

President Masoud Pezeshkian Says Recent Iran-U.S. Talks, Held With the Follow-Up of Friendly Regional Governments, Marked "a Step Forward," Stressing That Iran's Nuclear Logic Is Based on Rights Enshrined in the Non-Proliferation Treaty

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Any Anti-Iran Adventure Will Bring Strategic Defeat to Enemies



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's top military official warns that any adventurous act against the Islamic Republic will bring "strategic defeat" to enemies and spread war across the entire region.

Chief of Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces Major General Abdolrahim Mousavi issued the stark warning in a Saturday message to Brigadier General Bahman Behnardi, the commander of the Islamic Republic of Iran Army Air Force, marking Air Force Day.

"The enemies of the Islamic Republic of Iran are well aware that any adventure or attempt to impose war against Islamic Iran will not only lead to their absolute and strategic defeat but will also cause the expansion of war and crisis throughout the region," he said.

He added that any adventure or war against Iran will also impose "heavy and irreparable" costs on its supporters.

Iran's Army Air Force plays a strategic role in strengthening active deterrence, promoting defensive preparedness and confronting enemy threats under the current sensitive circumstances and amid complex domestic and regional developments, especially after the Israeli-American 12-day imposed war against the country in June, he emphasized.

Mousavi said the Air Force has constantly been engaged in modernization and upgrading its combat capability and comprehensive preparedness, and currently stands at the "highest level of readiness".

Iran, Qatar Say Keeping Regional Peace Is Shared Responsibility



TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Foreign Ministers of Iran and Qatar have reiterated in a meeting in Doha that safeguarding regional stability and peace is a shared responsibility of all countries in the West Asia region.

The Saturday meeting between Iran's Abbas Araqchi and his Qatari counterpart, Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al-Thani, who also serves as Qatar's Prime Minister, took place a day after Iran and the United States began nuclear negotiations aimed at reducing escalating military tensions in the region.

"The two sides highlighted the shared responsibility of all regional countries to help preserve and safeguard sustainable security and stability in the region," Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in a statement following the meeting.

The statement said that Araqchi had briefed Sheikh Mohammed on the diplomatic exchanges between Iran and the US held a day earlier in the Omani capital, Muscat.

The Iranian Foreign Minister also acknowledged Qatar's "significant contribution" to efforts aimed at resolving disputes related to Iran's nuclear program.

The Qatari Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a similar statement, welcoming the negotiations between Iran and the US and expressing hope that they would lead to a comprehensive agreement serving the interests of both parties while enhancing regional security and stability.

The Iran-US talks in Muscat followed an increase in threats of military confrontation between the two countries.

No One Has the Right to Tell Iran What It Should or Should Not Have



IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Iran's Foreign Minister, Seyed Abbas Araqchi, delivered a speech at the First National Congress on Foreign Policy and the History of Foreign Relations.

The First National Congress on Foreign Policy and the History of Foreign Relations was held on Sunday morning, February 8, with the participation of Seyed Abbas Araqchi, Iran's Foreign Minister; Kamal Kharrazi, head of the Strategic Council on Foreign Relations; Ali Akbar Salehi, former Iranian foreign minister; as well as a number of diplomats and university professors. The event took place at the Center for Political and International Studies of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Speaking at the congress and commemorating the Ten-Day Dawn anniversary of the Islamic Revolution, Araqchi said it was fitting to remember the late Imam Khomeini and the martyrs of the Islamic Revolution, "those who made the will of the Iranian people sovereign." He noted that on the anniversary of the Revolution, it is appropriate to reflect on why the Islamic Revolution occurred, what its ideals were, and how Iran should conduct its foreign policy.

He added that the main slogan of the people

during the Revolution was "Independence, Freedom, Islamic Republic."

While the concept of freedom is clear, he asked why people emphasized independence. "Iran has never been a colony throughout its history, so why independence? Because in that decade, people did not consider themselves independent," he said, pointing to the Qajar era as one filled with a sense of humiliation and foreign interference. "The Shah, as head of the country, could not freely travel everywhere within his own country."

Referring to the rise of the Pahlavi dynasty and the August 19, 1953 coup, Araqchi cited Imam Khomeini's famous 1964 speech, calling it revealing. "Imam said his heart ached because of a law passed by parliament granting immunity to foreign advisers," Araqchi recalled. "He said that if an American servant were to run over your Shah, no one could say anything to him, but if your Shah were to run over an American dog, he would be punished."

Araqchi said this history explains why genuine independence became a core demand of the Iranian people during the Revolution. "Our country must achieve real independence. The central axis of our Constitution is independence," he stressed.

He added that rejecting domination and preserving independence are fundamental principles of

the Islamic Republic. "If we do not understand this, we cannot understand Iran's foreign policy," he said, noting that the Constitution emphasizes the government's duty to prevent foreign influence. "Iran's foreign policy cannot be understood without the principle of independence and national dignity."

Using Iran's nuclear program as an example, Araqchi said Iran has paid a heavy price for pursuing a peaceful nuclear program and uranium enrichment, which he described as a national need. "From the perspective of independence, no one has the right to tell us what we should have or should not have. It is my right to enrich uranium, and it is my own business," he said.

He added that Iran's adversaries argue that Iran should not have enrichment capabilities because they are concerned. "But no one has the right to tell us, 'You must not have this because I want it that way,'" Araqchi said. "Iran must prove that it takes orders from no one. If there are questions about Iran's nuclear program, we will explain. The only path is diplomacy. They even bombed our facilities, but they failed."

