

Iran's Top Military Official Says He Is Satisfied With the Continuous Enhancement of the Iranian Air Defense Systems Made Possible by the Specialized and Selfless Efforts of the Personnel

# IRAN NEWS

Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Esmaeil Baqaei Has Called for Collective Action to Confront the Constant Threat Posed by “the Racist Israeli Regime” to Regional and Global Peace and Stability

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## 2 DOMESTIC



### Two Newly Purchased Aircraft Detained

> SEE PAGE 2

## 3 INTERNATIONAL

### Australia Vows Stricter Gun Laws as Nation Mourns Bondi Beach Shooting Victims



> SEE PAGE 3

### Russian Delegation Visited Tehran a Few Days Ago



#### IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Behram Kamalvandi, spokesperson for Iran's Atomic Energy Organization, told Tasnim News Agency that “we currently have no inspections of our nuclear facilities.” He emphasized that “measures must be taken regarding the facilities that have been attacked.”

Speaking about Iran-Russia nuclear cooperation, Kamalvandi said: “We cooperate with Russia; we have one operational power plant and two under construction. During Mr. Eslami's recent visit to Russia, we signed contracts to build four 1,200-megawatt power plants in the Sirik region. We have long-term plans with Russia, including a 20,000-megawatt nuclear electricity program.”

He added that the main goal is for Iran to develop domestic reactor manufacturing capabilities. “We have a 300-megawatt reactor in Darkhovin. Since our industrial capacity allows us to produce key equipment such as steam generators and turbines, we can eventually manufacture entire power plants. We are already producing some components for the Bushehr plant. The long-term vision is for Iran to become a nuclear power plant manufacturer.”

Regarding recent visits to Russia and new agreements, Kamalvandi stated: “We maintain continuous exchanges. Just a few days ago, we hosted a Russian delegation in Tehran. We are working on a protocol related to small modular reactors, which are gaining global momentum.”

### Iran, Belarus Sign Key Agreements to Boost Cooperation, Counter Western Sanctions



TEHRAN (PresSTV) - Iran and Belarus have signed three agreements aimed at enhancing cooperation and coordinating efforts to counter unilateral sanctions and coercive measures imposed by Western countries.

During his visit to Minsk on Monday, Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi met with his Belarusian counterpart, Maxim Ryzhenkov, to discuss bilateral relations.

The two diplomats reaffirmed their countries' commitment to expanding their strategic partnership.

They also explored avenues to strengthen cooperation within international and intergovernmental organizations, including the United Nations and its agencies, as well as the BRICS group, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), and the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM).

The discussions focused on safeguarding the rule of law and countering mounting pressures against multilateralism.

The ministers also signed three documents: “The Declaration of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Republic of Belarus on Strategic Principles for Countering Unilateral Coercive Measures and Ways to Reduce and Eliminate their Negative Consequences,” “The Declaration of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Republic of Belarus on Strengthening the Role of International Law in International Relations,” and the “Cooperation Program between the Foreign Ministry of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Foreign Ministry of the Republic of Belarus 2026-2030.”

## Iran Urges Fair Process in Selecting Next UN Chief

#### IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Iran has called for a fair process to select the next UN secretary-general, warning that candidates who remained silent on unlawful military attacks against Iran's peaceful nuclear program are unfit — in an apparent reference to the head of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), Rafael Grossi.

In a statement during a Security Council session on Monday, Iran's Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Amir Saeid Iravani, articulated Iran's vision for principled and effective UN leadership, grounding his remarks in the core provisions of the UN Charter.

He stated that the power granted by Article 99, allowing the Secretary-General to bring threats to international peace before the Council, has been “paralyzed by the veto of a permanent member over the past two years.”

This period, he said, included “the genocidal war and grave war crimes committed by the Israeli regime in Gaza, the killing of UN humanitarian personnel and UN peacekeepers, and acts of aggression against regional countries.”

He added that in these critical moments, the exceptional authority entrusted to the Secretary-General under Article 99 of the Charter “has not been exercised fully, in a timely manner, or with the rigor required by the circumstances.”

Turning to Article 100, Iravani emphasized that the next Secretary-General must embody “independence and integrity.”

He warned that “a candidate who has deliberately failed to uphold the UN Charter—or to condemn unlawful military attacks against safeguarded, peaceful nuclear facilities ... undermines confidence in his ability to serve as a faithful guardian of the Charter and to discharge his duties independently, impartially, and without political bias or fear of powerful States, as required under the Charter.”

The envoy was referring to the June strikes carried out by the US and Israel against Iran's peaceful nuclear facilities, which were under the UN supervision. These illegal acts of



aggression also targeted Iranian nuclear scientists. Yet the IAEA, whose director general, Rafael Grossi, has now announced his candidacy for the role of UN Secretary-General, chose not to condemn the attacks.

The director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) refrains from condemning the assassination of Iranian nuclear scientists during the illegal Israeli-US aggression, saying the issue is not within his responsibilities.

The ambassador also highlighted Article 105 of the Charter, stating that the Secretary-General has “a clear and non-derogable responsibility” to safeguard the rights and privileges of representatives and to ensure the full and equal participation of all Member States.

He said violations such as visa denials, movement restrictions, or harassment must be addressed decisively and without selectivity by the UN Secretariat, noting that such protections are legally binding on the host country.

“Failure to do so weakens the United Nations and erodes the principle of sovereign equality at the heart of the UN system,” he added.

Iravani called for “a transparent and inclusive selection process,” while also voicing readiness to engage in meaningful discussions throughout this process, to work with the next Secretary-General “to advance peace, justice, and the purposes and principles of the Charter.”

The term of the current UN Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres, will end on December 31, 2026. The terms of service of the UN Secretary-General are not limited, but the longest term of office of the UN Secretary-General has been 10 years.

According to the current procedure, the Secretary-General should not be chosen from among the five permanent members of the Security Council, including Russia, Britain, China, the United States and France.

Elections or term extensions are also coming up in many other UN bodies.

