

Iran Is Racing Against Time to Complete the Construction of a Massive Solar Power Plant in Its Central Province of Isfahan, a Project Expected to Supply Electricity to Nearly 2.5 Million Homes

# IRAN NEWS

Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesman Esmail Baghaei in a Post on His X Account Condemned the “Violent” Attack on a Jewish Event in Sydney, Australia, Which Killed 15 People and Injured Dozens of Others

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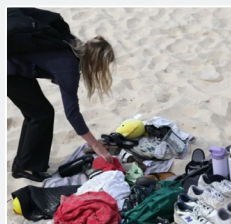
### Opportunity for Wheat Trade with Kazakhstan

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### Father and Son Gunmen Kill 15 at Jewish Festival on Australia’s Bondi Beach

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### Civilizations Urged to Unite Against Unilateralism, Warmongering



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran’s deputy foreign minister for legal and international affairs says unity among civilizations should be embraced as a strategic principle to address global crises, stressing that an alliance of civilizations must stand as a bulwark against warmongering.

Speaking at the 11th Global Forum of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC) in Riyadh, Kazem Gharibabadi emphasized the critical need for cohesion in confronting global issues, including counter-terrorism, establishing sustainable peace and security, promoting social and economic justice, and advancing shared science and technology.

He identified the primary culprits behind international instability, pointing to Western hegemonic policies.

“The formation of domineering coalitions, recourse to force and illegal actions, instrumental exploitation of multilateral mechanisms, and the promotion of the logic of supremacy, exceptionalism, and interventionism are among the common roots of the current global crises,” he said.

Gharibabadi reaffirmed Iran’s foundational role as the originator of the “Dialogue Among Civilizations” initiative in 2001 and pledged the nation’s full commitment to cooperation.

“We believe that civilizations must interact with each other, not confront each other. Only through dialogue and the exchange of experiences can we find common solutions to global challenges,” he said. “Iran has always taken steps toward promoting global peace, security, and solidarity, and is ready to cooperate with all countries of the world in this path.”

### Iran’s “Neighbor-Centric” Policy Receives Warm Reception at ECO Summit



#### IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Iran’s “neighbor-centric” and regional engagement policy received widespread approval from member states at the recent Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) Ministers of Interior summit, Interior Minister Eskandar Momeni said. After more than a decade-long hiatus, Iran’s initiative to host the meeting was met with enthusiasm, with participants expressing surprise that such a valuable opportunity for regional cooperation had been delayed for over ten years.

Speaking at the inauguration of educational projects in Golestan province, Momeni praised the province’s historical and cultural contributions, calling it the “Art Gallery of Iran.” He emphasized that investment in Golestan promises high returns, noting that while the province significantly contributes to the nation’s culture, economy, and knowledge, it has not fully benefited from national resources. He stressed the government’s commitment to ensuring the province’s development aligns with national priorities.

Momeni highlighted the national campaign “Iran Life,” a collaboration between the Interior Ministry and national media, which showcases Golestan’s historical role and capacities. He said the initiative provides both government and private investors a clearer understanding of the province’s potential, underlining that every investment in Golestan guarantees substantial returns.

## Strengthening Relations with Neighbors Key to Neutralizing U.S. Sanctions

#### IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Strengthening economic and political ties with its 15 neighboring countries is essential for Iran to withstand the effects of U.S. sanctions, according to Major General Yahya Safavi, head of the Sacred Defense Research Institute. Speaking on Monday at the first national conference on “Basij, Development, and Sustainable Security in Southeast Iran,” Safavi emphasized that fostering strong regional relations would make sanctions ineffective. “The Americans cannot control Iran’s economic relations if we reinforce ties with our neighbors,” he said.

The conference, held at the Major General Qasem Soleimani Sacred Defense Research Institute, attracted participation from 64 academic centers across four provinces, as well as representatives from various branches of the armed forces. The event was designed as a national platform for promoting sustainable regional development and security, showcasing both scientific research and practical initiatives.

Safavi highlighted the strategic importance of Iran’s southeast region, which includes South Khorasan, Sistan and Baluchestan, southern Kerman, and eastern Hormozgan. Covering nearly 500,000 square kilometers—roughly one-fifth of Iran’s territory—the region is home to approximately nine million people. In recent years, the area has witnessed notable development and improvements in security, making it conducive to hosting scientific and policy-oriented gatherings.

Describing the conference as a “scientific-applied” event, Safavi explained that its goal is to provide actionable outputs that can serve as policy guidance for government ministries, regional authorities, and the armed forces. “This conference aims to generate evidence-based recommendations that can guide sustainable development and security initiatives,” he said. The conference will rotate through several provinces, culminating in Zahedan in late January under the theme “Hidden Treasure.” Safavi referred to Chabahar’s coastal region as Iran’s “lost paradise,” emphasizing that the northward development of the area—from the Makran coast along the Gulf of Oman—is crucial for regional progress.

The conference also features a comprehensive exhibition of handicrafts, scientific innovations, and industrial advancements. Highlighted projects include the Zahedan-Chabahar railway and freshwater pipelines from Tehlab to Zahedan, both spearheaded by the Khatam al-Anbiya Construction Headquarters. The exhibition aims to demonstrate government achievements, showcase provincial initiatives, and attract both domestic and foreign investment. For the first time, coordination with approximately 300 local NGOs in Sistan and Baluchestan has been established to maximize community engagement and



support regional development.

Safavi also announced a parallel “Health and Development” conference led by Zahedan University of Medical Sciences, focusing on the region’s capacities and investment potential. Participants will identify key challenges and priorities, utilizing artificial intelligence tools to analyze data and propose solutions. One major initiative involves creating a network linking universities and government agencies to monitor and evaluate economic and security trends. This network will produce monthly reports to inform policymakers and the public.

The general stressed the strategic significance of the region’s borders, which stretch approximately 1,400 kilometers along Afghanistan and Pakistan. These borders offer Iran the potential to serve as a major economic corridor, facilitating trade and regional integration. Currently, two million tons of goods are exchanged annually between Iran and Pakistan, with the capacity of Chabahar Port capable of handling several million more. Safavi emphasized that strengthening rail and trade infrastructure in the southeast will further enhance economic resilience and reduce dependence on external actors.

Southeast Iran also holds considerable untapped potential in renewable energy and water resources. Safavi noted that only two percent of desalination capacity along the Persian Gulf and Oman Sea coasts is currently utilized, while the region has the potential to generate thousands of megawatts of solar power. Highlighting the role of modern technology, he called for the deployment of innovative solutions in energy, water, and transportation to support sustainable development.

