

The Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Navy in a Statement Announced the Seizure of Two Fuel Smuggling Vessels Near Farsi Island in the Persian Gulf and Discovered More Than One Million Liters of Fuel Aboard the Two Vessels

# IRAN NEWS

The President, in a Message to His Sri Lankan Counterpart, Congratulated the Government and People of Sri Lanka on the Anniversary of the Country's Independence and Emphasized the Expansion of Cooperation Between the Two Nations

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## Iran's Deterrence Power Strengthened After Ballistic Missile Upgrades



TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Iran's top military official says the country has strengthened its deterrence by upgrading domestically manufactured ballistic missiles.

Chief of Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces Major General Abdulrahman Mousavi made the remarks during a visit to an Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) missile town.

"By upgrading its ballistic missiles in all technical dimensions, Iran has been able to strengthen its deterrence power," he said during the visit, accompanied by Brigadier General Majid Mousavi, commander of the IRGC Aerospace Force.

Mousavi also expressed Iran's readiness to confront any act of aggression by its enemies.

"Following the 12-day war, we have changed our military doctrine from defensive to offensive by adopting the policy of asymmetric warfare and [boosting readiness for a] crushing response to the enemies," the top general said.

He was referring to the illegal US-Israeli aggression against Iran that killed at least 1,064 people last June.

Israel launched the unprovoked war on June 13 while Iran was engaged in nuclear talks with the US, which also joined the aggression by striking Iranian nuclear sites.

## 600 Foreign Investment Applications Worth \$17b Approved This Year



### IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - More than 600 foreign investment applications worth a total of \$17 billion have been approved in Iran since the beginning of the year.

According to ILNA, citing the Organization for Investment, Economic and Technical Assistance of Iran (OIETAI), the 301st and 302nd meetings of the Foreign Investment Board—also the 11th and 12th meetings held in the year 1404—took place on Tuesday, January 20, 1404, and February 3, 1404. The meetings were chaired by Heidari, Head of OIETAI, and attended by members of the Foreign Investment Board representing the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Central Bank of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Planning and Budget Organization, the Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture, the Iran Chamber of Cooperatives, and representatives from relevant specialized bodies.

These included officials from the Ministry of Agriculture Jihad, the Ministry of Industry, Mine and Trade, the Ministry of Oil, the Ministry of Energy, the Ministry of Information and Communications Technology, the Vice Presidency for Science and Technology, the Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Organization (SATBA), the Road Maintenance and Transportation Organization, and the Secretariat of the Supreme Council of Free Trade-Industrial and Special Economic Zones. The sessions were held at the Persian Gulf Hall of OIETAI.

## Iranian FM Says Muscat Nuclear Talks Was a Good Start

### IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN – Iran's Foreign Minister Seyyed Abbas Araqchi discussed the results of Friday's nuclear negotiations with the United States and described it as a good beginning.

Nuclear negotiations between Iran and the United States, mediated by Oman, were held in Muscat, the capital of Oman.

After the negotiations, Araqchi told reporters: "Today, several sessions were held indirectly."

He added: "Multiple rounds of meetings took place. Our perspectives and concerns were exchanged after this period."

Araqchi emphasized: "Our rights and interests were also discussed in a very good atmosphere."

The Foreign Minister stated: "Overall, it was a good start, but continuing it depends on consultations in the capitals and how we decide to proceed. It was agreed that the negotiations will continue."

He expressed optimism, saying: "I believe the atmosphere was good and it was a solid start. Now, after the period of hardship we've gone through, the dialogue process is beginning again."

Araqchi also acknowledged: "This distrust is a significant challenge for the negotiations. We need to overcome this distrust. Today, a good discussion took place, and it was agreed that it would continue."

The Foreign Minister further added: "If this same approach persists on the other side, we can reach a framework for negotiations."

He concluded by saying: "From my perspective, it was a good start, and it now depends on the other side and the decisions made in Iran."

According to an Oman Foreign Ministry statement, Albusaidi held separate consultations Friday morning with the Iranian and American delegations.

"These consultations focused on creating appropriate conditions for the resumption of diplomatic and technical negotiations, while also underscoring their importance in light of the parties' commitment to the success of these talks in advancing sustainable security and stability,"



the statement said.

In his talks with Albusaidi, Araqchi touched on Iran's approach of utilizing diplomacy to safeguard Iran's national interests, stressing the country's full readiness to defend its sovereignty and national security against any form of excess or adventurism.

The Omani foreign minister commended Iran's goodwill, sense of responsibility, and seriousness toward diplomatic processes, noting the determination of all countries in the region to prevent any escalation of tensions.

He expressed hope that this round of negotiations, through the goodwill and timely engagement of all parties, would pave the way for a lasting understanding between Iran and the United States.

Iran's main demand in the Muscat talks is the effective and verifiable lifting of economic and financial sanctions, Iranian officials say. Tehran has repeatedly stressed that any

agreement lacking tangible economic benefits would be of no practical value, making the timing and outcome of the negotiations especially important for Iran.

On the nuclear front, Iran insists on its legal right to enrich uranium on its own soil, describing the issue as a red line in the talks. From Tehran's perspective, any potential technical measures can only be considered within a framework that recognizes this right, and any preconditions beyond it would be seen as a sign of bad faith by the other side.

Another key priority for Iran is keeping the scope of the negotiations limited to the nuclear issue. Iranian officials have said at various times that missile or regional matters have no place in these talks, warning that introducing such issues could undermine the diplomatic process. Tehran maintains that regional issues should be addressed by countries in the region themselves, without interference from external actors.

Earlier, Baghaei wrote in a post on X that the diplomatic engagement is being conducted "with strength and with the objective of achieving a fair, mutually satisfactory and dignified agreement."

