There are concerns from stakeholders, especially platforms, but we are in dialogue with them and coordinating with other ministries to address both regulatory and operational issues," he explained.

He noted that the Digital Economy Task Force has recently become more cohesive and active. At its latest session, representatives from the insurance and stock exchange sectors participated to hear the concerns of platforms, and follow-up discussions are ongoing.

Responding to questions about public expectations for better telecommunications and internet services following the recent 12-day disruption, Hashemi said: "Improving quality is a top priority. I hold weekly in-person meetings with operators to review concerns and resolve issues case by case. The Communications Regulatory Authority has also been tasked with organizing multiple meetings and securing commitments from operators to ensure a scheduled program for quality enhancement."

He identified 5G expansion and the deployment of fiber-optic networks as two main pillars of improvement. "Of course, the impact of restrictions on service quality cannot be denied, but these issues are being pursued through multiple parallel efforts," he added.

The minister concluded by expressing hope that with sustained oversight of mobile operators, citizens will experience tangible improvements in internet and phone services by the Persian New Year (Nowruz).

## Russia Grants \$1.6b Loan for Astara Railway Project

TEHRAN - Iran's Minister of Roads and Urban Development, Farzaneh Sadegh, announced that Russia has finalized a \$1.6 billion loan for the construction of the Rasht-Astara railway, a strategic link in the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC). The loan will finance both railway infrastructure and rolling stock, she said.

Speaking to reporters in Gilan Province, Sadegh highlighted the project's significance for regional trade and connectivity.

"The Rasht-Astara railway is the most important development for Gilan Province. Once completed, it will have not only national but also international benefits, driving economic growth across the region," she stated.

According to the minister, the railway will serve as a crucial link for India, the Caucasus, Europe, and neighboring countries, transforming export and transit dynamics across the region.

Addressing concerns about continued Russian financing, Sadegh said: "Two weeks ago, I met with Russia's transport minister, and a tripartite meeting between Iran, Russia, and Azerbaijan is scheduled for next month. Despite regional challenges in recent months, both Russian and Azerbaijani partners have pursued the project with consistent commitment."

She explained that delays in previous years—mainly over land acquisition—had caused some mistrust.

"Until last year, Iran was expected to complete all land acquisitions before Russia's Caspian Construction Company could begin work.



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That didn't happen on time, but over the past year we've acquired 34 kilometers of land and handed it over to the Russians. We're prepared to deliver half of the remaining 80-kilometer route within the next two months," she added.

"I assure everyone: not only has cooperation with Russia remained intact, but earlier obstacles are being resolved."

Responding to questions about freight volume on the future line, the minister projected a capacity of 15 million tons per year.

"Azerbaijan has signed a bilateral agreement with Russia, guaranteeing the transit of 5 million tons through this corridor. The Azerbaijani railway network is already operational and is ready to connect with Iran's new line," she said.

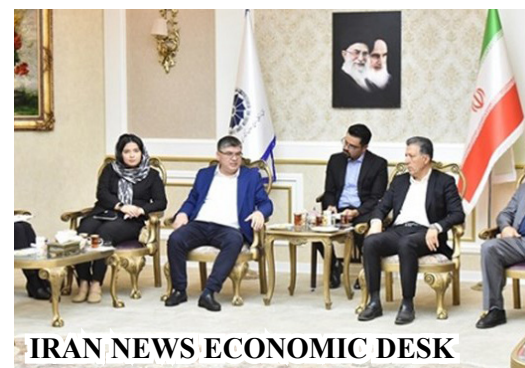
Sadegh emphasized that the upcoming tripartite meeting would also address freight guarantees.

"When the intermediary country [Azerbaijan] commits to 5 million tons, it's clear that Russia will rely on this route. Moreover, Indian traders have been among the strongest advocates for completing the Rasht-Astara railway."

She concluded by noting the economic impact of the 162-kilometer connection:

"Businesses understand how much transportation costs will be reduced and how much easier cargo movement will become once this project is operational."

