

Iranian Foreign Ministry Invited the Charge d'Affaires of the Omani Embassy in Tehran to the Ministry Regarding Rumors That Two People in That Country Died After Consuming Mineral Water Imported From Iran

IRAN NEWS

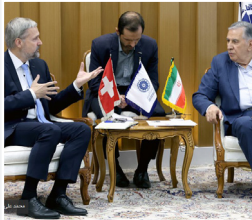
Director General for South Asian Affairs at the Foreign Ministry, Mohammad-Reza Bahrami, and Pakistan's Special Representative for Afghanistan, Mohammad Sadiq Khan, Emphasized the Importance of Establishing Stability, Reducing Tensions, and Strengthening Regional Convergence

VOL. XXIX, No. 8386 TEHRAN Price 50,000 Rials

www.irannewsdaily.com

TUESDAY OCTOBER 14, 2025 MEHR 22, 1404

2 DOMESTIC



Iran, Switzerland's Private Sectors Seek Closer Cooperation in Non-Sanctioned Industries

> SEE PAGE 2

3 INTERNATIONAL

Hamas Begins Releasing Israeli Hostages



> SEE PAGE 3

Iran Declines Gaza Summit Invitation



TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Iran's foreign minister has rejected an invitation to attend the Sharm El-Sheikh summit on Gaza, saying he cannot sit down with leaders who have "attacked the Iranian people and continue to threaten and sanction us."

Abbas Araqchi, in a post on X, expressed gratitude for Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi's invitation but made clear that neither President Masoud Pezeshkian nor himself would meet with hostile counterparts.

Araqchi was referring to US airstrikes on Iran's nuclear facilities during Israel's 12-day war of aggression, as well as sanctions targeting the country's economy and energy sector.

He reiterated Iran's firm support for any Palestinian decision that ends Israel's genocide in Gaza.

"Iran welcomes any initiative that ends Israel's genocide in Gaza and ensures the expulsion of occupation forces," he said. "Palestinians are fully entitled to secure their fundamental right of self-determination, and all states remain obliged, more than ever, to assist them in their lawful and legitimate cause."

The minister added that Iran remains "a vital force for peace in the region," in contrast to the Israeli regime's pursuit of "forever wars."

"Iran has always been, and will always remain, a vital force for peace in the region. Contrary to the genocidal Israeli regime, Iran is not after forever wars, particularly on the dime of its purported allies, but seeks forever peace, prosperity, and cooperation."

Iran's Sharm El-Sheikh Decision Based on National Interests, Expert Review

TEHRAN - Foreign Ministry spokesperson, Esmail Baqaei, clarified the Islamic Republic's stance on the Sharm El-Sheikh summit, noting that the decision followed thorough expert evaluations both inside and outside the ministry. He confirmed that the invitation was extended by Egypt's president to Iran's president and that the final decision reflects Iran's national interests.

Speaking at a press briefing on Monday, Baqaei stressed that the most pressing issue for Iran and the broader Muslim world is the ongoing crisis in Gaza and occupied Palestine. "West Asia requires timely reactions. After over 700 days of continuous killings and imposed starvation in Gaza, recent efforts have led to a temporary halt in Israeli attacks. Yet the scale of crimes over the past two years remains evident, as rescue operations continue to uncover the extent of casualties," he said.

He also warned of Israel's repeated ceasefire violations in Lebanon, citing over 4,500 breaches, emphasizing the need for vigilance by those committed to peace.

Baqaei confirmed that Iran is actively pursuing the release of Mahdiah Efsandiari, an Iranian citizen detained in France, as part of an ongoing prisoner exchange. "Preparations on our side are complete, and we hope for her swift release," he stated.

On tensions between Afghanistan and Pakistan, Baqaei highlighted Iran's focus on regional security. "Both countries are Muslim neighbors, and any conflict could have consequences beyond their borders. We call for dialogue and restraint, urging disputes to be resolved peacefully," he said.

Responding to claims that Iran's absence at Sharm El-Sheikh indicates diminished regional influence, Baqaei stressed that Iran's role is not limited to attending meetings. "Over the past two years, Iran has actively pressured Israel and its allies to halt the genocide, engaging regionally and through international organizations, including the UN and OIC," he noted.

Regarding a recent statement by European countries on Iran, Baqaei described it as repetitive and insincere. He reiterated that Iran neither seeks nor possesses nuclear weapons



IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

and criticized Europe's use of JCPOA dispute mechanisms to create diplomatic deadlock.

Baqaei condemned Israeli mistreatment of the Al-Sumood convoy as a terrorist act and a violation of international human rights obligations. On the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize to a figure supporting Gaza's genocide, he said such awards are not reliable indicators of peace advocacy, citing controversial historical laureates.

Addressing potential cooperation with the US, Baqaei stressed caution. "The US has a history of unilateral and aggressive actions toward Iran. Any future engagement will prioritize Iran's interests," he said.

Baqaei addressed allegations of contaminated Iranian mineral water exported to Oman, stating the incident involved criminal and personal revenge elements rather than Iran's water quality. He emphasized that swift clarification by Omani authorities is expected to restore the reputation of the Iranian company involved.

Regarding Iran and China's election to the UN Human Rights Council advisory committee, Baqaei criticized attempts by some countries to dominate international institutions, emphasizing that Iran's participation promotes balanced perspectives on human rights.

Baqaei reaffirmed that UNSC Resolution 2231 will expire on October 18, 2025. He warned that attempts by three European countries to reinstate previous nuclear resolutions are legally invalid and opposed by China and Russia.

He highlighted trilateral coordination mechanisms, such as the Iran-Azerbaijan-Russia meeting, as important tools for promoting regional stability and security.

Finally, Baqaei explained why Iran has not signed comprehensive agreements with the West. "As long as negotiating partners fail to respect each other's fundamental rights, genuine agreements cannot be reached. US administrations have consistently approached Iran unilaterally, and the nuclear deal experience cannot serve as a model for other issues," he said.

Iran Will Turn Circumventing Sanctions Into Their Complete Removal



TEHRAN - First Vice President emphasized that, despite the intentions of Iran's adversaries, sanctions have not brought the country to its knees. He stated, "We are working to turn circumventing sanctions into their full removal because bypassing sanctions comes at a cost. We hope that with experience and national resolve, we can eliminate sanctions altogether."