## Public Trust Is Not Built by Slogans

### IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN – Public trust is not created through slogans, but through honesty, listening, clear explanations, and correcting mistakes, Mohammad Jafar Qaem-Panah, Executive Vice President's aide, said, emphasizing that the government considers itself accountable to public opinion and will make every effort to address shortcomings.

Qaem-Panah made the remarks on Tuesday, Bahman 14, 1404 (February 3, 2026), at the inauguration ceremony of 40 development and investment projects in the Maku Free Trade-Industrial Zone, highlighting the significance of transparency, accountability, and responsive governance.

Referring to recent tragic events in the country, he said they had left deep wounds on Iranian society that continue to weigh heavily on many families. "I am sincerely sorry and extend my heartfelt sympathy to the families of the martyrs, those who lost their lives, and the injured," he said.

He stressed that in such moments, the government's role is not limited to condolences. "The government must also be accountable, transparent, and responsible, taking concrete steps to restore public confidence and compensate for losses," he said.

Qaem-Panah reiterated that public trust cannot be built through rhetoric alone. "Trust is built through honesty, listening, explaining, and correcting errors. We see ourselves as accountable to public opinion and will strive to rectify shortcomings," he added.

The Executive Vice President's aide noted that this principle underlined the importance of his visit to Maku. "We are in Maku, among people who do not see the border merely as a line on a map, but who live with it every day. I am pleased to be present alongside the steadfast border guards and the proud people of this region—a gateway for trade and interaction with neighboring countries, while also serving as guardians of national peace and security," he said.

Qaem-Panah described Maku as a significant economic, geopolitical, and social opportunity for Iran. "For this reason, Maku cannot be discussed in general terms; it requires precise, operational planning," he said.

Referring to the unveiling of the Comprehensive Plan for the Maku Free Trade Zone, he emphasized that the plan is not a theoretical document but a binding commitment. "It must clarify the path forward, set priorities, realistically assess resources, and most importantly, serve as a basis for accountability. If the plan is not an executable roadmap, it will neither convince investors nor inspire public hope. Without clear indicators, timelines, and responsible authorities, the outcome will be big promises and small achievements, which is exactly what people are tired of," he said.

Addressing the role of free trade zones, Qaem-Panah said, "They matter because they can transfer development from the center to the periphery. Iran needs balanced development more than anything



else. The gap between central and peripheral regions is not just economic; it is about opportunity, dignity, and hope. Wherever people feel opportunities are unfairly distributed, social dissatisfaction grows."

He stressed that free trade zones must be engines of local prosperity, not mere showpieces. "Development must be experienced by local communities and improve their daily lives," he said.

Qaem-Panah highlighted that balanced development cannot be achieved without recognizing the importance of borders. "Border provinces are the front line of trade. Today, trade is not just about exchanging goods—it is a key component of national resilience. Reliable, predictable, and diversified trade routes for essential goods strengthen food security, while formal, low-cost trade benefits the national economy and curbs smuggling and the underground economy," he said.

"In simple terms," he added, "an active border is a more secure border, and national security deepens when

supported by a dynamic economy."

He pointed to Maku's potential as more than a transit point. "Goods must be linked to modern logistics, standard warehousing, cold chains, packaging, processing, and professional customs services. Otherwise, movement creates traffic, not wealth. The comprehensive plan must reduce time, lower costs, and increase reliability. Capital flows to places where planning is predictable," he said.

Qaem-Panah stressed that predictability depends on good governance. "Economic actors must know that laws will not be overturned overnight, that licensing processes are clear, delays are explained, and transparency replaces arbitrary approvals," he said.

He also emphasized local employment as a core principle. "A free zone without local employment is meaningless. Development that excludes local labor will not take root. Skills training, linking universities and vocational education to market needs, and prioritizing local hiring must be central to the plan," he said.

He warned against environmental negligence. "If we ignore environmental considerations today for short-term growth, we will pay far higher costs tomorrow—financially, socially, and politically. Good development must combine growth with sustainability," he said.

Concluding, Qaem-Panah said, "All these efforts come down to one word: trust. Trust comes through transparency—clear indicators, regular reporting, and active involvement of local communities and experts. In today's world, the best governance is governance under light: the light of media scrutiny, public oversight, and accountability."

He expressed hope that Maku could serve as a model for integrating border regions into national development and transforming free zones into centers of production, export, and value addition, strengthening food security and national resilience.

## Iran's Newly Unveiled Ground Stations to Boost Satellite Control



TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Head of the Iranian Space Agency (ISA) Hassan Salarieh has announced that the launch of the Salmas and Chenaran ground stations has enabled more precise control of Iranian satellites and faster reception of satellite imagery.

Speaking to reporters regarding the details and the importance of the two facilities, Salarieh said Salmas and Chenaran stations are among Iran's key space facilities, located in the northwest and northeast of the country.

The stations, he added, provide access to satellite data and enable full control of Iranian satellites.

He explained that multiple antennas operating across different wavelengths and frequency bands have been installed at the stations.

Satellite mission control centers are also based at the sites, allowing for the transmission of commands and the reception of satellite data, he further said.

Salarieh emphasized that increasing the number of ground control centers—especially with coverage extending from east to west—expands communication opportunities during satellite passes. This leads to longer communication windows with satellites and allows larger volumes of imagery to be downloaded.

He added that the expanded ground infrastructure shortens the process of satellite control and stabilization in orbit, enabling faster and more efficient satellite operations, which he described as a key strategic advantage.

