

On the Sidelines of the Second Meeting of Emerging Economies in AIUla, Saudi Arabia, the Minister of Economic Affairs and Finance of the Islamic Republic of Iran Met and Held Talks With the President of the OPEC Fund for International Development (OPEC Fund)

# IRAN NEWS

Kamal Kharrazi, Head of the Strategic Council on Foreign Relations and a Former Foreign Minister, Says Iran Should Make Improving Relations With Its Neighbors the Top Priority of Its Foreign Policy, While Firmly Resisting External Pressure

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### New Details Emerge on Iran's Radar Satellites as "Rad-1" Nears Unveiling



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Iran's Space Agency has released new details about the country's radar satellite program, announcing that its first radar imaging satellite, known as "Rad-1," is nearing completion and will be unveiled in the near future.

Speaking in an interview with Tasnim News Agency, Hassan Salarieh, head of the Iranian Space Agency, confirmed reports regarding the construction of Iran's first domestically developed radar satellite and provided further clarification on the project. In response to a question about the satellite's name and specifications, Salarieh said that Iran is currently designing and building radar satellites under two separate families, known as "Rad-1" and "Rad-2."

According to Salarieh, the "Rad-1" satellite is a Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR) satellite capable of Earth imaging with a spatial resolution of better than 50 meters. He noted that the satellite has entered the integration phase and is currently undergoing its final stages of assembly and testing.

"The Rad-1 satellite is now in the aggregation and final preparation phase, and God willing, it will be unveiled soon," Salarieh said, signaling that the project has reached a critical milestone in Iran's space technology development.

He added that a second, more advanced satellite in the series, known as "Rad-2," is also under development at the Iranian Space Research Center. Salarieh stated that Rad-2 is designed to offer improved imaging capabilities, with a resolution of better than 20 meters. He said the development process for this satellite is ongoing and that it is expected to be unveiled in the coming years.

### Iran Increases Gas Production in Northeast by 5m Cubic Meters



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Iran has officially launched gas production from the Tous gas field in the northeast of the country, increasing regional gas output by up to five million cubic meters per day. Officials say the development of this field will play a strategic role in ensuring stable gas supply, balancing network pressure, and supporting consumption across five northern provinces.

Hamid Bovard, Managing Director of the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC), announced the start of gas production at a ceremony on Monday, February 9, 2026, which also marked the inauguration of the Dehloran gas pressure boosting station. The event was carried out under the order of President Masoud Pezeshkian and attended by Oil Minister Mohsen Paknejad. Bovard highlighted the commitment of Iran's 14th administration to inaugurate major projects on a monthly basis.

"We promised the president that each month a major project would be brought into operation, and thanks to God, several large projects have already been successfully completed," Bovard said. "Today, two major projects located in border areas of the country are officially inaugurated."

### Enemies Are Attempting to Destabilize the Country Again

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Iran's Judiciary Chief, Hojjatolleslam Gholam-Hossein Mohseni Ejei, issued a warning to security agencies on Tuesday, 20th of Bahman 1404, that foreign adversaries are reportedly seeking to undermine national security by directing domestic elements to threaten public safety. Ejei made the remarks during a meeting of the Supreme Council of the Judiciary, coinciding with the sacred Fajr Decade and the anniversary of the 22nd of Bahman.

Reflecting on Iran's history under the Pahlavi monarchy, Ejei said that foreign powers had controlled all aspects of the country, appointing kings, ministers, and lawmakers, while imposing capitulations and granting their citizens free rein to commit crimes on Iranian soil. "In the military, agriculture, industry, and public health sectors, the country was in a catastrophic state, with resources plundered and the nation left vulnerable," he said. He credited the late Imam Khomeini and the Iranian people's reliance on divine power with overthrowing the tyrants and achieving national independence and dignity. "Today, Iran stands as a sovereign and proud nation, yet our adversaries continue seeking revenge and aiming to inflict harm on the Iranian people," he added.

Ejei criticized individuals who have forgotten the country's dire conditions before the Islamic Revolution. "Some have aligned themselves with our enemies, spreading despair and hopelessness among the youth. Others have served the agendas of the criminal leaders of the Zionist regime and the United States, targeting the foundations of the revolution and disrespecting sacred values," he said. He emphasized that the judiciary has a dual responsibility: to educate the public, especially young people, about the nation's history and achievements, and to act decisively against those playing into enemy hands, using justice where needed or exercising patience to guide them back to the right path.

Regarding ongoing investigations into participants in recent unrest, Ejei said that while all cases are being pursued, some have not progressed as swiftly as expected. "I understand the workload is substantial and some cases require extended investigation. Nevertheless, all judicial bodies must process the cases of individuals who committed crimes during the disturbances with maximum diligence, ensuring justice and fairness. The public expects the

judiciary to act promptly," he stated.

Ejei called on the Judiciary Media Center to increase efforts in documenting and publicizing the crimes committed by rioters. "Our enemies' media empires are attempting to distort facts, portraying perpetrators as victims and vice versa. It is crucial to provide clear, factual narratives to counter these attempts," he noted.

He further stressed the importance of preventive measures to safeguard citizens, noting evidence that enemies are attempting to compromise public security through domestic actors. "All relevant entities inside and outside the Judiciary must take precautionary measures and act decisively against those preparing to threaten public safety," he said.

The Judiciary Chief also highlighted economic threats as a current focus of adversaries. "The enemy is concentrating on straining the livelihood of our people. Some may inadvertently or deliberately assist this by disrupting the economy, hoarding essential goods, or obstructing production. All responsible authorities must take preventive action and deal firmly with those who exacerbate public hardship," Ejei emphasized.