## Iran Invites Senior Trade Officials From Seven Eurasian Countries to Eurasia Expo

#### IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Iran has extended invitations to ministers and senior trade officials from seven countries, including the five members of the Eurasian Economic Union (Russia, Belarus, Armenia, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan), as well as Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, to participate in the fourth edition of the “Eurasia Expo” in Tehran this February. The invitation also marks the inaugural “High-Level Iran-Eurasia Trade Cooperation Meeting,” aiming to strengthen economic ties between Tehran and the Eurasian region.

Kazem Jalali, Iran's ambassador to Russia, announced the initiative during a coordination meeting for the upcoming exhibition held at the Iranian embassy in Moscow. The meeting, attended by over 50 Russian business figures and diplomats, including Sheikh Ahmed bin Nasser bin Jassim Al-Thani, Qatar's ambassador to Russia, highlighted Iran's efforts to boost trade relations with Eurasian countries and neighboring states.

Jalali cited the recent meetings between Iranian and Russian leaders—specifically the November 12, 2025, meeting between Masoud Pezeshkian and Vladimir Putin on the sidelines of the Ashgabat Summit, as well as the visit of Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi to Moscow—as evidence of a growing commitment to bilateral cooperation. He emphasized the critical role of private sector actors in expanding trade exchanges and leveraging new economic opportunities.

Highlighting Iran's strategic observer status in the Eurasian Economic Union, Jalali stressed that the implementation of the Free Trade Agreement between Iran and the five member states provides a legal framework to expand commercial ties. He noted that the previous three editions of the Eurasia Expo in Tehran were successful in fostering connections, citing President Pezeshkian's attendance at the third edition as a demonstration of Tehran's commitment to deepening relations with Eurasian partners, particularly Russia.

Jalali urged Russian businesses to engage actively in the upcoming fourth exhibition, emphasizing that the event is more than ceremonial: “Governments and the private sector will work together to reach key decisions, while business actors will finalize practical agreements to boost trade levels.” He added that the exhibition could facilitate solutions to technical trade issues—including standards, certification, packaging, and logistics—while fostering joint investment and production projects for third-party markets.

Vladimir Serpikov, Director of Trade Policy at the Eurasian Economic Commission, also underscored the importance of the Free Trade Agreement in enhancing trade relations, identifying Iran as a natural and strategic partner due to its strong economy, rich resources, and geographic location. Serpikov highlighted the Expo as a platform to explore new trade opportunities, including halal trade, and expressed hope for advancing digitalization and paperless transit processes for goods.



Alexei Valkov, Deputy Director of the Russian Congress Foundation, noted that relations between Tehran and Moscow have entered a long-term cooperation phase with mutual benefits. Citing the third Eurasia Expo, which attracted 20,000 visitors from eight countries, he expressed confidence that the fourth edition will continue this upward trend.

Sergey Krasilnikov, Deputy Head of the Union of Russian Industrialists and Entrepreneurs, recommended holding the next multilateral Iran-Eurasia Trade Council meeting in Tehran alongside the Expo. He highlighted the potential for collaboration in sectors such as trade, mining, medicine, and other industries, reinforced by the implementation of the Comprehensive Strategic Treaty

between Iran and Russia.

Leonid Lozhchenko, Chairman of the Russia-Iran Business Relations Council, noted that numerous memoranda of understanding were signed during previous Expo events and emphasized that the Free Trade Agreement, implemented in May 2025, has facilitated tariff reductions for 87 percent of goods and eased various non-tariff barriers, creating strong incentives for further collaboration.

Alireza Jafari, Chairman of the Eurasia Expo organizing committee, confirmed that the fourth edition will take place from February 1–4, 2026, at Tehran's Permanent International Fairgrounds. One day after the opening ceremony, a high-level meeting of ministers and trade officials from the five Eurasian Economic Union countries, along with Iranian, Uzbek, and Turkmen ministers, is scheduled to take place.

The Expo's geographic scope has been expanded, inviting additional countries including Tajikistan, Azerbaijan, Qatar, Kuwait, Oman, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Serbia, and Turkey to showcase national pavilions. Specialized sessions will run in parallel, covering logistics, the North-South Transport Corridor, customs, banking, insurance, and other trade-related sectors.

Iran joined the Eurasian Economic Union as an observer in 2024, alongside Uzbekistan and Cuba. In January 2024, Iran and the five member states signed a Free Trade Agreement, which took effect in May 2025, eliminating tariffs on 87 percent of traded goods. A follow-up meeting in October 2025 in Moscow set the framework for collaboration through 2028, including the adoption of a three-year roadmap for cooperation across multiple sectors, reinforcing Iran's position as a strategic partner in Eurasian trade.

The fourth Eurasia Expo, combining high-level governmental dialogue with active private sector participation, is poised to serve as a landmark event in advancing Iran's trade and economic relations with the Eurasian region.

### Who is a True Intellectual?

By: Hamid Reza Naghashian

These days, some people, frustrated by their unsatisfactory performance within party frameworks, have their hearts set on internal rebellion to prove their irreverent—and sometimes worldly—intentions, and pretend to display intellectualism! If you browse blogs, you come across discussions about the betrayal of minorities, for example:

They say: Oriana Fallaci, the famous Italian journalist, in the past decades, asked Winston Churchill, the British Prime Minister during World War II, in an interview:

“Mr. Prime Minister, why do you go across the Indian Ocean to establish a colonial and puppet government and create the East India government, but you cannot do the same right under your nose, in Ireland, which has been at war and in conflict with you for years?”

After a moment of reflection, Winston Churchill replied:

“To do this, you need two important tools, which we do not have in Ireland.”

The journalist asked, “What are these two tools?”

Churchill replied: “A foolish majority and a treacherous minority!” Regardless of the accuracy of this story, we are now in the era of the Islamic Republic of Iran—that is, the era of freedom and independence—facing groups in universities, media, and the country's bureaucracy who, while benefiting fully from the atmosphere of independence, freedom, and security, seem to have no real attachment to this land. The roots of their insights, tendencies, and even motivations appear to exist outside the country. These are people who call themselves “intellectuals,” and their past, if not entirely full of loyalty, ignorance, and betrayal, can certainly be said to have brought no meaningful achievements.