## UN Group Denounces EU's Illegal Designation of Iran's IRGC



TEHRAN (Dispatches) - The Group of Friends in Defense of the Charter of the United Nations has strongly condemned a recent "illegal" move by the European Union to blacklist Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) and level unfounded accusations against the elite military force.

In a statement released on Wednesday, the 18-member UN group said that the EU's "terrorist" designation of the IRGC targets a constitutional part of the armed forces of an independent country.

The EU's move clearly violates the fundamental rules of international law, including the principle of sovereign equality of states and the principle of non-interference in their internal affairs, and runs contrary to the purposes and principles enshrined in the UN Charter, it added.

Under well-established principles of international law, states, as equal and independent entities, do not have the right to exercise jurisdiction or impose unilateral measures against each other, and cannot subject legitimate armed forces of a sovereign state to unlawful and coercive measures, and label them as a terrorist group.

The UN group also noted that the EU's decision sets a dangerous precedent and undermines genuine counter-terrorism efforts, while ultimately serving the interests of terrorist groups.





## Egyptian FM, IAEA’s Grossi Discuss Iran’s Nuclear File

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Egypt’s Foreign Minister Badr Abdelatty and IAEA Director General Rafael Grossi have discussed the latest developments in Iran’s nuclear program and potential pathways to resume negotiations. According to the Lebanese Al Mayadeen news network on Friday, Abdelatty had a phone conversation with Grossi regarding Iran’s nuclear program.

The two sides discussed ways to alleviate the current tense atmosphere and emphasized the need for regional restraint. Abdelatty briefed Grossi about his country’s extensive consultations and communications in recent weeks aimed at resuming dialogue between Iran and the United States.

## Localization of Graphite Electrodes Freed the Steel Industry From Strategic Dependence



### IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Minister of Industry, Mine and Trade emphasized the strategic importance of the steel industry in national development, saying the launch of the Ardakan graphite electrode plant was a key strategic move to eliminate dependence and reduce the risk of steel production halts under sanctions.

Seyed Mohammad Atabak made the remarks on Wednesday at the inauguration ceremony of the first graphite electrode production unit in Iran and the Middle East, located in Ardakan, Yazd Province. He said the steel industry is not an ordinary sector but a major indicator of countries’ level of development, noting that all paths of industrial development require steel.

Referring to challenges faced by the steel industry in the 2000s, Atabak said one of the country’s biggest concerns was dependence on imported graphite electrodes for electric arc furnaces—a vulnerability that at times led to multiple price hikes and even threatened production shutdowns.

Stressing that the Ardakan graphite electrode plant was among the first projects whose rapid implementation he personally prioritized, the minister said that thanks to the efforts of domestic managers, specialists, and investors, this strategic shortcoming has now been resolved and the country’s steel industry has achieved greater stability.

Atabak also underlined the necessity of observing environmental considerations, stating that compliance with environmental standards is a prerequisite for the continued operation of major industries, and neglecting environmental issues could undermine the industry’s social capital.

## Imam Khomeini Airport Ready to Handle Domestic Flights



### IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The CEO of Imam Khomeini Airport City Company has outlined details of a plan to transfer part of Tehran’s domestic flight traffic from Mehrabad Airport to Imam Khomeini International Airport.

Ramin Kashef Azar, CEO of Imam Khomeini Airport City Company, told ILNA that Imam Khomeini Airport has the capacity to operate domestic flights and that, in the near future, part of the traffic currently handled by Mehrabad Airport should be shifted to Imam Airport.

He noted that Mehrabad Airport faces limitations and complexities in terms of further development. “For this reason, some domestic flights can be transferred to Imam Khomeini Airport. At Imam Airport, there are no capacity or traffic constraints preventing the acceptance and operation of domestic flights,” he said.

Kashef Azar added that from a passenger demographics perspective, potential users include travelers arriving in Iran via Imam Khomeini Airport—such as those flying on routes from Najaf to Tehran or to religious destinations—who could then continue to Mashhad without the need to transfer to Mehrabad Airport. He emphasized that requests from other passengers for domestic flights operating from Imam Airport would also be accommodated. “Therefore, a share of future domestic flight traffic must inevitably be transferred to Imam Khomeini Airport,” he said.

Regarding the timeline for implementing the transfer of domestic flights, Kashef Azar said that no final date has yet been set, but planning is underway. “We are currently determining what share of Mehrabad Airport’s traffic can be transferred to Imam Airport and which domestic flights can be operated from there,” he explained.

# Comprehensive Support for the Pharmaceutical Industry Is a Gov’t Priority

### IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - President Masoud Pezeshkian emphasized that the government will take serious action to ensure the sustainable supply of medicines and to address challenges facing the pharmaceutical industry.

In line with the administration’s policies to support the provision of essential medicines for the country, a major specialized meeting was held on Thursday morning, February 5, 2026, hosted by President Pezeshkian. The meeting was attended by senior economic and health officials of the government, as well as heads and representatives of companies active in the production, importation, distribution, and supply of medicines and medical equipment, along with representatives of the private sector.



During the meeting, stakeholders in the pharmaceutical industry, in a positive and constructive atmosphere based on dialogue and collective thinking, outlined their views, problems, concerns, and challenges. After carefully listening to the issues raised, the president assured participants that the government, with a serious and responsible approach, has placed the resolution of issues in this strategic sector firmly on its agenda.

The meeting was also attended by the Minister of Health and Medical Education, the Governor of the Central Bank of Iran, and the Head of the Plan and Budget Organization, with emphasis placed on full coordination among relevant institutions to support the supply of medicines.

President Pezeshkian stressed the need to increase investment in the pharmaceutical industry to strengthen the production chain, and issued key directives regarding the provision of foreign currency needed for medicines and medical equipment, reforming allocation mechanisms, and resolving liquidity problems faced by industry players.