Speaking at the "National Guilds Day" ceremony on Monday, Mohammad Reza Aref said, "Supporting guilds and those whose services reach the people is not a favor from the government—it is its duty. The presence of two key ministers, Agriculture and Industry, Mines, and Trade, at this event alongside me demonstrates the government's special attention to this vital sector. While I cannot promise miracles, we will do our best within available resources."

He added that conditions are currently not ideal for resolving some issues, such as the informal market, but the government will strive to address them, similar to successful efforts during the 2000s.

Responding to a business leader's call for practical government support for guilds and the private sector, Aref reiterated that sanctions have failed to weaken Iran. "We aim to turn the act of circumventing sanctions into fully eliminating them, as circumventing comes with costs. With national experience and determination, we hope to overcome these restrictions. If adversaries gain reason, they may stop their hostile measures—but if not, we will find a way to remove sanctions ourselves," he said.

Bright Prospects for Iran's Relations with China and Russia



IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - The Chairman of Iran's Article 90 Commission announced that, according to a report presented by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the future of Iran's relations with China and Russia looks promising.

According to ISNA, Hojjatoleslam Nasrollah Pejmanfar stated that the commission's meeting with Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi was held to discuss recent developments in the Caucasus region and the Zangezur Corridor, issues related to foreign nationals known as "Khavari citizens," Iran's sovereignty over the three Persian Gulf islands, and the latest status of relations with China and Russia.

On the Zangezur Corridor, Pejmanfar said that the Islamic Republic shares a border with Armenia, and during the meeting, economic activities and trade exchanges aimed at strengthening relations with neighboring countries, particularly those in the South Caucasus, were reviewed and discussed.

Emphasizing the need to regulate the presence of foreign nationals in Iran, he noted that some reside temporarily for work, while others hold long-term residency. He added that discussions were held with the foreign minister on granting citizenship to certain eligible foreign nationals.

Iran Restricts Gold Imports to Control Dubious Trade

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Iran has imposed restrictions on imports of gold into the country amid reports pointing to the dubious trade of Iranian gold reserves to meet government requirements for the return of export proceeds.

The semi-official Tasnim news agency said in a Sunday report that the Central Bank of Iran (CBI) had decided to restrict gold imports "to manage the foreign currency market and control the smuggling of gold from the country".

It cited a statement from head of Iran's Trade Promotion Organization, Mohammad Ali Dehghan, which showed that Iranian exporters could no longer be able to import gold to pay their hard currency liabilities to the CBI.

Iran cut its tariffs on gold imports to zero in November 2022 to boost its gold reserves and to facilitate the return of funds held in other countries because of US sanctions.

However, reports published in local media have suggested that some exporters have been transferring gold from Iran to other countries to re-import and sell it in the domestic market to benefit from the difference between official and free market prices of foreign currency.

"Given the situation of the market and the new forex policies, gold imports would no longer be a proper instrument for exporters to pay their foreign currency liabilities, and the CBI has decided to impose restrictions in this regard," Dehghan said in a news briefing on Saturday.

Iran imported around 100 metric tons of gold worth \$8 billion in the calendar year to late March, according to the country's customs figures.

CBI governor Mohammad Reza Farzin said in March that Iran was among the top five gold-buying countries of the world last year as he insisted that the lender had converted some 20% of its reserves to gold.

Meanwhile Iran's Central Bank Governor, Mohammadreza Farzin, has declared that while regulatory measures aim to support digital businesses and fintech innovation, money laundering and capital flight remain absolute red lines for financial technology operations in the country.

During a three-hour meeting with digital economy and fintech entrepreneurs, Farzin outlined the Central Bank's dual approach of supporting innovation while ensuring strict adherence to legal and financial compliance. He emphasized that the Bank's main priorities include compliance with anti-money laundering laws, prevention of speculative activity, control of capital outflows, and protection against monopolies.

To enhance collaboration, Farzin ordered the formation of a joint expert committee comprising Central Bank officials and relevant agencies to address the specialized needs of the digital economy, including foreign currency provision for IT infrastructure projects.

"The Central Bank's approach is based on regulation through cooperation and mutual trust," Farzin said. "Given the rapid growth of this sector, our regulatory framework must evolve



IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

accordingly — but without hindering innovation or business development."

He stated that the Central Bank recognizes the strategic importance of the digital economy and has defined several "red lines" for fintech regulation. "Fintech activities must never become a channel for money laundering. Any financial transaction that is illegal under existing law remains prohibited in this sector as well," he said, calling for the creation of clear, enforceable anti-money laundering measures specific to fintech operations.

While acknowledging that profit-making is an inherent part of fintech, Farzin cautioned against excessive speculation, especially under economic sanctions and amid attempts by hostile actors to fuel psychological and

inflationary pressures.

Farzin described transparent regulation and trust-building as essential for aligning public and private sector interests in the digital economy. "Regulation should not restrict business growth — it should ensure fairness and stability," he said, adding that defining rules of engagement ultimately serves the sector's long-term development.

He called on fintech companies to share operational data with the Central Bank, noting that this is not an attempt to restrict activity but a professional regulatory necessity for monitoring anti-money laundering compliance.

Another major red line, Farzin stressed, is capital flight. "This restriction exists in every country. Preventing the outflow of national capital is a natural concern for all central banks," he said.

The governor also underscored the need to prevent market monopolies, ensuring that small and medium-sized fintechs are not overshadowed by larger players.

Farzin clarified the Central Bank's stance on online gold trading platforms, saying these businesses must not operate as deposit-taking institutions based on gold. "They should engage only in actual trading and must physically possess the gold they sell. Selling gold before purchasing it raises both religious and legal issues," he explained.

He added that all gold-related funds must be held in designated bank accounts to protect customers in the event of bankruptcy or fraud, and that transaction transparency and settlement procedures must meet Central Bank standards.

Responding to requests for 24-hour gold trading, Farzin said such proposals require expert review, emphasizing that every market must have defined trading hours.

Calling public trust the most valuable asset of financial institutions, Farzin said, "All of the Central Bank's regulatory measures aim to preserve that trust."