A foolish majority and a treacherous minority have, at many of history's most difficult junctures, abandoned the Iranian nation, joined its enemies, and acted as facilitators for humiliating privileges and contracts benefiting foreigners. These are people accustomed to seeing our country and people through images taken outside Iran. They then show us such images depicting poverty, backwardness, corruption, irrationality, despotism, anti-intellectualism, and the like, in a mysterious and fantastical way; a country utterly wretched and helpless, with a nervous and uncultured population compared to other countries.

Despite all the literary and political daydreams of this group, the history of Iran is full of justice-seeking, opposition to oppression, and the pursuit of truth. The essential question now is: why is there so much resentment, hatred, and hostility among so-called intellectuals toward the authentic culture, history, beliefs, and currents of Iran?

### Iran Opposes Trump's Corridor Plan for Caucasus Amid Security Concerns



#### IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN (PresSTV) - A senior advisor to Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei says Iran is categorically opposed to US President Donald Trump's transit route in South Caucasus, citing security concerns arising from America's presence on the country's borders.

Ali Akbar Velayati made the remarks during a meeting with Armenia's Ambassador to Iran Grigor Hakobyan in Tehran on Monday.

He said the so-called Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity (TRIPP) is no different from the Zangezur Corridor.

The route connects Azerbaijan to its Nakhchivan exclave through Armenian territory along its entire border with Iran. On a 99-year land lease, the US will operate the 43-kilometer route, which will include railways, communication networks, and pipelines for oil and gas.

Velayati said past experience shows the United States often enters sensitive regions under the guise of economic projects, only to gradually expand its presence into military and security spheres.



# IRAN NEWS



## Venezuelan Aircraft Undergo Maintenance in Iran

TEHRAN (ILNA) - Iran is not only maintaining and repairing all domestic aircraft but has also extended its aviation maintenance services to neighboring countries, including Venezuela, according to Abuzar Shiroudi, acting head of Iran's Civil Aviation Organization. Speaking at a press conference, Shiroudi highlighted that Iran currently operates around 150 active aircraft, all undergoing regular maintenance cycles. He emphasized that ensuring flight safety remains the top priority of the Civil Aviation Organization and will never be compromised. Shiroudi noted that the country's growing aviation repair capabilities now allow Iran to provide maintenance services for foreign fleets, specifically citing Venezuelan aircraft. He also stressed the importance of renewing and expanding Iran's domestic fleet, reporting an addition of approximately 2,000 seats to the country's air transport capacity in recent weeks under the current administration.

## Iran Reports 40% Drop in Gasoline Consumption on First Day of Price Reform



### IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Iran saw a significant reduction in gasoline consumption on the first day of its fuel price reform, according to the head of the Iranian Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines, and Agriculture. At the same time, the country's essential goods stockpiles have been secured through the end of the year. Speaking at a meeting of the Council for Dialogue between the Government and the Private Sector, Samad Hassanzadeh highlighted the immediate impact of the recent gasoline price adjustment. "On the first day of the reform, gasoline consumption fell by 40 percent," he reported, describing the decline as a positive development for both traffic management and environmental pollution reduction. Hassanzadeh emphasized that, despite the increase in fuel prices and its potential ripple effects on the cost of other goods and the general public's livelihood, social stability was maintained and no significant public unrest occurred. "People accepted the change. In fact, many citizens were so preoccupied with ongoing inflation that some were unaware that gasoline prices had increased at all," he said, underscoring the broader economic challenges facing households. The chamber head also praised the efforts of Dr. Foroud Asgari, head of Iran Customs, for implementing solutions to improve trade procedures and address obstacles faced by businesses, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises in the agriculture and food sectors. Hassanzadeh noted that these measures have helped resolve issues related to business registration cards and other operational hurdles. On the supply of essential goods, Hassanzadeh reassured the public that stocks are sufficient for the remainder of the year. According to a report presented by Dr. Norouzi at a recent market regulation session, all livestock feed shortages have been resolved within two days, ensuring uninterrupted supply for animal husbandry and poultry farms. He added that essential commodities, including rice and sugar, are fully stocked in warehouses across the country, guaranteeing availability through the end of the year. Hassanzadeh also praised the effective distribution of these goods, noting that cooperation between the public and the national distribution network has been "commendable." The early success of the fuel price reform, coupled with secure essential goods reserves, demonstrates a coordinated effort by Iranian authorities to balance economic reform, environmental benefits, and social stability amid broader inflationary pressures.

## Power Exports Remain Paralyzed Without Financial Channels



### IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The chairman of the board of the Syndicate of Power Generation Companies has warned that Iran's electricity export potential remains effectively locked as long as the government lacks the ability to conduct financial transactions with other countries, while continued state dominance and price controls in the power sector further exacerbate structural imbalances. Speaking at a press conference, Hassanali Taghizadeh pointed to the significant capacity of the private sector to engage in electricity imports and exports. He said the issue of electricity imbalance—referring to the gap between supply and demand—has been repeatedly examined, and numerous solutions have been proposed. However, he noted that these solutions have failed to produce tangible results in practice. Taghizadeh sharply criticized the government's role in electricity trading, arguing that state involvement has consistently led to poor outcomes. "The government has never been a good trader anywhere," he said. "Wherever it has entered commercial activity, the result has been failure." He added that although policymakers have now largely acknowledged that government-led electricity trade is a mistake, there remains a strong institutional attachment to retaining this role. According to the syndicate chairman, a fundamental issue lies in how electricity is defined within the policymaking framework. He asked whether electricity should be treated as a commodity or a public service, noting that in recent years, both at the level of policy formulation and decision-making, the dominant view has been to regard electricity as a service. This perception, he said, has prompted parliament to fix energy carrier prices, undermining market mechanisms.