## Urmia Targets \$100m in Exports to Tashkent by 2026



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TEHRAN - The Urmia Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines, and Agriculture has set a target of \$100 million in exports from Urmia to Tashkent by 2026 (Iranian year 1405), according to chamber president Ghasem Karimi.

Speaking during a joint meeting between West Azerbaijan business leaders and Uzbekistan's diplomatic delegation in Urmia, Karimi said:

"With the implementation of the \$2 billion agreement signed by the presidents of Iran and Uzbekistan, and the removal of banking and transport barriers, West Azerbaijan's share of Uzbekistan's \$56 billion market could rise from the current \$7 million to over \$100 million within a year."

Highlighting Uzbekistan's population of 36 million and cultural and linguistic ties with Iran, Karimi described the country as "Iran's main gateway to the 75-million-strong Central Asian market." He added that if banking and transport infrastructure is modernized, West Azerbaijan alone could generate \$150 million annually from exports of apples, honey, machine-made carpets, and trailers.

Karimi emphasized that West Azerbaijan's current \$7 million share of Uzbekistan's trade represents less than half a percent. "With improved money transfer systems and the launch of a new rail link, our target is to reach \$100 million in exports by 2026," he said.

Uzbekistan's Ambassador to Iran, Fariddin Nasirov, also attended the meeting and announced the signing of a "\$2 billion roadmap" during the recent visit of Iran's president to Tashkent. He confirmed that 40 joint projects in agriculture, mining, and processing industries are ready for implementation in the coming months.

## 30% of Iran's Saffron Exports Go to Italy



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TEHRAN - The head of the Iran-Italy Joint Chamber of Commerce announced that about 30 percent of Iran's saffron exports are sent to Italy, emphasizing Italy's interest in cooperating with Torbate Heydarieh, a major saffron production hub.

Speaking in a webinar between the Iran-Italy Chamber of Commerce and the Islamic Azad University of Torbate Heydarieh, Giuseppe Zampini said on Thursday that the session provided valuable insights on saffron, which will be shared with Italian business leaders.

"We are eager to gain more scientific knowledge about saffron and are grateful to the Islamic Azad University of Torbate Heydarieh for the information provided," Zampini noted.

Meanwhile, the president of the Islamic Azad University of Torbate Heydarieh, Saeed Mirzadeh, highlighted the city's role as Iran's saffron capital and expressed readiness for academic and economic collaboration with Italy. He added that saffron harvesting in the region will begin in about a month, inviting members of the Iran-Italy Chamber of Commerce to visit during the harvest season.

According to data from the Khorasan Razavi Agricultural Jihad Organization, out of Iran's 120,000 hectares of saffron farmlands, 91,000 hectares—about 76 percent—are located in Khorasan Razavi Province. Within this, Torbate Heydarieh and Zaveh counties together account for over 20,000 hectares, solidifying their position as Iran's saffron hub and the "world capital of saffron." Torbate Heydarieh alone holds 9,200 hectares.

Extending within a 50-kilometer radius around Torbate Heydarieh, saffron fields now cover more than 30,000 hectares, representing over 34 percent of Khorasan Razavi's saffron cultivation area. The region produces an average of 4 kilograms per hectare, totaling around 120 tons annually, and ranks first both in Iran and globally.



## Curfew Declared in Madagascar Capital After Violent Protests

ANTANANARIVO (Dispatches) - Authorities in Madagascar on Thursday imposed a dusk-to-dawn curfew in the capital, after protests over frequent power outages and water shortages turned violent, according to a top security official. Police fired teargas to disperse the thousands of mostly youth protesters who were marching and carrying placards, in Antananarivo, the capital, according to a Reuters witness. The demonstrators were denouncing the government and demanding restoration of reliable water and electricity across the country. "There are unfortunately individuals taking advantage of the situation to destroy other people's property," General Angelo Ravelonarivo, who heads a joint security body that includes the police and the military, said in a statement he read on privately owned Real TV late on Thursday.