Safavi concluded by reiterating the importance of leveraging regional potential to counter external pressures. “With strong relations with our neighbors, investment in infrastructure, and utilization of local capacities, U.S. sanctions cannot take effect, and they cannot control Iran’s economic relations,” he said. He called on all government bodies, organizations, and the public to collaborate to ensure security, economic growth, and sustainable development in the southeast region.

The conference, Safavi stressed, is not merely a forum for discussion but a platform to produce concrete policy recommendations, investment strategies, and security solutions that can guide long-term regional progress. By documenting challenges and solutions, the event aims to provide a strategic roadmap for the Iranian government, military, and Parliament to ensure the southeast’s development is both comprehensive and resilient.

## Efficiency of Religious Governance Is a Prerequisite for a Strong Iran

#### IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN – Majlis Speaker said that if the nation seeks a strong Iran and a secure future for its children, the efficiency of religious governance must be proven in practice.

Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf made the remarks at a meeting with researchers of the Parliament’s Islamic Research Center, held on the occasion of Research Week. Emphasizing the necessity of linking science and religion in governing society, he said: “Today, whatever happens in the Islamic Republic is attributed to religion. Therefore, if we are seeking to realize a strong Iran, we must demonstrate the effectiveness of religious governance in practice.”

He added: “Any event in the Islamic Republic is ultimately credited to religion, and this represents a great opportunity for religious research centers to establish a connection between science and religion for administering society. If we care about religion, the Revolution, the late Imam, or the future of our children, and if we are seeking a strong Iran, we must prove the efficiency of religion in governing society.”

The Speaker stressed that this is a major opportunity created by scholars, jurists, martyrs, and great scientists—those who struggled for more than fourteen centuries—enabling the establishment of religion within a political organizational framework at the international level for nearly half a century under the sacred system of the Islamic Republic.

Qalibaf noted that governing a state has multiple dimensions and requires jurisprudential rulings, emphasizing: “For the elevated administration of society, we must make use of a complete religious framework. As managers, we consider all tools. What is currently transforming the world is technology; data are replacing laws, and this is changing lifestyles.”

Referring again to the theme of the meeting, Qalibaf said the future lies in the use of data, which will transform everything, and added: “In this context, we must ask how these transformations will relate to religion.”

He pointed out that artificial intelligence is now a major issue and that data will shape the future, noting: “Human behavior has been transformed by the tools people create and by access to them; time horizons are becoming shorter. It is essential to address these issues seriously and fundamentally in all dimensions.”

He said that, according to the directives of the Supreme Leader, Iran must be among the world’s top ten countries in the field of artificial intelligence, adding that given the current structure and software foundations of AI, this field must be further strengthened.

He stated that many fundamental issues lie ahead, adding: “When we look at different countries, we see that they are advancing at an unimaginable speed in software and technology, and we too must pay serious attention to this critical arena.”



The Speaker emphasized that governing the country is possible through science alongside religion, stating: “In administering society, all components—from artificial intelligence to the complexity of various issues—must be taken into account, and religious governance must accompany them in order to achieve the necessary efficiency.”

He noted that in certain areas of lawmaking, human oversight is undoubtedly required, adding: “Artificial intelligence learns well, but it has no foresight or independent thinking; it is a tool to which humans must impart thought and reasoning.”

Qalibaf stressed that Parliament is capable of reducing the number of existing laws—currently 12,583—to a much smaller figure so that people can live with greater ease and comfort. “One of the causes of corruption in the country is the existence of inefficient laws,” he said. “Many laws suffer from weaknesses and must be reorganized.”

He added that people must be aware of their rights within the system of governance and demand them from officials. “If people are familiar with their rights, they will also be aware of their duties. If an individual fails to fulfill their duties, they cannot demand or receive their rights; everyone must act on their responsibilities according to the rights they possess.”

Qalibaf said that in social governance, there is no capital greater than trust, adding: “All the problems in society stem from a lack of trust. Trust must lead to meaningful participation, and meaningful participation should reveal the four sources of power, wealth, knowledge, and social status, which are the tools of governance. The proper functioning of these four components enables the effective administration of society.”

He noted that with the cooperation of the Parliament Research Center and the Islamic Research Center, a principled structure for lawmaking must be established, emphasizing that no institution other than Parliament has the authority to legislate. “Parliament stands at the apex of affairs and must regulate matters,” he said.

The Speaker stated that Parliament should reduce the more than 12,000 existing laws to around 3,500, adding that, according to the Guardian Council, any law that contradicts Islamic law must be amended. “We cannot neglect the refinement of laws under the pretext of lack of time. Everyone must work together to achieve this goal,” he said.

Qalibaf added that the Parliament Research Center in Tehran and the Islamic Research Center in Qom must jointly advance the process of producing sound legislation and revising past laws.

### Banks: The Esfandiar’s Eye of the System

By: Hamid Reza Naghashian

The term Esfandiar’s Eye (Equal to Achilles’ Heel) comes from Ferdowsi’s Shahnameh (One of Iran’s famous poet’s work) and refers to a point of weakness or vulnerability. According to the epic, King Goshasp subjected his son, Esfandiar, to the seven trials to restrain Rostam and bathed him in the sacred waters to strengthen him. While his body became resilient and toughened, his eyes remained unprotected. Rostam eventually struck him in the eyes with a thorn arrow, bringing him down.

The Islamic Republic of Iran emerged from a revolution grounded in 1,400 years of faith-based principles. These religious foundations have been tempered through centuries to withstand any ideology—whether materialist, syncretic, false mysticism, or even new social schools of thought—leaving enduring guidance. However, in the management of money and financial policy, even with the Quran’s explicit guidance that “wealth is a tool of survival; do not entrust it to fools,” the system’s inexperience and mismanagement caused irreparable harm to both the nation and its people over the 47 years of the revolution. One can liken this mismanagement to what the Quran calls folly in handling wealth.

Sadeq Amoli Larjani, former head of the judiciary and current chairman of the Expediency Council, recently addressed this destructive role of monetary policy and banks in a speech on Student Day, December 9, 2025. He candidly admitted that the system erred in privatizing banks and relinquishing control over monetary management. He criticized the establishment of private banks, stating, “The creation of private banks, which began even before Ahmadinejad, was 100% wrong!” He further noted that this system had become a “private haven for corrupt activities.”

Larjani also highlighted the Central Bank’s five-year neglect in dealing with the Future Bank crisis, which then spread to other banks such as Bank Sepah, stressing the need for corrective measures.