Emphasizing that there is no alternative to negotiations, he said talks succeed only when Iran's rights are acknowledged. "We do not want anyone to grant us our rights. Our rights exist and must be respected," he said.

Araqchi reiterated that Iran is not seeking an atomic bomb. "Our atomic bomb is saying 'no' to the great powers," he said. "We reject bullying by powerful states. This is enshrined in our Constitution, and we pursue it. We have obtained this right at great cost, and abandoning it would impose even greater costs."

He continued by saying that the resilience of the Iranian people was proven during the recent 12-day war. "Those who tweeted on the third day about unconditional surrender were tweeting about an unconditional ceasefire on the twelfth day," he said, adding that current military posturing in the region does not intimidate Iran. "We believe in diplomacy and logic, but we are also prepared for war and possess power."

In closing, the foreign minister stressed that if Iran is addressed in the language of force, it will respond in the same language, and if addressed with respect, it will respond likewise. "The first principle of our foreign policy is dignity—dignity means preserving independence and safeguarding the nation's honor," he said.

Justice Must Be Reflected in the Lifestyle of Officials and Public Servants



IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Iran's Chief Justice, Hojjatoleslam Gholamhosseini Ejei, said justice and the practice of justice must be clearly reflected in the lifestyle and conduct of all officials and public servants, stressing that it is unacceptable for someone to speak about justice while failing to adhere to its requirements in their own life.

Mohseni Ejei made the remarks during a meeting with members of the headquarter organizing events for the 47th anniversary of the victory of the Islamic Revolution. Congratulating the Ten-Day Dawn (Daheh-ye Fajr) celebrations, he said that despite all the conspiracies planned and implemented over the past 47 years by "tyrants, devils, arrogant powers, and the forces of Satan," the Islamic Revolution remains resilient, dynamic, and steadily advancing toward its sacred goals.

Referring to the core objectives of the Islamic Revolution—among them leading people out of darkness and establishing comprehensive justice—the head of the judiciary said that over the past 47 years, significant steps have been taken in the Islamic Republic of Iran to expand justice across all spheres. He noted that in areas related to the judiciary, efforts began immediately after the victory of the Revolution to reclaim public assets and state property that had been plundered by tyrants and their affiliates.

"Resources, mines, lands, and even the waters of this country—belonging to the people—had been seized and looted by tyrants and those associated with the former regime," he said. "After the Revolution, these assets were returned to the people and put at the service of the public, especially the deprived and the underprivileged."

Iranian Gasoline Quality Meets Standards, Official Says



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - The quality of gasoline produced in Iran is considered acceptable, according to the head of the Petrochemical and Polymer Reference Laboratory at the National Standards Organization.

Speaking to reporters on Sunday during a visit to the organization's laboratories, Vahid Imanian said that gasoline samples are evaluated and tested according to standard indicators. "The results of our quality assessments show that the gasoline produced in the country meets the required standards," he noted.

Imanian acknowledged that occasional discrepancies might arise, particularly in the sampling process, but emphasized that overall, the country's gasoline is evaluated within the framework of international and national standards.

He explained that Iran's gasoline is primarily derived from natural gas condensates, which generally provide higher quality compared to conventional gasoline. "The octane rating of domestically produced gasoline falls within the standard range and, in some cases, even exceeds the minimum thresholds," he added.

Highlighting the importance of fuel quality, Imanian noted that low-quality gasoline can increase fuel consumption. He also clarified that Euro 5 gasoline has a defined global standard, and there is no difference between Euro 5 gasoline produced in Iran and that produced in European countries or the United States.

President Emphasizes Duty to Support the Vulnerable, Highlights Books' Role in Shaping Human Behavior



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - President Masoud Pezeshkian said on Sunday that books and reading play a vital role in shaping human behavior, adding that reading guides people toward awareness, growth, and progress—an inclination he described as intrinsic to human nature.

Speaking at the closing ceremony of the 43rd Islamic Republic of Iran Book of the Year Awards, Pezeshkian addressed writers, researchers, intellectuals, and members of the publishing community, expressing appreciation for those working to promote books and reading culture. He said the nation's reservoir of knowledge expands through their efforts, noting that Iran's strengths are rooted in books and teachers, while existing weaknesses must be examined and traced back along the same path.

The president stressed that through books, individuals grow, gain experience, and find their way from darkness to light. He said that across all fields—from economics and industry to politics—progress depends on awareness, understanding, and execution skills. Referring to religious texts, he said opposition often arises even when citing the Qur'an or Nahj al-Balaghah, adding that books provide guidance for life and ignoring them leads to deviation.

"If we had acted upon the Book of God, we would not be facing today's conditions," Pezeshkian said, emphasizing that managers and policymakers cannot remain unaware of the guidance contained in books or act contrary to them. He added that books and research are not meant to be placed on shelves without application, reiterating his belief that failure to act on divine teachings has contributed to current challenges.

He described adherence to the Book of God as essential, saying that prosperity comes from following its guidance, while misfortune results from neglecting it. The president underscored that the pursuit of truth and justice is central to divine teachings and to all human endeavors.

Pezeshkian said establishing justice is a shared responsibility of the government and governance system, warning that no society can endure without truth and justice. He attributed shortcomings in this area to ignorance and inadequate understanding of prophetic tradition and divine guidance, adding that ego and self-interest obstruct the implementation of these teachings.

