

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi
Says Huge Crowds of People Participating
in Nationwide Rallies Marking the
Anniversary of the 1979 Islamic
Revolution Clearly Announced That Their
Rights and Dignity Are Not for Sale

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Supreme Leader Thanks
Iranians for Disappointing
Enemies With Multimillion
Rallies



TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei has praised the Iranian people for a massive nationwide turnout during the Islamic Revolution anniversary rallies, saying the demonstrations left the enemies disappointed.

"On 22 Bahman (February 11) this year, you accomplished a great deed; you brought honor to Iran," Ayatollah Khamenei said in a televised message delivered Thursday evening.

"As always, by supporting the Islamic Republic you increased its strength, and the enemies who, in their statements and plans, sought the surrender of the Iranian nation became disappointed," he added.

He described the reward of this great public movement as greater dignity, stronger authority, and fuller independence for Iran, adding: "Let us all strive to preserve this connection and national cohesion, which is very valuable and precious."

Ayatollah Khamenei praised the people's presence in the streets and their unified slogans, saying they demonstrated their identity and character to adversaries.

"I thank the entire Iranian nation and extend my abundant greetings to each and every person present at this great, million-strong gathering across the country," the Leader said.

Tens of millions of Iranians poured into the streets across the country on Wednesday, marking the 47th anniversary of the victory of the Islamic Revolution with one of the largest nationwide turnouts in recent years.

**Iran Dismisses
Claims of Detainee
Rights Violations as
"Psychological
Warfare"**



TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Iran's Prosecutor General Mohammad Movahedi has rejected allegations circulated by hostile media outlets regarding violations of detainees' rights, describing such reports as part of a coordinated psychological warfare campaign against the country.

Late last month, economic hardships, caused and exacerbated by years of Western sanctions, triggered a wave of peaceful protests among merchants in Tehran and other cities.

Officials said that some of the mercenaries were armed, trained, and recruited by US and Israeli spy agencies to incite violence, damage public property, and kill civilians and members of security forces.

Movahedi stressed the importance of "decisive, precise, and lawful handling" of detainee cases. He stated that individuals whose involvement in criminal acts is proven "must be processed swiftly and without leniency, strictly within the framework of the law."

He emphasized that Iran's criminal procedure law is "one of the most advanced legal frameworks for safeguarding defendants' rights," adding that any failure to observe those rights carries legal consequences.

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - President Masoud Pezeshkian says that foreign powers, including the United States and Israel, exploit Iran's challenges without genuine concern for the country's welfare.

"It is undeniable that Israel and the US take advantage of our country's situation. They have done nothing but create problems for us. Their hearts are not with Iran," Pezeshkian said Thursday in a meeting with intellectuals, political, social, and cultural figures in the northern province of Golestan.

Referring to the recent riots, Pezeshkian added, "During the recent events, Trump and Netanyahu beat the drum of protests. Did they intend to solve our nation's problems? Has anyone other than them caused issues for us? They have blocked all our paths, frozen our transactions, and obstructed our work, while telling some inside the country that they want to 'save' us."

On Jan 8 and 9 protests initially sparked by economic grievances turned into unruly scenes of mayhem and destruction. Armed groups infiltrated the demonstrations, leading to damage to shops, government buildings and public facilities, as well as casualties among civilians and security forces.

Iranian authorities confirmed that American and Israeli spy agencies were directly involved, providing funding, training, and media support to the perpetrators.

According to a statement last month by Iran's Foundation of Martyrs and Veterans Affairs, a total of 3,117 people lost their lives during the riots, including 2,427 innocent civilians and security personnel.

The president stressed the importance of national unity in overcoming challenges, saying, "A great wound has been created. We must repair and heal it with unity and cohesion, not deepen it with division and discord, which only increases the country's problems."

Pezeshkian also highlighted the longstanding pressure Iran has faced, asserting that those who themselves commit genocide "speak of humanity and human rights, and accuse us of massacre and plunder."

He noted that since the beginning of the Islamic Revolution, "all kinds of pressures and conspiracies have been applied to prevent us from serving the people properly."

"Our responsibility is to understand the situation and continue serving the people despite all the pressures," he further said.

Meanwhile referring to public evaluations of officials and the administrative system, the President stated that dissatisfaction with the system in the country is high, and public services are inadequate, leaving citizens dissatisfied with government performance.

Pezeshkian emphasized that the responsibility of all managers and officials is to serve and properly respond to the people. He said, "Officials must perform their duties correctly. During recent incidents, there were grounds for public protests, which Israel and the U.S. exploited, creating challenges for us."

He urged officials to embrace criticism rather than avoid it, stating, "If I am at fault, I must hear it and correct it. We cannot just demand praise. Hearing the truth is part of our duty to act based on justice and fairness."

Highlighting the importance of employee satisfaction, Pezeshkian said public satisfaction is tied to the contentment of government staff. "If capable employees are sidelined and positions are given based on political affiliation, dissatisfaction will grow," he warned.

He also cited provincial data showing that many citizens' rights have been neglected. "We have fully implemented all decrees during our visits, but unfulfilled commitments from the past 20 years fall on those who failed to act. As the Quran says, it is highly reprehensible to speak and not act."

He added, "Unfortunately, public satisfaction with our system is low. Properly addressing citizens' concerns and solving their problems depends on how we interact with them. If people are dissatisfied, the problem lies with us, not abroad. If we serve correctly, citizens will not be unhappy. This means that both the government and managers must recognize the reality and strive to be accountable."

He noted that in sectors such as health, education, and many others, public satisfaction is not adequate. Provincial managers and officials must respond kindly and work to resolve issues. This does not require intervention from the capital but depends on their behavior and approach.

"The people want accountability and proper conduct from us, and this is the responsibility of our managers. If citizens are dissatisfied, it indicates a problem. We must show that we are trying to serve them, and even if we cannot fully solve their problems, they will be satisfied if they see our genuine effort," Pezeshkian said.