Regarding cryptocurrency regulation, he noted that economic activity in this sector is inherently risky. "Participants in the crypto market cannot be treated the same as licensed banking institutions. Both investors and operators must accept part of the risk," he said, adding that regulation should focus on risk mitigation and financial stability rather than stifling innovation.

Iran, China Sign Cooperation Agreement on Wastewater and Technology Transfer



TEHRAN - Iran and China have signed a cooperation agreement in the field of wastewater management and technology transfer, marking a significant step toward improving water efficiency and access to clean water, officials said.

Seyed Ali Seyedzadeh, Director General of Iran's Water Consumption Management Office, described the agreement as an important initiative for enhancing water accessibility and waste management. Speaking on the "Seke Sobh" program on Radio Eghtesad, he noted that the collaboration is part of the long-term economic cooperation framework between Iran and China and leverages the capacities of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

A key focus of the agreement is technology transfer, including knowledge sharing, localization of smart technologies, and reduction of water loss. "Training human resources and upgrading the skills of water and wastewater industry experts and managers are central to this agreement, which will increase productivity and the efficiency of infrastructure," Seyedzadeh said.

IRAN NEWS



Minister of Roads and Urban Development Arrives in Baku

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iran's Minister of Roads and Urban Development, Farzaneh Sadegh, who also serves as the Iranian Chair of the Joint Commission for Economic Cooperation between Iran and the Republic of Azerbaijan, arrived at Baku International Airport a short while ago. Sadegh's visit will include multilateral meetings with delegations from Azerbaijan and Russia focused on expanding cooperation in transportation, energy, and customs. The minister is also scheduled to inspect border corridors linking Iran and Azerbaijan.

Export-Oriented Exhibitions Pave the Way for National Trade Development



TEHRAN - The President of the Iran Chamber of Cooperatives, Bahman Abdollahi, emphasized the vital role of export-focused exhibitions in boosting the country's trade, describing them as one of the most effective tools for marketing and developing export markets.

Speaking at the opening ceremony of the Shiraz International Expo, Abdollahi noted that Shiraz has long been recognized as the cultural, literary, and artistic capital of Iran. "Today, through this exhibition, we are also witnessing another dimension of Fars Province's capabilities—its economic and export potential—which is both valuable and impactful," he said.

Abdollahi highlighted the importance of exports, particularly under current economic conditions, calling the timing of the event "strategically smart." He said it could significantly contribute to improving the country's trade balance.

Referring to last year's trade statistics, Abdollahi noted that Iran's trade balance in 2024 (Persian year 1403) was negative: "We had around \$58 billion in exports and \$74 billion in imports, resulting in a \$14 billion trade deficit. This situation demands intensified efforts to boost exports."

He added that during the first six months of this year (1404), the situation has improved considerably, with \$26 billion in exports and \$28 billion in imports, narrowing the trade deficit to just \$2 billion.

"Given the country's currency situation, every dollar earned through exports is invaluable," Abdollahi stressed, urging the cooperative sector, chambers of commerce, and private enterprises to play a more active role in expanding non-oil exports.

The Shiraz Expo's focus on Persian Gulf Arab markets is "entirely correct and intelligent," Abdollahi said, noting that roughly 30% of Iran's exports in 2023-2024 were to just two Arab countries—about \$7 billion to the UAE and \$12 billion to Iraq, totaling nearly \$19 billion, or one-third of all exports.

Iran, Kuwait Take New Step Toward Joint Overland Tourism Development



TEHRAN - The Touring & Automobile Club of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the International Automobile Club of Kuwait have signed a strategic cooperation agreement aimed at strengthening regional interaction in overland tourism and expanding automotive-related activities.

The strategic cooperation agreement was signed during an official ceremony attended by Mohammad Totouchi, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Islamic Republic of Iran to Kuwait. The document was signed by Mohammad Hossein Soufi, Chairman of the Board and Managing Director of the Touring & Automobile Club of Iran, and Essa Hamzah Al-Failakawi, CEO of the International Automobile Club of Kuwait.

The agreement, designed to enhance joint collaboration and international connectivity in tourism and automotive sectors, emphasizes the expansion of cultural and people-to-people exchanges, facilitation of land travel between the two countries, improvement of travel safety, promotion of responsible tourism, and creation of new platforms for cooperation in motoring and mobility.

Other key provisions include organizing joint tourism and motor rallies, offering reciprocal roadside assistance services, collaborating on road safety education, exchanging technical expertise, and streamlining the issuance and acceptance of international documents such as the Carnet de Passages en Douane (customs transit permit).

During the signing ceremony held in Kuwait, the managing directors of the two clubs described the agreement as a significant step toward advancing overland tourism, deepening cultural relations, and strengthening the friendly ties between Iran and Kuwait.

Iran, Switzerland's Private Sectors Seek Closer Cooperation in Non-Sanctioned Industries

TEHRAN - The Iranian and Swiss private sectors are exploring ways to deepen economic cooperation in non-sanctioned areas, with business leaders from both sides emphasizing the potential for broader collaboration in technology, healthcare, industrial development, and digital economy training.

In a recent meeting between Samad Hassanzadeh, President of the Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICIMA), and Oliver Banggert, Switzerland's newly appointed ambassador to Iran, both sides expressed optimism about expanding bilateral relations beyond traditional areas of engagement.

Hassanzadeh said that Iran and Switzerland have significant potential to strengthen partnerships in most industrial fields, particularly in non-sanctioned sectors where trade and investment can flourish without external constraints.

"Free trade zones in Iran provide favorable conditions for investment," Hassanzadeh stated. "Iranian and Swiss companies can initiate joint ventures in non-sanctioned sectors. Iran's economic and industrial capacities make it well-positioned to cooperate with Switzerland not only economically, but also in cultural, social, and academic domains."

Acknowledging the impact of international sanctions, Hassanzadeh highlighted that Iran has nonetheless achieved notable progress in advanced technologies, knowledge-based production, petrochemical and polymer industries, as well as medical and pharmaceutical manufacturing.

Despite these developments, he noted that trade volume between the two countries remains low and called for greater efforts to identify and promote mutual capacities. "Both nations should work to raise awareness of their respective strengths," he said. "The Iran Chamber of Commerce is ready to invite Swiss economic and trade delegations to participate in Iran's specialized and commercial exhibitions."