## Two Newly Purchased Aircraft Detained



### IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The acting head of Iran Air (Homa) said that two aircraft recently purchased by the national carrier have been detained, significantly limiting the airline's operational capacity. Speaking at a press conference on the sidelines of the Transportation Exhibition, Abdolhay said that all Iran Air flights to Europe have been completely suspended. He explained that the scope of sanctions is not limited to Iran Air itself, noting that even airlines operating in neighboring countries are not permitted to carry Iranian passengers from Iran to European destinations. "This issue is being pursued through legal channels, but resolving it requires intensive diplomatic efforts," he said. The acting head of Iran Air emphasized that although the airline owns 20 aircraft, the majority of flights are currently being operated with only eight aircraft, as two newly purchased planes are under detention. He also disclosed that Iran Air owes around \$15 million to airports in Istanbul, Najaf, Dubai, Jeddah, and Medina. According to him, operational problems related to flights to Istanbul have not yet been resolved, though negotiations are underway and talks are expected to continue over the coming week to resume these flights. Abdolhay further noted that the airline's financial difficulties have accumulated over years, with historical debts reaching approximately 43 trillion tomans. He attributed this situation to an imbalance between revenues and costs over the past 11 years. He stressed that these challenges have severely affected Iran Air's ability to maintain regular international operations and highlighted the urgent need for financial restructuring and diplomatic solutions to address the airline's ongoing constraints. Abdollahy, commenting on the airline's legal action in international courts to regain its flight routes, said that the resumption of flights to the European Union requires intensive diplomacy and a different bureaucratic process, which is being pursued through the efforts of the company's legal department in coordination with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He said, on the second day of the 9th International Transportation and Logistics Exhibition, in response to IRNA, that prior to the suspension of European flights, sanctions against Iran's aviation industry and Iran Air were already in place in areas

such as aircraft parts, flight operations, insurance, leasing, and fuel.

He explained that, for example, fuel restrictions forced the airline to use aircraft such as the Airbus A330, capable of flying the entire outbound and return route without refueling, or alternatively to carry fewer passengers. Abdolhay noted that as a result, the number of flights gradually declined until, eventually, flights to the European Union were suspended for political reasons. He added that even airlines operating in neighboring countries that intended to transport Iranian passengers to Europe were not permitted to do so. Stressing that these challenges will not be resolved all at once or quickly, he said that Iran Air's legal department and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs have held extensive communications with relevant authorities and made significant efforts. However, he emphasized that resuming EU flights requires heavy diplomatic engagement and a different bureaucratic approach within the European Union—a process that is currently underway and will be pursued further. Speaking about airplane ticket prices, he said: "I believe the real price of tickets is what it is now, and if even these rates are not observed, we will not have even the same number of aircraft that we currently have in the coming years." He emphasized: "Today we are facing the difficult conditions of sanctions, to the extent that we are not even given a single aircraft screw. In other words, if an aircraft encounters a problem in any country, no assistance is provided to us." The CEO of Homa then raised this question: when airlines incur their costs in dollars but earn their revenue in rials, why should their required foreign currency be transferred to the second exchange hall? Abdollahy stated: "I believe that even if we make costs realistic, the price of airplane tickets is still low." He said: "I believe the country needs at least 1,000 aircraft—500 to meet our domestic needs and the rest to become a regional hub." The CEO of the Islamic Republic of Iran Airline also said regarding ATR aircraft: "Thirteen of these aircraft entered the country. We could have flown them to cities along the Persian Gulf or even operated them on routes within the Persian Gulf region, but in practice they ended up serving all regions of the country." He added: "This issue gradually caused costs to be imposed on these aircraft, and now each of these aircraft has incurred costs of between three and four million dollars."

## Iran Calls for a Global Network of Iranian Business Actors

### IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - At a meeting of the Export Development Commission of the Iran Chamber of Commerce, officials and private-sector representatives stressed the need to establish an active global network of Iranian businesspeople and to formally include private-sector representatives in the economic working groups of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Speaking at the session, Ghadir Ghyafeh, Vice President of the Iran Chamber of Commerce, said the absence of an active network of Iranian business owners around the world has seriously harmed the country's trade capacity. He emphasized the need to create a digital platform containing information on Iranian economic actors abroad to connect them with domestic businesses. He noted that the platform could be based anywhere in the world, as long as it maintains effective links with Iran, adding that the Iranian Committee of the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) could help develop such a platform. Ghyafeh said sanctions have distanced Iran not only from global trade networks but also from up-to-date knowledge, banking services, and business facilitation institutions. While noting that ICC does not engage in sanctioned areas, he said cooperation with the Iranian ICC Committee could still be effective in non-sanctioned fields and called for a seminar to familiarize Iranian businesses with ICC capacities. Mohammadreza Nafar, Head of the Economic Affairs Department at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, outlined the ministry's trade-oriented approach, saying foreign policy is inseparable from



economic, cultural, and political considerations. He stressed that export-driven and development-oriented growth is a key priority, particularly given sanctions, regional complexities, and Iran's economic conditions. Nafar said the Foreign Ministry acts as a facilitator for private-sector trade and places special emphasis on border economies and cooperation with Iran's 15 neighboring countries. He noted that the ministry has established specialized trade desks for products such as carpets, saffron, and dates, and reported that Iran exported over \$4 billion in technical and engineering services last year, with exports expected to exceed \$5 billion this year. He added that since the beginning of the year, 12 joint economic commissions have been held and 32 bilateral cooperation agreements signed. Mohammad Khazaei, Secretary General of the Iranian ICC Committee, called for permanent private-sector representation in the Foreign Ministry's economic working groups. He highlighted ICC's global reach, with more than 45 million corporate members, and its role in dispute resolution, standard-setting, and contract models widely used in international trade. Finally, Mohammad Lahouti, Head of the Export Development Commission, warned that exporting has become increasingly difficult for Iranian businesses due to restrictive currency and regulatory policies. He said greater authority for border provinces and stronger coordination with neighboring countries could help remove export barriers, and reiterated the private sector's readiness to participate in Foreign Ministry working groups and make better use of ICC mechanisms to facilitate foreign trade.