Calling the human ego a major barrier to justice, fairness, and humanity, he said oppression occurs when individuals fail to recognize truth or stand against it. Many societal problems, he added, stem from a lack of awareness, study, understanding, belief, and implementation.

The president reiterated that understanding and applying the guidance found in books is a missing element across sectors. Reading, he said, fosters healthier relationships, reduces hostility, and promotes humanity.

On foreign policy and humanitarian issues, Pezeshkian said Iran's defense of Palestine and oppressed people worldwide is rooted in human values, adding that the same sense of humanity requires addressing

domestic problems and supporting those facing difficulties.

He described resolving social challenges as a heavy responsibility for the government and expressed hope that intellectuals would help reshape societal perspectives. Books, he said, help people set aside arrogance and judge ideas fairly.

Pezeshkian highlighted the irreplaceable role of books in changing behavior and pointed to efforts to advance educational justice and school construction with public participation. He said 2,500 schools have been inaugurated this year, with another 1,000 to open during the Ten-Day Dawn celebrations, adding that schools are being built wherever needed with support from citizens and benefactors, rather than relying solely on government funds.

He announced that benefactors have invested 240 trillion rials in school construction, praising public unity and participation. He also cited examples of citizens donating compensation funds for school building as commendable acts.

In healthcare, the president said 290 trillion rials have been spent on equipping hospitals. He added that the next phase of the educational justice initiative will focus on equipping schools and improving teaching methods, curricula, and students' practical skills.

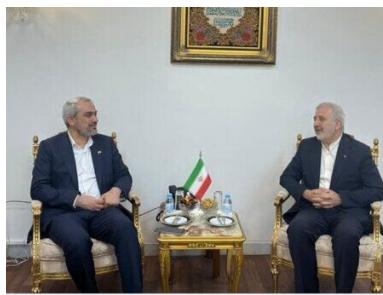
Knowledge and skills are essential, he said, but their application in serving the public must be prioritized. Schools, he added, are platforms for education, and students must receive high-quality training to become the country's future builders.

Pezeshkian said he believes every Iranian child represents a vast resource and potential, capable of achievements beyond imagination if their capacities are properly realized.

Addressing youth engagement, he said that if young people fail to accept new ideas, the problem lies with adults who must provide appropriate environments, modern facilities, books, and capable teachers who demonstrate knowledge in practice.

He expressed hope that, with the help of scholars and writers, effective methods for transferring knowledge to future generations will be developed, and said the government seeks to maintain close cooperation with the intellectual community.

In closing, Pezeshkian pointed to Iran's high energy consumption compared to global averages, noting that excessive use has led to gas and electricity cuts for factories, disrupting production and employment. He said the government is working to address the issue and has installed more than 5,000 megawatts of solar panels to date, with efforts continuing.



Iran's Exports to Eurasia Grow by 13% in First Eight Months of Current Year



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The Acting Head of the Secretariat of the Iran-Eurasia Free Trade Agreement announced a 13 percent increase in the value of Iran's exports to the Eurasian Economic Union (EAU) during the first eight months of the current year, adding that imports from the bloc also rose by 30 percent in value over the same period.

According to a report released by the Trade Promotion Organization of Iran, Elham Haji-Karimi presented an analytical overview of bilateral trade performance, stating that Iran's exports to the Eurasian Economic Union reached \$1,454 billion in value and 3,884 million tons in weight during the eight-month period.

She noted that this represents a 13 percent increase in value and a 10 percent rise in volume compared to the same period last year.

Haji-Karimi said the highest export growth in value was recorded with Belarus and Armenia, posting increases of 64 percent and 31 percent, respectively. Russia accounted for the largest share of Iran's exports to the bloc, importing \$764 million worth of goods, equivalent to 52 percent of total exports to the union.

Explaining the composition of Iran's export basket, Haji-Karimi said the industrial sector ranked first with \$611 million in exports, accounting for 42 percent of total export value. Within this sector, food industries, automotive and powertrain products, and polymer products were the leading commodity groups.

Head of INSO Stresses Need for High-Quality, Standardized Home Appliance Production



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The head of the Iran National Standards Organization (INSO) has emphasized that producing standardized and high-quality home appliances in the country is essential to ensuring the safety, health, and quality of products that are used daily by the public.

Farzaneh Ansari made the remarks on Tuesday during a meeting with members of the board of directors of the Iran Home Appliance Association. She said that strict attention to standards and quality indicators in the production of home appliances plays a key role in safeguarding consumers and improving the overall quality of these widely used goods.

Ansari noted that the National Standards Organization is fully prepared to cooperate with relevant government bodies and industry associations in drafting and developing standards for newly manufactured home appliances. "With the rapid evolution of technology and the introduction of new products to the market, it is necessary that standards be continuously updated and adapted to current needs," she said.

She added that identifying and preventing the import or domestic production of non-standard home appliances is among the organization's top priorities. "Market monitoring and quality control will be strengthened to ensure that only products that meet national standards are allowed to reach consumers," Ansari said.

The head of INSO stressed that genuine support for domestic production does not merely mean limiting imports, but rather requires careful planning to ensure that locally manufactured products are produced in line with high-quality and safety standards. "Sustainable support for domestic industries lies in improving product quality and competitiveness, which can only be achieved through adherence to standards," she added.