## Trump Vows to Block Israeli Annexation of West Bank



NEW YORK (Dispatches) - U.S. President Donald Trump vowed Thursday to stop Israel from annexing the West Bank as he presses to end the Gaza war, ahead of a high-stakes visit by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Netanyahu will address the United Nations and later meet Trump in Washington as Israeli ministers muse of annexing the West Bank in response to recognition of a Palestinian state by France, Britain and several other Western powers.

But Trump, who has offered crucial support to Netanyahu as Israel comes under mounting global pressure, made clear he would not back annexation, which far-right Israelis see as a way to kill any real prospect of an independent Palestine.

"I will not allow Israel to annex the West Bank," Trump told reporters at the White House. "No, I will not allow it. It's not going to happen."

Trump voiced optimism about ending nearly two years of devastating war, echoing the confidence expressed a day earlier on the sidelines of the United Nations by his roving envoy, Steve Witkoff.

"We're getting pretty close to having a deal on Gaza and maybe even peace," said Trump, who also spoke to Netanyahu by telephone on Thursday.

Trump met Tuesday at the United Nations with the leaders of key Arab and Muslim nations who warned him of consequences if Israel moved ahead.

"I think the president of the US understands very well the risks and dangers of annexation in the West Bank," Saudi Arabia's Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan told reporters.

## Latvia Says Denmark Told Allies Drone Activity Linked to State Actor



UNITED NATIONS (Dispatches) - Denmark has informed its allies that drone incursions that have briefly closed airports and affected military installations in the country are linked to another country, Latvia's Foreign Minister Baiba Braze told Reuters on Thursday.

"The Danish government said it's a state activity that operates it," Braze said in an interview with Reuters.

"So we will wait for further assessments from our Danish colleagues, but it's very clear on allies' side, on our side, we all have to invest in counter-drone capability."

Denmark's foreign ministry did not immediately reply to a request for comment.

Denmark said on Thursday that the incidents were hybrid attacks aimed at spreading fear, though authorities could not identify the perpetrators.

Latvia is active in developing counter-drone capabilities, including acoustic sensors, and has been working closely with Ukraine, which faces drone attacks from Russia almost daily.

"We have been consciously investing in counter-drone activity. But at the same time, these types of scenarios are asymmetric. It's very difficult to predict when and where," she said.

Braze said it was tricky to handle for countries like Latvia and Denmark given they were not at war so their airspace was not closed unlike in Ukraine.

"There's a lot of legitimate activity that's happening. So that has to be worked out properly," she said.



## Palestinian Leader Pledges to Work With Trump, Others on UN-Backed Gaza Plan

UNITED NATIONS (Dispatches) - Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas pledged at the United Nations on Thursday to work with U.S. President Donald Trump, Saudi Arabia, France and the United Nations on a peace plan for Gaza overwhelmingly backed by the world body.

The 193-member U.N. General Assembly overwhelmingly endorsed this month a seven-page declaration that aims to advance a two-state solution for Israel and the Palestinians and end the Gaza war between Israel and Hamas militants.

The declaration emerged from an international conference at the U.N. in July - hosted by Saudi Arabia and France - on the decades-long conflict. The United States and Israel boycotted the event and have rejected the international efforts.

Separately, U.S. special envoy Steve Witkoff said on Wednesday that Trump had presented a 21-point peace plan for the Middle East and Gaza during a meeting with leaders of several Muslim-majority countries on the sidelines of this week's U.N. General Assembly.

Abbas addressed the annual gathering of world leaders on Thursday via video after the United States said it would not give him a visa to travel to New York.

"Despite all that our people have suffered, we reject what Hamas carried out on October 7th - acts that targeted Israeli civilians and took them as hostages — because such actions do not represent the Palestinian people nor their just struggle for freedom and independence," Abbas said.

"We have affirmed — and will continue to affirm — that Gaza is an integral part of the State of Palestine, and that we are ready to assume full responsibility for governance and security there. Hamas will have no role in governance, and it - along with other factions - must hand over its weapons to the Palestinian National Authority," he said. "We reiterate that

we do not want an armed state."