I myself, back in 1992, criticized the initiation of private banking by Mohsen Nourbakhsh, then head of the Central Bank, supported by Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, in an article summarized in the Central Bank bulletin. Despite this, the Central Bank hastened the establishment of numerous private banks, cementing a policy that became nearly irreversible.

For 33 years, this model of banking—mirroring the English system imposed in many British colonies to dominate monetary control—has perpetuated devastating inflation and created a nouveau-riche class. It produced an unbelievable Gini coefficient and competitive interest rates in a country where usury (riba) is strictly forbidden, effectively becoming the Achilles’ heel of the Islamic system.

Since those early years, I have consistently advocated in speeches and writings for a unified banking system under ten specialized organizations. Under this model, a Central Bank is unnecessary. Oversight of the specialized organizations could be conducted under a single banking authority, which would both rectify past mistakes and ensure proper, faith-aligned use of financial resources.

We must remain vigilant. I will hold accountable those responsible in the afterlife and challenge the deaf ears of those who, over 33 years, created this Achilles’ heel of the system.

### Judiciary Chief Urges Vigilance Against Playing into Enemy Hands



#### IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Hojjatolislam Eje’i, head of Iran’s judiciary, emphasized the need for a determined yet informed fight against corruption during the Supreme Judicial Council meeting on Monday. He warned that the nation must maintain unity and focus on public issues to avoid inadvertently “playing in the enemy’s court.”

Eje’i highlighted that while public demands for anti-corruption measures are legitimate, addressing corruption requires more than arrests and punishments. “Past experience shows that merely imprisoning offenders does not eradicate corruption. Structural reforms, closing loopholes, raising public awareness, and implementing anti-corruption laws are all essential,” he said.



# IRAN NEWS



## Shiraz and Surkhandarya Chambers Sign Cooperation Agreement

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - The Shiraz Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture and the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Uzbekistan's Surkhandarya Province signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) aimed at expanding bilateral economic cooperation.

The agreement was signed during the visit of an economic delegation from Surkhandarya Province to Fars Province and the city of Shiraz. The signing ceremony was attended by the Governor of Fars, senior government officials, and economic stakeholders from both Iran and Uzbekistan. The MoU was signed by Mohammad Sadegh Hamidian, Head of the Shiraz Chamber, and Hakimov Aziz Lutfullayevich, Head of the Surkhandarya Chamber.

## Areas of Iran–Spain Cooperation for the Development of Renewable Energy



### IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Spain's Economic and Trade Counsellor in Tehran, pointing to Iran's strategic importance in the Middle East, its significant wind and solar energy potential, and its extensive plans to expand renewable energy, said there are clear opportunities for cooperation between Iran and Spain in supplying certain equipment, transferring technical and engineering services, providing training, and building human resource capacity.

Opportunities for technical and scientific cooperation in the development of renewable power plants in Iran were outlined during an online meeting for 16 companies active in the energy and renewable sectors at the Spanish Economic and Trade Counsellor's Office in Tehran. Inigo Gil Casares Armando, Spain's Economic and Trade Counsellor, highlighted Iran's considerable wind and solar potential and its broad renewable energy development programs.

He noted that cooperation in this sector is not directly subject to primary or secondary US and European sanctions. However, he added that challenges related to financial transactions, insurance coverage, and similar issues may create difficulties for cooperation. Despite these constraints, he emphasized that opportunities remain in the supply of certain equipment, the transfer of technical and engineering services, as well as training and capacity building for human resources.

Satkin, an adviser to Iran's Minister of Energy, also elaborated on the country's potential for constructing wind and solar power plants in various regions, as well as the measures and programs underway across different provinces. He stressed that the provision of certain equipment, along with educational, scientific, and technical cooperation, are among the areas proposed by the Ministry of Energy for collaboration with Spanish companies.

Mehdi Tafazoli, Head of the International Cooperation Development Group at the Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Organization (SATBA), highlighted SATBA's role and position in advancing national programs and the renewable energy development roadmap. He explained the investment drivers and models designed by SATBA for Spanish companies participating in the meeting.

Tafazoli described joint cooperation in organizing training courses and transferring experience in integrating renewable energy into the power grid as key areas of collaboration. He also pointed to the supply of equipment and engineering services—particularly in fields such as solar power plants, thermal systems, and smart inverters—as promising areas for joint efforts.

## Tourism Education in Schools Worldwide



### IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - The UN World Tourism Organization (UN Tourism) and the International Baccalaureate (IB) have signed a memorandum of understanding, opening a new pathway for tourism education at the high school level. The aim of the partnership is to empower young people and connect school-based learning with the real needs of the tourism industry.

According to IRNA, citing the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts, UN Tourism and the International Baccalaureate Organization have agreed to launch a joint collaboration to expand access for high school students worldwide to specialized education in tourism. The cooperation will be formalized through an official memorandum of understanding and will focus on improving the quality and content of tourism education within international education systems.

Under the agreement, the two organizations will review and implement a range of programs designed to strengthen the skills and knowledge of students interested in tourism. Educational empowerment, professional development, and preparing students to enter the tourism labor market have been identified as key pillars of the partnership. Ongoing dialogue on linking education with the tourism industry will also form an important part of the collaboration.



## Opportunity for Wheat Trade with Kazakhstan

### IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The Head of the Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA) said Kazakhstan produces more than 20 million tons of wheat annually, around 13 million tons of which is surplus, noting that Iran could generate significant value-added by purchasing this excess wheat, processing it into flour, and exporting it to third countries.

Speaking on Sunday at a meeting of the ICCIMA Board of Representatives, Samad Hassan Zadeh said that if policymakers are seeking practical solutions to overcome current economic challenges, they must fundamentally review mechanisms that have led to bottlenecks in trade.

Referring to foreign exchange repatriation requirements, Hassan Zadeh said the policy has become one of the most challenging issues for exporters in practice. He noted that it has reduced incentives for formal exports, increased risk and uncertainty, put pressure on small export-oriented firms, encouraged the use of rented commercial cards, and pushed part of trade toward informal channels or under-declaration.

“The private sector believes that the return of foreign currency is a national necessity,” he said. “However, under current economic conditions, foreign exchange repatriation has effectively turned into a hidden tax on formal exports. This benefits neither the government, nor production, nor economic transparency.”

He added that instead of facilitating currency returns, the policy has reduced the depth of productive exports. Given the positive interest shown by other countries in engaging Iran's private sector, Hassan Zadeh said the government is expected to undertake a serious review of its policies and mechanisms to ease trade for economic actors.