UNICEF Stresses the Need for Clear Planning to Support Children Under 18

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - The Acting Representative of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in Iran has emphasized the importance of having a clearly defined program to support children under the age of 18.

Monika Olszewska Nielsen made the remarks during a meeting with the Head of the State Welfare Organization. She said it is crucial for UNICEF to ensure that a specific and well-structured plan exists to support children under 18.

Referring to the joint campaign by Tejarat Bank and UNICEF titled "Disability Is a Part of Me," Nielsen added that, within this framework, two joint meetings were held between UNICEF and the State Welfare Organization. Based on needs assessments, the organization identified priority items required for children with disabilities.

The Acting UNICEF Representative in Iran noted, however, that the main issue is that the funds donated by the public to support children with disabilities do not fall within the scope of the current cooperation program, and a solution must be found to address this matter.

Nielsen also pointed to the joint cooperation program between UNICEF and the State Welfare Organization, stating that over the past two years the program has effectively not been implemented, with only one or two components carried out.

She said the primary focus of this cooperation is the promotion of children's rights. For example, in the area of working children and street children, one of the planned cooperation programs was not implemented, resulting in the loss of approximately two million dollars in financial resources.

During the meeting, Seyed Javad Hosseini, Head of the State Welfare Organization, stressed the need to expand cooperation with UNICEF, saying that relations should be established at the highest level through joint programs.

He noted that, in addition to financial assistance, Iran needs UNICEF's knowledge and experience gathered from around the world.

Hosseini added that the State Welfare Organization is currently implementing 12



transformative programs in the field of children's welfare, which should be shared with UNICEF.

He said a joint meeting with UNICEF representatives and experts will also be held to identify and remove any obstacles to cooperation and to achieve the highest possible level of collaboration.

Referring to some of the organization's child-focused initiatives, Hosseini said a comprehensive program has been designed for the post-placement period and for children after they turn 18, emphasizing that children should not be abandoned once they reach this age.

He added that a comprehensive educational, cultural, social, and skills-training program has been developed for 10,000 children living in quasi-family care centers.

The Head of the State Welfare Organization also highlighted the implementation of the "Kind Hands" initiative, under which elderly residents of welfare centers are paired with children who lack parents.

Hosseini announced plans to establish daytime childcare centers and said that, in the area of family support, the "Family Child Caregiver" program is being implemented for families with twins or multiple children, under which a caregiver will be sent to the family to assist the mother.

He added that another joint meeting with UNICEF will be held next week to address existing concerns and ensure that activities continue in a structured and systematic manner.

At the meeting, Fatemeh Abbasi, Deputy for Rehabilitation at the State Welfare Organization, said there are currently 1.66 million disability case files in the country, of which 137,000 involve individuals under the age of 18. While various educational and rehabilitation programs have been designed for this group, the main priority remains the provision of rehabilitation equipment.

She added that last year, 133,000 rehabilitation devices and pieces of equipment were provided to people with disabilities, 33,000 of which were allocated to children.

52% of Iran's Transport Fleet Worn Out

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - The head of the Transport Fleet Renovation Headquarters at the Industrial Development and Renovation Organization of Iran (IDRO) said that while nearly half of the country's transport fleet is at or near the end of its service life, about 80 percent of worn-out motorcycles are carburetor-based and generate several times more pollution than fuel-injected motorcycles.

In an interview with ILNA, Mohammad Sadegh Hatami, responding to a question about the number of worn-out vehicles currently operating in the country, said around 41.2 million vehicles and motorcycles are in circulation nationwide. Of this figure, about 22.1 million units—equivalent to 52 percent of the total fleet—are worn out or on the verge of being scrapped, with motorcycles and passenger cars accounting for the largest share.

Hatami noted that passenger cars make up the largest portion of worn-out vehicles. He explained that out of 41.2 million vehicles in operation, about 22.4 million are passenger cars. If the wear threshold is set at 10 years, based on traffic police data, some 7.5 million cars are considered worn out or near the end of their service life.

He added that if the wear threshold is extended to 20 years, nearly 2.6 million vehicles are over two decades old. "This means that out of 7.5 million vehicles older than 10 years, more than 2.5 million are over 20 years old. From our perspective, these vehicles are worn out and are not eligible for operation, fuel allocation, or license plate replacement," he said.

According to Hatami, under Article 8 of the Clean Air Law and Article 10 of the Vehicle Industry Regulation Law, 2.5 million passenger cars are subject to restrictions on traffic, fuel cards, insurance, license plate replacement, and access to traffic-restricted zones.

Asked whether these restrictions are fully enforced, Hatami said only some are implemented. He pointed to a provision in the executive bylaw of Article 10, under which owners who register their worn-out vehicles in the "Worn-Out Vehicle Renovation and Scrapping System" are exempt from certain restrictions for up to five years. During this period, they are not fined or restricted due to vehicle age, although this exemption is not applicable in major



metropolitan areas.

He described the measure as an incentive to encourage owners to proceed with scrappage.

Currently, license plate replacement for worn-out vehicles is not permitted in major cities, Hatami said, while restrictions related to fuel cards, insurance, and traffic circulation are generally not enforced. He attributed this to social considerations, noting that the sheer volume of

worn-out vehicles makes it difficult to halt their operation entirely. Hatami said that under the executive bylaw of Article 10, authorities are required to plan over a two-year period—from 2024 to 2026—for the renewal of public transport vehicles, work motorcycles, and intercity buses.