Addressing reports of patients paying unofficial fees to some doctors, he said, "This issue stems from our performance. Those committing such acts claim the government does not reach the people. We need to reform these management practices and be responsive to citizens."

The President stressed that "we should not fear stating the truth but should fear hiding it." On the issue of cyberspace, he said, "Filtering only conceals the problem. The reality is that with VPNs, people can access all content, often worse than before. We cannot escape reality. Blocking content does not solve the problem; it pushes youth further in that direction."

He added, "We must face reality and find solutions. Ignoring the issue does not help. Even among young people in mosques and religious circles, many use VPNs. Filtering channels nearly 30 trillion rials into the pockets of VPN providers."

Pezeshkian emphasized, "Who says I cannot guide youth in this space with faith, truth, and justice? Officials should serve as models of honesty, integrity, fairness, and efficiency. Criticism should be welcomed, not feared. If I have faults, they must be addressed."

He urged officials to embrace criticism rather than avoid it, stating, "If I am at fault, I must hear it and correct it. We cannot just demand praise. Hearing the truth is part of our duty to act based on justice and fairness."

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Iran Proposes Islamic Transport Task Forces and Financial Fund at OIC Summit

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Iran's Minister of Roads and Urban Development has proposed the establishment of specialized transport task forces and a joint Islamic transport financing mechanism at the second meeting of transport ministers of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) in Istanbul.

According to the Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA), Farzaneh Sadeq, who is attending the summit on behalf of Iran, described the gathering as a historic event held after four decades, initiated by Turkey.

Sadeq emphasized that the meeting represents more than a ceremonial event, calling it a renewed political commitment to redefine the role of the Islamic world in the evolving global transport and trade landscape.

Highlighting the strategic importance of transport infrastructure, Sadeq said no development project can succeed without efficient transportation networks. She noted that global trade routes are being reshaped and competition over transit corridors is intensifying, making coordination among OIC member states increasingly critical.

She referred to initiatives such as the COMCEC "Islamic Corridor of Success" as examples of how institutional coordination and joint projects can yield tangible results.

However, she stressed that policy frameworks must move beyond declarations and translate into operational cooperation. "Physical infrastructure alone is not sufficient," she said, underscoring the need for regulatory harmonization, streamlined border procedures, and intelligent digital systems to avoid costly delays at borders.

Iran formally proposed the creation of three specialized working groups under the OIC framework focusing on logistics, legal and institutional coordination, and transport digitization. The aim, Sadeq said, is to establish a sustainable mechanism for implementing summit decisions and ensuring continuous, results-oriented collaboration rather than limiting engagement to periodic meetings.

In addition, she introduced two operational initiatives: the formation of a "Joint Islamic Transport

Operations Room" to coordinate infrastructure projects, create a unified cargo tracking system, and reduce overlapping permits; and the establishment of an "Islamic Transport Financial Fund" to support joint investment in strategic projects.

The proposed fund would leverage innovative financing tools, including support from the Islamic Development Bank and the issuance of Islamic financial instruments such as infrastructure sukuk.

Sadeq emphasized that transport integration goes beyond trade and contributes to cultural exchange and tourism among Muslim nations.

She highlighted Iran's strategic geographic position at the crossroads of Eurasia and outlined major infrastructure projects aimed at strengthening regional connectivity. These include linking Port of Chabahar to Central Asia's rail network and developing the East-West transit corridor from Bazargan to

Shalamcheh.

The minister announced that rail access to Port of Chabahar—described as the shortest route for regional countries to international waters—is expected to be completed within months. Once finalized, the port's capacity is projected to increase from 8.5 million tons to over 30 million tons.

She also cited progress on the Marand-Cheshmeh Soraya railway project, which will connect Iran's rail network to Turkey's system, transforming the southern branch of the East-West corridor into a fully rail-based transit route.

Sadeq called for a digital revolution in transportation, advocating the use of artificial intelligence for border management, blockchain technology for customs documentation, and the creation of an integrated regional fleet platform.

Concluding her remarks, she expressed hope for deeper transport integration across the Islamic world, stating that connectivity is the foundation of unity and a strategic asset for OIC member states.

Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi and His Bahraini Counterpart, Abdullatif al-Zayani, in a Telephone Conversation Have Discussed Bilateral Ties and Regional Developments

Iran Elected Vice-Chair of UN Commission for Social Development



TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Iran has been elected as the vice-chair of the United Nations Commission for Social Development.

Iran's appointment was approved without objection during a recent meeting of the commission at the UN headquarters in New York.

Iranian representative Abbas Tajik will be one of the vice-chairs of the commission's 65th session.

Also during the meeting, Stefano Guerra from Portugal and Shahriyar Hajiyev from Azerbaijan were named chair and vice-chair of the UN body's sixty-fifth session, respectively.

Addressing the meeting, Guerra highlighted the role of the UN Commission for Social Development as a central multilateral platform for advancing inclusive social policies.

The commission, which is a Commission within the United Nations Economic and Social Council, provides advice to the UN on social development issues.

Established in 1946, it has helped shape global policy frameworks on employment, poverty eradication, social protection and inclusion, including by steering follow-up to agreements such as the 1995 Copenhagen Declaration and the 2025 Doha Political Declaration.

The commission has, over the past years, driven progress on universal social protection, decent work for all, and international focus on groups at risk of exclusion such as people with disabilities, older persons, youth and families.

Iran Puts "Jam-e Jam 1" Into Orbit in Milestone for National Broadcasting



TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Jam-e Jam 1 was placed into orbit minutes after liftoff aboard a Proton-M carrier rocket from the Baikonur Cosmodrome in Kazakhstan, alongside a Russian meteorological satellite.

Iran's national broadcaster has successfully launched its first dedicated geostationary satellite "Jam-e Jam 1", internationally registered as "Iran DBS", marking a strategic step toward strengthening the country's space-based media infrastructure.