In this regard, the Governor of the Central Bank was tasked with holding specialized and expert-level sessions, with the direct participation of stakeholders

and industry actors, to address obstacles and facilitate pharmaceutical industry activities in a step-by-step manner.

Highlighting the paramount importance of safeguarding public health, the president described support for the pharmaceutical industry as one of the government’s definite priorities. He stated that addressing public concerns regarding sustainable and timely access to essential medicines for patients requires comprehensive support across all segments of the pharmaceutical value chain, including production, importation, procurement, distribution, and supply—an issue the government is pursuing with determination.

Pezeshkian also identified the provision and completion of the country’s strategic pharmaceutical reserves as among the top priorities, stressing that all existing obstacles to achieving this goal will be removed through decisive and coordinated decisions. He noted that addressing public health and medical care is not a matter of choice but an obligation and a fundamental duty of governments and governing systems, adding that the administration will firmly stand alongside the pharmaceutical industry in this effort.

Referring to structural problems and the accumulation of receivables in the health and pharmaceutical sectors, the president ordered the elimination of redundant and inefficient procedures that have led to the stagnation of financial resources in the health sector—particularly pharmaceuticals—and delays in transferring funds to producers, importers, and distributors.

Emphasizing a synergistic approach to balancing the interests of producers and consumers, Pezeshkian stated that the government will make decisions and act in a way that benefits both producers and service recipients, noting that under such conditions, policymakers and implementers will undoubtedly also be winners.

## Serious Emphasis on the China East-West Corridor Passing Through Iran



### IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The Minister of Economy highlighted the importance of the China East-West Corridor passing through Iran, stating that this topic was strongly emphasized during his meeting with the President of China.

Madani Zadeh described the government’s main approach in free zones as focusing on developing export-oriented production, expressing hope that this approach will be seriously pursued in the Sarakhs Free Zone as well.

He referred to the international opportunities ahead for the country and explained that within the framework of the “Silk Road” plan designed by China, he had traveled to China alongside the President of Iran. During his meeting with the Chinese President, a strong emphasis was placed on the passage of the East-West Corridor through Iran. This presents a golden opportunity to connect the East with the West, with Sarakhs region being a key part of this route.

The Minister of Economy stated that economic diplomacy is one of the country’s strategic and pivotal decisions. He noted that the Supreme Leader has also emphasized this matter in recent meetings with officials. He called on economic actors not to view economic diplomacy solely as the responsibility of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Instead, he said, the Ministry of Economy and its affiliated agencies see themselves as responsible for playing an active role in this arena.

# Eurasia as a Successful Model of Trade Diplomacy

### IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The Deputy of International Business Development at the Iran Trade Promotion Organization (TPO) described the government’s decision to reform currency policies as a bold move. He emphasized that synergy between regional agreements, monetary pacts, and currency policy reforms can accelerate exports, ensure sustainable production, and reduce challenges faced by active traders.

According to the Public Relations Office of the Iran Trade Promotion Organization, Amir Roshanshabb, while congratulating the anniversary of the Islamic Revolution’s victory, highlighted the importance of strengthening intelligent trade links with target countries. He added that now, more than ever, Iran should leverage the capacity of international agreements to develop sustainable foreign trade.



Referring to the significant role of trade agreements—particularly Iran’s Free Trade Agreement with the Eurasian Economic Union—he noted that Eurasian experience has shown that when negotiations are specialized, targeted, and based on commodity lists tailored to the needs of both sides, better outcomes are achieved in preferential and free trade sectors. Consequently, one of the main strategies for market development is to focus on preferential trade and gradually move toward free trade.

Roshanshabb also stressed that one of the most effective ways to access new markets is through joining regional and international agreements and treaties, which can facilitate and accelerate trade development.

Reviewing Iran’s recent trade performance with Eurasian Economic Union member countries, he pointed out that contrary to initial assumptions of trade decline or stagnation, data indicates that in the first six months of implementing the agreement, Iran’s exports to Eurasian countries increased by approximately 16%, with exports to Belarus growing by 50%. Comparing early months of 2024 with the same period in 2023 shows no significant decline, indicating that the agreement’s overall trend remains positive and acceptable.

Regarding currency policy reforms, the deputy emphasized that one of the most important and bold steps taken was the reform of currency policies and the elimination of preferential exchange rates. Analyzing export issues revealed that 80 to 90 percent of challenges faced by economic actors were related to currency

matters such as allocation, repatriation, and delays in currency receipt, which caused export slowdowns, importers’ delays, and disruptions in the supply chain of raw materials and production.

He linked the slowdown in export and import flows to reduced production and rising inflation, noting that decreased supply and increased demand exerted price pressures on the market. Currency issues also impacted domestic markets; however, after streamlining and accelerating export processes, not only does trade flourish, but inflationary pressures also ease.

Roshanshabb further discussed the importance of monetary agreements amid sanctions, stating that these agreements—such as barter and use of local currencies—can play an effective role in facilitating trade. Previously, due to significant currency exchange rate differences and speculative motives, these agreements did not function properly. However, with more realistic exchange rates and the removal of currency allocation concepts, the situation has improved.

He added that exporters can now import using foreign currency earned from exports, which has eliminated unrealistic motives from the market and allowed genuine importers and traders to remain active. This transformation has laid a solid foundation for the more effective implementation of monetary agreements and the expansion of Iran’s foreign trade.

In a separate comment, he reviewed the state of Iran’s exhibition industry, noting that necessary permits have been issued, and a clear framework has been established for trade shows and exhibitions. However, he pointed out that the exhibition industry, as the country’s trade showcase and front line, is heavily influenced by the overall economic and trade conditions.