Turning to recent provincial oversight, Ejei noted a Judiciary delegation's visit to Markazi Province, confirming that some previously planned measures have been completed while others are underway. He instructed officials to ensure that all provincial initiatives are fully implemented.

Ejei also addressed industrial issues, citing the AzarAb Industries Company, a refinery technology producer. Once operating at half capacity, the company now runs in full double shifts. However, he noted two outstanding issues: a pending legal case in Tehran's Economic Court and a frozen account due to banking and tax matters. He directed Tehran authorities to resolve the case promptly and ensure financial obstacles do not disrupt production.

Finally, Ejei encouraged collaboration with academic and religious institutions to enhance the judiciary's technological capabilities. "The judiciary welcomes cooperation with universities, seminaries, and innovators, particularly in areas like artificial intelligence, new technologies, and other innovations that support judicial processes," he said.

### Flare Gas Recovery and Clean Energy Key to Iran's Energy Strategy

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - The President emphasized the urgent need to prevent gas wastage and ensure reliable electricity supply as he inaugurated several major oil and renewable energy projects across Iran on Tuesday, 20th of Bahman 1404. Speaking at simultaneous ceremonies, he highlighted that the collection of flare gas, the expansion of renewable power, and the promotion of energy efficiency are critical components of Iran's national development strategy, economic growth, and environmental protection.

Coinciding with the sacred Fajr Decade of the Islamic Revolution, the President inaugurated the Tous gas field and the Dehloran associated gas gathering and pressure-boosting plant through an online ceremony. The Tous field, located 100 kilometers northeast of Mashhad, contains an estimated 58 billion cubic meters of gas and was developed with \$120 million in domestic investment. The Dehloran plant, 40 kilometers southwest of Dehloran, was constructed to collect and process associated gas through four stages of compression, ensuring that valuable resources are recovered instead of being wasted through flaring.

"The collection of flare gas is a highly valuable effort, and we must not lose even an hour in this work," the President said. He emphasized that every cubic meter of gas that is captured and redirected contributes not only to the energy supply but also to national development and economic growth. Masoud Pezeshkian, speaking after the inauguration, highlighted that revenues generated from flare gas recovery would be reinvested in local development initiatives. "It is unacceptable for 5 million cubic meters of gas, equivalent to \$17 million, to be burned daily. This resource could instead drive significant regional development, generate employment, and address pressing national challenges," he stated.

Alongside these oil and gas initiatives, Pezeshkian inaugurated 148 renewable power projects nationwide, collectively generating 750 megawatts of electricity. He stressed that efficient energy consumption is vital to ensuring the country does not face electricity shortages, especially during the summer months. "Average energy use in Iran is three times higher than in Western countries. By optimizing consumption, rather than



eliminating it, we can solve many of our energy problems," he explained.

The President cautioned that cutting electricity to factories would lead to substantial economic losses, with cascading effects on employment and tax revenues. "Power outages or interruptions in industrial electricity supply not only harm production but also have a ripple effect across the economy, affecting jobs and national revenue," he said. He emphasized that ensuring a stable electricity supply requires careful planning, investment in infrastructure, and the use of clean, efficient energy technologies.

Energy efficiency, Pezeshkian noted, is not only an economic imperative but also an environmental one. "Last year, we faced numerous challenges, including factory shutdowns and widespread blackouts. Many of these issues have been addressed this year, but we must continue to improve how we consume energy. Optimizing energy use, rather than simply reducing consumption, allows us to protect the environment while meeting economic needs," he added.

The President also stressed that any delays in completing solar power projects would be unacceptable. He urged households to transition from gas to electricity for heating and cooking where feasible, highlighting the importance of clean energy in conserving resources and safeguarding the environment. "When we can fully deploy clean energy, it will trigger a major revolution in energy consumption. This is not only about reducing costs or preventing shortages, but about creating a sustainable energy future for our nation," he concluded.

By integrating flare gas recovery, renewable energy expansion, and energy efficiency initiatives, Iran aims to reduce waste, strengthen energy security, and promote sustainable development. Officials emphasized that the combination of recovered gas, solar power, and optimized energy consumption will have a direct impact on industrial growth, employment, tax revenues, and environmental protection. The government's message was clear: time is critical, and every effort must be made to prevent unnecessary wastage of energy resources while ensuring a stable and reliable electricity supply for citizens and industries alike.

### Number of Transit Trains from China to Iran Surpasses 60



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The CEO of the Islamic Republic of Iran Railways highlighted a significant increase in transit trains traveling from China to Iran and onward to the European Union, emphasizing the need to reduce transportation tariffs between Iran and China to stimulate exports.

Speaking at the signing ceremony of a memorandum of understanding (MoU) on investment, operation, and development of logistics hubs in the cities of Tabriz, Yazd, and Sirjan, Jabar Ali Zakari said that, to date, 60 trains have arrived in Iran from China, destined for Iran and European markets. He added that on the day of the ceremony, three additional trains were on the verge of entering the country at the Incheh Borun border crossing.

Zakari noted that six-party agreements had been signed to define shared tariffs along the transit route, a move aimed at facilitating smoother and more cost-effective transport. He emphasized that these measures, alongside other planned initiatives, would activate the southern branch of the East-West corridor, enhancing Iran's role as a key transit hub in the region.