The satellite, owned by the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB), was launched into space from the Baikonur Cosmodrome in Kazakhstan. Jam-e Jam 1 was placed into orbit minutes after liftoff aboard a Proton-M carrier rocket, alongside a Russian meteorological satellite.

According to IRIB's Media Development and Technology Department, Jam-e Jam 1 represents the first technical and operational step toward implementing next-generation interactive radio and television broadcasting technology.

The satellite has been designed to transmit interactive audio and video signals to ground-based public broadcasting stations, laying the groundwork for interactive mass broadcasting services.

Based on the scheduled plan, Jam-e Jam 1 will be transferred and stabilized at its final orbital position at 34 degrees East within less than three weeks. The designated orbital slot is expected to provide optimal coverage for IRIB's communications requirements.



Uzbek Fleet Traffic to Iran Surges 117% in 2025



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Traffic by Uzbek transport fleets to Iran increased by 117 percent in 2025, while Iranian fleet traffic to Uzbekistan recorded an 18 percent rise, following the implementation of a joint transport roadmap and the reciprocal removal of \$400 road tolls, Iranian officials announced.

The figures were disclosed by Iran's Minister of Roads and Urban Development, Farzaneh Sadegh, during a meeting with Uzbekistan's Minister of Transport, Ilhom Makhkamov. The talks took place on the sidelines of the second Meeting of Transport Ministers of Islamic Countries, Istanbul.

Sadegh described transport and trade relations between Tehran and Tashkent as entering one of their most dynamic phases in recent years. She emphasized that structured coordination and policy alignment in the road transport sector have played a decisive role in boosting cross-border freight movement and reducing logistical barriers.

Central to this progress has been a jointly developed roadmap aimed at strengthening bilateral road transport cooperation. A key provision of the agreement was the mutual elimination of a \$400 road toll previously imposed on transport fleets operating between the two countries. Officials said the removal of the fee significantly lowered transport costs, improved competitiveness for exporters and importers, and encouraged greater use of overland routes.

"As a result of this mutual understanding, Uzbek fleet traffic to Iran rose by 117 percent in 2025 compared with the previous year," Sadegh said. "At the same time, Iranian fleet traffic to Uzbekistan increased by 18 percent, reflecting a balanced expansion of transport exchanges."

Iran, Turkey Emphasize Expansion of Transport Cooperation



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Iran and Turkey have underscored their commitment to expanding bilateral transport cooperation, including plans for a new rail connection at the Cheshmeh Soraya-Aralik border crossing to complete the East-West rail transit corridor.

Iran's Minister of Roads and Urban Development, Farzaneh Sadegh, met with Turkey's Minister of Transport, Abdulkadir Uraloglu, on the sidelines of the second Meeting of Transport Ministers of Islamic Countries.

During the meeting, Sadegh expressed appreciation for Turkey's hospitality and initiative in hosting the summit, and discussed bilateral cooperation in rail, road, and air transport sectors.

She highlighted the upcoming session of the Iran-Turkey Joint Transport Committee, scheduled for February 2026 after a three-year hiatus, noting that the committee has recorded one of its most productive periods, with negotiations advancing at both technical and strategic levels. She added that the trilateral meeting between Iran, Turkey, and Uzbekistan, held on the sidelines of the summit, was among the first tangible outcomes of the renewed cooperation.

The two sides reviewed joint initiatives across rail, road, and aviation sectors and reaffirmed their determination to expand transport collaboration.

Among the main issues discussed were increasing capacity at shared border crossings, establishing a new rail link at the Cheshmeh Soraya-Aralik border point to complete the eastern-western rail transit route, expanding roll-on/roll-off (Ro-Ro) capacity across Lake Van, and resuming passenger train services on the Tehran-Ankara and Tehran-İstanbul routes.

Iran-China Rail Link via Afghanistan Proposed to Facilitate Goods Transit

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - A proposed rail connection linking Iran to China through Afghanistan could cut transportation distances by up to 50 percent and enable direct freight train movement to Europe, according to the Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA).

The proposed "Herat-Mazar-e-Sharif-Wakhan" railway line is described as a strategic project that would connect China by rail to Europe and West Asia via Afghanistan, Iran, and Turkey, playing a significant role in expanding regional and global trade and transit.

Earlier this month, the rail connection and its economic and investment significance were discussed during a meeting between Afghanistan's acting deputy minister of public works and the CEO of the Islamic Republic of Iran Railways.

Experts have stressed the importance of strengthening rail links with neighboring countries, noting that enhancing freight connectivity with China has become a necessity.

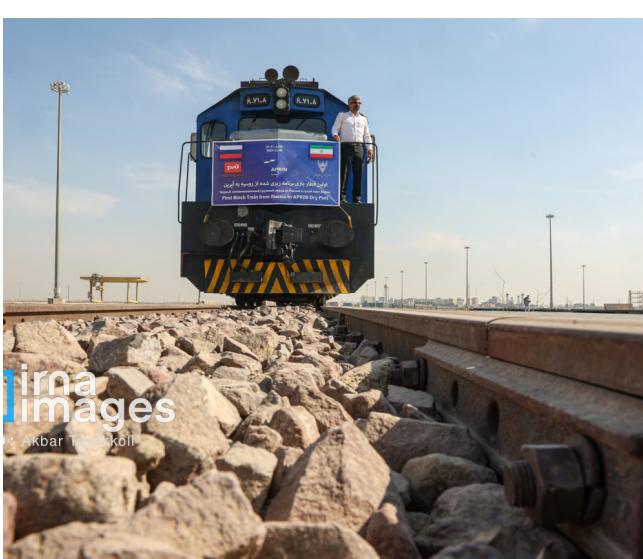
Since the beginning of the current Iranian year, more than 63 freight trains from China bound for Iran and the European Union have entered the country, compared with just seven trains operating on the route last year. The signing of six-party memorandums of understanding to establish unified tariffs along the corridor is expected to further activate the southern branch of the East-West corridor passing through Iran.