He announced that dual-fuel taxis in major cities outside Tehran are currently eligible for loans of up to 400 million tomans, with delivery of the new taxis expected soon. Loans for nearly 300 taxis have already been disbursed.

Regarding private vehicles, Hatami said owners can participate in automakers' replacement schemes to receive vehicles outside of lottery systems. While the scrappage and renewal process applies to them, no direct purchase loans are offered, as financial resources are prioritized for public transport.

He added that loans of 200 million tomans are available for replacing gasoline motorcycles and 300 million tomans for electric motorcycles, repayable over 36 months.

Hatami said there are about 13.7 million motorcycles operating nationwide, of which 11.3 million—around 80 percent—are worn out. Of these, 80 percent are carburetor-based motorcycles that produce significantly higher emissions than fuel-injected models. "Replacing these carburetor motorcycles is our top priority," he said.

He emphasized that worn-out vehicles contribute substantially to air pollution. Over the past two years, about 540,000 vehicles have been scrapped, leading to an estimated 10 percent reduction in air pollution. This renewal effort has also saved around 1.6 billion liters of gasoline, averaging nearly 2.5 million liters per day, helping ease fuel imbalances.

Transit of 14 Million Tons of Goods by the End of Month of Dey



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The Director General of the Office of Transit and International Transport at the Road Maintenance and Transportation Organization announced that from the beginning of the current year until the end of Dey (late January), 13,852,905 tons of goods were transited through the country's land borders.

According to IRNA's report on Saturday from the Road Maintenance and Transportation Organization, Javad Hedayati said this volume of road transit was carried out through 624,550 trips by the international transport fleet across Iran's territory.

He added that during the same period, 11,122,498 tons of goods were exported from the country through more than 464,000 trips by freight transport fleets, while 2,105,354 tons of goods were imported through nearly 96,000 trips by active fleets in this sector.

The Director General of the Office of Transit and International Transport also reported the activity of 2,944 companies in the field of international freight transport and 68 companies and branches in international passenger transport nationwide.

Hedayati noted that with the efforts of 63,000 professional drivers and the use of 51,000 vehicles in the public transport sector—with an average operational age of 12 years—the transportation of goods and passengers on international routes is continuing without interruption.

He further stated that currently, with the operation of 26 border terminals across 12 provinces, the exchange of goods and the movement of passengers between the Islamic Republic of Iran and neighboring countries is ongoing.

Iran Chamber Secretary General Warns Against Multiple Exchange Rates



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The Secretary General of the Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture said the country's multiple exchange-rate system wastes hard-earned national resources, stressing that recent currency reforms can succeed if implemented with proper oversight and public support.

Abolfazl Roghani Golpayegani said multi-tier exchange rates amount to "spraying money and auctioning off national resources," particularly under sanctions when foreign currency is difficult to obtain. "We should not sell off the country's foreign exchange reserves cheaply," he said.

Roghani, a veteran economic figure recently appointed as the chamber's secretary general, described the government's recent currency reforms—including the removal of preferential exchange rates for basic goods, the transfer of subsidies directly to consumers, and the integration of currency trading halls at Iran's exchange center—as fundamental economic steps.

He said Iran's exchange-rate system since the 1979 Revolution has repeatedly suffered from distortions such as multiple rates, sharp devaluations, and price controls, benefiting rent-seekers rather than genuine producers and consumers. As an example, he cited the misuse of subsidized currency allocated to paper imports, which ultimately benefited foreign markets instead of domestic users.

North Korea Announces First Party Congress Since 2021

SEOUL (Dispatches) - North Korea's leadership will hold a party congress later this month, state media announced Sunday, in what will be the first such major gathering since 2021. The decision was made Saturday in a meeting of top leaders of the country's ruling Workers Party of Korea (WPK), including Kim Jong Un, the state-run Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) reported. "The Political Bureau of the WPK Central Committee adopted with unanimous approval a decision on opening the Ninth Congress of the WPK in Pyongyang, the capital of the revolution, in late February 2026," KCNA said. The last party congress - the reclusive nuclear-armed nation's eighth - was held in January 2021.



IRAN NEWS

Police Fire Water Cannon at Protesters Hurling Smoke Bombs in Olympic Host Milan



MILAN (Dispatches) - A group of around 100 protesters threw firecrackers, smoke bombs and bottles at police after breaking away from the main body of a demonstration in the Olympic host city of Milan on Saturday.

Police in riot gear and with shields responded with water cannon to try to disperse the group, some of whom wore hoods and scarves to cover their faces. Order was restored after a few minutes.

Six people were detained during the skirmishes, police sources said.

An estimated 10,000 people had taken to the streets of Milan in a protest over housing costs and environmental concerns on the first full day of the Milano Cortina Winter Olympics.

The march, organized by grassroots unions, housing-rights groups and social centre community activists, is seeking to highlight what activists call an increasingly unsustainable city model marked by soaring rents and deepening inequality.

Security in Italy's financial capital had been tightened for the Games.

The demonstration was seen as a flashpoint after a rally last weekend by the hard-left in the city of Turin turned violent, with more than 100 police officers injured and nearly 30 protesters arrested, according to an interior ministry tally.

The Olympics cap a decade in which Milan has seen a property boom following the 2015 World Expo, with locals squeezed by soaring living costs as an Italian tax scheme for wealthy new residents, alongside Brexit, draws professionals to the financial capital.