The official also highlighted the development of a new rail transit route to Afghanistan, noting rapid growth in trade via this corridor. "In the first eight months of last year, total rail exports and transit to Afghanistan reached 15,000 tons. In contrast, in the first ten months of this year, that figure has risen to 570,000 tons," Zakari said, illustrating a substantial increase in trade volume over a short period.

### Defense Ministry Halts Public Unveiling of Military Achievements Over Security Concerns



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - The spokesperson for Iran's Ministry of Defense and Armed Forces Logistics announced on Monday that the public unveiling of the country's defense achievements has been suspended due to security considerations and the need to preserve the element of surprise.

Speaking to reporters on the sidelines of a ceremony marking the induction of a drone fleet into the Iranian Red Crescent Society's search-and-rescue operations, Brigadier General Reza Talaei-Nik said the decision was made in line with national security requirements. The event was held on Monday, February 9, 2026, according to the Iranian calendar. "Given security considerations and the necessity of safeguarding the principle of surprise, we have currently halted the public presentation of defense achievements," Talaei-Nik said. He stressed, however, that this does not mean a slowdown in defense development or deployment. "In the operational, offensive, and defensive domains, today's defense achievements have already been, and continue to be, integrated into the country's defense units. However, we refrain from publicizing them through the media," he added.

The defense spokesperson also highlighted the growing role of artificial intelligence in advancing Iran's defense technologies. He said the Ministry of Defense has made planned and targeted investments in the field of artificial intelligence, viewing it as a key driver in enhancing modern defense capabilities.



# IRAN NEWS



## Iran, Afghan Officials Stress Continued Border Cooperation in Phone Call

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Senior officials from Iran and Afghanistan stressed the need to continue cooperation on border management during a phone call on Sunday.

Kazem Gharibabadi, deputy foreign minister for legal and international affairs, spoke with Noorullah Noori, Afghanistan's minister of borders and tribal affairs, as part of ongoing engagement between the two neighbors on border-related issues.

During the call, the two sides emphasized the importance of maintaining border cooperation, particularly the continuation of work to update border documents and markers. They also agreed to accelerate the holding of joint technical and legal meetings.

## Iran Not Worried About Petroleum Product Exports



### IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - A board member of Iran's Union of Oil, Gas, and Petrochemical Product Exporters said the recent intensification of sanctions on oil tankers has increased transportation and transfer costs but has not halted—and will not halt—the country's exports of petroleum products.

Ahmad Maroufkhani addressed the impact of new U.S. sanctions on Iran's petroleum product exports, saying such products are effectively non-sanctionable due to their direct influence on consumer markets. "The United States can never truly sanction petroleum products, because sanctioning any refined product affects the consumer market, which ultimately harms them as well," he said.

Maroufkhani noted that Washington has recently pursued a policy of tightening sanctions and economic pressure on Iran. Over the past few months, he said, a large number of Iranian vessels and oil tankers have been sanctioned in an effort to increase pressure and advance U.S. objectives.

Despite these measures, he stressed that exporters are not concerned about sanctions targeting petroleum product exports. "Sanctioning tankers carrying refined products does not affect export markets or destinations, but it does raise costs," he said.

Maroufkhani added that Iran's geopolitical and geographic position—sharing land borders with 16 countries and having access to two major maritime routes—means sanctions cannot cripple the country. He pointed out that over the past two decades, despite extensive sanctions, Iran's export process has never stopped, although it has imposed significant additional costs.

## National Cohesion, Social Capital Key to Overcoming Challenges



### IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts said national cohesion, strengthened social capital, and effective governance are the three essential pillars for overcoming the country's current challenges, stressing that dialogue with the younger generation is a strategic necessity.

Speaking at the centralized inauguration and launch of 218 development, economic, and investment projects in Ardabil County, Seyyed Reza Salehi-Amiri said the government is pursuing a responsible approach that simultaneously safeguards national interests and responds to public demands.

The ceremony was held at Ardabil University of Medical Sciences with the participation of provincial officials, executive managers, and members of the public. Conveying the president's greetings to the people of Ardabil, Salehi-Amiri praised local officials and staff, saying the achievements seen in the province are the result of synergy, solidarity, and coordinated efforts between executive bodies and the public, and should be regarded as a national asset.

Referring to the country's complex and pressure-filled conditions, the minister said Iran is at a sensitive juncture that requires rationality, calmness, vigilance, and unity. "Passing through this stage will not be possible through emotion, but through prudence, solidarity, and mutual trust between the government and the people," he added.

Explaining the government's broader strategy, Salehi-Amiri said Iran has consistently adopted a balanced approach in addressing regional and international developments, based on protecting national interests, strengthening domestic capabilities, and utilizing dialogue. He said this approach continues with determination.

# Iran Excluded from Global Corridors and Supply Chains Despite Geopolitical Position

### IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Seyed Ali Mohammad Mousavi, Deputy for International Affairs at Iran's Ministry of Oil, said that despite Iran's strategic geopolitical location, the country has been excluded from major international transport corridors and global supply chains, a situation that has weakened its economic and energy influence.

Speaking at a specialized session titled "The Outlook for Economic Diplomacy in Iran's Foreign Policy," Mousavi said Iran's overall policy approaches and developments have not been aligned with economic growth and development, resulting in severe economic and livelihood challenges.

Mousavi described economic diplomacy as a neglected area both nationally and within the Foreign Ministry, noting that relevant departments have at times been dissolved or merged. "In many countries, everything is geared toward development and the economy, but in our country the opposite is true," he said.