The points he raised are included in the declaration endorsed by the General Assembly.

"We declare our readiness to work with President Donald Trump, with Saudi Arabia, France, the United Nations and all partners to implement the peace plan" backed by the General Assembly, Abbas said.

Hamas rejected the remarks by Abbas.

"We consider the President of the Authority's assertion that Hamas will have no role in governance an infringement on the inherent right of our Palestinian people to decide their own destiny and to choose who governs them, and a submission — unacceptable to us — to external dictates and schemes," Hamas said in a statement.

The group also said that its weapons "cannot be compromised so long as the occupation remains entrenched on our land and oppressing our people," adding: "We denounce the President of the Authority's call to surrender them."

Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Saar described Abbas' speech as "nice words" to the West and accused the Palestinian leader of failing to fight terrorism.

Abbas "said that he is ready to receive the Gaza Strip, which he so easily lost to Hamas in 2007. How nice of him," Saar posted on X.

An October 7, 2023, Hamas attack on Israel triggered the war in Gaza. Hamas killed 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and about 251 were taken hostage, according to Israeli tallies. More than 65,000 people, also mostly civilians, have since been killed during the war in Gaza, according to local health authorities.

## Trump Pushes Turkey on Russian Oil, Hints at Lifting Sanctions



Trump's approval to lift U.S. sanctions to allow for purchases of F-35 fighters.

Seated side by side in the Oval Office, Trump called Erdogan a "very tough man" and said they remained friends while his predecessor Joe Biden was in office. Biden kept Turkey at arm's length partly over what he saw as the fellow NATO member's close ties with Russia.

Ankara is keen to leverage the friendly personal relationship with Trump to further national interests and take advantage of a U.S. administration eager to make deals in return for big-ticket arms and trade agreements.

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - President Donald Trump said on Thursday he believes Turkey will agree to his request to stop purchasing Russian oil and that he may lift U.S. sanctions on Ankara so it can buy advanced American F-35 jets.

Trump told reporters after his two hours of talks with Turkey's President Tayyip Erdogan that their meeting was "very conclusive" on a variety of issues but offered no further details about an announcement he said would be made later.

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Trump has been pressing European nations to stop purchases of Russian oil in exchange for his agreement to impose tough sanctions on Moscow to try to dry up funding for Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Frustrated by Russia's refusal to halt the fighting, Trump this week in a major shift said it was possible Ukraine could reclaim all the territory it has lost to Russia.

Asked if Turkey will stop purchasing Russian oil, Trump sounded confident. "I believe he will stop it, yeah. You know why? Because he can buy it from a lot of other people," Trump said of Erdogan.

Two other European nations, Hungary and Slovakia, also buy Russian oil. Trump seemed to give them a pass, saying they have limited ability to get energy elsewhere.

Erdogan came to the White House for his first visit in about six years seeking

When Trump and Erdogan took questions from reporters during their meeting, Trump sounded willing to make a deal to sell the F-35s.

"I think he'll be successful in buying the things that he wants to buy," Trump said. Trump also said he could lift sanctions against Turkey "very soon," and that "if we have a good meeting, almost immediately."

Trump and Erdogan - both seen as increasingly autocratic by their critics at home - had a checkered relationship during the Republican president's first term. But since Trump's return to the White House, their interests have aligned on Syria - the source of the biggest bilateral strain in the past - where the U.S. and Turkey now both strongly back the central government.

A warming trend in ties has renewed Turkish hopes that Trump and Erdogan, who have exchanged mutual praise, can find a way around U.S. sanctions imposed by Trump himself in 2020 over Turkey's acquisition of Russian S-400 missile defenses.

That, in turn, could pave the way for Ankara to buy Lockheed Martin's advanced F-35 fighter jets, for which it was both a buyer and manufacturer until it was barred over the S-400s.

Erdogan had said the defense industry, including the topic of F-35s and ongoing negotiations over 40 F-16 jets Ankara also wants, would be a focus of the meeting, along with regional wars, energy and trade.