Describing the exhibition industry as a venue for sales, negotiations, and business connections, he said that recent events—including the 12-day war and other incidents—have directly impacted the sector. These factors have contributed to many events being canceled or postponed, leading to a busy schedule at the end of this year and planning challenges for the upcoming year.

Finally, Roshanshabb emphasized that, despite these challenges, a comprehensive exhibition calendar for the next year has been drafted and is currently awaiting approval.

## Fresh Red Meat Imported from Russia and Pakistan



### IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The head of the Tehran Province Agricultural Jihad Organization said that many goods which were not subject to changes in foreign-exchange policies have nevertheless seen sharp price increases in recent months, stressing that relevant authorities must strengthen oversight and take action against overpricing.

Jebreil Baradari, head of the Tehran Province Agricultural Jihad Organization, told ILNA that essential commodities are currently being supplied and distributed in the market in response to the introduction of the new ration card scheme.

Responding to a question about the supply and pricing of chicken in Tehran Province, Baradari said that between 1,700 and 1,800 tons of fresh chicken are distributed daily across the province.

He added that the wholesale price of chicken at the Bahman Market ranges from 170,000 to 190,000 rials per kilogram, while retail prices in the city range between 220,000 and 230,000 rials.

Commenting on the availability of essential goods, Baradari said that at the start of the subsidy optimization plan, the agricultural sector experienced minimal shortages, with all goods widely available. He noted that many items were even sold at prices below the government’s indicative rates.

Referring to the abnormal increase in prices of certain goods, he said that many products not covered by preferential exchange rates or not affected by changes in currency policies have also become significantly more expensive, adding that supervisory bodies must address and confront such price hikes.



## Japan to Restart World's Biggest Nuclear Plant

TOKYO (Dispatches) - Japan will switch the world's largest nuclear power plant back on next week, after a glitch with an alarm forced the suspension of its first restart since the 2011 Fukushima disaster. Takeyuki Inagaki, the head of the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant run by Tokyo Electric Power (TEPCO), told a press conference Friday that they planned "to start up the reactor on February 9". The announcement came after TEPCO restarted the reactor on January 21 but shut it off the following day after an alarm from the monitoring system sounded. Due to an error in its configuration, the alarm had picked up slight changes to the electrical current in one cable even though these were still within a range considered safe, Inagaki said.



## Venezuela Legislature Advances Amnesty Bill for Political Detainees



CARACAS (Dispatches) - Venezuela's legislature has moved forward with an amnesty bill proposed by acting President Delcy Rodríguez that could pave the way for the release of hundreds of opposition figures, journalists and human rights activists held for political reasons, though the lack of public details has prompted cautious reactions from rights groups.

Venezuela's legislature on Thursday advanced an amnesty bill proposed by acting President Rodríguez that could lead to the release of hundreds of opposition leaders, journalists and human rights activists detained for political reasons.

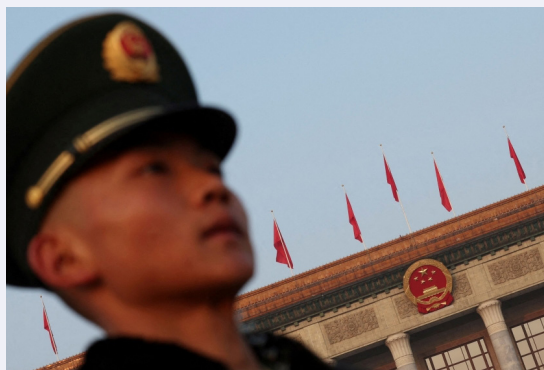
Such an amnesty is a central demand of the country's opposition and human rights organisations with backing from the United States. But the contents of the bill have not been released publicly, and rights groups have so far reacted with cautious optimism – and with demands for more information.

The bill, introduced just weeks after the US military captured then president Nicolas Maduro, still requires a second debate that has yet to be scheduled. Once approved, it must be signed by Rodríguez before it can go into effect.

In announcing the bill late last month, Rodríguez told a gathering of justices, magistrates, ministers, military brass and other government leaders that the ruling party-controlled National Assembly would take up the legislation with urgency.

"May this law serve to heal the wounds left by the political confrontation fuelled by violence and extremism," she said in a pre-taped televised event. "May it serve to redirect justice in our country, and may it serve to redirect coexistence among Venezuelans."

## China Says It Will Not Join Nuclear Talks at This Stage



BEIJING (Dispatches) - China said today it would not join nuclear talks "at this stage" after the expiry of the U.S.-Russian New START treaty triggered fears of a global arms race.

Campaigners have warned that the expiry of the New START treaty, which ended decades of restrictions on how many warheads the two powers deploy, could encourage China to expand its own arsenal.

The United States has said any new nuclear agreement would have to include China, but international efforts to encourage Beijing to join fresh talks have so far failed.

"China has always maintained that the advancement of arms control and disarmament must adhere to the principles of maintaining global strategic stability," Beijing foreign ministry spokesman Lin Jian told a news conference.

"China's nuclear capabilities are of a totally different scale as those of the United States and Russia (and) will not participate in nuclear disarmament negotiations at this stage," he said.

The New START treaty ended at the turn of the calendar on February 5, after US President Donald Trump did not follow up on Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin's proposal to extend warhead limits in the agreement for one year.

Russia and the United States together control more than 80 per cent of the world's nuclear warheads but arms agreements have been withering away.

# Cuba Ready for Dialogue With U.S., Rejects Threats and Preconditions

HAVANA (Dispatches) - Cuba is prepared to hold dialogue with the United States but not under pressure, President Miguel Díaz-Canel insisted Thursday after months of threats from U.S. President Donald Trump.