Mousavi explained that the Ministry of Oil pursues energy diplomacy through bilateral and multilateral channels and is responsible for joint commissions with Oman and Russia, while also participating in international energy forums. He noted that the ministry's international affairs department was once a key point of contact for ambassadors and major oil companies, but said conditions have deteriorated in recent years. Despite this, Iran has sought to remain influential within OPEC.

He said that within OPEC Plus, Saudi Arabia holds greater leverage due to its high production levels, but Iran remains a major energy player, producing around 4 million barrels of oil per day and exporting about 1.5 million barrels daily. Mousavi acknowledged that "unjust sanctions" have created serious challenges for oil sales, but added that Iran has nevertheless managed to finance state operations. He expressed hope that ongoing negotiations would improve conditions for energy trade.

Highlighting Iran's declining role in global markets, Mousavi said that despite holding significant oil reserves, Iran's position has weakened to the extent that even a



Saudi Arabia signed a China-brokered agreement that eased political tensions, the improvement has not translated into economic cooperation. "No meaningful economic action has taken place, and this situation continues," he said, adding that this is precisely where active economic diplomacy is needed.

Describing the situation as regrettable, he said Iran has failed for years to attract investment even in limited infrastructure areas, despite earlier interest from neighboring countries. He emphasized that a country located at the crossroads of east-west and north-south routes, and possessing vast oil and gas reserves, should not be excluded from global corridors and markets.

"In the energy sector and in transit alike, this reality is evident," Mousavi said, noting that although Iran is often described as a leading holder of oil and gas reserves and a key financial contributor within OPEC, its influence on global markets has become limited.

In concluding remarks, Mousavi summarized his expectations for economic diplomacy in two points: lifting sanctions and facilitating investment. He stressed that Iran's oil sector urgently requires investment, particularly in drilling, wells, and pipeline infrastructure, and said supporting capital attraction should be a top diplomatic priority.

# Iran's Economy Must Move Toward Attracting Foreign Technology

### IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Mohammad Hossein Adeli, former Secretary General of OPEC and former Governor of the Central Bank of Iran, said Iran's economy needs to gradually move toward attracting foreign technology and investment, stressing that such an approach is both necessary and legitimate for economic growth.

Speaking at a specialized session titled "The Outlook for Economic Diplomacy in Iran's Foreign Policy," held during the Congress on Iran's Foreign Policy, Adeli emphasized the need to internationalize Iran's economy. He noted that, as a developing country, Iran—like other developing nations—must use international relations and foreign policy as tools to achieve its economic objectives.

Adeli said economic diplomacy should be understood both as an instrument and an objective in international relations. He recalled that when the concept was first introduced in Iran in the early 2000s, it was not widely accepted, reflecting the long process required for new ideas to become operational and reach national consensus.

He explained that economic power is one of the most important components of national power, characterized by its sustainability and its ability to generate other forms of power, including political and military strength. Countries such as Japan, Germany, Eastern European states, and more recently China and India, he said, have successfully aligned their foreign policies with economic development goals, eventually achieving greater economic and political influence.

Adeli divided countries' use of economic diplomacy into two categories: economically powerful states that use their strength to pursue political goals, and developing countries that rely on foreign policy and international relations to advance economic development. Iran, he argued, clearly falls into the second category.

He noted that until around 2003, economic diplomacy and development priorities were largely neglected in Iran. The country adopted an inward-looking, self-sufficiency-oriented economic model, shaped by security threats and a cautious approach to the outside world. As a result, internationalization was often viewed as a risk rather than an opportunity.

Reviewing Iran's economic performance, Adeli said average GDP growth since the Revolution and the Iran-Iraq war has been weak overall. However, between 1989 and 2007—covering the presidencies of Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani and Mohammad Khatami—Iran achieved relatively strong growth averaging about 5.5 percent annually, ranking first in the region in GDP. Since 2011, however,



economic growth has been close to zero, with similar stagnation seen in employment and investment.

According to Adeli, no economy can grow without using the resources of others, whether capital, savings, or technology. He argued that internationalizing the economy is essential for overcoming Iran's current challenges. Sanctions, he said, have made Iran's trade highly concentrated, with 75 to 80 percent of its roughly \$150 billion in imports and exports limited to just four or five countries, including China, the UAE, Iraq, Turkey, and Afghanistan—restricting the scope of effective economic diplomacy.

He also highlighted the importance of integrating into global value chains as a source of economic leverage and security. Iran's geographic position, he said, gives it strategic potential along north-south energy corridors and east-west trade routes. Stronger economic ties could provide Iran with security leverage against external threats.

Adeli called for expanding economic cooperation wherever possible and forming regional and multilateral partnerships. He proposed trilateral frameworks involving Iran, China, and Saudi Arabia; Iran, China, and Pakistan; and Iran, China, and Iraq. Given companies' reluctance to engage bilaterally with Iran due to perceived risks, he said multilateral arrangements could be more effective.

Attracting foreign technology and investment, Adeli stressed, is vital for economic dynamism and should not be viewed negatively. He also pointed to past successes in economic diplomacy, noting that intensive negotiations once reduced Iran's economic risk rating from 7 to 4, with each level of reduction benefiting the country by hundreds of millions of dollars.

Finally, Adeli emphasized the need for better institutional coordination, recalling the former "Foreign Relations Coordination Headquarters," which brought together key economic officials to align policy. Making full use of existing diplomatic and economic capacities, he concluded, is essential to reducing threats and advancing Iran's economic interests.