## Nearly \$12m Worth of Iranian Tea Exported Since Beginning of the Year



### IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The head of the Iranian Tea Organization announced that nearly 9.8 million kilograms of Iranian tea, valued at approximately \$12 million, have been exported since the beginning of the current year, marking a significant increase in the country's tea exports. Habib Jahansaz said on Monday that the government has implemented a comprehensive support program for tea growers, including the provision of working capital facilities, insurance coverage, and liquidity to purchase chemical fertilizers. He noted that so far, 109 billion tomans in financial support have been allocated, with about 79 billion tomans provided through the banking system as working capital for tea farmers. These measures aim to bring approximately 2,000 hectares of abandoned tea gardens back into the cycle of rehabilitation and renewal each year. Jahansaz explained that three banks are cooperating with the Iranian Tea Organization to provide financial facilities to tea growers and processors. Under this framework, one private bank offers loans at a 4 percent interest rate for the rehabilitation, renewal, and mechanization of tea gardens, with a three-year repayment period. Another bank provides loans of up to 3 billion tomans at a 15 percent interest rate for the modernization and improvement of tea-processing factories. A third bank supports working capital for tea growers and the expansion of factory mechanization, again at a 4 percent interest rate with a three-year repayment term. He said these arrangements have enabled tea growers to carry out garden rehabilitation and modernization projects without major financial concerns.

## Iran's Steel Value Chain Exports Grow by 41%



### IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The Iranian Steel Producers Association has released new figures on the country's steel value chain exports for the first eight months of the Iranian year 1404, showing a significant increase in export volumes despite ongoing challenges facing domestic producers. The volume of Iran's iron and steel exports rose by 31 percent during the eight-month period, while total exports across the entire steel value chain increased by 41 percent compared to the same period last year. The data point to a strong overall growth trend in foreign shipments of steel-related products. However, the association noted that the share of production units in total steel exports has declined to around 40 percent. In other words, despite the sharp rise in export volumes across the steel value chain, manufacturers themselves have not been the primary beneficiaries of this growth, raising concerns about the distribution of export gains within the industry. In value terms, exports of iron and steel value chain products reached more than \$5.3 million during the eight-month period, marking a 27 percent increase year-on-year. This growth reflects both higher export volumes and improved performance in certain segments of the value chain. The upward trend in exports of raw materials within the steel value chain has continued strongly. In particular, exports of iron ore concentrate recorded a notable 77 percent increase in volume compared with the same eight months last year. This sharp rise highlights the growing role of upstream materials in Iran's steel exports, even as downstream producers face mounting pressures. At the same time, the downward trend in exports of long steel products has shown signs of moderation. According to the eight-month statistics, the decline in exports of these products eased compared to the cumulative figures reported in the previous month, with the drop narrowing from 14 percent to 9 percent. This suggests a relative stabilization in this segment, although export levels remain below those of last year.

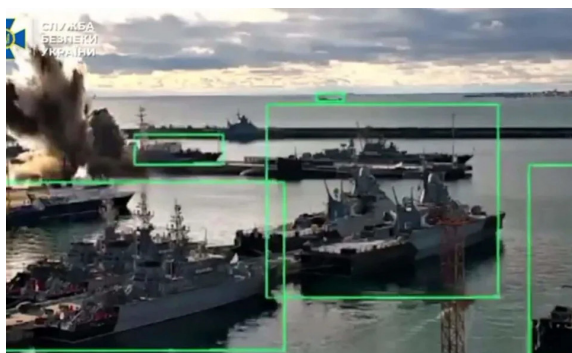


## U.S. Military Kills Eight in Strikes on Alleged Narco-Trafficking Vessels

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) – U.S. military strikes on three suspected narco-trafficking vessels in the eastern Pacific killed eight people on Monday, U.S. Southern Command said, part of an ongoing campaign that has left more than 90 dead. The command said intelligence showed the vessels were operating along known trafficking routes. Strikes on three alleged narco-trafficking vessels in the eastern Pacific Ocean killed eight people on Monday, according to the US military, as part of an ongoing campaign that has ended more than 90 lives.



## Ukraine Blows Up £300m Russian Submarine With Underwater Drones



KYIV (Dispatches) - Ukraine has claimed to have blown up a Russian submarine using underwater drones for the first time.

The submarine, which was carrying Kalibr cruise missiles and is estimated to cost close to £300m, was critically damaged after being hit in the Russian port city of Novorossiysk, according to the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) on Monday.

The SBU did not specify the date or time of the attack. If verified, this would be the first time an underwater drone has hit a Russian submarine since the invasion began in 2022.

Russia's Black Sea Fleet said a Ukrainian attempt to attack the Russian naval base failed, according to news agencies.

"Not &NoBreak;a single ship or submarine of the Black Sea Fleet located at the base in Novorossiysk Bay &NoBreak;was damaged," agencies quoted the Black Sea Fleet as saying on Monday. "There were no injuries to crew."

Video footage purportedly of the attack shows multiple Russian warships and a surfaced submarine, before there's a sudden explosion in the water.

The clip has not been independently verified, but Reuters confirmed the location as Novorossiysk using the port's layout and piers.

The SBU claimed the 636.6 Varshavyanka-class submarine, which "carried four Kalibr cruise missile launchers", had been left effectively inoperable.

## Protests Hamper Honduran Special Vote Recount in Latest Election Turmoil



TEGUCIGALPA (Dispatches) - The head of Honduras' National Electoral Council, Ana Paola Hall, said on Monday that protests in the capital Tegucigalpa have delayed the start of a special recount of some of the ballots from the contested November 30 presidential election.

Hundreds of supporters of the ruling leftist party LIBRE protested on Monday outside the building where ballots are being stored.

The protest prevented election workers from beginning a hand recount of some 15% of the tally sheets - representing hundreds of thousands of ballots - that are said to have "inconsistencies."