Trump has vowed to cut off Cuba's access to oil and stated the communist island was "ready to fall" as he warned it to "make a deal" with Washington "BEFORE IT IS TOO LATE."

The Republican did not say what kind of a deal he was after, but has repeatedly stated the two countries were in negotiations, which Havana has denied.

"Cuba is willing to engage in dialogue with the United States, a dialogue on any topic... but without pressure or preconditions," Díaz-Canel said on state TV and radio.

He said any talks must take place "from a position of equals, with respect for our sovereignty, our independence and our self-determination" and without "interference in our internal affairs."

Trump and Secretary of State Marco Rubio, the Miami-born son of Cuban immigrants, have made no secret of their desire to bring about regime change in Havana.

White House spokeswoman Karoline Leavitt told reporters Thursday: "I think the fact that the Cuban government is on its last leg and its country is about to collapse, they should be wise in their statements directed towards the president of the United States."

Asked about Cuba's denial of the existence of negotiations, she said her boss was "always willing to engage in diplomacy and I believe that is something that is taking place, in fact, with the Cuban government."

Cuba, in the grips of an economic crisis, had long relied on oil supplies from Venezuela, whose leader was ousted in a deadly US military operation last month.

Trump subsequently claimed to have taken control of Venezuelan oil, vowed to starve Cuba of the commodity, and threatened



Díaz-Canel said the pressure that Cuba found itself under highlighted the importance of its drive for greener energy and reducing reliance on others.

Cuban officials blame US sanctions for Cuba's worst economic crisis in decades, marked by shortages of fuel, food and medicine.

But observers say poor economic management and a tourism collapse following the Covid-19 pandemic contributed to the island's woes.

tariffs on any other nation stepping in to help US-sanctioned Havana.

The pressure tactics threaten to plunge Cuba into complete darkness as its power plants struggle to keep the lights on due to fuel shortages.

Earlier yesterday, hundreds of thousands of people in the country's east were left without electricity for hours after an electricity grid failure.

Díaz-Canel insisted his country still had friends, which he did not name, as it confronts what he described as an "acute fuel shortage."

"We cannot openly explain everything we are doing," he said, but "Cuba is not alone."

He said energy production from diesel- and oil-powered generators has been "zero" for weeks.

Yesterday, the US State Department announced it was providing \$6 million in direct aid to Cubans through the Catholic Church in that country.

It comes after US\$3 million of earlier assistance, also provided through the same mechanisms, with the material aid being delivered by local parish representatives.

Mexico's President Claudia Sheinbaum said this week that her country was using all available diplomatic channels to ensure a resumption of crude shipments to Cuba, but would not put itself at risk of punitive US tariffs.

# Ukraine, Russia End Second Round of Peace Talks

KYIV (Dispatches) - Ukraine and Russia concluded a second round of U.S.-brokered talks in Abu Dhabi on Thursday aimed at ending Europe's biggest conflict since World War Two, with the two sides conducting a major prisoner swap and agreeing to resume negotiations soon.

U.S. President Donald Trump's special envoy Steve Witkoff said the delegations from the U.S., Ukraine, and Russia had agreed to an exchange of 314 prisoners of war, which took place on Thursday. It was the first such swap in five months.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said some of the released POWs had been held for nearly four years. He said the next round of talks would be held soon, likely in the United States.

Witkoff, writing on the X social media platform, said: "The discussions were constructive and focused on how to create the conditions for a durable peace."

He said the talks "demonstrate that sustained diplomatic engagement is delivering tangible results and advancing efforts to end the war in Ukraine."

Zelenskyy, speaking in his nightly video address, said Ukraine favored any diplomatic format "that can realistically bring peace closer and make it reliable, lasting, and such that deprives Russia of the appetite to continue fighting."

Speaking earlier alongside Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk, Zelenskyy said the talks covered the main differences between the two sides.

Zelenskyy said he was keen for the talks to lead to the end of the four-year war, but repeated his insistence that Ukraine must receive robust security guarantees, including from Washington, to ensure Russia does not attack again.

U.S. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent, who took part in earlier talks with Russian officials and Witkoff, said the imposition of further sanctions on Russia would depend on how the talks proceeded. Bessent maintained his belief that Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine was illegal and continued to believe Russian President Vladimir Putin was a war criminal.

Russia's envoy, Kirill Dmitriev, said there was progress and positive movement. He also said work was under way to restore Russia's relations with the United States, including within a U.S.-Russia working group on the

economy.

Russia and Ukraine have exchanged 157 prisoners of war each, the Russian Defense Ministry said. Three civilians from the Kursk region were also returned to Russia.

A video released by Ukraine's presidency showed dozens of Ukrainian prisoners of war - many wrapped in the national flag - disembarking from buses in the snow, some hugging each other and others crying as they spoke to relatives on mobile phones.

POW exchanges were the only concrete steps towards peace that emerged from the previous rounds of talks between Ukraine and Russia last year in Turkey.

Hundreds of thousands of soldiers on both sides have been killed, wounded, or gone missing in nearly four years of war.

Zelenskyy said this week that about 55,000 Ukrainian soldiers had been killed on the battlefield, but gave no details on the number of wounded or missing Ukrainian servicemen.

The Center for Strategic and International Studies, a Washington-based think tank, said Russia had suffered nearly 1.2 million casualties. Moscow dismissed



the report as unreliable.

Despite pressure by the Trump administration on Kyiv and Moscow to find a compromise, fighting continues to rage along the roughly 1,200-km (750-mile) front line.

Russia's troops launched major airstrikes on Ukraine overnight on Tuesday, ahead of the talks, and followed up with smaller drone attacks on Wednesday and Thursday.