Officials estimate that, following agreements among six countries along the China-Europe route, annual train traffic could rise to 300 trains.

Shahriar Naghi-Zadeh, Director General of International Commerce at the Islamic Republic of Iran Railways, said the company has proposed an initiative aimed at improving trade and transport relations between Iran and China.

Under the plan, the Iran-China rail link would pass through Afghanistan using standard gauge tracks (1,435 mm), resolving transit bottlenecks at China's borders with Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan.

Naghi-Zadeh explained that the project is designed to allow trains to travel directly from China to Europe without the need to change bogies or transfer cargo between wide-gauge and standard-gauge wagons.



The proposal has reportedly been welcomed by the parties involved, and technical studies are currently underway to assess investment requirements.

The project includes constructing a 64-kilometer rail segment to Herat and extending the line to Mazar-e-Sharif, ultimately connecting through Afghanistan's Wakhan region to China's Xinjiang province. The route is considered geographically challenging, and in addition to Iranian firms, Afghan companies have expressed readiness to participate in construction.

According to Naghi-Zadeh, developing Afghanistan's rail network on a standard gauge would not only offer economic benefits but also strengthen Afghanistan's integration with Iran's rail system.

Officials say the new route would offer significant time and cost advantages compared to existing corridors, which currently require transshipment at two points — the China-Kazakhstan border and the Turkmenistan-Iran border.

Transshipment, the transfer of cargo to an intermediate destination before reaching its final destination, increases both transit time and costs.

If implemented, the project is expected to reduce transport distances between China and Iran by around 50 percent and enable direct freight train operations to Europe, potentially transforming regional rail transport and boosting trade ties between Tehran and Beijing.

Earlier, Jabar Ali Zakeri, CEO of the Islamic Republic of Iran Railways, announced the formation of a new cargo and transit corridor to Afghanistan. He noted that rail exports and transit from Iran to Afghanistan totaled 15,000 tons during the first eight months of the previous year, compared with 570,000 tons in the first 10 months of the current year.

Zakeri added that rail exports and transit to Afghanistan reached 94,000 tons in the Iranian month of Dey and are expected to surpass 120,000 tons in Bahman. Projections for the next year indicate volumes could reach three million tons, including transit of goods from the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, and Russia.

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One Iranian Diagnosed With Cancer Every Five Minutes, Experts Warn

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - A senior Iranian cancer specialist has warned that nearly one person in Iran is diagnosed with cancer every five minutes, as officials point to rising incidence rates, mounting treatment costs, and gaps in insurance coverage.

According to remarks published by ILNA, the head of Iran's Cancer Research Center recently stated that cancer cases in the country are increasing at one of the fastest rates globally. Cancer is currently the second leading cause of death in Iran after cardiovascular diseases, with approximately 100,000 new cases identified annually.

However, Yasha Makhdoomi, Vice President of the Iranian Society of Radiation Oncology, said the widely cited statistics require clarification. He noted that official figures released annually by the Health Ministry indicate between 170,000 and 180,000 new cancer diagnoses each year. Even if the total were as high as 200,000, he explained, that would translate to roughly 1.9 new patients every five minutes.

Makhdoomi emphasized that cancer rates in Iran, when measured relative to population size, remain moderate. While incidence is lower than in the United States, it is higher than in some other countries. He acknowledged, however, that the growth rate of cancer cases in Iran is slightly above the global average.

Experts say lifestyle factors account for the vast majority of cancer cases. According to available data, about 98 percent of cancer risk is linked to lifestyle and environmental conditions, while only 2 percent is attributed solely to genetic causes. Breast cancer is the most common type in Iran, while stomach cancer is the deadliest.

Makhdoomi pointed to rapid urbanization as a major contributing factor. Before the 1979 revolution, much of the population lived in rural areas; today, most reside in cities. Increased stress, air pollution, dietary changes, and reduced physical activity have all been linked to higher cancer risks.

He explained that cancer is typically a multifactorial disease influenced by both genetic predisposition and environmental triggers. Certain cancer-related genes may increase risk but never



activate unless environmental "promoter" factors—such as tobacco use, pollution, or exposure to harmful chemicals—are present. Smoking, for example, can both trigger and accelerate cancer development, particularly in the lungs, larynx, bladder, and kidneys.

Air pollution has also been associated with lung, kidney, and bladder cancers, while high consumption of processed and fast foods has been linked to colorectal cancer.

Makhdoomi warned that treatment costs are placing increasing strain on patients and the healthcare system. In addition to surgery and radiotherapy, cancer treatment often requires chemotherapy—both traditional and newer targeted drugs—as well as immunotherapy.

While older chemotherapy medications are relatively affordable and partially covered by insurance, newer therapies are significantly more expensive and often lack comprehensive insurance coverage.

Immunotherapy drugs, in particular, carry very high price tags.

Radiotherapy equipment is also costly and largely imported, with more than 90 percent sourced from abroad. Installation requires complex infrastructure, adding to financial burdens.

Iran remains dependent on imported cancer medications and raw materials, though some drugs are produced domestically. Makhdoomi noted that oversight of drug imports and prevention of illegal distribution fall under the responsibility of regulatory bodies, including the Food and Drug Administration.

Makhdoomi cited constitutional provisions stating that safeguarding public health is a core duty of the state and that the government is obligated to provide healthcare services and insurance coverage. However, he stressed that health sector challenges are closely tied to broader economic conditions.

"Health economics is part of the overall economy," he said, arguing that systemic economic issues directly affect healthcare sustainability. While no single official can be solely blamed, he concluded that those responsible for managing the country's broader economic challenges must ultimately be accountable for ensuring adequate healthcare access and cancer prevention efforts.