In a post on X, Hall said the protest "prevented the necessary conditions for the special recount to begin."

It's the latest delay of the vote-tallying process as Honduras remains in a state of political paralysis more than two weeks after the nationwide election.

Former President Mel Zelaya, the husband of current president Xiomara Castro, called for supporters of the ruling LIBRE party to also protest on Monday and to demand a hand recount of every ballot from the contested election.

The latest preliminary results show conservative National Party's Nasry Asfura in the lead with 40.54% of the vote, about 43,000 votes ahead of the center-right Liberal Party's Salvador Nasralla, who has 39.19% of the vote.

# Australia Vows Stricter Gun Laws as Nation Mourns Bondi Beach Shooting Victims

SYDNEY (Dispatches) - Australia's leaders have agreed to toughen gun laws after attackers killed 15 people at a Jewish festival on Bondi Beach, the worst mass shooting in decades decried as anti-Semitic "terrorism" by authorities.

Dozens fled in panic as a father and son fired into crowds packing the Sydney beach for the start of Hanukkah on Sunday evening.

A 10-year-old girl, a Holocaust survivor and a local rabbi were among those killed, while 42 others were rushed to hospital with gunshot wounds and other injuries.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese convened a meeting of leaders of Australia's states and territories in response yesterday, agreeing with them "to strengthen gun laws across the nation".

Albanese's office said they agreed to explore ways to improve background checks for firearm owners, bar non-nationals from obtaining gun licenses and limit the types of weapons that are legal.

Mass shootings have been rare in Australia since a lone gunman killed 35 people in the town of Port Arthur in 1996, which led to sweeping reforms long seen as a gold standard worldwide.

Those included a gun buyback scheme, a national firearms register and a crackdown on ownership of semi-automatic weapons.

But Sunday's shooting has raised fresh questions about how the two suspects — who public broadcaster ABC reported had possible links to the Islamic State group — obtained the guns.

Police are still unravelling what drove Sunday's attack, although authorities have said it targeted Jews.

Albanese called it "an act of pure evil, an act of anti-Semitism, an act of terrorism on our shores".

A string of anti-Semitic attacks has spread fear among Australia's Jewish communities after the October 7, 2023, Hamas assault on Israel and the ensuing war in Gaza.

The Australian government this year accused Iran of orchestrating a recent wave of anti-Semitic attacks and expelled Tehran's ambassador nearly four months ago.

But Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu accused Australia's government of "pouring oil on the fire of anti-Semitism" in the months before the shooting, referring to Canberra's announcement that it would recognize Palestinian statehood in August.



Other world leaders expressed revulsion, with US President Donald Trump condemning the "anti-Semitic attack".

The gunmen opened fire on an annual celebration that drew more than 1,000 people to the beach to mark Hanukkah.

They took aim from a raised boardwalk at a beach packed with swimmers cooling off on the steamy summer evening.

Witness Beatrice was celebrating her birthday and had just blown out the candles when the shooting started.

"We thought it was fireworks," she told AFP. "We're just feeling lucky we're all safe."

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 remains under guard in hospital with serious injuries.

Australian media named the suspects as Sajid Akram and his son Naveed Akram.

Tony Burke, the home affairs minister, said the father arrived in Australia on a student visa in 1998 and had become

a permanent resident. The son was an Australia-born citizen.

Hours after the shooting, police found a homemade bomb in a car parked close to the beach, saying the "improvised explosive device" had likely been planted by the pair.

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

"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 avoided questions about the attackers' religion or ideological motivations.

Misinformation spread quickly online after the attacks, some of it targeting immigrants and the Muslim community.

Police said they responded to reports of several pig heads left at a Muslim cemetery in south-western Sydney.

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 one man, identified by local media as fruit seller Ahmed al Ahmed, grabbing one of the gunmen as he fired.

# European Leaders Agree Ukraine Security Guarantees Must Include Multinational Force

BERLIN (Dispatches) - European leaders meeting in Berlin on Monday agreed that Ukraine required robust security guarantees, including a European-led "multinational force" with US support, before making any decisions on potential territorial concessions to Russia. A statement issued by 10 European leaders said security guarantees should also include a US-led ceasefire monitoring mechanism.

European leaders said they had agreed that any decisions on potential Ukrainian territorial concessions to Russia could only be made once robust security guarantees were in place which should include a European-led multinational force.

The statement issued by 10 European leaders as well as EU Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen came after they met in Berlin to back up peace talks between US and Ukrainian negotiators seeking to end the deadliest conflict in Europe since World War Two.

Outlining what they considered necessary security guarantees, the statement said Ukraine should be able to keep its armed forces at around 800,000 to be able to deter conflict.

In addition, Europe should coordinate a "multinational force Ukraine" made up from contributions from willing nations and supported by the United States.

"It will assist in the regeneration of Ukraine's forces, in securing Ukraine's skies, and in supporting safer seas, including through operating inside Ukraine," read the statement.

Security guarantees would also include a US-led ceasefire monitoring mechanism to provide early warning of any future attack and respond to any



breaches.

"Decisions on territory are for the people of Ukraine, once robust security guarantees are effectively in place," the statement read.

Countries should also make a "legally binding commitment, subject to national procedures, to take measures to restore peace and security in the case of a future armed attack".

The statement was also signed by the leaders of Denmark, Finland, Italy, the

Netherlands, Norway, Poland and Sweden, as well as the heads of the European Council and the European Commission.

Earlier on Monday, German Chancellor Friedrich Merz said that talks in Berlin with two of US President Donald Trump's close advisors — special envoy Steve Witkoff and Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner — had yielded "substantial" progress on security guarantees, long a sticking point over any potential peace deal.

The joint statement also stressed the importance of rebuilding Ukraine's economy, with the leaders backing favourable trade arrangements and "major resources" for reconstruction.

The signers also said they "strongly support" Ukraine joining the European Union.

Talks remain in flux, however, and the statement stressed that "nothing is agreed until everything is agreed".