Haiti's Transitional Council Hands Power to PM



PONT-AU-PRINCE (Dispatches) - Haiti's presidential transitional council, which has run the impoverished Caribbean nation for nearly two years, on Saturday handed power to US-backed Prime Minister Alix Didier Fils-Aime, after failing to rein in rampant gang violence.

The transfer of power between the nine-member council, created in April 2024, and 54-year-old businessman Fils-Aime took place under tight security, given Haiti's unstable political climate.

"Our watchwords are clear: security, political dialogue, elections, stability. Mr Prime Minister, in this historic moment, I know that you are gauging the depth of the responsibility you are taking on for the country," council president Laurent Saint-Cyr told Fils-Aime.

Fils-Aime is now the country's only politician with executive power.

He faces the daunting task of organizing elections with the backing of a polarized political establishment.

For years, Haiti -- the poorest country in the Americas -- has been in the throes of deadly gang violence, with frequent murders, rapes and kidnappings.

Elections have not taken place since 2016, and the country has not had a president since Jovenel Moise was assassinated in July 2021.

Trump Pushes for Peace in Ukraine by June



KYIV (Dispatches) - Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky on Saturday said Washington has proposed that Russian and Ukrainian negotiators meet in the United States next week to discuss a possible peace deal. "They say they want to do everything by June," Zelensky said of the US mediators.

United States wants Ukraine and Russia to end their nearly four-year war by June, and has offered to host talks between the two sides in Florida next week, Ukrainian President Zelensky said.

US-led efforts to end Europe's deadliest conflict since World War II have stepped up a gear in recent weeks, but Moscow and Kyiv remain at odds over the key issue of territory.

Russia, which occupies around 20 percent of its neighbour, is pushing for full control of Ukraine's eastern Donetsk region as part of any deal and has threatened to take it by force if talks fail.

But Ukraine says ceding ground will embolden Moscow and has signalled it will not sign an agreement that fails to deter Russia from invading again.

"The United States has proposed for the first time that the two negotiating teams—Ukraine and Russia—meet in the United States, probably in Miami, in a week's time," Zelensky told reporters in comments made public early Saturday.

"They say that they want to do everything by June," he added.

The US has mediated two rounds of negotiation between the two sides in Abu Dhabi since January, brokering a major prisoner exchange but failing to reach a breakthrough on territory.

Both Moscow and Kyiv say talks have been difficult.

Zelensky has repeatedly expressed frustration that his country is being asked to make disproportionate compromises compared to Russia.

Ukraine has proposed freezing the conflict along the current front lines.

But Russia has rejected this, and Washington has pushed for Kyiv to convert the land it currently controls in the Donetsk region into a "free economic zone" where neither side has military control.

"Even if we come to the creation of a free economic zone, we will need fair and reliable rules," Zelensky said.

The two sides have also failed to reach a "common understanding" on the issue of control over the Russian-occupied Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant, Zelensky said.

Russian forces seized the plant, the largest in Europe, at the start of the conflict and have held onto it since.

Ukraine will not tolerate Russia and the United States making deals about Ukraine behind its back, Zelensky added.

Throughout the negotiating progress Russia has launched waves of deadly strikes on Ukraine that have cut heating and power to millions during freezing temperatures.

Russian attacks earlier Saturday forced Ukraine's three operating nuclear power plants to throttle their generation capacity, "creating a direct risk of a nuclear incident", Foreign Minister Andriy Sybiga said.

The UN's atomic energy watchdog issued a

statement calling for "restraint".

Russia, which denies targeting civilians, accused Ukraine on Friday of orchestrating the shooting of a top military intelligence general in Moscow, leaving him wounded. Kyiv has yet to comment.

Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022, describing it as a "special military operation" to prevent the expansion of NATO, a war aim that Kyiv has called a pretext for an illegal land grab.

The conflict has resulted in a massive wave of destruction that has left entire cities in ruins and killed tens of thousands of soldiers and civilians, while forcing millions to flee their homes.

Saudi Arabia to Invest Billions of Dollars in Syria



RIYADH (Dispatches) - Saudi Arabia on Saturday agreed to make major investments in war-torn Syria, including a jointly owned low-cost airline and a new \$1 billion telecommunications project.

Syria and Saudi Arabia signed deals Saturday that include a joint airline and a \$1-billion project to develop telecommunications, officials said, as Syria seeks to rebuild after years of war.

Saudi Arabia has been a major backer of Syria's Islamist authorities who took power after toppling longtime ruler Bashar al-Assad in December 2014.

The new authorities in Damascus have worked to attract investment and have signed major agreements with several companies and governments, including Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states.

Syrian Investment Authority chief Talal al-Hilali announced a series of deals including a low-cost Syrian-Saudi airline aimed at strengthening regional and international air links.

The agreement also includes the development of a new international airport in the northern city of Aleppo, and redeveloping the existing facility.

Hilali also announced an agreement for a project called SilkLink to develop Syria's telecommunications infrastructure and digital connectivity.

Syrian Telecommunications Minister Abdulsalam Haykal told the signing ceremony that the project would be implemented "with an investment of around \$1 billion".

For decades, Syria was unable to secure significant investments because of Assad-era sanctions.

But the United States fully removed its remaining sanctions on Damascus late last year, paving the way for the full return of investments.

Syria and Saudi Arabia also inked an agreement on water desalination and development cooperation on Saturday.

At the ceremony, Saudi Investment Minister Khalid Al-Falih announced the launch of an investment fund for "major projects in Syria with the participation of the (Saudi) private sector".