Non-Oil Exports of Iran's 14th Gov't Surpass \$86b

TEHRAN (IRNA) - The Iranian Customs Administration has reported that non-oil exports under the 14th government have reached \$86 billion, marking a significant achievement in the country's foreign trade. The customs office detailed the 14th government's performance in foreign trade, highlighting that non-oil exports reached 236 million tons, amounting to \$86 billion in value. During the same period, Iran also imported 60 million tons of goods, with a total import value of \$102 billion.

The report further stated that Iran's performance in foreign transit has also been noteworthy. Over 31 million tons of various goods have been transited through Iran's territory since the beginning of the 14th government's term.

Iran Chamber Calls for Trade Exemptions in U.S. Talks



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - A senior official at the Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture has called for any potential diplomatic breakthrough with the United States to include concrete economic gains, warning that negotiations should not remain confined to political and nuclear issues.

Ghadir Ghiyafeh, Vice President of the Iran Chamber, said in an interview with the chamber's news outlet that after a prolonged period of uncertainty—described as "neither war nor peace"—a shift has occurred from military pressure toward negotiations, driven by Iran's initiative, regional backing, and pressure on Washington.

"Although we are still in an ambiguous situation, we hope that the upcoming talks, as announced by foreign policy officials, will lead to clearer outcomes," Ghiyafeh said.

He emphasized that discussions to date have largely focused on nuclear matters, but argued that negotiations should incorporate specific and tangible economic and trade exemptions, particularly those facilitating the movement of goods and exports originating from Iran.

"The broader goal may be the removal of most sanctions, but we must acknowledge that such an outcome appears difficult under current conditions," he said. "Therefore, we need to secure realistic and meaningful economic concessions."

Ghiyafeh stressed that any agreement should yield measurable economic benefits, including expanded oil export capacity. He said that increasing Iran's oil exports beyond current levels must be a central objective of negotiations.

Iranian Diplomat in Dubai Stresses Development of Sustainable Economic Links Among Traders



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The Consul General of Iran in Dubai highlighted the country's scientific and industrial achievements during a ceremony commemorating the anniversary of the Islamic Revolution, addressing business leaders and diplomats residing in the United Arab Emirates.

The ceremony marking the 47th anniversary of the Islamic Revolution and Iran's National Day was held in Dubai with broad participation from senior UAE government officials, prominent international diplomats, and members of the Iranian expatriate and business community.

Alireza Mahmoudi, Consul General of Iran in Dubai and the Northern Emirates, emphasized Iran's scientific and industrial progress and underscored new opportunities for economic cooperation between the two countries.

In his remarks, Mahmoudi described bilateral relations as being rooted in good neighborly ties and deep historical connections. He noted that traders from both countries play a central role in facilitating commercial exchanges, goods transit, and private-sector activities.

He also pointed to significant growth in trade relations in recent years, stating that the active presence of the Iranian community in transportation, services, and investment sectors has played an undeniably role in advancing economic development.

Second U.S. Aircraft Carrier to Head to Middle East

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - The U.S. is sending a second aircraft carrier to the Middle East amid tensions with Iran, U.S. media outlets reported late on Thursday. The aircraft carrier USS Gerald R. Ford and its escort ships will be sent to the Middle East from the Caribbean, the New York Times, which first reported the news, said, citing U.S. officials. The White House and the Pentagon did not immediately respond to a Reuters request for comment outside of regular business hours. Earlier this week, President Donald Trump had said he was considering sending a second aircraft carrier to the Middle East if a deal is not reached with Iran. The first aircraft carrier, the USS Abraham Lincoln and several guided-missile destroyers arrived in the Middle East in January.



IRAN NEWS

Syria Says Army Takes Control of Al-Tanf Base After U.S. Forces Withdraw



DAMASCUS (Dispatches) - Syria's defense ministry said today that the army had taken control of the Al-Tanf base after the withdrawal of US forces deployed there as part of the coalition against the Islamic State group.

"Through coordination between the Syrian and American sides," army units have taken control of the base "and have begun deploying along the Syrian-Iraqi-Jordanian" border nearby, a defense ministry statement said.

Two Syrian military sources told AFP on Wednesday that US forces had withdrawn from the base to Jordan.

One of them said the US forces had been moving equipment out for the past 15 days.

During the Syrian civil war and the fight against the Islamic State (IS), US forces were deployed in the country's Kurdish-controlled northeast and at Al-Tanf, near the borders with Jordan and Iraq.

The Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) had been a major partner of the anti-IS coalition, and were instrumental in the group's territorial defeat in Syria in 2019.

However, following the fall of longtime ruler Bashar al-Assad over a year ago, the United States has drawn closer to the new government in Damascus, recently declaring that the need for its alliance with the Kurds had largely passed.

Syria agreed to join the anti-IS coalition when President Ahmed al-Sharaa visited the White House in November.

U.S., Taiwan Finalize Deal to Cut Tariffs, Boost Purchases of U.S. Goods



WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - Trump administration officials signed a final reciprocal trade agreement that confirmed a 15% U.S. tariff rate for imports from Taiwan, while committing Taiwan to a schedule for eliminating or lowering tariffs on nearly all U.S. goods.

The document released by the U.S. Trade Representative's office on Thursday also commits Taiwan to significantly boost purchases of U.S. goods from 2025 through 2029, including \$44.4 billion of liquefied natural gas and crude oil, \$15.2 billion of civil aircraft and engines, \$25.2 billion of power grid equipment and generators, marine and steelmaking equipment.

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The agreement adds technical language and specific details to a trade framework deal first reached in January that cut tariffs on Taiwanese goods, including from its powerhouse semiconductor industries, to 15% from the 20% initially imposed by Trump. That puts Taiwan on an equal footing with its closest Asian export competitors, South Korea and Japan.