The two-day Congress on Iran's Foreign Policy and the History of Foreign Relations opened Sunday at the Foreign Ministry's Institute for Political and International Studies, with senior diplomats and academics, including Kamal Kharrazi and former Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi, in attendance.

## Iran, Pakistan Economy Ministers Stress Boosting Bilateral Trade



### IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The economy ministers of Iran and Pakistan met on the sidelines of the Emerging Markets Conference in Saudi Arabia, emphasizing their mutual commitment to facilitating economic cooperation and increasing the volume of bilateral trade.

Pakistan's Ministry of Finance said in a statement that Senator Muhammad Aurangzeb, Pakistan's Minister of Finance and National Revenue, held talks with Seyed Ali Madani-Zadeh, Iran's Minister of Economic Affairs and Finance, during the conference hosted by the Saudi government in the city of AIUla.

The statement said the meeting focused on strengthening bilateral trade and economic cooperation between Pakistan and Iran.

Both ministers, in line with the vision and directives of the leaders of Iran and Pakistan, reaffirmed their shared commitment to expanding the volume of bilateral trade.

The Iranian and Pakistani economy ministers also called for sustained engagement, trade facilitation, and the removal of existing barriers in order to achieve shared economic benefits.

During the meeting, Iran's Minister of Economic Affairs and Finance outlined several specific investment and cooperation opportunities aimed at deepening economic ties and creating mutually beneficial outcomes, which were welcomed by the Pakistani finance minister.

Senator Aurangzeb invited his Iranian counterpart to pay an official visit to Pakistan, while Madani-Zadeh extended a reciprocal invitation for the Pakistani finance minister to visit Tehran.

## Iran Ranks Top in the Middle East in Thermal Power Plant Maintenance



### IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The head of the Production Operations Directorate at Iran's Thermal Power Plants Holding Company said Iran has become the leading country in the Middle East in the field of maintenance and overhaul of thermal power plants, citing the breadth of installed capacity and the advanced expertise of domestic specialists.

Masoud Moradi, speaking about the achievements of Iran's power generation industry, said the wide variety of thermal power plants installed and operated across the country has enabled Iranian experts to acquire unparalleled technical knowledge in the maintenance of such facilities.

He noted that prior to the 1979 Islamic Revolution, maintenance and overhaul of thermal power plants in Iran could only be carried out in the presence of foreign experts from the original equipment manufacturers. "However, thanks to the determination and efforts of the country's young specialists and the development and localization of technical know-how, Iran no longer needs foreign turbine manufacturers' experts to carry out thermal power plant maintenance," Moradi said.

He added that these sustained efforts have resulted in Iran achieving complete self-sufficiency in this field. "Today, not only are 100 percent of thermal power plant repairs carried out domestically, but Iran has also begun exporting technical and engineering services related to power plant maintenance to other countries," he said.



## Nicaragua Scraps Visa-Free Entry to Cubans

MEXICO CITY (Dispatches) - Nicaragua has ended visa-free entry for Cuban citizens effective, ending a policy that allowed thousands of Cubans to transit the Central American country in recent years on their journey north to the United States. The government confirmed the decision in a statement. People familiar with the move said President Daniel Ortega's administration appeared to be responding to pressure from Washington. The United States under both the Trump and Biden administrations has accused Ortega and Vice President Rosario Murillo of allowing Cubans and other nationals to pass freely through Nicaragua and contribute to illegal migration to the U.S. U.S. pressure on Managua has intensified in recent weeks following the capture by U.S. special forces of Venezuela's president, Nicolas Maduro, a close ally of Ortega.



## Venezuela Frees Prominent Opposition Members as Prisoner Releases Continue



CARACAS (Dispatches) - Venezuelan opposition politicians Juan Pablo Guanipa and Freddy Superlano, along with prominent lawyer Perkins Rocha, have been freed from jail, their families and human rights organizations said on Sunday, marking the latest high-profile releases by the government in Caracas.

Under mounting pressure from the U.S. to free political prisoners, rights group Foro Penal said some 35 political prisoners were released on Sunday and that it was verifying additional cases.

The organization previously confirmed that 383 political prisoners had been let go since the Venezuelan government announced on January 8 that it would begin a new series of releases.

Guanipa, Rocha and Superlano are close allies of Nobel Peace Prize winner and opposition leader Maria Corina Machado. Rocha, a lawyer for the Vente Venezuela opposition movement, was detained in August 2024 on terrorism and related charges. Guanipa was arrested last May after months in hiding for allegedly leading a terrorist plot.

Venezuela's opposition and human rights groups have said for years that the country's socialist government uses detentions to stamp out dissent.

Leader of the Voluntad Popular Party, Freddy Superlano, was arrested after the 2024 presidential elections. He was captured on video being pushed into the back of an unmarked car surrounded by armed security agents and according to his wife, spent many months in isolation. Foro Penal confirmed he was among those released on February 8.

## Thailand PM Anutin Consolidates Power With Dominating Election Win



BANGKOK (Dispatches) - Thai Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul's Bhumjaithai Party won a clear victory in Sunday's general election, raising the prospect that a more stable coalition may now succeed in bringing an end to a period of prolonged political instability.

Anutin set the stage for the snap election in mid-December during a border conflict between Thailand and Cambodia, a move political analysts said appeared to be timed by the conservative leader to cash in on surging nationalism.

It is a gamble that paid off for a prime minister, who - having taken over after premier Paetongtarn Shinawatra of the populist Pheu Thai party was ousted over the Cambodian crisis - then dissolved parliament less than 100 days later.