In his address, Zelenskyy noted "good results" from the Security Service of Ukraine, singling out an attack by Ukrainian-made long-range Flamingo missiles on the testing ground for Russia's Oreshnik hypersonic missiles near the Caspian Sea.

After his talks with Tusk, Zelenskyy repeated his pleas for air-defence missiles and said Kyiv was ready to swap its drones, in which it has become a global leader, for the missiles from allies or for Poland's Soviet-era MiG-29 fighter jets.

The Ukrainian General Staff said in a statement its forces had launched successful strikes on a Russian intermediate-range ballistic missile launch site last

month.

The fate of the eastern Donetsk region, where the most intense battles are taking place, remains one of the most complicated issues in the talks.

Moscow wants Kyiv to pull its troops from the entire region, including a line of heavily fortified cities regarded as one of Ukraine's strongest defences.

Ukraine has said the conflict should be frozen along the current front lines and rejects any unilateral pullback of its forces. Kyiv says it wants control of the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant, the largest in Europe, which is in Russian-controlled territory.

The head of the state nuclear corporation Rosatom said on Thursday that Moscow was ready for international cooperation over the Zaporizhzhia plant, including with the United States, but the facility must be Russian.

Russia occupies about 20% of Ukraine's national territory, including Crimea and parts of the eastern Donbas region seized before the 2022 invasion. Analysts say Russia has gained about 1.5% of Ukrainian territory since early 2024.

# Pakistan Embassy in Tehran Observes Kashmir Solidarity Day

## IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Embassy of Pakistan in Tehran organized an event to commemorate the Kashmir Solidarity Day and to express unwavering support for Kashmiri brothers on February 5.

Ambassador of Pakistan in Tehran, H.E. Muhammad Mudassir Tipu, in his address reiterated the commitment of Pakistan to continue to support Kashmiris politically, morally and diplomatically. He added that Kashmiri have been under illegal occupation since decades. He stressed on the rightful and timely solution of the conflict as per united Nation's resolutions and aspirations of Kashmiris. The timely and justly solving such



Ambassador of Pakistan in Tehran Muhammad Mudassir Tipu addressing on Kashmir Solidarity Day organized by Embassy of Pakistan, Tehran on 5th February, 2026.

situation will help mitigate the sufferings of people.

The messages of the President of Pakistan, Mr. Asif Ali Zardari and Prime Minister of Pakistan, Mr. Shehbaz Sharif were also read out on the occasion. A detailed documentary to highlight the atrocities of Indian forces in the Indian held Kashmir and the sufferings of Kashmiri people was also shown. A photo exhibition was also organized to highlight the message of Kashmir solidarity day.





## Man City Storm Past Newcastle to Set Up League Cup Final With Arsenal

MANCHESTER (Dispatches) - Manchester City will face Arsenal in the League Cup final after ending Newcastle's reign as holders with a first-half blitz in their 3-1 victory.

Pep Guardiola's side were already in pole position after winning the semi-final first leg on Tyneside in January and they finished the job in ruthless fashion at the Etihad Stadium.

Omar Marmoush struck twice in the first half of the second leg before Tijjani Reijnders put the result beyond doubt.

Anthony Elanga reduced the deficit after the interval, but City's 5-1 aggregate win sent them back to the League Cup showpiece for the first time since 2021.

City's final date with Arsenal is set for March 22 at Wembley after the Premier League leaders knocked out Chelsea on Tuesday.

Reaching the final was a welcome tonic for Guardiola following the frustration of blowing a two-goal lead in a 2-2 draw at Tottenham on Sunday that delivered a major blow to their title challenge.

With a crucial trip to Liverpool looming this weekend, City trail Arsenal by six points in the Premier League title race.

The League Cup was the first silverware of Guardiola's City reign when they beat Arsenal in the 2018 final, with current Gunners boss Mikel Arteta then working as the Spaniard's assistant.

City went on to win the competition for the following three years, but haven't lifted the League Cup since 2021.

"We will travel to London again, they will wait for us there. They never travel to the north (for finals) but I am really happy to be back. Five (League Cup) finals in 10 years is a big milestone," Guardiola said.

"It will be good. You have to live this experience. The first title we won here was in the League Cup.

"When you win something, it helps to win more. It's a pleasure to play against Arsenal, the best team right now in Europe and maybe the world."

Newcastle boss Eddie Howe added: "Really annoyed with the first half display. We pride ourselves on being really organised and tactically we want to be able to handle any problem the opposition gives us.

"That first half we weren't good enough individually and our duels were off and it gave us huge problems."

Guardiola used sarcasm and statistics this week to defend City against claims the club's success has been due to the financial muscle of their Abu Dhabi-based owners.

The City manager pointed out six English clubs have spent more than his side over the past five years, but he knows he will never win over the critics.

Guardiola's only way to silence the outside noise — and mounting suggestions that City are a team in decline — is with silverware.

## China's Su Advances, Norway's Roisland Knocked Out in First Big Air Event



LIVIGNO (Dispatches) - Defending big air Olympic champion Su Yiming, from China, made it through the first round of snowboarding competition at the 2026 Games on Thursday despite a rocky start, while 2022 silver medalist Mons Roisland failed to advance to the finals.

All four members of Japan's powerhouse line-up also made the group of 12 that will compete in the big air finals on Saturday in the Italian resort town of Livigno. Hiroto Ogiwara led the pack, and teammate Kira Kimura ranked third.

Su fell on his landing in the first of three rounds at the Milano Cortina Games on a jump he said he did not consider difficult. He gained momentum in the following two, locking in a long, high switch backside that granted him a fourth-place finish.