Japan Seizes Chinese Fishing Boat, Arrests Captain

TOKYO (Dispatches) - Japanese authorities seized a Chinese fishing boat and arrested its skipper, authorities said, in a move likely to further heighten tensions with Beijing.

In November, Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi enraged China by suggesting that Japan would intervene militarily if Beijing sought to take Taiwan by force.

"The vessel's captain was ordered to stop for an inspection by a fisheries inspector, but the vessel failed to comply and fled," Japan's fisheries agency said.

"Consequently, the vessel's captain was arrested on the same day," according to a statement.

The incident happened yesterday inside Japan's exclusive economic zone off Nagasaki Prefecture, 89.4 nautical miles (165 kilometres) south-southwest of the island of Meshima, it added.

It was the first time since 2022 that the agency has seized a Chinese fishing boat.

The skipper in the latest incident is a 47-year-old Chinese national. There were 11 people on board including the captain.

China has a number of territorial disputes with Japan, and there have been



repeated incidents around the Senkaku Islands, known as the Diaoyu in China.

The arrest of another Chinese fishing boat captain in 2010 off those islands in the East China Sea became a major diplomatic incident between the two countries.

Japan and China have close economic ties but Takaichi's comments about Taiwan have sent relations spiralling downwards again.

China has long insisted that Taiwan, occupied for decades by Japan until 1945, is its territory and has not ruled out force to achieve "reunification".

Taiwanese President Lai Ching-te told AFP in an interview this week that countries in the region would be China's next targets should Beijing seize the democratic island.

Lai said if China were to take Taiwan, Beijing would become "more aggressive, undermining peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific and the rules-based international order".

"The next countries under threat would be Japan, the Philippines, and others in the Indo-Pacific region, with repercussions eventually reaching the Americas and Europe," he said.

Bangladesh Nationalist Party Claims Victory in Landmark Post-Hasina Election



DHAKA (Dispatches) - Bangladesh's opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), led by Tarique Rahman, was projected to win a landslide in the first election since a deadly 2024 uprising, local television channels said on Friday. Senior BNP leader Ruhul Kabir Rizvi claimed a "sweeping victory".

The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) on Friday claimed a thumping win in the first elections held since a deadly 2024 uprising, with leader Rahman poised to become prime minister.

Final results are still to come, but the United States was swift to offer its congratulations to Rahman and the BNP for an "historic victory", its embassy in Dhaka said.

Rahman had told AFP two days before polling he was "confident" that his party - crushed during the 15 years of ousted premier Sheikh Hasina's autocratic rule - would regain power in the South Asian nation of 170 million people.

"This victory was expected. It is not surprising that the people of Bangladesh have placed their trust in a party ... capable of realising the dreams that our youth envisioned during the uprising," Salahuddin Ahmed, a leading BNP committee member, told AFP Friday.

"This is not a time for celebration, as we will face mounting challenges in building a country free from discrimination."

At 8am (0200 GMT), broadcasters projected that the BNP had pushed well past the 150-seat threshold to secure a clear majority in parliament - predicting they would win more than two-thirds of seats.

Broadcasters projected that the BNP had secured a two-thirds majority with 212 seats in parliament, with Jamaat winning 76 - a huge leap from past results, but far short of the outright win it had campaigned for.

Jamaat chief Shafiqur Rahman, 67, who mounted a disciplined grassroots campaign on a platform of justice and ending corruption, has not commented on the predicted results.

The Election Commission, who said that turnout was 59 percent, is expected to release final results later on Friday, for a total of the 299 constituencies of 300 in which voting took place.

A further 50 seats in parliament reserved for women will be named from party lists.

Senior BNP leader Ruhul Kabir Rizvi, in a party statement, claimed a "sweeping victory", without giving figures, calling for followers to give thanks in prayer on Friday rather than celebrate on the streets.

"There will be no victory rally despite the BNP's sweeping victory," the statement said. "We will hold special prayers at mosques after Jumma (Friday) prayers across the country."

Party workers spent the whole night in front of the BNP offices.

"We will join the nation-building effort led by Tarique Rahman," Md Fazlur Rahman, 45, told AFP.

"Over the last 17 years, we have suffered a lot, faced multiple politically motivated cases and lost a factory I owned."

Heavy deployments of security forces are posted countrywide, and UN experts warned ahead of the voting of "growing intolerance, threats and attacks", and a "tsunami of disinformation".

Political clashes killed five people and injured more than 600 during campaigning, police records show.

But polling day was largely peaceful, according to the Election Commission, which reported only "a few minor disruptions".

Interim leader Muhammad Yunus, who will step down once the new government takes power, has urged all sides to stay calm.

"We may have differences of opinion, but we must remain united in the greater national interest," he said.

The 85-year-old Nobel Peace Prize winner has led Bangladesh since Hasina's rule ended with her ouster

in August 2024.

His administration barred her Awami League party from contesting the polls.

Yunus, after casting his vote, said the country had "ended the nightmare and begun a new dream".

Hasina, 78, sentenced to death in absentia for crimes against humanity, issued a statement from hiding in India, where she called the vote an "illegal and unconstitutional election".

Yunus has championed a sweeping democratic reform charter to overhaul what he called a "completely broken" system of government and to prevent a return to one-party rule.

Voters also took part in a referendum on the charter and whether to endorse its proposals for prime ministerial term limits, a new upper house of parliament, stronger presidential powers and greater judicial independence.

Television projections suggested the electorate had backed the charter.

North Korea Warns of Terrible Response Over South Korean Drone Flights



SEOUL (Dispatches) - North Korea on Friday warned of a "terrible response" if more drones cross its border from the South, escalating tensions despite Seoul's efforts to improve ties. Pyongyang said it shot down a surveillance drone last month. Kim Yo Jong cautioned that further incursions would trigger severe consequences.

South Korean President Lee Jae Myung has sought to repair ties with North Korea since taking office last year, criticizing his predecessor for allegedly sending drones to scatter propaganda over Pyongyang.