"Bhumjaithai's victory today is a victory for all Thais, whether you voted for Bhujaiithai Party or not," Anutin told a press briefing. "We have to do the utmost to serve the Thai people to our full ability."

With nearly 95% of polling stations reporting, preliminary results released by the election commission showed the Bhumjaithai Party winning about 192 seats, compared to 117 for the progressive People's Party, and 74 for the once-dominant Pheu Thai party.

# Japan PM Takaichi basks in Historic Election Triumph

TOKYO (Dispatches) - Japan's Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi savoured an election landslide Monday, with her ruling party projected to have won a two-thirds majority in the powerful lower house for the first time in its history.

If confirmed by official results, the outcome gives Japan's first female premier a strong mandate to implement her conservative agenda and stamp her mark on the country of 123 million people over the next four years.

The Asia-Pacific region will be watching closely, however, to see if the 64-year-old ups the ante or lowers the temperature with China after enraging Beijing in November with comments about Taiwan.

Financial markets may also be nervous about Japan's public finances and its gargantuan debt pile if Takaichi decides to cut taxes and boost spending in Asia's number-two economy.

"We have consistently stressed the importance of responsible and proactive fiscal policy," Takaichi insisted late Sunday.

"We will prioritise the sustainability of fiscal policy. We will ensure necessary investments. Public and private sectors must invest. We will build a strong and resilient economy," she said.

On Monday, the Nikkei jumped around five percent to hit a new high, with equities "poised to benefit from higher fiscal spending but interest rates that remain accommodative and negative in real terms", according to analyst Kyle Rodda of Capital.com.

With a stronger mandate, Takaichi is also expected to push through her ambitious policy agenda, which includes boosting the defence budget, tougher immigration measures and potentially changing the constitution.

Capitalising on her honeymoon start after becoming Japan's fifth premier in as many years in October, Takaichi called the snap election last month.

The gamble paid off handsomely, with local media reporting that her Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) won around 316 of the 465 seats contested, citing partial results.

That takes the party past the 310-seat threshold needed for a two-thirds majority. Together with its junior coalition partner, they're expected to secure 352 seats.



But she will have to deliver on the economy to remain popular.

"With prices rising like this, what matters most to me is what policies they'll adopt to deal with inflation," voter Chika Sakamoto, 50, told AFP at a voting station in snowy Tokyo on Sunday.

Despite being her country's first woman premier, Takaichi has shown little appetite for framing her leadership around gender in male-dominated Japanese politics.

She has been 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

She is socially conservative, opposing any revision to a law requiring married couples to share the same surname, a rule that overwhelmingly results in women taking their husband's name.

Before becoming prime minister, Takaichi was seen as a China hawk. She was a regular visitor to the Yasukuni Shrine, which honours convicted war criminals along with 2.5 million war dead and is seen as a symbol of Japan's militarist past.

# Ukraine's FM Calls for Acceleration of Peace Talks

KYIV (Dispatches) - Kyiv's foreign minister has said the Ukrainian and Russian leaders need to meet in person to hash out the hardest remaining issues in peace talks, and that only U.S. President Donald Trump has the power to bring about an agreement.

Ukraine wants to accelerate the efforts to end the four-year-old war and capitalise on momentum in the U.S.-brokered talks before other factors come into play, such as campaigning for the U.S. Congressional mid-term elections in November, Foreign Minister Andrii Sybiha said in an interview.

"Only Trump can stop the war," Sybiha told Reuters in his office in Kyiv, close to the Dnipro river.

From a 20-point peace plan that has formed the basis of recent trilateral negotiations, only "a few" items remain outstanding, Sybiha said. "The most sensitive and most difficult, to be dealt with at the leaders' level."

On key issues, such as land, the two sides appear far apart. Russia has maintained its demand that Ukraine cede the remaining 20% of the eastern region of Donetsk that it has failed to occupy during years of grinding, attritional warfare - something that Kyiv has steadfastly refused. Ukraine also wants control over the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant - the largest in Europe - which is in Russian-occupied territory.

During a second round of trilateral peace talks in Abu Dhabi this week there was no sign of a breakthrough, though an exchange of 314 prisoners of war was concluded on Thursday - the first such swap since October. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy told reporters on Saturday that the U.S. had proposed a new round of talks in Miami in a week, which Kyiv had agreed to.

"My assessment is we have momentum, that's true," Sybiha, in post since 2024, said in an interview conducted on Friday. "We need consolidation or mobilisation of these peace efforts, and we're ready to speed up."

Nearly four years after its full-scale invasion in February 2022, Russia



occupies almost a fifth of Ukraine's territory - including the Crimean Peninsula and parts of eastern Ukraine occupied before the war - and has devastated the electricity and heating network with targeted bombing. On the battlefield, analysts say Russia has gained only about 1.3% of Ukrainian territory since early 2023.

Zelenskyy said on Saturday that Washington hoped the war could be ended before the summer and Ukraine had suggested a sequencing plan, but he provided no details.

Sources had told Reuters on Friday that Ukrainian and U.S. officials had discussed a timetable including a draft deal with Russia by March and a referendum on it in Ukraine alongside elections in May.

Ukraine is focused on obtaining Western security guarantees to deter future Russian aggression once a ceasefire enters force.

The U.S., Sybiha said, had confirmed to Ukraine that it was prepared to ratify security guarantees in Congress; it would then provide a security "backstop" to support the peace deal, though no U.S. troops on the ground in Ukraine.

"I personally do not believe, at this stage, in any security infrastructure or architecture without the Americans ... We must have them with us - and they are in the process. That's a huge, huge achievement," he said.