Addressing the outcomes of a recent Iranian trade delegation's visit to Kazakhstan, Hassan Zadeh said nine cooperation documents were signed between the private sectors of the two countries. These covered mining, as well as broader trade and economic cooperation. An agreement was also signed on the transit transportation of Kazakh cargo toward Southeast Asia and Africa via Iran's corridor.

Highlighting wheat trade as a major opportunity, he said senior Kazakh officials have expressed interest in exporting their surplus wheat either directly to Iran or through Iran to other markets. “Iran has extensive capacity in flour milling. If several

flour mills take the initiative to purchase Kazakhstan's surplus wheat and export flour to other countries, substantial value-added can be created,” he said.

Hassan Zadeh also outlined a number of operational proposals presented during meetings with Kazakhstan's minister of trade, head of customs, and other senior public- and private-sector officials. These included forming a joint Iran–Kazakhstan operational task force to immediately define priority trade items under the Eurasian free trade agreement; launching a Kazakhstan–Iran green transit corridor with customs discounts; establishing a joint Iran–Kazakhstan logistics terminal at Iran's southern ports; creating a joint industrial park in free zones to export to Eurasia; and forming a joint consortium in Iran to process Kazakhstan's mineral resources for value-added exports to third countries.

In another part of his remarks, Hassan Zadeh addressed recent regulations on credit ceilings for commercial cards, discussed at the December 12 meeting of the Council of Provincial Chamber Heads. He said that under a directive issued by the Trade Promotion Organization, all commercial cards without rankings were deactivated as of November 30, 2025, and holders are required to obtain bank guarantees to receive or increase export and import credit ceilings.

He warned that the directive has caused widespread confusion among economic actors, particularly in border provinces, regarding credit assessment and bank guarantee procedures. Chamber heads across the country concluded that credit assessment should be delegated to chambers of commerce from the outset of the process.

“If chambers nationwide can manage credit assessment, it would be a major achievement,” Hassan Zadeh said, noting that although a similar proposal was made by the Trade Promotion Organization three months ago, chambers were not ready at the time due to a lack of necessary systems. He said the Board of Representatives must now decide whether chambers can provide the required guarantees for businesses.

At the beginning of his remarks, Hassan Zadeh also referred to the change of secretary general at ICCIMA, praising Dr. Sasan Shahveisi for his academic standing and valuable contributions to strengthening the chamber. He emphasized that Shahveisi's departure from the post does not mean the chamber will no longer benefit from his expertise, describing him as a national asset whose experience will continue to be utilized in other capacities.

## Yazd Has Major Trade Potential in Turkmenistan

### IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The head of the Iran–Turkmenistan Joint Chamber of Commerce said that despite Yazd province's strong production and economic capabilities, its traders have only a limited presence in the Turkmen market, missing significant opportunities for expanding bilateral trade.

Speaking at a webinar titled “Strategies for Developing Trade with Uzbekistan,” organized by the Yazd Chamber of Commerce, Ramadan Bahrami noted that Iran–Turkmenistan annual trade stands at around \$600 million, adding that Yazd's products already have a foothold in the Turkmen market but are far from reaching their full potential.

Bahrami, who has been active in trade with Turkmenistan since 1993 and has led the joint chamber for the past two years, said effective cooperation between provincial chambers and the joint chamber is essential for achieving tangible results. He pointed to the establishment of a strong virtual business platform in Turkmenistan and the creation of solid ties with experienced Turkmen traders as positive steps already taken.

While noting the importance of Iran's five northern provinces bordering Turkmenistan, Bahrami stressed that provinces such as Yazd should not be overlooked. “Yazd has powerful economic actors and competitive products that are consumed in Turkmenistan, yet Yazdi traders are not present in the market to the extent their capacity allows,” he said.

He highlighted Turkmenistan's role as a regional trade hub, noting that the country, with a population of about six million, records annual trade of \$16–17 billion and can serve as a transit bridge for Iranian goods to CIS countries. He also described Iran–Turkmenistan borders as secure and suitable for trade and said Turkmenistan is moving rapidly toward industrial development.

Bahrami criticized sudden export policy changes, saying that while some recent measures aimed at regulating exports were necessary, their timing was inappropriate and led to the loss of markets. He



cited previous bans on poultry exports as an example, arguing that such decisions pushed Turkmenistan toward self-sufficiency and eliminated Iran's market share.

He added that products from Yazd—including electrodes, wires and cables, construction materials, ceramics, and metal sections—are used in Turkmenistan, but unprofessional practices and excessive brokerage at border points have harmed producers. Referring to Iran's \$570 million trade surplus with Turkmenistan, Bahrami said this balance could be both an opportunity and a threat. He questioned why Yazd, a major textile hub, does not source raw materials from Turkmenistan, warning that if Iranian traders do not act, alternatives will emerge.

Bahrami also urged Yazdi traders to participate in gas tenders and major energy projects in Turkmenistan, citing the country's significant energy potential. He proposed establishing a “Turkmenistan Desk” at the Yazd Chamber of Commerce, pledging to bring Turkmenistan's ambassador to Yazd and organize trade delegations if intermediaries are removed and producers engage directly with the market.

Ali-Asghar Beigi, Vice President of the Yazd Chamber of Commerce and head of its Trade Facilitation and Export Development Commission, said Yazd is active in Turkmenistan, particularly in construction materials, but has far greater capacity to expand. He expressed readiness to host Turkmen trade delegations and announced plans to send a specialized construction-sector delegation to Turkmenistan.

Mohammadreza Nasiri, head of the Foreign Trade Department at Yazd's Industry, Mine and Trade Organization, highlighted Yazd's strong industrial, agricultural, and mining capacities. He said more than 56 percent of Iran's tile and ceramic production comes from Yazd, with exports to 15 neighboring countries, including \$6.3 million worth to Turkmenistan. He added that improved logistics coordination and smoother foreign exchange repatriation could significantly boost trade with CIS countries.

## 42nd Train from China Arrives in Iran



### IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - The Director General of Foreign Commercial Affairs at the Islamic Republic of Iran Railways (RAI) announced that, following rail agreements among six countries along the China–Europe route—China, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Iran, Turkey, and Turkmenistan—the 42nd freight train from China entered Iran.

Speaking on Sunday to IRNA, Shahriar Naqizadeh said that two container freight trains from China and Russia entered Iran simultaneously today, describing the development as a significant milestone.