Hassanzadeh also praised Swiss expertise in water recycling, purification, and advanced copper downstream technologies, expressing Iran's willingness to cooperate in these areas. He emphasized that Iran's vast natural resources — including precious metal mines, industrial soils, and decorative stone quarries — present excellent opportunities for Swiss investment.

In addition, he proposed joint efforts in social responsibility and humanitarian projects, citing Switzerland's long-standing experience in these areas. The Iranian private sector, he said, is also prepared to cooperate in building hospitals, research centers, and medical facilities through joint ventures.

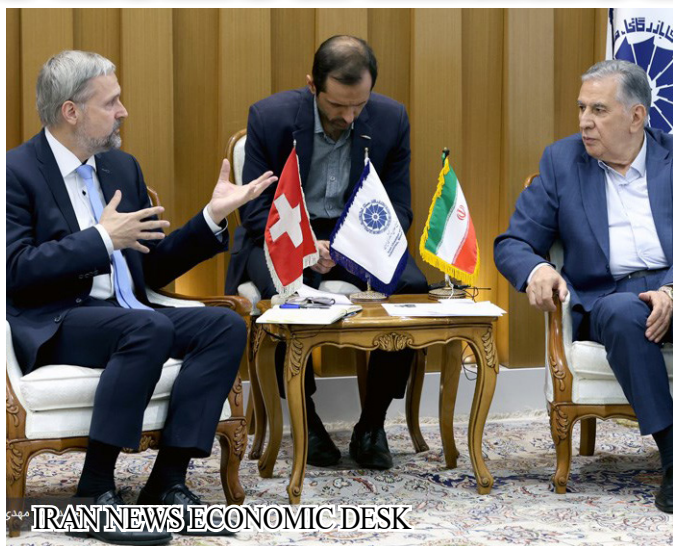
Hassanzadeh reiterated that sanctions should not impede progress in academic and economic partnerships.

"We expect that economic, scientific, and academic cooperation will expand further," he said. "The private sectors of Iran and Switzerland can play an influential role in regulating trade exchanges and deepening relations in all fields."

Eisa Mansouri, head of the Research Center of the Iran Chamber of Commerce, also addressed the meeting, emphasizing Switzerland's pivotal role in facilitating Iran's relations with Western countries.

He suggested that Switzerland could expand its function from a purely political mediator to a commercial and economic bridge between Iran and Europe or North America.

"If Switzerland transforms its role from political to economic, Iran-Switzerland



relations will enter a new phase," Mansouri said.

He further argued that Iran could become a regional hub for raw material supply, noting Europe's growing desire to diversify supply chains away from East Asia. Mansouri proposed that with investment from both Asian and European partners, Iran could host industrial production for export to Europe and beyond, with Switzerland helping to coordinate such initiatives.

Turning to digital development, Mansouri explained that Iran has invested heavily in building digital economy capacity despite sanctions. Because the digital economy is less dependent on goods trade, it faces fewer restrictions from sanctions, making it a promising area for cooperation.

Iran's Seventh National Development Plan includes a goal to train 500,000 digital economy specialists, of which 5,000 senior experts will be developed under the Chamber's supervision. Mansouri proposed that these specialized training programs be conducted in cooperation with Swiss institutions and international agencies based in Switzerland.

"There are fewer international restrictions in digital economy education," he said. "We hope to host or co-organize Train-the-Trainer (TOT) courses either in Iran or Switzerland. Such cooperation would be a sound investment for the future."

He also emphasized the importance of technical and vocational education to build a skilled workforce, expressing hope that the Swiss Embassy could facilitate such training partnerships.

Rashidi, a board member of the Iran-Switzerland Joint Chamber of Commerce, urged stronger cooperation between the joint chamber, the Swiss Embassy, and Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs to revitalize economic diplomacy. He noted that bilateral trade volume has fallen to one-tenth of its 2010 level, stressing the need for new strategies to boost economic exchanges.

In response, Ambassador Oliver Banggert outlined his key priorities during his tenure in Tehran, saying his foremost goal is to raise the overall level of bilateral cooperation.

"My first priority is that by the end of my term, the level of cooperation between Iran and Switzerland will have significantly increased," he said.

His second priority is to support Swiss companies already active in Iran, which have gradually increased their trade with Iran over the past five years despite challenges.

Banggert confirmed that Swiss firms are eager to expand operations in Iran, though they face obstacles such as currency access for imports and intellectual property protection. He also noted that visa durations for Swiss business travelers had been shortened from three years to one year, suggesting that these administrative barriers could be resolved with continued dialogue.

"These are practical issues that can be addressed through engagement," he added.

As Iran and Switzerland look to the future, both sides appear committed to leveraging their private sectors as engines of cooperation, focusing on non-sanctioned industries, education, technology, and sustainable development — areas where partnership can flourish despite political headwinds.

India, Turkey Overtaking Iran in Iraq's Health Tourism Market



TEHRAN - Iran is rapidly losing its share of Iraq's lucrative health tourism market to India and Turkey, according to senior industry officials. Both Iraqi and Iranian tourism authorities have warned that Iraqi patients seeking medical services are increasingly turning to neighboring countries due to better organization, trust, and direct access to services.

Seyed Mostafa Mousavi, Chairman of the Tourism Commission at Iran's Chamber of Commerce and head of the Khorramshahr Chamber, warned that Iran's once-dominant position in Iraq's health tourism sector is slipping away. "Iran's health tourism portfolio in Iraq is eroding," he said, emphasizing the urgent need for reform.

According to Iraq's Karbala Tourism Organization, Iraqi health tourists are now traveling to Turkey, India, and other neighboring countries because of more reliable and cost-effective medical and hospitality services. While treatment in these countries is not necessarily cheaper than in Iran, the trust and confidence they have built through local platforms and direct service channels have given them a major competitive edge.

Mousavi explained, "India and Turkey have created strong health tourism platforms inside Iraq that allow patients to directly connect with hospitals and hotels without intermediaries. This has eliminated the role of brokers and built significant trust among Iraqi travelers."

He added that branding and marketing efforts by India and Turkey have been far stronger than Iran's, highlighting what he described as "serious shortcomings in Iran's public sector performance in health tourism."