But North Korea claims it shot down a surveillance drone just last month, an incident which threatens to blight Lee's efforts to patch things up.

Kim Yo Jong, the powerful sister of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, warned of severe repercussions if the drones did not stop.

"I give advance warning that reoccurrence of such provocation as violating the inalienable sovereignty of the DPRK will surely provoke a terrible response," Kim said in a statement carried by Pyongyang's official Korea Central News Agency.

"We don't care who the very manipulator of the drone infiltration into the airspace of the DPRK is and whether it is an individual or a civilian organisation," she added, using the acronym for North Korea's official name.

Seoul initially denied any official involvement in the January drone incursion, with officials suggesting it was the work of civilians.

But a joint military-police task force announced earlier this week it was investigating three active-duty soldiers and one spy agency staffer in an

effort to "thoroughly establish the truth".

Seoul's unification minister Chung Dong-young expressed "deep regret" earlier this week.

Any government involvement in the January drone incursion would run counter to Lee's efforts to lower the temperature with Pyongyang.

Chung has previously suggested the drone may have been the work of government staffers still loyal to former hardline leader Yoon Suk Yeol.

Kim Yo Jong said that Chung's conciliatory remarks were "quite sensible

behavior".

The statement by Kim Yo Jong suggests that Pyongyang is "closely monitoring the latest developments in the South Korean side", Yang Moo-jin, former president of the University of North Korean Studies, told AFP.

The North Korean military downed a drone carrying "surveillance equipment" in early January, according to a statement published by the state-run KCNA.

Photos showed the wreckage of a winged craft scattered across the ground next to a collection of grey and blue components that allegedly included cameras.

The drone had stored footage of "important targets" including border areas, a military spokesman said at the time.

South Korea's disgraced ex-president Yoon Suk Yeol was accused of using unmanned drones to scatter propaganda leaflets over North Korea in 2024.

Lee has vowed to mend ties with North Korea by stamping out such provocations, and has even suggested a rare apology may be warranted.

A UN Security Council committee recently approved exemptions allowing fresh flows of food and medicine into North Korea.

Analysts said this could kickstart efforts to lure Pyongyang into nuclear negotiations with US President Donald Trump.

North Korea is preparing to hold a landmark party congress at the end of February.

The political showcase - typically held just once every five years - will lay out the nation's foreign policy, war planning and nuclear ambitions for the next five years.

Japan Seizes Chinese Fishing Boat, Arrests Captain



TOKYO (Dispatches) - Japanese authorities seized a Chinese fishing boat and arrested its skipper, authorities said, in a move likely to further heighten tensions with Beijing.

In November, Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi enraged China by suggesting that Japan would intervene militarily if Beijing sought to take Taiwan by force.

"The vessel's captain was ordered to stop for an inspection by a fisheries inspector, but the vessel failed to comply and fled," Japan's fisheries agency said.

"Consequently, the vessel's captain was arrested on the same day," according to a statement.

The incident happened yesterday inside Japan's exclusive economic zone off Nagasaki Prefecture, 89.4 nautical miles (165 kilometres) south-southwest of the island of Meshima, it added.

It was the first time since 2022 that the agency has seized a Chinese fishing boat.

The skipper in the latest incident is a 47-year-old Chinese national. There were 11 people on board including the captain.

China has a number of territorial disputes with Japan, and there have been

Atletico Madrid Hammer Barcelona 4-0 in Copa del Rey Semis First Leg

MADRID (Dispatches) - Atletico Madrid hammered Copa del Rey holders Barcelona 4-0 in the first leg of their semi-final.

After an Eric Garcia own goal sent Diego Simeone's side ahead early on, Antoine Griezmann, Ademola Lookman and Julian Alvarez struck to give Atletico a landslide lead by half-time.

Barca defender Garcia was sent off in the final stages, with Atletico maintaining their significant advantage on the record 32-time winners, which they will take into the second leg at Camp Nou on March 3.

Both sides missed good chances in the second half, with Barca's Pau Cubarsi having a goal disallowed before Garcia was sent off in the final stages.

Atletico were able to preserve their significant advantage on the record 32-time winners, which they will take into the second leg at Camp Nou on March 3.

"In the first 45 minutes we got a great lesson for us. Sometimes it's good to get (that) in the right moment, maybe today is the right moment," Flick told reporters.

"The second half was much better and we have one game more and we will fight (to win) that."

Well off the pace in La Liga and not showing the quality of a side likely to go deep in the Champions League, the Copa del Rey represents Atletico's best chance of silverware this season.

With that motivation in mind, the Rojiblanco conjured the best football of their season to



completely dismantle the Spanish champions in the first half, as the fans lapped it up.

"I think our fans need these games, they've been coming for years, pushing, they're always there, they need big matches," said Simeone.

"We had a great first half, reading the game very well, we were very efficient and calm in the final third."

The hosts took the lead after seven minutes when Garcia's pass, on the uneven Metropolitano stadium pitch, bobbled towards Joan Garcia and then under the goalkeeper's foot and into the net.

Former Barca striker Griezmann slid home the second as Atletico breached the Catalans' high defensive line repeatedly, leaning on the pace of Giuliano Simeone and Lookman.

Fernan Lopez hit the crossbar for Barceloneta but it was one-way traffic and Atletico nearly got a third when Alvarez's effort was cleared off the line by Jules Kounde.

Eventually Nigerian international Lookman steered home the third at the end of a fine team move, with overjoyed Atletico coach Simeone racing down the touchline in celebration.

Having spent much of the season demanding his team take their chances more clinically, all of the Argentine's dreams came true at once.

Alvarez, who had failed to score in his last 11 matches, ended his drought for Atletico's fourth, ramming home from just inside the area.

LeBron James Nabs Another NBA Milestone With Triple-Double in Lakers Win

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - Superstar LeBron James nabbed another NBA record on Thursday, becoming at 41 the oldest player to record a triple-double as he propelled the Lakers to a 124-104 victory over the Dallas Mavericks.