Turkey, NATO's second-largest army, wants to ramp up air power to counter what it sees as growing threats in the Middle East, Eastern Mediterranean and the Black Sea, where it neighbours Russia and Ukraine.

## Russia Accuses NATO, EU of Waging Real War on It Via Ukraine

UNITED NATIONS (Dispatches) - Russia's top diplomat accused NATO and the European Union of using Ukraine to declare a "real war" against his country in a speech at the United Nations on Thursday that Britain dismissed as "false fantasy world distortions."

He spoke at a G20 meeting of foreign ministers at the U.N. two days after U.S. President Donald Trump signaled a harsher stance on Moscow, praising Ukraine's war effort and saying NATO allies should shoot down Russian jets that enter their airspace.

Tensions have mounted along Europe's eastern flank where Estonia has accused Moscow of sending three fighter jets into its airspace, a week after NATO jets shot down Russian drones in Polish airspace.

"Another clear example is the crisis in Ukraine provoked by the West, through which NATO and the EU have ... already declared a real war on my country and are directly involved in it," Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said.

Lavrov, foreign minister for more than two decades, has made similar remarks in the past, but their echo within the walls of the United Nations building -- delivered



in front of fellow G20 foreign ministers -- underscored the gravity of the moment.

He made no reference to Trump's comments earlier this week, instead repeating Russia's position that it was the West's actions that provoked the war in Ukraine, which began when Moscow's forces launched a full-scale invasion in February 2022.

British Foreign Secretary Yvette Cooper called out Lavrov as he made to leave when she began her speech and condemned Russia's "unprovoked war of aggression" against Ukraine.

"No amount of false fantasy world distortions, misinformation and propaganda from the Russian representative about the causes of the war will convince anyone," she said.

Russian forces occupy around 20% of Ukraine and the fighting rages in the east of the country more than 3-1/2 years since the full-scale invasion.

Europe's foreign policy chief, Kaja Kallas, called on world powers to exert international pressure on the Kremlin.



## Israel Facing Potential UEFA Suspension Vote as Political Pressure Mounts

NYON (Dispatches) - UEFA appears poised for an emergency vote on suspending Israel from European competition next week, with national federations scrambling to position themselves amid mounting political pressure following calls for action.

The brewing crisis intensified this week when United Nations experts called for Israel's suspension from international football amid the unfolding genocide in occupied Palestinian territory.

A source confirmed that Europe's soccer body could potentially decide next week to vote on whether to suspend Israel from European competition.

Should UEFA vote to ban Israel, it would put the organisation on a collision course with the government of the United States -- co-hosts for the 2026 World Cup -- which is vehemently against such a motion.

"We will absolutely work to fully stop any effort to attempt to ban Israel's national soccer team from the World Cup," a spokesperson for the U.S. state department told Sky News.

But even though UEFA has the power to suspend Israel or its clubs from their competitions, it may not be able to stop them from competing in World Cup qualifiers, which fall under the ambit of global soccer body FIFA.

The general secretaries of all UEFA national associations are meeting this week in Marbella, where Israel is not officially on the agenda, but officials expect UEFA to call an emergency vote next week.

FIFA did not respond to a Reuters request for comment while UEFA declined to comment.

Palestinian Football Association president Jibril Rajoub said Israelis should not be allowed to participate in any matches, whether they are under UEFA or FIFA.

"Israel has violated the principles, values and FIFA's statutes. Therefore, I believe that Israel should be sanctioned," Rajoub told TV2.

"The sanctions should come from UEFA and FIFA."

Israel's national team are set to face Norway and Italy, the top two teams in their World Cup qualifying group, next month.

"We don't have any indications that we are facing such an act (UEFA suspension)," a spokesperson for the Israel Football Association told Reuters.

"We are focusing on our international matches against Norway and Italy."

Norwegian broadcaster NRK reported the Norwegian Football Federation (NFF) is one of the member associations that have been the driving force behind calling for a meeting on the Israel situation. The NFF declined to comment.