A statement issued after a meeting in Paris last month of the "coalition of the willing" said the allies would participate in a proposed U.S.-led ceasefire monitoring and verification mechanism. Officials have said this would likely involve drones, sensors and satellites, not U.S. troops.

The foreign minister said some other countries beyond Britain and France, both already publicly committed, had confirmed their readiness to send troops to Ukraine as a deterrence force, but he declined to identify them.

Apart from "boots on the ground", Sybiha said there should be a mechanism akin to the NATO alliance's Article Five that classifies an attack on one member state as an attack on all. Ukraine's proposed membership of the European Union would also provide an additional element of security, he said.

Zelenskyy has said Ukraine wants to join the 27-nation bloc by 2027 - which would require significant reforms and legislation.

On Saturday, Zelenskyy raised concerns about bilateral talks between Russia and the U.S., which he said included a proposal from Moscow for \$12 trillion in investments.

Sybiha said some of these discussions could affect Ukraine's sovereignty or security, and Kyiv would not support any such deals made without it.

He also said any country's decision in the course of a peace settlement to recognise Russian sovereignty over Crimea or the Donbas, Ukraine's eastern industrial heartland, would be "legally void".

"We will never recognise this. And it will be a violation of international law," Sybiha said. "This was not about Ukraine. It's about principle."

# José Seguro Defeats Far-Right Rival in Portugal Presidential Race

LISBON (Dispatches) - Centre-left Socialist António José Seguro scored a landslide victory over far-right populist André Ventura in Portugal's presidential runoff on Sunday, exit polls showed, dealing a blow to the country's rising populist right and handing the largely ceremonial presidency to a moderate figure promising stability after years of political turmoil.

Seguro recorded a thumping victory over far-right populist André Ventura in Portugal's runoff presidential election Sunday, exit polls indicated.

Polls by the country's three main broadcasters suggested the moderate Seguro won a five-year term in Lisbon's riverside "pink palace" with around 70% of the votes, compared with about 30% for Ventura. Most official results were expected by 11 p.m.

The ballot was an opportunity to test the depth of support for Ventura's brash style, which has struck a chord with voters and helped make his Chega (Enough) party the second-biggest in the Portuguese parliament, as well as gauge the public appetite for Europe's increasing shift to the right in recent



years.

Seguro, a longstanding Socialist politician, positioned himself as a moderate candidate who will cooperate with Portugal's centre-right minority government, repudiating Ventura's anti-establishment and anti-immigrant tirades.

He won the backing of other mainstream politicians on the left and right who want to halt the rising populist tide.

In Portugal, the president is largely a figurehead with no executive power. Traditionally, the head of state stands above the political fray, mediating disputes and defusing tensions.

However, the president is an influential voice and possesses some powerful tools, being able to veto legislation from parliament, although the veto can be overturned. The head of state also possesses what in Portuguese political jargon is called an "atomic bomb," the power to dissolve parliament and call early elections.





## Seahawks Dominate Patriots to Win Super Bowl LX

SANTA CLARA (Dispatches) - The Seattle Seahawks relied on a relentless defense to beat New England 29-13 in Super Bowl LX on Sunday, denying the Patriots an NFL record seventh championship and avenging a loss to the same opponent in the title game 11 years ago.

Seattle sacked Patriots quarterback Drake Maye six times -- including one that resulted in a fumble returned for a late touchdown -- and got five Jason Myers field goals, while Sam Darnold connected with AJ Barner for a touchdown.

Preseason longshots Seattle received the ball to start the game and went on an eight-play drive that set up a 33-yard Myers field goal for the opening score.

Myers doubled the Seattle lead in the second quarter from 39 yards and connected from 41 yards in the closing seconds of an opening half during which the Patriots punted on all five of their possessions.

A costly Maye fumble late in the third quarter led to the 16-yard Barner touchdown five plays later. But the Patriots, who had not had a snap inside the Seattle 43-yard line all game, responded immediately with a touchdown drive of their own as Maye connected with Mack Hollins on a 35-yard scoring play to cut into the Seattle lead with just over 12 minutes to play.

After being pinned to their four-yard line by a 55-yard punt from Australian Michael Dickson, the Patriots' ensuing drive ended abruptly when a Maye pass intended for Kyle Williams was intercepted by Julian Love, leading to another Myers field goal and 22-7 Seattle lead.

The Seahawks then put the game out of reach with a strip sack of Maye that saw Uchenna Nwosu scoop up the loose ball and return it 44 yards for the score.

Maye connected with Rhamondre Stevenson for a late touchdown to get New England within 16 points but the Patriots failed to recover the ensuing onside kick as Seattle went on to victory.

## Man City Fight Back to End Anfield Hoodoo and Reel in Arsenal

LIVERPOOL (Dispatches) - Erling Haaland's stoppage-time penalty earned Manchester City a dramatic 2-1 win at Liverpool on Sunday to reduce Arsenal's lead at the top of the Premier League back to six points.

City were heading for defeat at Anfield with six minutes to go before Bernardo Silva cancelled out Dominik Szoboszlai's stunning free-kick to spark an incredible finale.

Haaland put City in front from the spot before the visitors had another goal ruled out and Szoboszlai was sent off in the same incident after a VAR review.

Victory was City's first away to Liverpool in front of a crowd since 2003 and reapplies some pressure to Arsenal's quest for a first title in 22 years.

"I feel the whole team knew before the game, if we lost it then the title race was probably over," said Silva. "We felt like we needed to win."