Data from Iran's tourism sector shows a consistent decline in the number of Iraqi patients visiting Iran for treatment, while Turkey and India are gaining ground. "The downward trend in Iran's health tourism graph in Iraq is undeniable," Mousavi said, calling it a warning sign for policymakers.

He noted that Iraq represents one of Iran's most important potential markets for regional health tourism because of geographical proximity, shared religious and cultural ties, active land borders, and lower travel costs. "With the right strategy, Iraq could become a genuine alternative to destinations like Turkey and India," he said.

To reclaim this market, Mousavi urged the creation of a national, bilateral digital platform between Iran and Iraq to manage health tourism services transparently and remove intermediaries. "By enabling direct communication between Iraqi patients and reputable Iranian hospitals, we can rebuild trust and redirect patient flows back to Iran," he stated.

He emphasized that the private sector must play a leading role, supported by both financial and institutional backing from the government. "The Iraqi market is thirsty for transparency and technology in healthcare services," Mousavi said.

Mousavi also highlighted Iran's strong reputation in advanced medical fields such as complex surgeries, organ transplants, infertility treatment, and cosmetic procedures. "Iran has world-class medical teams and specialists. With proper branding and marketing in Iraq, we can increase confidence in Iran's healthcare system," he asserted.

He called for coordinated efforts between the Ministry of Health, Cultural Heritage and Tourism Organization, and Iran's Chamber of Commerce to design and implement a comprehensive national health tourism platform. Such an initiative, he said, would bring transparency, organize patient management, and eliminate the exploitative middlemen currently dominating the sector.

Mousavi concluded: "The absence of a structured, national framework for Iran-Iraq health tourism is the main barrier to progress. By building this system, we can restore order, trust, and efficiency—and regain Iran's rightful share in the regional health tourism market."

Population Cap for Tehran Reaches Its Limit



TEHRAN - Tehran has officially reached its planned population ceiling, according to the Deputy Minister of Roads and Urban Development. Based on the city's comprehensive urban plan, Tehran's projected population capacity by 1406 (2027) was set at 9.1 million residents, with an overall urban capacity of 10.6 million. The Deputy Minister confirmed that the 9.1 million population benchmark has already been reached, and the city's total capacity is now nearly full.

Gholamreza Kazemian, Deputy Minister of Roads and Urban Development, told ILNA that national land-use and development strategies prioritize population control in major metropolitan areas, particularly Tehran. He noted that urban population growth must remain within the approved capacity limits outlined in official urban development plans.

Kazemian explained that the Supreme Council of Urban Planning and Architecture has approved several planning frameworks — including the comprehensive and detailed plans — that define exact population capacities for Tehran and other large cities across the country.

Highlighting the specific figures for Tehran, Kazemian reiterated:

"According to the comprehensive plan, Tehran's population was projected at 9.1 million by 1406, with an overall capacity of 10.6 million. The 9.1 million mark has now been reached, and the city's remaining capacity is almost entirely utilized."

Addressing ongoing construction in District 22 despite the city reaching full capacity, he explained that the district has an allocated quota under the detailed plan. "Construction must align with that approved capacity," he said, adding that population distribution can be adjusted across districts but no expansion beyond approved limits is permitted. He emphasized that the central policy of the government — as personally stressed by the President — is to prevent any further population loading beyond Tehran's capacity.

Countries Now Using Cyberspace as a Weapon of War



TEHRAN - The Secretary of Iran's Supreme Council of Cyberspace has warned that cyberspace is no longer merely a platform for communication and public use, but has evolved into a strategic weapon of warfare.

Speaking at a meeting on international measures against the militarization of cyberspace, Seyed Mohammad Amin Aghamiri, Secretary of the Supreme Council and Head of Iran's National Center for Cyberspace, said that nations worldwide now view cyberspace as a key battleground. "In 2023, the United States officially recognized cyberspace as one of the five domains of military activity — alongside land, air, sea, and space," Aghamiri said. He explained that U.S. defense documents classify cyber warfare into four main areas: cyberattacks, military use of advanced technologies, cyber weapons, and psychological operations conducted through online platforms.

Aghamiri noted that two key UNESCO documents currently prohibit the extensive use of artificial intelligence for mass manipulation within countries, reflecting global concerns about the misuse of AI-powered platforms. He cited recent examples, including changes in content moderation on TikTok and X (formerly Twitter) that, he argued, shifted narratives to favor specific political agendas after corporate negotiations or leadership meetings in the United States.

China's Exports to U.S. Drop in September

HONG KONG (Dispatches) - China's exports to the United States fell 27% in September from the year before, even though growth in its global exports hit a six-month high.

Customs figures released Monday showed that China's worldwide exports were 8.3% higher than a year earlier, at \$328.5 billion, surpassing economists' estimates. That was markedly better than the 4.4% year-on-year increase in August.

Imports grew 7.4% last month, significantly better than a 1.3% increase by year in August, although a weaker domestic economy and a real estate sector downturn continue to weigh on demand and consumption.

China's exports to the United States have fallen for six straight months. In August they dropped 33%.



Maduro Calls Nobel Peace Laureate Machado a Demonic Witch



CARACAS (Dispatches) - Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro called opposition leader Maria Corina Machado a "demonic witch", two days after she won the Nobel Peace Prize for promoting democracy. The Nobel Committee praised Machado's "tireless work" for human rights in Venezuela, long at odds with Washington since the Trump administration deployed warships nearby.

The Norwegian Nobel Committee had named Machado as the winner, citing the 58-year-old's "tireless work promoting democratic rights for the people of Venezuela and for her struggle to achieve a just and peaceful transition from dictatorship to democracy".

The United States has long opposed the leftist Venezuelan leader's rule, and under President Donald Trump has deployed warships in Caribbean waters off Venezuela.

Maduro has accused Machado of calling for a foreign invasion.

"Ninety percent of the population rejects the demonic witch," Maduro said, without directly mentioning Machado or commenting on his political rival being awarded the prestigious prize.

The government often refers to her as "la sayona", a word that evokes a spirit in Venezuelan folklore who, like the opposition leader, has white skin and straight black hair.

"We want peace, and we will have peace, but peace with freedom, with sovereignty," Maduro said at an event commemorating the discovery of the Americas, celebrated in Venezuela as "Indigenous Resistance Day."