Lise Klaveness, the president of the NFF and a member of the UEFA Executive Committee, has also been vocal about the crisis in Gaza ahead of her country's home game against Israel on October 11.

"Neither we nor other organisations can remain indifferent to the humanitarian suffering and disproportionate attacks that the civilian population in Gaza has been subjected to for a long time," Klaveness said in a statement last month.

"We want to donate the proceeds (from the game) to a humanitarian organisation that saves lives in Gaza every day and provides active emergency aid on the ground."

The Dutch football federation (KNVB) said it knows nothing about a vote to suspend Israel.

"As soon as the football association receives a message about this, it will take a position," the KNVB told Dutch outlet NOS.

Last week, Spain's Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez said Israel should be banned from international sports competitions. However, officials from the Spanish FA (RFEF) have kept a low profile on the matter.

## Pakistan Down Bangladesh to Set Up Asia Cup Final Clash v India



DUBAI (Dispatches) - Pakistan beat Bangladesh by 11 runs in a make-or-break Super Fours contest on Thursday to book their place in Sunday's Asia Cup final where they will hope to make it third time lucky against arch-rivals India.

It was a virtual semi-final between two sides who both managed to beat Sri Lanka in the Super Fours but proved no match for defending champions India in the Twenty20 tournament.

Put in to bat, Pakistan posted 135-8 and even that modest total did not look a possibility when they were reeling at 46-4 at the halfway stage of their innings.

Shahen Afridi (3-17) and Haris Rauf (3-33) led their spirited effort with the ball as Pakistan restricted Bangladesh to 124-9 to set up a mouthwatering clash with India, who have beaten them twice already in the tournament.

"If we can win these kind of games, then we must be a special team," Pakistan captain Salman Agha said.

"We were like 10-15 runs short, there's no way I'm going to deny that. But I knew if we bowl like that, we can create pressure.

"In a game like this, when it's almost a semi-final, when you create pressure up front, it's hard to chase."

Pakistan made five runs from the first 10 balls, losing two key wickets in the process and were reeling at 49-5 in the 11th over.

Taskin Ahmed (3-28) removed Sahibzada Farhan in the first over and spinner Mahedi Hasan, sharing the new ball, dismissed Saim Ayub for the batter's fourth duck in the tournament.

Pakistan's lower order, however, did not give up so easily.

Afridi (19) hit a couple of sixes while Mohammad Haris (31) and Mohammad Nawaz (25) made useful contributions down the order to take Pakistan past the 125-mark.

Almost mirroring their opponents' shambolic start, Bangladesh, rattled by Afridi's early double strike, slumped to 29-3 in the sixth over.

Afridi dismissed Parvez Hossain Emon and Towhid Hridoy to deny Bangladesh a strong start and went on to dismiss Shamim Hossain, who topscored for Bangladesh with a fluent 30.

## Arsenal, Man City Advance to League Cup Last 16

LONDON (Dispatches) - Eberechi Eze scored his first Arsenal goal as the Gunners beat Port Vale 2-0 to reach the League Cup fourth round, alongside Manchester City, Tottenham and Newcastle.

Arsenal boss Mikel Arteta was able to exhibit the strength in depth of his squad as Eze, Bukayo Saka and Gabriel Martinelli were among the nine changes from Sunday's 1-1 draw against Manchester City.

Eze has made an impressive start after his move from Crystal Palace last month that could be worth up to £68 million.

The England international slotted in from Myles Lewis-Skelly's flick to give Arsenal the perfect start after just eight minutes.

"I've been waiting to score for this club for a long time and the first is very special," said Eze, who was released by Arsenal as a teenager.

The visitors were unable to build on that advantage despite dominating the game.

Devante Cole, son of former Manchester United striker Andy Cole, came closest to a shock equaliser for Vale when his strike flew just over the bar.

Leandro Trossard finally killed the tie off with a powerful and precise finish into the bottom corner five minutes from time.

Arsenal will host Brighton in the next round.

Phil Foden was City's key man with a goal and assist as they



beat Huddersfield 2-0.