It remains unclear how Russian President Vladimir Putin might react to the proposals — particularly the prospect of security guarantees for Ukraine and European troops potentially being deployed on Ukrainian territory.

There also remains the key question of the fate of territory occupied by Russian forces, a sticking point in earlier discussions.

The statement said it is "now incumbent upon Russia to show willingness to work towards a lasting peace by agreeing to President Trump's peace plan and to demonstrate their commitment to end the fighting by agreeing to a ceasefire".

Until then, the European leaders "agreed to continue to increase pressure on Russia to bring Moscow to negotiate in earnest".

# Trinidad and Tobago to Open Airports to U.S. Military

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - The government of Trinidad and Tobago said on Monday it would allow the US military access to its airports in the coming weeks, as tensions rise between Washington and Venezuela. Authorities said a newly installed US radar in Tobago is for crime-fighting and denied the country would be used to launch attacks.

The government of Trinidad and Tobago said that it would allow the US military to access its airports in coming weeks as tensions build between the United States and Venezuela.

The announcement comes after the US military recently installed a radar system at the airport in Tobago. The Caribbean country's government has said the radar is being used to fight local crime, and that the small nation wouldn't be used as a launchpad to attack any other country.

The US would use the airports for activity that would be "logistical in nature, facilitating supply replenishment and routine personnel rotations," Trinidad and Tobago's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in a statement. It did not provide further details.

Trinidad's prime minister previously has praised ongoing US strikes on alleged drug boats in the Caribbean.

Only 7 miles (11 kilometers) separate Venezuela from the twin-island



Caribbean nation at their closest point. It has two main airports: Piarco International Airport in Trinidad and ANR Robinson International Airport in Tobago.

Hours after the announcement, Venezuelan Vice President Delcy Rodríguez said her country was immediately canceling any contract, deal or negotiation to supply natural gas to Trinidad and Tobago.

She claimed that the government of Trinidad and Tobago participated in the recent US seizure of an oil tanker off the country's coast, calling it an "act of piracy."

She also accused Trinidad and Tobago Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar of having a "hostile agenda" against Venezuela, noting that the US military installed an airport radar in Tobago.

"This official has turned the territory of Trinidad and Tobago into a US aircraft carrier to attack Venezuela, in an unequivocal act of vassalage," Rodríguez said. Persad-Bissessar told The Associated Press that she wasn't bothered by the statement, describing it as "simply false propaganda."

"They should direct their complaints to President Trump, as it is the US military that has seized the sanctioned oil tanker. In the meantime, we continue to have peaceful relations with the Venezuelan people," Persad-Bissessar said.





## Bournemouth and Man United Share Spoils in Eight-Goal Thriller

MANCHESTER (Dispatches) - Bournemouth's Eli Junior Kroupi struck late to salvage a point for his side in a 4-4 draw with Manchester United on Monday, capping a Premier League thriller that swung wildly from start to finish.

Ruben Amorim's men squandered the chance to move level with fourth-place Chelsea in the standings, and instead are sixth on 26 points. Bournemouth are 13th on 21 points.

United looked set for victory after Bruno Fernandes, with a stunning freekick, and Matheus Cunha struck two minutes apart in the second half to make it 4-3.

Bournemouth's 19-year-old substitute Kroupi silenced United's fans just five minutes later when Alejandro Jimenez found him on the edge of the box in the 84th minute.

United goalkeeper Senne Lammens made an instinctive save with his right foot to stop a diving header from David Brooks in the sixth minute of stoppage time to preserve the draw.

Each side had nine shots on target in a game that will go down as a classic, with end-to-end action. As the final whistle blew after 100 exhausting minutes, it was hard to say whether either team left feeling satisfied.

"I suppose for the neutrals it's been a nice game," Bournemouth boss Andoni Iraola told Sky Sports. "It had everything. Moments where you think it's a loss. Moments where you think we have this one, we are comfortable.

"You didn't even know if we were happy finishing the game or give us one minute more."

United's Amad Diallo opened the scoring with a close-range header in the 13th minute after goalkeeper Djordje Petrovic initially saved Diogo Dalot's cross.

However, the visitors gradually began to find their feet and equalised through Antoine Semenyo in the 40th minute.

Casemiro restored United's lead with a header from a corner on the stroke of halftime, gifted by goalkeeper Djordje Petrovic's fumbled save attempt.

But they were pegged back again when Evanilson struck seconds after the break while thousands of fans at Old Trafford had yet to return to their seats.

Marcus Tavernier scored with a low freekick in the 52nd minute to put Bournemouth ahead but United fought back, with Fernandes curling in a set-piece of his own in the 77th minute to level.

Cunha thought he had scored the winner in the 79th when Benjamin Sesko sent the ball in from the left wing and the Brazilian slotted home. But the night had one more twist as Kroupi had the last word.

United, who had 17 shots in the first half, rued the chances they did not put away in a key game before Diallo and Bryan Mbeumo leave for the Africa Cup of Nations.

"It's really disappointing," United boss Ruben Amorim told the BBC. "We are really disappointed. Crazy game. It might look like we lost the two points in the second half but I think we lost them in the first half.

"We dominated and created so many chances. We had to go to halftime with a different result. In the end we deserved more."

## Sabalenka Named WTA Player of the Year for Second Straight Season

LONDON (Dispatches) - World number one Aryna Sabalenka has been named WTA Player of the Year for the second consecutive season after spending the entire year at the top of the rankings, the governing body of women's tennis announced on Monday.

Sabalenka capped a dominant 2025 campaign by successfully defending her U.S. Open title, leading the tour in match wins and titles, reaching nine finals. She finished as runner-up at the Australian Open and Roland Garros and reached the semi-finals of Wimbledon.

The Belarusian won four trophies overall and recorded 63 victories over the season.

As she retained the year-end number one ranking for a second straight year, Sabalenka also set a single-season prize money record of \$15,008,519, the WTA said.

Amanda Anisimova was voted the Most Improved Player, having also been nominated for Player of the Year.