Madagascar President Warns of Coup Attempt as More Soldiers Join Protests



ANTANANARIVO (Dispatches) - Madagascar's presidency said that an attempt to grab power by force was under way as more soldiers threw their support behind a youth-led protest movement that has rocked the African island nation for more than two weeks.

Troops from the elite CAPSAT unit, which helped President Andry Rajoelina seize power in a 2009, urged fellow soldiers to disobey orders on Saturday and back the demonstrators. The protests, initially over grassroots grievances, began on September 25 and now pose the most serious challenge to Rajoelina's rule since his reelection in 2023.

CAPSAT officers said on Sunday they had command over the country's security operations and would coordinate all branches of the military from their base on the outskirts of the capital, Antananarivo. They said they had appointed General Demosthene Pikulas, the former head of the military academy, as army chief.

A unit of the paramilitary gendarmerie, which had so far tackled the protests together with the police, also broke ranks with the government on Sunday.

"All use of force and any improper behavior towards our fellow citizens are prohibited, as the gendarmerie is a force meant to protect people and not to defend the interests of a few individuals," the Intervention Forces of the National Gendarmerie said in a statement broadcast on Real TV.

It said it was coordinating with the CAPSAT headquarters.

Hamas Begins Releasing Israeli Hostages



CAIRO (Dispatches) - Hamas handed over the first group of the last surviving Israeli hostages seized in the October 7, 2023, attack on Monday, a key step in ending two years of devastating conflict in Gaza as part of a ceasefire deal pushed by U.S. President Donald Trump.

With hundreds of cheering people gathered in Tel Aviv's Hostages Square, Israel's military said it had received the first seven of 20 surviving hostages after their transfer out of Gaza by the Red Cross.

"I am so excited. I am full of happiness. It's hard to imagine how I feel this moment. I didn't sleep all night," said Viki Cohen, mother of hostage Nimrod Cohen, as she travelled to Reim, an Israeli military camp where the hostages will be transferred.

The remaining 13 confirmed living hostages, along with the bodies of 26 dead hostages and another two whose fate is unknown, are also expected to be released on Monday, along with nearly 2,000 Palestinian detainees and convicted prisoners.

In Gaza, about a dozen masked and black-clad gunmen, apparently members of Hamas' armed wing, arrived at Nasser Hospital where a stage and chairs had been laid out to welcome returning Palestinian prisoners.

"I hope that these images can be the end to this war. We lost friends and relatives, we lost our houses and our city," said Emad Abu Joudat, 57, a Palestinian father of six from Gaza City as he watched the handover preparations on his phone.

The releases are one of the most important parts of the first phase of the ceasefire agreement concluded last week in the Egyptian resort of Sharm el-Sheikh where Trump and other world leaders will be meeting later on Monday.

Two years of war have left Gaza in ruins, with nearly all its people homeless, and caused a humanitarian disaster on a massive scale. It has also reshaped the Middle East through Israeli conflicts with Iran, Lebanon's Hezbollah and Yemen's Houthis.

Progress towards a lasting peace now hinges on global commitments that may be taken up by a summit later on Monday of more than 20 world leaders led by Trump in Egypt's Sharm el-Sheikh resort.

Near Israel's Reim camp, where the hostages will be brought to be taken to hospitals, people lined the road waving Israeli flags on which a yellow ribbon - the symbol of remembrance for the hostages - was interwoven with the blue Star of David.

At Israeli prisons, some 1,966 detainees boarded buses and most were expected to be released at Gaza's Nasser Hospital on Monday, an official involved in the operation said.

In a statement issued on Monday, the armed wing of Hamas affirmed its commitment to the terms and timeline of the deal, contingent on Israel's adherence. It said Israel agreed to a ceasefire and swap deal after it failed to free the hostages through its military offensive.

The main U.N. aid agency working in Gaza, UNRWA, urged Israel to allow more aid into the territory.

The conflict was sparked by a Hamas attack on October 7, 2023, that killed around 1,200 people in Israel with 251 taken hostage. Israeli airstrikes and ground assaults have since devastated Gaza, killing more than 67,000 Palestinians, the enclave's health officials say.

Ukraine Accuses Russia of Deliberately Severing External Link to Zaporizhzhia Plant

KYIV (Dispatches) - Ukraine's foreign minister accused Russia of deliberately severing the external power line to the Russian-held Zaporizhzhia nuclear power station in order to link the plant to Moscow's power grid.

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Andrii Sybiha said Moscow was attempting to test a reconnection to Russia's grid.

Ukraine has long feared that Moscow would try to redirect the plant's output to its grid. But Russian officials have denied any intention of trying to restart the plant, seized by Moscow's forces in the early weeks of the February 2022 invasion of Ukraine.

The plant produces no electricity at the moment, but has been without an external electricity source for nearly three weeks. Officials have relied on emergency diesel generators to secure the power needed to keep the fuel cool inside the facility and guard against a meltdown.

"Russia intentionally broke the plant's connection with the Ukrainian grid in order to forcefully test reconnection with the Russian grid," Sybiha wrote on X in English. He denounced the "attempted theft of a peaceful Ukrainian nuclear facility".

"Moscow tries to fool the IAEA and the whole



technical and diplomatic community by pretending that the problem is caused by anyone other than itself," Sybiha said.

Each side has accused the other of shelling that caused the line outage.

The IAEA, the U.N.'s nuclear watchdog, said last week that the process of re-establishing the external link was underway and has repeatedly called on both sides to refrain from actions that compromise nuclear safety.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said in his nightly video address, that it was not in Russia's interests to restore security at the plant. He said the IAEA needed to establish "a clearer, more honest position".

There was no immediate Russian reaction to the Ukrainian allegations.

Last week, the Interfax news agency quoted Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov as saying there were no grounds to restart the Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant for now in the absence of an external power source. Before that report, Russia's state nuclear corporation Rosatom was quoted as saying it was preparing to restart the plant.

Pakistan Closes Border With Afghanistan After Dozens Killed in Overnight Clashes

ISLAMABAD (Dispatches) - Pakistan closed all border crossings with Afghanistan after deadly overnight clashes in which both sides claimed to have killed dozens of troops. Islamabad regularly accuses the Taliban administration in Kabul of harbouring militants who attack Pakistan, a charge Afghan officials deny.