Foden has shown signs in recent weeks of rediscovering the form that made him the Premier League player of the year two seasons ago.

The England midfielder arrowed in a low drive to give the visitors the lead after 18 minutes.

Erling Haaland was among those given the night off as Pep Guardiola made nine changes.

The Norwegian's lethal finishing was missed as City had to wait until 15 minutes from time to make the tie safe when Savinho blasted in Foden's pass from a narrow angle.

City's reward is a trip to second-tier Swansea in the last 16.

Holders Newcastle will face Tottenham in the next round after both cruised to victory against third-tier opposition.

Joelinton and William Osula both struck twice as Newcastle beat League One leaders Bradford 4-1.

Tottenham also got the job done inside the opening 20 minutes in a 3-0 victory over Doncaster.

Joao Palhinha's overhead kick opened the scoring before Jay McGrath turned into his own goal after just 17 minutes.

Spurs had to wait until stoppage time for their third when Brennan Johnson raced through to net his third goal of the season.

Premier League champions Liverpool will take on FA Cup winners Crystal Palace in the other standout fourth-round tie.

Chelsea travel to Wolves, while Fulham visit Wycombe.

League Two Grimsby, who shocked Manchester United in round two, will fancy their chances of reaching the quarter-finals after being handed a home tie against Premier League strugglers Brentford.

Wrexham's reward for reaching the fourth round for the first time since 1977/78 is an all-Welsh clash against Cardiff.

## Alonso Hints at F1 Exit Next Year



LONDON (Dispatches) - Formula One's oldest driver Fernando Alonso says he is more likely to retire next year if his Aston Martin team have a competitive season.

The double world champion will be 45 next July and out of contract at the end of a season that sees a major technical change, with a new engine era and Honda joining as Aston Martin's partner.

"If things go well, I think it's a very good moment to stop," the Spaniard said in an interview published on the team's website.

"I've been chasing a competitive car and a competitive racing for many, many years, and if I have that I think it's a very good way to close my career.

"Let's say that if we are competitive, there is more chance that I stop. If we are not competitive, it will be very hard to give up without trying again."

Alonso has not won a race since the 2013 Spanish Grand Prix, when he was at Ferrari, and took his championships with Renault in 2005 and 2006.

He joined Aston Martin, who now have multiple-title-winning designer and technical ace Adrian Newey working for them, in 2023 from Renault-owned Alpine after a previous stint with McLaren.

The Spaniard is also a double winner of the Le Mans 24 Hours with Toyota and has competed in the Indianapolis 500 and Dakar Rally.

## Alcaraz Survives Injury Scare to Beat Baez

TOKYO (Dispatches) - World number one Carlos Alcaraz overcame a foot injury scare to beat Argentina's Sebastian Baez 6-4 6-2 on his Tokyo Open debut on Thursday, extending his sizzling run of form to reach the second round at the ATP 500 event.

The 22-year-old, who reclaimed top spot after winning the U.S. Open earlier this month, called a medical timeout at 2-2 in the opening set after jarring his left foot while stretching for a return.

The Spaniard returned with heavy strapping but played through discomfort, breaking Baez to edge 5-4 ahead before serving out the set.

After a brief rain suspension, Alcaraz eased past Baez without facing a break to close out the contest in an hour and a half. The victory improved his season record to 63-7, having



won 48 of his last 51 matches.

"I was scared. I'm not going to lie. I felt my ankle and did not feel great. I'm just happy to be able to play after that," Alcaraz said.

"I will try to be ready for the next match. It was unlucky. In the first five minutes I thought I wouldn't continue."

Alcaraz, who is aiming to become only the sixth player to win the Tokyo title while ranked world number one, will next face Belgium's Zizou Bergs.

Meanwhile qualifier Alejandro Tabilo stunned world number nine Lorenzo Musetti 6-3 2-6 7-6(5) to win the Chengdu Open, while French Open quarter-finalist Alexander Bublik edged Valentin Royer 7-6(4) 7-6(4) in the Hangzhou Open final.