Defeat delivered another blow to Liverpool's hopes of Champions League football next season.

The defending champions remain down in sixth and four points adrift of the top five.

These two clubs have combined to win the last eight Premier League titles, but both showed the flaws which



have opened the door for Arsenal to potentially end their long wait to be crowned champions of England once again.

Haaland has scored just once from open play in his last 13 games and an uncharacteristic lack of confidence from the Norwegian showed with the best chance of the first half inside the opening two minutes.

Silva's clever pass split the Liverpool defence, but Haaland's shot lacked conviction under pressure from Milos Kerkez, and Alisson Becker was able to save low to his left.

Second half slumps have been a consistent feature of City's season and the visitors again faded in the second period until a late flurry saved their title challenge.

"Second half we pressed really high and played good football," said Liverpool boss Arne Slot. "We have improved so much, but we need to improve the results."

Marc Guehi was relentlessly booed after his proposed move to Liverpool from Crystal Palace broke down on transfer deadline day in September.

## Australia Humiliated by Ecuador in Davis Cup Qualifier



MELBOURNE (Dispatches) - Australia slumped to their worst Davis Cup result under long-serving captain Lleyton Hewitt, suffering a 3-1 humiliation away to lowly Ecuador in the first round of qualifiers.

With Australia's number one Alex De Minaur opting out of the tie in Quito, the 28-times champions crashed out when Rinky Hijikata and Jordan Thompson were beaten 7-6(5) 6-4 by Gonzalo Escobar and Diego Hidalgo in the decisive doubles rubber.

Lacking a player in the top 200, Ecuador set up their unlikely triumph on home clay by claiming both the opening singles rubbers on Saturday.

Alvaro Guillen Meza downed Hijikata in three sets before 257th-ranked Andres Andrade shocked world number 86 James Duckworth, also in three.

Ecuador next face Britain in the second round of qualifiers in September.

With De Minaur leading the charge, Australia reached back-to-back finals in 2022-23 and the semi-finals in 2024.

However, the Ecuador shock continues the team's decline following their failure to reach the eight-nation Finals in 2025, Hewitt's 10th year in charge.

Meanwhile Czech qualifier Sara Bejlek defeated No. 2 seed Ekaterina Alexandrova of Russia 7-6 (5), 6-1 to capture her first title at the Mubadala Abu Dhabi Open in the United Arab Emirates.

The 20-year-old Bejlek, ranked No. 101 in the world, pulled away after a competitive first set to win the WTA 500 trophy in one hour and 39 minutes.

After rallying from a 4-2 deficit in the tiebreak, Bejlek dominated the second set by breaking Alexandrova's serve three times. Bejlek became the first qualifier and first Czech to win the tournament in its five-year history.

## Kamindu Heroics Steer Sri Lanka Past Ireland in T20 World Cup



COLOMBO (Dispatches) - Sri Lanka's 11th-hour call to draft in Kamindu Mendis proved a masterstroke as the all-rounder produced a match turning cameo to set up a 20-run win over Ireland in their T20 World Cup opener at Colombo's R. Premadasa Stadium.

Kamindu's blistering 44 off 19 balls with four fours and two sixes gave Sri Lanka the late thrust they badly needed to post 163.

The spin trio of Maheesh Theekshana, Wanindu Hasaranga and Dunith Wellalage then ran through the Irish middle order, sharing seven wickets to seal a comfortable victory.

"I just wanted to score a few boundaries and put a partnership with Kusal Mendis," said Kamindu.

"Kusal was outstanding today. He deserves a lot of credit. We wanted someone to bat through the innings.

"They played well during the run chase until the 15th over. We had to keep our calm and we knew they had to take risks and we bowled well towards the end."

Hasaranga claimed three wickets to take his World Cup tally to 40, second only to Bangladesh's Shakib Al Hasan, who has 50.

There were anxious moments when the leg-spinner, who has a history with hamstring injuries, limped off after his second over.

Though he returned to complete his quota, he moved gingerly, raising question marks over his fitness for the rest of the campaign.

## Crash Ends Vonn's Olympic Dream as Johnson Wins Downhill Gold

MILAN (Dispatches) - Lindsey Vonn's Winter Olympic dream ended with a broken leg after she dramatically crashed out of downhill won by her American teammate Breezy Johnson.

Vonn had been trying to claim the fourth Olympic medal of her career despite suffering a ruptured anterior cruciate ligament in her left knee just over a week ago, but her race ended in agony after just 13 seconds in Cortina d'Ampezzo.

She cried out in anguish after her violent crash high up the course and medical staff quickly surrounded the distraught 41-year-old on the Olimpia delle Tofane piste where has enjoyed so much success in the past.

The 2010 Olympic downhill champion hit the snow face first, soon after pushing off from the start gate, and then rolled down the slope with her skis still attached.

Vonn's Olympic dream now lies in tatters after her



audacious bid to achieve the seemingly impossible, an attempt which ended with her being winched up to a rescue helicopter as fans in the stands saluted her with loud applause.

She was taken to Treviso's Ca' Foncello hospital which later revealed that Vonn "underwent orthopaedic surgery to stabilise a fracture of the left leg".

Johnson, who was already in the traditional leader's chair after her aggressive run down the slope, said that she felt "heartache" at Vonn's crash, which completely changed the complexion of the race.

Already the reigning world downhill champion, Johnson finished in front of Germany's Emma Aicher by just 0.04s with Italy's speed specialist Sofia Goggia taking bronze in front of home fans.