The railway official noted that the continued arrival of containerized and transit freight trains from Russia to Iran's southern ports, as well as to Afghanistan via the Shantiq border, and the ongoing operation of transit trains from Turkey to Afghanistan, are major developments in the rail sector. He also pointed to the resumption of the Islamabad–Tehran–Istanbul railway line after several years of suspension, which is scheduled to restart in early Dey (late December), calling it another promising step toward rail sector growth.

Naqizadeh added that coordination is under way for the entry of a second Chinese freight train bound for Europe via Iran. He noted that previously, only one such train had entered Iran on a trial basis in Esfand 1403 (February–March 2025).

## Construction of Shalamcheh–Basra Railway to Begin Next Year



### IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The Deputy Minister of Roads and Urban Development announced that the Deputy for Passenger Affairs of Turkish State Railways is expected to visit Iran soon, likely within the next week. During this visit, technical and financial negotiations regarding the Tehran–Ankara train service will be held.

Speaking to reporters, Jabbarali Zakeri said that one of the key components of the Shalamcheh–Basra railway project was completing the domestic rail line up to the zero border point. “By Arbaeen this year, two tracks—station tracks at Shalamcheh Station at the zero border point—were constructed and put into operation. Completion of the remaining sections is underway, and God willing, by Arbaeen next year we will have fulfilled all commitments related to freight and passenger lines,” he said.

He added that another major task in the project was mine clearance. “This process took about seven months, and 14 kilometers of the 16 kilometers under Iran's government commitment have been cleared of mines. The prepared substructure has now been handed over to the contracting company,” Zakeri noted.

Regarding the bridge section of the project, the Deputy Minister said significant progress has been made. “Three spans of the 700-meter bridge have been constructed. The remaining spans are being pursued using the segmental method, with one segment produced daily in Ahvaz and transferred to the project site. We hope to complete the bridge construction by June next year and hand it over to Iraqi Railways,” he said.

Zakeri emphasized that, according to assurances from the Iraqi government, the executive operations of the project are expected to begin in early next year.

On the resumption of the Tehran–Ankara train service, Zakeri explained that an understanding has been reached with Turkish State Railways to address issues related to Lake Van. “Unfortunately, since mid-year one of the lines has been under repair, causing disruptions to freight transport and, naturally, making passenger transport impossible,” he said.



## China, Saudi Arabia Agree to Strengthen Coordination on Regional

BEIJING (Dispatches) - China and Saudi Arabia agreed to have closer communication and coordination on regional and international issues, with Beijing lauding Riyadh's role in Middle East diplomacy, statements following a meeting between the nations' foreign ministers on Sunday showed.

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi is on a three-nation tour in the Middle East that began in the United Arab Emirates and is expected to end in Jordan. He met with Saudi Arabia's Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al-Saud in Riyadh on Sunday.

A joint statement published by China's official news agency Xinhua did not elaborate on what issues the countries will strengthen coordination on, but mentioned China's support for Saudi Arabia and Iran developing and enhancing their relations.



## Released Belarus Prisoners Have No Regrets Over Their Actions



MINSK (Dispatches) - Two prominent Belarusian opposition leaders released by Belarusian authorities in a deal brokered by the U.S. said on Sunday they had no regrets over the actions that led to their incarceration.

Maria Kalesnikava, 43, was one of the leaders of mass protests in 2020 accusing President Alexander Lukashenko of rigging his re-election for a sixth term. Lukashenko crushed the protests through mass police action.

Kalesnikava, quoted by Belarusian opposition news outlet Nasha Niva, was one of a group of released prisoners to address journalists at an undisclosed location in Ukraine a day after their release. A total of 123 prisoners were freed, with 114 taken to Ukraine and nine to Lithuania.

"No, I regret nothing. I believe that there are times during which certain questions are raised, difficult questions and you have to make difficult choices," Nasha Niva quoted her as saying in the news conference.

"It was easy to make that difficult choice because I was and remain certain that I supported the right idea ... I am not alone. There are many of us."

Kalesnikava, a musician, said she would now devote time to music, art, theatre, travel and "communication with people I love and care deeply about".

Seized in 2020 and driven to the Ukrainian border, she tore up her passport to prevent being deported - and was later jailed for 11 years on charges including conspiracy to seize power.

## Hamas Says Israel's Killing of Senior Commander Threatens Ceasefire



GAZA CITY (Dispatches) - Israel's assassination of a senior Hamas commander threatens the viability of the Gaza ceasefire, the chief negotiator of the militant group said on Sunday, calling on U.S. President Donald Trump to demand Israel comply with the terms of the truce.

Thousands of Hamas supporters rallied in central Gaza City at a funeral for senior commander Raed Saed and three associates killed alongside him on Saturday.

The mourners chanted "Martyrs are dear to God" and carried the bodies in coffins draped in green Hamas flags, in one of the group's biggest displays of its presence since a U.S.-backed ceasefire deal came into effect in Gaza in October.

In a televised address, Hamas chief negotiator Khalil al-Hayya, who lives in exile, confirmed the killing of Saed, the highest-profile assassination of a senior Hamas figure since the truce.

"The continued Israeli violations of the ceasefire agreement... and latest assassinations that targeted Saed and others threaten the viability of the agreement," Hayya said.

"We call on mediators, and especially the main guarantor, the U.S. administration and President Donald Trump, to work on obliging Israel to respect the ceasefire and commit to it."

# Father and Son Gunmen Kill 15 at Jewish Festival on Australia's Bondi Beach

SYDNEY (Dispatches) - A father and son opened fire on a Jewish festival at Sydney's Bondi Beach in a shooting spree that killed 15 people including a child, authorities said Monday as they denounced the attack as anti-Semitic "terrorism".

The duo fired into crowds packing the beach for the start of Hanukkah on Sunday evening, sending people fleeing in panic across the tourist hotspot.

A 10-year-old girl was among the 15 dead in Australia's worst mass shooting for almost 30 years, while 42 more were rushed to hospital with gunshot wounds and other injuries.

Police are still unravelling what drove the shootings, although authorities have said the plot was clearly designed to sow terror among the nation's Jews.

"What we saw yesterday was an act of pure evil, an act of anti-Semitism, an act of terrorism on our shores," Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said on Monday, before laying flowers at the Bondi Pavillion.

The gunmen targeted an annual celebration that drew more than 1,000 people to the beach to mark the Jewish festival.

They took aim from a raised boardwalk looking over the beach, which was packed with swimmers cooling off on a steamy summer evening.