The deals are part of "building a strategic partnership" between the two countries, he said.

Syria's Hilali said the agreements targeted "vital sectors that impact people's lives and form essential pillars for rebuilding the Syrian economy".

Syria has begun the mammoth task of trying to rebuild its shattered infrastructure and economy.

In July last year, Riyadh signed investment and partnership deals with Damascus valued at \$6.4 billion to help rebuild the country's infrastructure, telecommunications and other major sectors.

A month later, Syria signed agreements worth more than \$14 billion, including investments in Damascus airport and other transport and real estate projects.

This week, Syria signed a preliminary deal with US energy giant Chevron and Qatari firm Power International to explore for oil and gas offshore.

Takaichi Tipped for Big Win as Japan Votes



TOKYO (Dispatches) - Japan voted in snap elections with Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi hoping to turn a honeymoon start into a resounding ballot box victory that could rile China and rattle financial markets.

Opinion polls suggest that Takaichi's Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), which has governed almost non-stop for decades, will easily win more than the 233 seats needed to regain a majority in the powerful 465-member lower house.

Pollsters even suggest -- with some caution due to undecided voters and wintry weather -- that the LDP and its coalition partner could secure 310 seats needed for a handy two-thirds majority.

This would be the best result for the LDP since 2017 when Takaichi's mentor, the late ex-premier Shinzo Abe, achieved a similar result.

"The future is something you have to build with your own hands," Japan's first woman premier said in a campaign video on YouTube that, like her others, has gone viral.

"The LDP will lead the way," she said.

Takaichi was a heavy metal drummer in her youth, an admirer of Britain's "Iron Lady" Margaret Thatcher, and on the ultra-conservative fringe of the LDP when she became leader in October.

She has defied pessimists to be a hit with voters, especially young ones, with fans lapping up everything from her handbag to her jamming to a K-pop song with South Korea's president.

"I came just to have a look at her. I think she is amazing," Yuka Ando, 17, a high-school student who went with her mother to hear Takaichi speak on a cold Saturday in Tokyo, told AFP.

Takaichi has sounded tough on immigration, helping for now to slow the sharp rise of the populist "Japanese first" Sanseito party.

Immigration screening "has already become a little stricter, so that terrorists, and also industrial spies, cannot enter easily", Takaichi said Saturday.

"We must properly examine whether (foreigners) are paying taxes, whether they are paying their health insurance premiums," she added.

Arsenal Go Nine Points Clear, Carrick Continues Perfect Start at Man United



LONDON (Dispatches) - Arsenal moved nine points clear at the top of the Premier League with a 3-0 victory against Sunderland, while Tottenham boss Thomas Frank faced renewed calls for his sacking after a 2-0 defeat at Manchester United.

Mikel Arteta's side went ahead in the 42nd minute at the Emirates Stadium as Martin Zubimendi fired past Sunderland goalkeeper Robin Roefs at his near post.

Viktor Gyokeres sealed Arsenal's second successive league win with a 66th-minute strike before the Swede netted again in stoppage time.

The Gunners, who haven't won a trophy since the 2020 FA Cup, are chasing their first English title in 22 years.

After three successive runners-up finishes in the Premier League, including blowing significant leads at the top in 2023 and 2024, the north Londoners finally look set to end their title drought.

Arsenal also beat Chelsea in midweek to book a League Cup final date with Manchester City at Wembley on March 22.

"We still have to win so many games to achieve what we want. I'm going to have a beautiful dinner tonight and watch a big game with City and Liverpool tomorrow," Arteta said.

Third-placed Aston Villa are also nine points adrift of the Gunners after a 1-1 draw at Bournemouth. Villa took the lead as Morgan Rogers lashed into the top corner in the 22nd minute.

But Brazilian teenager Rayan equalised for Bournemouth with his first top-flight goal in the 55th minute.

Manchester United profited from Tottenham captain Cristian Romero's red card to stretch their perfect start under Michael Carrick to four games, leaving the beleaguered Frank under mounting scrutiny.

With the game still scoreless in the 29th minute, Romero - who has been vocal in his criticism of Tottenham's owners lately - was dismissed after lunging in to catch Casemiro on the ankle.

Bryan Mbeumo swept United ahead from a clever corner routine in the 38th minute.

Bruno Fernandes' close-range finish in the 81st minute ended an eight-game winless run against Tottenham for United, who cemented their hold on fourth place in the race to qualify for next season's Champions League.

Another damaging defeat for Frank left Tottenham in 14th place - just six points above the relegation zone - as their winless league run in 2026 extended to seven matches.

"It is what it is. We need to deal with it," Frank said.

"Cristian clearly goes for the ball. Unfortunately, the way the rules are, it becomes a red. He apologised to his team-mates."

Interim boss Carrick is making his case for the permanent job after masterminding an impressive turnaround since Ruben Amorim was sacked in January.

Cole Palmer scored a first-half hat-trick as fifth-placed Chelsea won 3-1 at bottom of the table Wolves.

Suryakumar's 84 Leads India to Opening Win Over USA in T20 World Cup



MUMBAI (Dispatches) - A sparkling unbeaten 84 from India captain Suryakumar Yadav and three wickets from late call-up Mohammed Siraj in Mumbai helped India avoid a shock defeat to the United States as they opened their defence of the T20 World Cup.