Afghanistan's Taliban forces launched attacks on Pakistani troops along their shared border late on Saturday, in what it called "retaliation for air strikes carried out by the Pakistani army on Kabul" on Thursday.

Islamabad has not directly claimed responsibility for the strikes, but has repeatedly stated the right to defend itself against surging militancy that it says is planned from Afghan soil.

The two sides have repeatedly clashed in border regions since the Taliban seized control of Afghanistan in 2021, but airspace violations deep into Afghan territory would



mark a significant escalation.

Zabihullah Mujahid, the Taliban government spokesman, said on Sunday that 58 Pakistani soldiers were killed and around 30 wounded in the clashes, while nine Taliban forces were killed.

The Pakistani military, meanwhile, said 23 of its soldiers and more than 200 Taliban and affiliated troops were killed.

The casualty figures could not be independently verified.

Afghan Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi said on Sunday the "situation is under control".

"Our operation last night achieved its objectives. And then our friends like Qatar and Saudi Arabia appealed that war must stop now, and the war is ceased right now," he said during a visit to India.



Dowdle Plays Big vs. Former Team as Panthers Edge Cowboys

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Bryce Young threw for three touchdowns, Rico Dowdle rushed for 183 yards and caught a touchdown pass against his former team and the Carolina Panthers beat the Dallas Cowboys 30-27 with a field goal on the final play in Charlotte.

Ryan Fitzgerald's 33-yard kick for his third field goal of the game gave the Panthers (3-3) their second consecutive victory. They held the ball for 15 plays on the game's last possession.

Dowdle, in his first season with Carolina after four years with the Cowboys, finished with 239 scrimmage yards (team-high 56 receiving). He is the first player in franchise history to top 200 in consecutive games. Young completed 17 of 25 passes for 199 yards, including two TD passes to first-round pick Tetairoa McMillan, and an interception.

Dak Prescott threw for three touchdowns and 261 yards on 25-for-34 passing for Dallas (2-3-1), which had only 31 rushing yards.

Chiefs 30, Lions 17

Patrick Mahomes passed for 257 yards and three touchdowns and ran for another score as host Kansas Chiefs City snapped Detroit Lions' four-game winning streak with 30-17 win.

Hollywood Brown caught four passes for 45 yards and two touchdowns. Tight end Travis Kelce had six receptions for 78 yards for the Chiefs (3-3).

Jared Goff passed for 203 yards and two touchdowns for the Lions (4-2). Wide receiver Jameson Williams caught six passes for 66 yards and a touchdown, while tight end Sam LaPorta contributed five receptions for 55 yards and a touchdown. Jahmyr Gibbs gained 65 yards on 17 carries.

Cameron Dicker's 33-yard field goal with 5 seconds left lifted Los Angeles Chargers to a close 29-27 win over host Miami Dolphins. The game-winner was Dicker's fifth field goal in five attempts for the game and helped the Chargers (4-2) snap a two-game losing streak.

Justin Herbert completed 29 of 38 passes for 264 yards, two touchdown passes and no interceptions and hit Ladd McConkey on a long 42-yard connection late to set up the game-winner. Kimani Vidal ran for 124 yards on 18 carries and caught a touchdown pass.

De'Von Achane rushed for 128 yards on 16 carries and scored a pair of rushing touchdowns for the Dolphins (1-5), who dropped their second in a row and are off to their worst start since opening the 2021 season with a 1-7 record.

Jonathan Taylor rushed for 123 yards and the go-ahead touchdown as Indianapolis Colts rallied in the fourth quarter to edge visiting Arizona Cardinals 31-27.

Taylor scored on a 1-yard run with 4:32 left as the Colts (5-1) took a one-game lead in the AFC South on Jacksonville, a 20-12 loser at home to Seattle. Quarterback Daniel Jones added 212 yards passing on 22 of 30 accuracy, throwing for two touchdowns and one interception.

Backup quarterback Jacoby Brissett, starting in place of injured Kyler Murray (foot), completed 27 of 44 passes for 320 yards with two touchdowns and one interception. It wasn't enough to prevent the Cardinals (2-4) from losing their fourth straight game.

Drake Maye threw for 261 yards and three touchdowns as visiting New England Patriots improved to 3-0 on the road with the 25-19 win at New Orleans Saints.

Maye, who hit 18 of 2 passes, hooked up DeMario Douglas for a 53-yard touchdown strike in the first quarter before connecting with Kayshon Boutte for 25 and 29 yards in the second to build a 22-14 halftime lead. Boutte finished with five catches for 93 yards for the Patriots (4-2), who tied their win total for last season.

Spencer Rattler completed 20 of 26 passes for 227 yards while Blake Grupe booted four field goals for the Saints (1-5). Taysom Hill scored on a 1-yard run for New Orleans' lone touchdown while Chris Olave collected six catches for 98 yards.

Aaron Rodgers threw for 235 yards and two touchdowns while host Pittsburgh Steelers' offense piled up six sacks to lead Cleveland Browns from start to finish 23-9 in an AFC North matchup.

Rodgers connected with Connor Heyward for 12 yards in the third quarter and DK Metcalf for a 25-yard score on the first play of the fourth. Jalen Ramsey and Nate Helbig registered two sacks apiece for the Steelers (4-1) while Chris Boswell booted three field goals of 40-plus yards.

Zidane Eyes Future Role as France Coach, But Timing Unclear



ROME (Dispatches) - Zinedine Zidane confirmed he would one day like to coach the France national team, but did not say if he was hoping to take over from outgoing boss Didier Deschamps.

Zidane, who scored twice in France's 1998 World Cup final win over Brazil, led Real Madrid to three Champions League titles in his only previous senior head coaching role.

"I'm sure I'll get back into coaching," Zidane said at an event organised by Italian sports daily La Gazzetta dello Sport.

"I'm not saying it's going to happen now, what I want one day is to coach the national team."

The 53-year-old is the favourite to take over from Deschamps when the 2018 World Cup-winning coach steps down after next year's tournament in the United States, Canada and Mexico.

"The most important thing is to have a passion for football and to want to pass on something to your players, what you have in you, deep within you," added Zidane, whose second spell in charge of Real Madrid ended in 2021.