Carrying long-barrelled guns, they peppered the beach with bullets for 10 minutes before police shot and killed the 50-year-old father.

The 24-year-old son was arrested and remained under guard in hospital with serious injuries.

Rabbi Mendel Kastel said his brother-in-law was among the dead.

"It's unbelievable that this has happened here in Australia, but we need to hold strong. This is not the Australia that we know. This is not the Australia that we want."

Wary of reprisals, police have so far dodged questions about the attackers' religion or ideological motivations.



"We want to get to the bottom of this. We want to understand the motives behind it," New South Wales police commissioner Mal Lanyon said on Monday.

Hours after the shooting, police found a homemade bomb in a car parked close to the beach.

They said the "improvised explosive device" had likely been planted by the pair.

A brave few dashed towards the beach as the shooting unfolded, wading through fleeing crowds to rescue children, treat the injured and confront the gunmen.

Footage showed a man -- identified by local media as fruit seller Ahmed al Ahmed -- grabbing one of the gunmen as he fired.

The 43-year-old wrestles the gun out of the attacker's hand, before pointing the weapon at the assailant who backs away.

A team of off-duty lifeguards sprinted across the sand to drag children to safety.

"The team ran out under fire to try and clear children from the playground while the gunmen were firing," said Steven Pearce from Surf Life Saving New South Wales.

"They were able to get the children inside," he told AFP.

"The other lifesavers went out and started trying to do CPR on the shot victims, and tried to drag as many inside as they could."

Bleeding victims were carried across the beach atop surfboards turned into makeshift stretchers.

Frenchman Alban Baton, 23, hid for several hours in the cool room of a Bondi Beach grocery store.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu accused Australia's government of "pouring oil on the fire of antisemitism" in the months leading up to the shooting.

# Hard-Right Candidate Jose Antonio Kast Wins Chile Presidential Election



SANTIAGO (Dispatches) - Chilean voters elected the most right-wing president in 35 years of democracy on Sunday, as official results showed Jose Antonio Kast with a thumping 58 percent of votes and his rival conceding defeat. With more than ten million votes counted -- almost 70 percent of the total -- Kast had an unassailable lead over Jeannette Jara, a Communist Party member heading a broad leftist coalition.

Kast won Chile's presidential election on Sunday, leveraging voter fears over rising crime and migration to steer the country in its sharpest rightward shift since the end of the military dictatorship in 1990.

Kast secured 58.30% of the vote in a runoff with leftist candidate Jeanette Jara, who was at 41.70%, with more than 95% of the ballots counted.

"Democracy has spoken loud and clear," Jara said as she conceded. "I have communicated with Jose Antonio Kast and wished him success for the good of Chile."

Kast has been a consistent right-wing hardliner throughout his decades-long political career. He has proposed building border walls, deploying the military to high-crime areas, and deporting all migrants in the country illegally.

His victory marks the latest win for the resurgent right in Latin America. He joins Ecuador's Daniel Noboa, El Salvador's Nayib Bukele, and Argentina's Javier Milei. In October, the election of centrist Rodrigo Paz ended almost two decades of socialist rule in Bolivia.

The campaign was Kast's third run at the presidency and second runoff, after losing to leftist President Gabriel Boric in 2021. Once seen by many

Chileans as too extreme, he has attracted voters who have become increasingly concerned by crime and immigration.

Supporters arrived at the Kast campaign headquarters in Santiago on Sunday evening, waving Chile flags. Some wore red caps emblazoned "Make Chile Great Again."

Ignacio Segovia, a 23-year-old engineering student, was among them.

"I grew up in a peaceful Chile where you could go out in the street, you had no worry, you went out and you never had problems or fear," he said.

"Now you can't go out peacefully."

While Chile remains one of the safest countries in Latin America, violent crime has spiked in recent years as organised crime groups have taken root, capitalising on the country's porous northern desert borders with coca-producing neighbours Peru and Bolivia, major international marine ports, and surge of migrants susceptible to human and sex trafficking.

The vast majority of migrants in Chile illegally have arrived from Venezuela in recent years, government data shows.

Kast's proposals include creating a police force inspired by US Immigration and Customs Enforcement to rapidly detain and expel migrants in the country illegally.

He has also touted massive cuts in public spending.

However, Kast's more radical proposals are likely to face pushback from a divided Congress. While right-wing parties won seats in both legislative houses in a November general election, most of those gains came from more traditional parties. The Senate is evenly split between left and right-wing parties, while the swing vote in the lower legislative body belongs to the populist People's Party.

Chile is the world's largest copper producer and a major producer of lithium, and expectations of less regulation and market-friendly policies have already buoyed the local stock market, peso and equity benchmark.

Kast has previously been outspoken against abortion and the morning-after pill, but changing the country's abortion laws would require the support of more than half of the Congress to pass.

# Zelensky Says Will Seek U.S. Support to Freeze Front Line

KYIV (Dispatches) - Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said he hoped the United States would back the idea of freezing the front line in Ukraine along its current shape at their meeting in Berlin.

Zelensky said he was ready for "dialogue" at the latest round of high-stakes talks with US President Donald Trump's envoy and European leaders on ending the war with Russia.

"The fairest possible option is to 'stay where we are'. This is true because it is a ceasefire... I know that Russia does not view this positively, and I would like the Americans to support us on this issue," Zelensky told reporters shortly before arriving in Berlin.

Trump has been stepping up pressure on Kyiv to reach an agreement since revealing a plan to end the war last month that was criticised as echoing Moscow's demands, including that Ukraine cede crucial territory.

The proposal has triggered a flurry of diplomacy between the United States and Ukraine's European allies, with Kyiv officials recently saying they had sent Washington a revised version.

Zelensky said on Sunday he had not received a response from Washington on Ukraine's amendments, but added: "I am receiving all the signals and will be ready for the dialogue that will begin today."



"The summit in Berlin is important. We are meeting with both the Americans and the Europeans... And today these meetings are taking place in Berlin, today and tomorrow," Zelensky added.

A White House official confirmed to AFP on Friday that Trump's envoy Steve Witkoff would meet with Zelensky and European leaders over the weekend to discuss the status of peace negotiations.