India were in trouble at 77-6 before Suryakumar took them to a competitive 161-9 at a packed Wankhede stadium and won by 29 runs as the USA could only muster 132-8 in reply.

"Only I can tell how much pressure I was feeling," said Suryakumar after his brilliantly paced knock, which contained 10 fours and four sixes as India plundered 75 off the last six overs.

"But I had the belief. I knew if I bat till the end, I can make a difference."

Chasing 162 for a massive upset, the Americans were quickly reduced to 13-3 as Siraj, only added to the squad 24 hours earlier as a replacement for the injured Harshit Rana, struck twice in his first two overs.

A 58-run fourth-wicket partnership between Milind Kumar (34) and Sanjay Krishnamurthi (37) gave the US a chance of pulling off a stunning win.

They were still in the hunt at 98-4 in the 16th over when spinner Axar Patel took two wickets in two balls to end their hopes.

"I thought our bowlers did a good job," said US captain Monank Patel.

"We dropped catches and that cost us. At one stage, I felt we could restrict them to 130."

"We made a few mistakes but we will try to come back stronger."

Siraj, who had not played a T20 international since July 2024 and would have been left out had Jasprit Bumrah not been sick with a fever, celebrated his recall by taking a wicket with his fourth ball.

US opener Andries Gous had just hit Siraj for six but the next ball could only find Tilak Varma, who took a low catch.

Sengun Shines as Rockets Rally to Beat NBA Champion Thunder



LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - The Houston Rockets, fueled by Alperen Sengun's triple-double and some timely baskets from superstar Kevin Durant, rallied to beat the short-handed NBA champion Oklahoma City Thunder 112-106.

Houston trailed by as many as 15 in the second quarter against a Thunder team missing reigning NBA Most Valuable Player Shai Gilgeous-Alexander.

But they chipped away to take the lead in the third period and held on down the stretch to snap a two-game losing streak.

"We started making shots," said Durant, a two-time NBA champion who launched his career with the Thunder franchise and heard boos from fans still miffed by his departure more than nine years ago.

"I think we got good looks that first half, we just weren't knocking them down. Second half, we knocked them down."

"We knew they would slow down a bit," Durant added.

"They were playing with a lot of energy at home the first half. They were missing three guys, other guys get an opportunity (and) they took advantage in the first half. The second half, I think we came out with the same energy."

Durant, bottled up in a first half that saw him attempt just three shots, finished with 20 points on 6-of-10 shooting.

Turkish center Sengun scored 17 points with 12 rebounds and 11 assists and added three steals and three blocked shots. Jabari Smith Jr. had a double-double of 22 points and 10 rebounds.

Tari Eason led Houston's scoring with 26 points as all five Rockets starters finished with at least 16.

Cason Wallace led the Thunder with 23 points and Isaiah Joe added 21 off the bench for the reigning champions, who still boast the league's best record at 40-13.

Lamine Yamal Continues Red-Hot Scoring Streak



BARCELONA (Dispatches) - Robert Lewandowski and Lamine Yamal scored as Barcelona eased to a comfortable 3-0 win over Mallorca to move four points clear at the top of La Liga.

The champions extended the gap to Real Madrid in second before Alvaro Arbeloa's side visit Valencia, with Marc Bernal also on target late on at the partially reopened Camp Nou stadium.

Barcelona's first-half display was sluggish, even though Lewandowski's goal had them ahead at the break.

"I was not happy... we were not on our level, the playing and passing was too slow," admitted Flick, who demanded more from his side going forward.

"The first half was not how Barca want to play, (but) the second half was much better."

Mallorca target man Vedat Muriqi came close early on as he slid in at the back post but hit the side netting, while Jan Virgili's shot was saved by Joan Garcia.

Marcus Rashford added some urgency into Barca's game after a listless start, curling inches wide of the far post after cutting in from the left.

A blocked shot from the England international led to the opener, with Dani Olmo knocking the rebound to Lewandowski to finish from close range.

Rashford's dangerous free-kick was tipped onto the bar by Mallorca stopper Leo Roman, and Yamal missed from point-blank range as Jules Kounde sent the rebound into his path.

Japan's Kimura Soars to Olympic Gold in Snowboard Big Air Final



LIVIGNO (Dispatches) - Kira Kimura won Japan's first-ever men's snowboard big air Olympic gold at the Milan-Cortina Games, producing a stunning final run under pressure to edge out compatriot Ryoma Kimata.

Kimura scored a total of 179.50 points to top the podium at Livigno Snow Park after posting an impressive 90.50 in his third and final run.

World champion Kimata finished with 171.50 points while defending Olympic champion Su Yiming of China took bronze with 168.50.

The 21-year-old Kimura, 11th at last year's world championships, topped the leaderboard after an impressive 89.00 in his first run.

But he flunked his second effort, meaning he had to produce something special in his third run -- and he did not disappoint.

Scores from two highest-scoring runs in the three rounds are combined to determine the athlete's overall score.

"I've devoted a lot of time to snowboarding this year," said Kimura. "My family, coach and everyone around me gave me tremendous support, so I'm truly delighted to have achieved this result and prove the doubters wrong."

"On the second run I didn't quite click and I couldn't land it properly. But I managed to fix that and the third run was clean, so that was good."

Japan and China are the dominant forces in men's big air but Japan had never previously won an Olympic medal of any colour in the discipline since big air made its Olympic debut in 2018.

Kimata said he had no option but to pull out all the stops in his final run in a bid to overtake Kimura.