"A coach has an important role in the success of his team. In my opinion his energy and desire are 80 per cent of whether things go well."

Lakers Earn First Preseason Victory With Win Over Warriors



LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - With Sunday marking a full week since their last preseason game, Lakers coach JJ Redick hoped the progress he saw from his team during their four practices over the previous five days would translate onto the game floor against the Golden State Warriors at Crypto.com Arena.

Better execution with their offensive sets. Creating more scoring chances in transition after playing in the halfcourt too frequently. Being more locked in defensively, especially off the ball.

The improvements from last week were evident, helping the Lakers beat the Warriors 126-116 to pick up their first preseason win.

"Biggest thing offensively, we did a great job of just getting to the next action," Redick said. "Shared the basketball. There wasn't a player that really dominated in terms of assists or time on the ball."

The Lakers' offense hummed in a way it didn't in its previous two exhibitions, racking up 28 assists.

Austin Reaves led the team with 21 points on 7-of-10 shooting in 23 minutes to go with three assists and three rebounds.

Rui Hachimura (6-of-10 shooting) and Dalton Knecht (4-of-9 shooting, six made free throws) both scored 16 points.

Knecht, who Redick said has been the best offensive player on the team during camp and has scored 42 more points than any of his Lakers teammates during live play in practices, started after coming off the bench in the previous two preseason games.

Deandre Ayton had 14 points, eight rebounds and five assists in 26 minutes, being more involved in the offense than he previously was as the Lakers shot 53.8% from the field (43 of 80), including 44.4% from beyond the 3-point arc (12 of 27).

The Warriors, who were without Stephen Curry, Jimmy Butler, Al Horford and Moses Moody, were led by Brandin Podziemski's 23 points and eight assists.

Reaves left the game midway through the third quarter after a collision with Podziemski during Podziemski's drive to the basket for a layup. He stayed in the game for a couple more plays before being subbed out, staying on the Lakers' bench for the remainder of the night after being checked out by team trainers. Reaves said postgame that he was "good".

Who wasn't available for the Lakers on Sunday garnered a significant amount of attention.

Vacherot Beats Cousin Rinderknech to Clinch Shanghai Masters Title

SHANGHAI (Dispatches) - Monaco's world number 204 Valentin Vacherot completed a fairytale run at the Shanghai Masters, rallying from a set down to defeat his cousin, Frenchman Arthur Rinderknech, 4-6 6-3 6-3 in the final and secure his first ATP title.

The 26-year-old's victory made him the first player from Monaco to win an ATP singles title and set a record as the lowest-ranked player to triumph at an ATP Masters 1000 event.

The victorious Vacherot was overwhelmed with emotion, before sharing a heartfelt embrace with his older cousin Rinderknech, 30.

Vacherot had earned a little under \$600,000 in career prize money but lifting the trophy in Shanghai will see him pocket over \$1.12 million.

Vacherot's remarkable run to the title also means he will be ranked world number 40 on Monday while Rinderknech, ranked 54th, is set to rise into the top 40.

"I'm just all like, crying, it's just, it's unreal what just happened. I have no idea what's happening right now, I'm not in a dream, it's just crazy. I'm just so happy of my performance these past two weeks," Vacherot said.

"I think there's just two winners today, one family that won, and I think for the sport of tennis, this story is just unreal."



"I wish there could be two winners, but unfortunately there's only one, and for myself, I'm really happy that it's me."

The cousins had given fans plenty to cheer about in the previous round — Vacherot stunning record 24-times Grand Slam champion Novak Djokovic and Rinderknech overcoming 2021 U.S. Open winner Daniil Medvedev.

With Swiss maestro and former champion Roger Federer watching from the stands, Rinderknech broke first to lead 2-1 in the opening set, capitalizing on a flurry of unforced errors from Vacherot.

The momentum continued to flow Rinderknech's way as he covered the court with impressive athleticism, racing to a 3-1 lead before extending it to 4-2.

Vacherot mounted a spirited fightback to narrow the gap to 5-4, but Rinderknech held his nerve to stave off his cousin's comeback attempt and seal the first set in 41 minutes.

In a tight second set, momentum swung back and forth with the duo locked at 3-3 before Vacherot crunched a backhand winner to break Rinderknech and surge ahead 5-3, keeping his cool to force a decider.

Meanwhile French Open champion Coco Gauff captured her third WTA 1000 title and first in Wuhan after rallying from two breaks down in the second set to defeat fellow American Jessica Pegula 6-4 7-5.

Gauff, who reached the Wuhan semi-finals last year, trailed 0-3 in the second set but clawed her way back, reducing the deficit to 3-5 before winning four straight games to seal victory in straight sets.

The 21-year-old secured her 11th career WTA singles title, adding to her WTA 1000 triumphs in Cincinnati (2023) and Beijing (2024), and reached her third final at this level in 2025 after runner-up finishes in Madrid and Rome.

Scotland Top 2026 World Cup Qualifying Group

PARIS (Dispatches) - Scotland moved top of their 2026 World Cup qualifying group with a tense 2-1 win at home to Belarus while the Netherlands closed in on securing their berth at the tournament with a comfortable win over Finland.

Steve Clarke's Scotland provisionally lead Group C by three points ahead of Denmark, although the Danes can hit back to take top spot when they host Greece later.

"We know every game from now until the end is so important," Scott McTominay told BBC Scotland.

"It's been good in terms of points picked up but we know we've got to be better than what we've shown, everybody does, me included."

"We've got to be at a higher standard than this."

Che Adams scored the opener for the hosts on the quarter-



hour at Hampden Park in an otherwise uninspiring performance by Scotland.

They thought they were due a penalty just shy of the hour for a succession of incidents in the Belarus box, including two calls for a foul and hand-ball shouts going both ways, but after a lengthy VAR review the referee declined the home side's appeals and awarded a free-kick out.

Scotland then had VAR to thank on 63 minutes when Evgeni Malashevich's leveller was eventually disallowed for a foul in the build-up on Napoli Serie A winner McTominay.

In a busy sequence for the VAR officials, Adams put the ball into the Belarus net for a second time in the 70th minute, confirming the original on-field decision that the Torino man was offside.