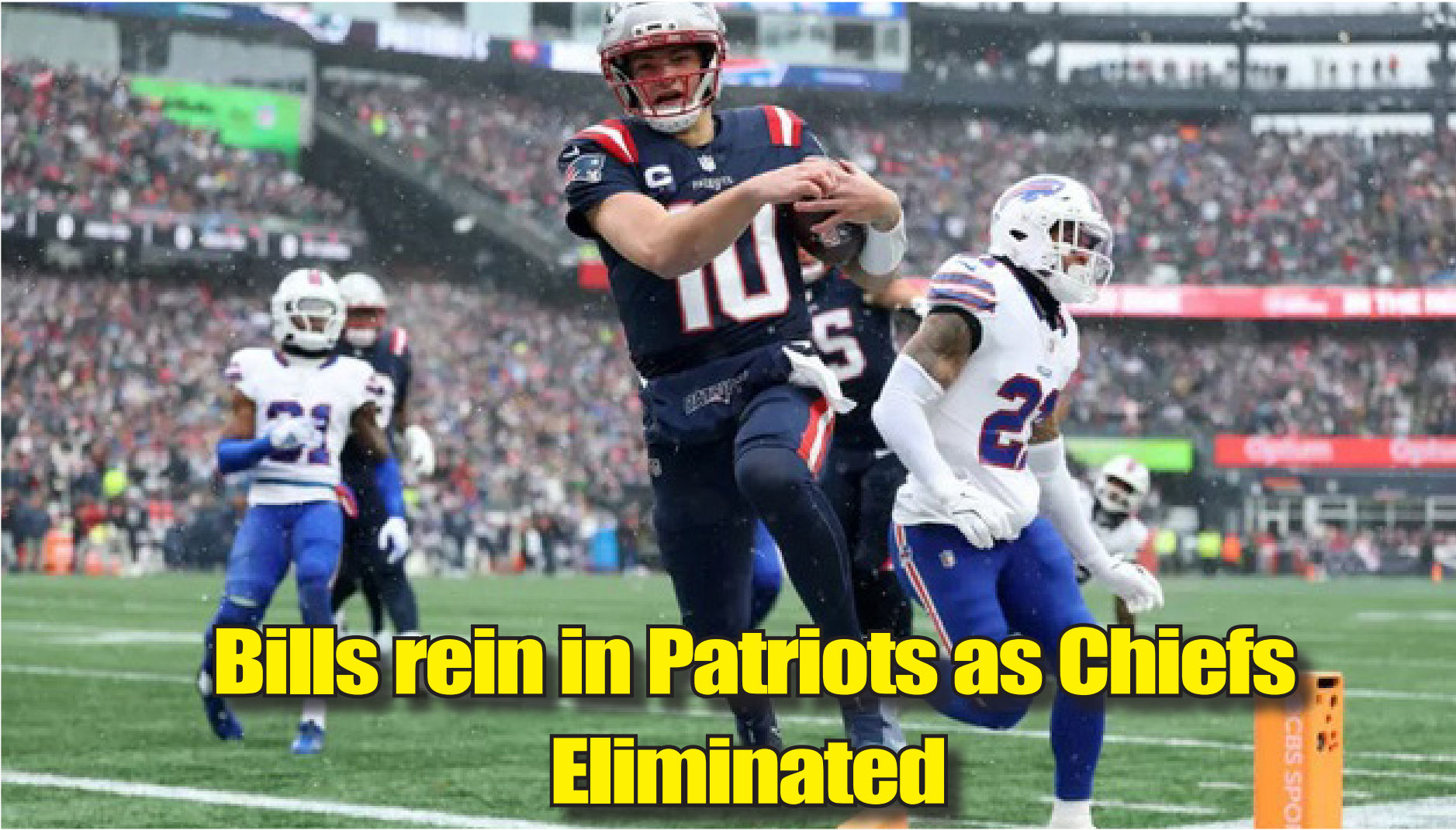
"The most important thing is that the plan should be as fair as possible, first and foremost for Ukraine, because Russia started the war," Zelensky said on Sunday. The latest push in the efforts to put an end to the war that has killed tens of thousands since Russia invaded in 2022 comes as Kyiv reported new aerial strikes.

According to its air force, Russia launched 138 drones and a ballistic missile overnight.

A Russian drone has hit "one of the hospitals in Kherson", the regional administration said on Telegram, wounding two people, including a nurse.

At least 11 people were wounded in the strikes on the Zaporizhzhia region, governor Ivan Fedorov said.





## Bills rein in Patriots as Chiefs Eliminated

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - Josh Allen fired the Buffalo Bills to a stunning comeback against the Patriots Sunday, as the Kansas City Chiefs' NFL playoff hopes ended with an injury to their star quarterback.

The Bills' 35-31 victory -- after having trailed 21-0 -- in sub-freezing conditions ended New England's 10-game winning streak and kept the AFC East division title race alive.

"What makes this team this team -- we're not out of it, we're going to continue to fight one play at a time, no matter what the score is," said Allen.

Reigning NFL Most Valuable Player Allen orchestrated five consecutive drives for touchdowns, at least temporarily thwarting the Patriots' bid to reclaim the division title from Buffalo after five years.

The result underlined Buffalo's status as a strong Super Bowl favorite despite inconsistent form this season.

"The last five-ish years we've found sustained success but never been able to punch our ticket to the Super Bowl... that's every team's dream," said Allen.

The Patriots had been utterly dominant in the first quarter, with quarterback Drake Maye rushing for two touchdowns in the snow.

The Bills battled back. Allen slung for three passing touchdowns.

Henderson briefly reclaimed the advantage for New England with a 65-yard sprint. But running back James Cook barged through for the game-winning touchdown score.

New England -- who dominated the NFL in the Tom Brady era of the 2000s and 2010s but have faced a difficult rebuild -- still lead the Bills by a single game with three to play.

Meanwhile, the Kansas City Chiefs -- the most dominant team in the NFL over the past decade -- saw

their slim hopes of making the playoffs officially end.

To compound their misery, quarterback Patrick Mahomes limped off the field with a torn left knee ligament.

"Don't know why this had to happen. And not going to lie (it) hurts," Mahomes posted on social media, vowing to "be back stronger than ever."

A 16-13 loss to the Los Angeles Chargers, combined with other results, means the Chiefs will miss the playoffs for the first time since 2014.

Kansas City have won three Super Bowls from five appearances since 2020, but saw a sharp drop off in form this season.

"The guys are down," said coach Andy Reid. "They busted their butt to win the game... it's not a great feeling."

The Los Angeles Rams and the Denver Broncos became the first teams to guarantee themselves post-season football.

The Rams defeated the Lions 41-31 despite having trailed 24-14. Detroit collapsed as this season's MVP front-runner quarterback, Matthew Stafford, ran the Rams show with two passing touchdowns.