"I was very disappointed in myself after the first jump," Su said. "To have to deliver in the last two jumps, I had no room for error. I had to give each of them my all."

"After making the final, I will actually feel less pressure because I have already reached the stage to vie for the biggest prize," the 21-year-old added.

Despite showing off his precision from the start, offering a clean and highly technical jump, Norway's Roisland fell at the end of his second jump and did not make it through, ending 16th in the ranking. He said he was happy with his riding even though he did not advance.

"I just underestimated the level that was going to be out there today," Roisland said. "It was just through the roof. Kudos to everyone today."

Ian Matteoli, 20, the first Italian to conquer the World Cup podium, stunned on home snow from the start, grabbing his board firm until the end of his jump in the first round and was showered with applause by the audience.

## Lakers Finally Return Home, Beat 76ers But Lose Doncic

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - Austin Reaves scored 35 points off the bench, LeBron James added 17 points with 10 assists, and the Los Angeles Lakers overcame the loss of Luka Doncic to earn a 119-115 victory over the Philadelphia 76ers in Southern California.

Jake LaRavia and Rui Hachimura each scored 14 points as the Lakers won in their return from a season-long eight-game road trip during which they went 5-3. Doncic left the game late in the second quarter with left leg soreness after scoring 10 points.

The Lakers came back from an 11-point deficit in the first half and won after not taking their first lead until 11:21 remained in the game.

Joel Embiid scored 35 points and Tyrese Maxey added 26 points with 13 assists as the 76ers saw their season-high five-game winning streak come to an end. Philadelphia is 2-1 to start a five-game road trip against Western Conference teams.

VJ Edgecombe scored 19 points with 10 rebounds and Dominick Barlow added 13 points for the 76ers.

Philadelphia led by as many as 14 points with 10:50



remaining in the third quarter and were up 74-62 with 7:07 left in the period before Los Angeles came to life. The Lakers went on a 16-8 run to take an 87-85 deficit into the fourth quarter.

The Lakers' first lead came on a rushed 3-pointer from 32 feet by Reaves to beat the shot clock to go up 88-87 in the opening minute of the fourth. Reaves had a personal 8-0 run to put Los Angeles up 93-87 with 10:16 left.

A 13-4 run, capped by another long 3-pointer from Reaves, gave the Lakers a 106-93 lead with 5:24 remaining. The Sixers went on a late 10-0 run to get within 110-104 with 1:47 left.

Philadelphia pulled within one possession at 116-113 after a steal and 3-pointer from Edgecombe with 36 seconds left before Los Angeles sealed the victory on a dunk from Hachimura with 12.3 seconds remaining.

Reaves' ninth game of at least 30 points this season came in his second game back from a 19-game absence because of a calf injury.

## Ronaldo Confident Brazil Can Chase Sixth World Cup Title Under Ancelotti

RIO DE JANEIRO (Dispatches) - Former striker Ronaldo said he is hopeful of seeing a reinvigorated Brazil at this year's FIFA World Cup, praising the positive influence of manager Carlo Ancelotti, Xinhua reported.

Five-time World Cup winner Brazil was below its best in the qualifiers, finishing fifth in the 10-team South American group, 10 points behind leader and reigning champion Argentina.

But Ronaldo said Ancelotti had brought newfound confidence to the national squad since his appointment last May.

"I am very optimistic," the two-time World Cup winner told reporters.

"We've caught up a few times and even filmed a fun commercial calling on Brazilian fans to believe in the sixth title. I know him, I know the way he works, so I am much more



enthusiastic than I was before he joined the national team."

The World Cup will be played from June 11 to July 19 in the United States, Mexico and Canada.

Brazil will begin its Group C campaign against Morocco on June 13 before facing Haiti on June 19 and Scotland on June 24.

Ronaldo, who led Brazil to its last World Cup triumph in 2002 when he scored eight goals, including two in the final against Germany, said the tournament would unite the country.

"It (the World Cup) is the greatest joy a Brazilian can have," the former Barcelona and Real Madrid star said.

"It is an event that will bring Brazilians together in pursuit of our sixth title. I think we have to take advantage of that chance."

## Nardi Upsets Fellow Italian Cobolli



PARIS (Dispatches) - Italian Luca Nardi blasted 17 winners as he downed countryman and ATP No. 20 Flavio Cobolli, 6-2, 6-3 at Montpellier.

Nardi was one of five winners on Thursday to finalize the quarterfinal matchups of the France-based event. Canadian Felix Auger-Aliassime, the No. 8 player in the world and the top-seeded player at the event, emerged from a battle with Stan Wawrinka 6-4, 7-6 (3), and will next face France's Arthur Fils, a 7-6 (4), 7-5 winner over fellow Frenchman Ugo Blanchet.

The Netherlands' Tallon Griekspoor -- the No. 4 seed -- took down Spain's Pablo Carreno-Busta 6-4, 6-4, while the lone American competing on the day, eighth-seeded Aleksandar Kovacevic, dropped a 4-6, 7-6 (5), 6-4 decision to France's Titouan Droguet. Droguet will face Griekspoor in the quarters.

Great Britain's Jack Draper and Cameron Norrie grabbed matching straight-set wins in Davis Cup qualifying in Oslo, Norway, giving their side a 2-0 lead over host Norway in the best-of-five competition.

The 13 winners in the first round of qualifiers will advance to the second round, set for late September.

Draper downed Viktor Durasovic 6-2, 6-2 while finishing 4-for-4 on break point opportunities. Draper, ranked No. 13 in the world, won 88% of first serve points, as opposed to Durasovic's 53%. Norrie defeated Nicolai Budkov Kjaer 6-4, 6-4, on the strength of three break point saves.