The American reached five finals, winning the first



WTA 1000 titles of her career in Doha and Beijing, and advanced to her first Grand Slam finals at Wimbledon and the U.S. Open.

Anisimova broke into the top 10 in July and qualified for the WTA Finals for the first time in her career, ending the year ranked fourth in the world.

Katerina Siniakova and Taylor Townsend were named Doubles Team of the Year after claiming a second Grand Slam title at the Australian Open, while they also reached the U.S. Open final.

Former Olympic champion Belinda Bencic received the Comeback Player of the Year award after becoming a mother in April 2024 and producing a strong run of results, highlighted by a victory over world number five Elena Rybakina to win the Abu Dhabi Open.

Meanwhile, 19-year-old Canadian Victoria Mboko was named Newcomer of the Season after surging to a career-high world ranking of 18, capped by her maiden WTA 1000 title on home soil in Montreal.

## Raptors Snap Losing Streak



LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - Brandon Ingram scored 28 points as the Toronto Raptors snapped a four-game losing skid with a 106-96 win over the host Miami Heat on Monday.

Ingram buried 5-of-7 threes, while Scottie Barnes compiled 17 points, 10 rebounds, six assists and three blocks.

Immanuel Quickley added 15 points as the Raptors dominated the fourth quarter 32-19.

Bam Adebayo and Norman Powell posted 20 points each for Miami, which suffered its fifth straight defeat.

Adebayo also hauled in 10 boards and Kel'e Ware had 13 rebounds in 19 minutes for the Heat, who lost Tyler Herro before the game with a right big toe contusion, then suffered another blow when Nikola Jovic suffered a right elbow injury in the first quarter.

Miami jumped ahead 10-2 before Ingram led a Toronto rally, scoring 12 of the Raptors' first 15 points.

Jovic had his right arm placed in a heavy brace after crash-landing on a hard foul by Collin Murray-Boyles with 3:38 remaining in the first period, just 12 seconds after subbing in for the Heat.

Miami coughed up eight turnovers in the opening period, which ended on a buzzer-beating three from Grady Dick to give Toronto its first lead, 23-22.

Powell, well held early, spearheaded a 14-0 rush in the second frame as the Heat surged in front 36-25.

The Raptors responded with an Ingram-inspired 10-0 burst to pinch the lead back, before Adebayo and Miami ripped the momentum back again, closing the half with a 52-46 lead.

The Heat forced six Toronto turnovers in the third and produced a 9-0 flurry late to lead 77-74 with a quarter to play.

Ware started the fourth period with a tip-dunk to make it 79-74 before the Raptors replied with a 17-2 outburst to storm ahead 91-81.

After Toronto led 100-89 on Ingram's fifth 3-pointer, a 7-0 Miami run dragged the deficit back to four with 1:28 to play. Toronto closed with Jamal Shad's floater, Barnes' tough putback and Jacob Poeltl's layup.

## Scheffler Wins Fourth Straight PGA Tour Player of the Year Award



Dec 15 (Reuters) - Scottie Scheffler, who counted two majors among his six titles in 2025, has been voted the PGA Tour Player of the Year for a fourth consecutive season, the PGA Tour said on Monday.

Scheffler, who joins Tiger Woods (1999-2003) as the only two players to win the award four or more straight times, beat Tommy Fleetwood, Ben Griffin and Rory McIlroy for the Jack Nicklaus Award, which is determined by a vote of PGA Tour members.

World number one Scheffler recorded a PGA Tour-best 17 top-10s in 2025 and did not miss a cut while bringing his career major tally to four with the PGA Championship and British Open titles that left him a U.S. Open triumph away from becoming only the seventh golfer to complete the career Grand Slam.

"Scottie's consistent level of success has been nothing short of spectacular as he continues to chase history on the PGA Tour, and we're excited to see what he will deliver in 2026," PGA Tour CEO Brian Rolapp said in a press release.

South African Aldrich Potgieter received the Arnold Palmer Award as the PGA Tour Rookie of the Year after a season in which he was the only rookie to qualify for the FedExCup Playoffs.

Potgieter, one of five rookies to win on the PGA Tour this season, is the third South African winner of the award, joining Ernie Els (1994) and Trevor Immelman (2006).

"What Aldrich has achieved at such a young age is truly remarkable," said Rolapp. "He has captivated fans across the globe including his home country of South Africa and the Tour is thrilled to see what his future holds."

## Salah Off to AFCON as Future at Liverpool Still Unclear

PARIS (Dispatches) - Mohamed Salah heads for Morocco this week to captain Egypt in the Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON) amid uncertainty over his future at Liverpool.

Salah came off the bench midway through the first half and set up the second goal in a 2-0 Premier League win over Brighton at the weekend.

After the match, manager Arne Slot said there was "no issue to resolve" with his star forward, but speculation continues to rumble over the Egyptian's future after his outburst last weekend. AFP Sport highlights African headline-makers in the major European leagues:

The 33-year-old came on as a substitute and seized his chance by setting up Liverpool's second goal for Hugo Ekitike. Salah had been left out of Liverpool's squad for Tuesday's Champions League victory at Inter Milan after his explosive rant about Slot following the recent draw at Leeds.



That was the third successive game that Salah had been left on the bench and his furious claim that he had been "thrown under the bus" hinted at a potential departure from the troubled Premier League champions during the January transfer window.

The Nigeria defender scored in his side's 3-2 win at Burnley. Bassey grabbed Fulham's second goal to put them 2-1 up in the 31st minute en route to their first victory at Turf Moor since 1951. The 25-year-old's close-range header from Harry Wilson's cross was his first goal since an FA Cup tie against Manchester United in March.

The Ivory Coast midfielder capped his side's 3-0 victory over Tottenham with the final goal. Sangare netted in the 79th minute at the City Ground, bending a superb strike in off the post with the outside of his foot. The 28-year-old's second goal this season – and his first in seven matches – helped boost Forest's bid to avoid relegation.