The victory was marred by a hamstring injury to star wide receiver Davante Adams.

In Denver, moments after Green Bay Packers star linebacker Micah Parsons limped off the field with yet another nasty-looking injury, the Broncos pulled ahead with a touchdown pass to Troy Franklin and won 34-26.

The Indianapolis Colts started a quarterback who retired five years ago and has been coaching high-school football since.

## Man City Smash Palace to Fire Title Warning, Villa Extend Streak

LONDON (Dispatches) - Manchester City thumped Crystal Palace 3-0 to move back to within two points of Premier League leaders Arsenal as Aston Villa kept up their surprise title charge.

Elsewhere, Nottingham Forest demolished struggling Tottenham 3-0, while Sunderland saw off local rivals Newcastle 1-0 thanks to a Nick Woltemade own goal.

Arsenal, who have set the pace this season, squeaked home on Saturday with a 2-1 win against bottom-club Wolves, thanks to two own goals.

That put the pressure back on City, who have been showing ominous signs that they are finding their feet in recent weeks.

Pep Guardiola's men braced for a tough task at Selhurst Park against high-flying Palace and had to withstand pressure from the home side.

But they were clinical, with two goals from the



ruthless Erling Haaland and one from Phil Foden.

"It is a really tough place to come," City boss Guardiola told Sky Sports. "When you lose the ball, they attack incredibly well but we were patient."

"We were lucky when they hit the post from (Adam) Wharton but really pleased for the performance and victory to grow our mentality."

He added: "Erling is a forward to score the goals but in the second half he keeps the ball. He was able to contain situations. He helped us be together. In the second half he was outstanding."

Oliver Glasner's Palace, who beat City in last season's FA Cup final, squandered their chances in the first half, with Jeremy Pino hitting the bar when he had only goalkeeper Gianluigi Donnarumma to beat.

## Arshdeep Helps India Beat South Africa to Take T20 Series Lead



DHARMASALA (Dispatches) - Arshdeep Singh led an inspired bowling attack to help India beat South Africa by seven wickets in the third T20 international on Sunday as the hosts took a 2-1 lead in the five-match series.

Left-arm quick Arshdeep returned figures of 2-13 as India bowled out South Africa for 117 after the hosts elected to field first in the Himalayan hill town of Dharamsala.

Fast bowler Harshit Rana, spinners Varun Chakravarthy and Kuldeep Yadav also took two wickets each.

In reply, Indian opener Abhishek Sharma hit 35 off 18 balls as India achieved the target with 25 balls to spare to bounce back from their previous defeat in the series.

"Sport teaches you a lot of things, how you come back is more important," said India skipper Suryakumar Yadav. "There was a lot of learning after last game in the meeting and then did what we did in Cuttack (opening match) today."

It was the home side's bowlers who set up victory after Arshdeep and fellow quick Rana struck in the first two overs to send back Reeza Hendricks, for a duck, and previous-match hero Quinton de Kock, for one.

Skipper Aiden Markram made a valiant 61 off 46 balls to stem the tide but the visitors continued to lose regular wickets.

Rana bowled Dewald Brevis for two, before pace bowler Hardik Pandya dismissed Tristan Stubbs for nine for his 100th T20 wicket.

Chakravarthy rattled the middle order with his mystery spin as he cut short Donovan Ferreira's knock on 20 and then had Marco Jansen bowled for two in his next over.

## Norway's Haugan Powers to Val d'Isere Slalom Win



VAL-D'ISERE (Dispatches) - Norway's Timon Haugan powered to victory in the Val d'Isere slalom for his sixth World Cup win and first this season edging out early leader Loic Meillard of Switzerland.

Haugan clocked a combined 1min 37.89sec to finish 0.28sec ahead of Meillard who had led ahead of the Norwegian after the first run in the French Alps.

Norway's Henrik Kristoffersen was third overall at 0.34sec.

For Haugan it was a "perfect weekend" after placing fourth in Saturday's giant slalom which Meillard won.

"It's a tough hill, tough with the tracks," said Haugan.

"So many guys going out and doing a lot of mistakes so I was just nervous that it could happen to me as well."

"I managed to follow my plan and avoid the big mistakes and get a big victory."

The demanding Face de Belvedere piste nearly produced a dramatic finish, with spectacular comebacks from Italian Alex Vinatzer and Norwegians Oscar Andreas Sandvik and Hans Grahl-Madsen, who gained 21, 18, and 22 places respectively, ultimately finishing just off the podium.

Olympic slalom champion Clement Noel of France was left frustrated after finishing eighth fastest in the first run and failing to finish the second.

With a third different winner in as many races, following Brazilian Lucas Braathen in Levi and Frenchman Paco Rassat in Gurgl, the slalom season is off to a competitive start with the Winter Olympics in Milan-Cortina from February 6-22.

Haugan, who has a record-extending seven consecutive top-five slalom finishes, leads the slalom standings 55 points ahead of Rassat.

"A few small mistakes too many to be on the top, but it was definitely a nice fight and good skiing as well," said Meillard, who missed a chance to achieve the first giant slalom and slalom double in the Alpine resort since 1964.

## Robinson Wins Super-G, Vonn 4th

ST. MORITZ (Dispatches) - New Zealand's Alice Robinson stole the limelight in the women's World Cup super-G in St. Moritz on Sunday as Lindsey Vonn placed fourth while Mikaela Shiffrin failed to finish on her return to speed racing after almost two years.

On an undulating and technical surface, Robinson, the best giant slalom skier this season, edged out France's Romane Miradoli by 0.08sec to claim her first super-G win, with Italian star Sofia Goggia third at 0.19sec.

"Crazy, I was not expecting this today," said Robinson, 24, whose previous best super-G finish was fourth.

"What a day, it's just incredible."

"I think I had a really good mix of clean skiing but pushing where I could and letting the skis run."

"I always felt like I was holding back in Super G a bit (before), but not a part of me was scared today - I just



wanted to go for it."

Vonn finished 0.27sec off the pace to take fourth place on what has been a successful weekend for the veteran on the Corviglia piste in the Swiss Alps.

The 41-year-old became the oldest skier to win a World Cup race in Friday's downhill, her first victory since 2018 -- and first in her comeback with titanium implants in her right knee.

On Saturday, the American narrowly missed out on a second straight World Cup downhill win at St Moritz, finishing second behind German Emma Aicher.

For US pair Vonn and Shiffrin it was their first World Cup race together since 2019.

Vonn lost time on the technical second section and was just behind Goggia in the final podium spot.