James, a four-time champion and the NBA's all-time leading scorer now in his unprecedented 23rd season, scored a game-high 28 points, grabbed 10 rebounds and handed out 12 assists, pulling down his final rebound with just over two minutes remaining.

He overtook Karl Malone -- who was 40 years, 127 days old when he recorded a triple-double for the Lakers in a win over San Antonio on November 28, 2003.

James's feat comes three days before his 22nd All-Star Game appearance.

Lakers coach JJ Redick said it was James's level of commitment after more than two decades in the league that continues to impress him the most.

"I don't take for granted how good he is," Redick said. "I recognize that on a daily basis."

"The more remarkable thing is how much he cares in his 23rd year with all his accomplishments. He's going to get another 'oldest player to do X, Y, or Z.'

"He's going to get another one of that. He is going to further cement his scoring record, he's going to do all those things."

"It's really just the day-to-day professionalism and care



factor that he exhibits that is the most remarkable thing."

With the Lakers again without NBA scoring leader Luka Doncic, James set an early tone with 14 first-quarter points and the Lakers bounced back from two straight defeats.

"The win, that's the most important thing," said James, who received a standing ovation when he was subbed out for son Bronny James, seconds after nabbing his 10th rebound.

Elsewhere, Milwaukee's Ousmane Dieng starred against his former team as the Bucks beat the NBA champion Oklahoma City Thunder 110-93.

The game in Oklahoma City lost some star power with OKC's reigning NBA Most Valuable Player Shai Gilgeous-Alexander missing a fifth straight contest with an abdominal strain and Milwaukee's two-time MVP Giannis Antetokounmpo sitting out a ninth straight game with a calf strain.

French forward Dieng, who landed in Milwaukee after being dealt by the Thunder before the trade deadline, scored 19 points with 11 rebounds, six assists and four blocked shots.

AJ Green added 17 points and Bobby Portis had 15 points and 12 rebounds off the bench for Milwaukee, who had seven players score in double figures.

Arsenal Held by Brentford to Offer Man City Premier League Title Hope

LONDON (Dispatches) - Arsenal missed the chance to extend their Premier League lead to six points as Brentford rattled the Gunners in a 1-1 draw to give Manchester City hope in the title race.

Noni Madueke headed the leaders in front on the hour mark, but the Bees were well worthy of at least a point and levelled through Kean Lewis-Potter.

Arsenal's lead at the top of the table now stands at four points as they aim for a first league title in 22 years.

But Mikel Arteta's men still have to travel to second-placed City in the remaining 12 games of the season.

A point boosted Brentford's bid to qualify for European football for the first time as they remain in seventh.

Keith Andrews' side have only been beaten twice at home all season and Arsenal can count themselves fortunate not to have suffered just a fourth league defeat of the campaign.

David Raya foiled his former club with a stunning save to claw away Igor Thiago's powerful header with the best



chance of the first half.

Arsenal were missing William Saliba and Kai Havertz through illness and injury respectively, but were boosted by the return of Martin Odegaard and Bukayo Saka on the bench.

Arteaga sent for Odegaard at half-time to turn the tide and the visitors started the second period with far more intent.

Arsenal's pressure had its reward when Madueke rose highest at the back post to head Piero Hincapie's cross back across Caoimhin Kelleher.

However, the visitors were guilty of trying to hold onto their advantage rather than continuing to take the game to Brentford.

Thiago stung the palms of Raya once more as the home side grew in confidence.

Lewis Potter should have levelled earlier when he headed wide from a corner when completely unmarked.

World Cup 2026 Ticket Resale Prices Skyrocket



WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - Ticket prices for the 2026 World Cup have skyrocketed on FIFA's official resale platform, with seats for many matches listed at several times their face value even though most tickets have only recently been distributed following the end of the main sales phase in January.

Weeks after FIFA President Gianni Infantino warned that tickets made available on resale sites were likely to come with an exorbitant price tag, those fears have come to pass on world football's own platform.

As of Wednesday, a "category three" seat — the highest section of the stands — for the tournament's opening game between Mexico and South Africa at Mexico City's Azteca Stadium on June 11 was listed at US\$5,324, compared to an original price of US\$895.

One category three seat for the World Cup final on July 19 at East Rutherford, New Jersey, meanwhile, was being advertised for an eye-watering US\$143,750 — more than 41 times its original face value of US\$3,450.

The cheapest available ticket for the final on the resale site was listed at US\$9,775.

In a few rare cases, though, some ticket prices have actually decreased. One ticket for Austria's group game with Jordan at the Levi's Stadium in California — which hosted Sunday's Super Bowl — is being offered at US\$552 despite costing its original buyer US\$620.

For football fans around the world, some of the prices on FIFA's resale site are confirmation of what they have railed against since the tournament draw in December.

Ceferin Opposes Staging Domestic League Matches Abroad



BRUSSELS (Dispatches) - UEFA president Aleksander Ceferin opposed the idea of hosting domestic matches abroad in a speech at the European body's 50th Congress on Thursday, saying European leagues should not risk eroding their supporters' loyalty for short-term goals.

Ceferin, speaking a day after UEFA reached a settlement with Real Madrid that ended their legal feud over the ill-fated European Super League, also stressed the need for European soccer to retain a single, open pyramid.

A LaLiga match between Villarreal and Barcelona was scheduled to take place in the United States, and a Serie A game between AC Milan and Como was set to be held in Australia, before their respective league authorities cancelled the plans last year.

Ceferin advised clubs against trading "roots for reach".

"Domestic leagues draw their strength from their territory, their traditions and match-going fans. Exporting domestic matches abroad might serve short-term interests but it weakens connection and erodes loyalty," the Slovenian lawyer and soccer administrator said.

"How do you build identity if you remove the game from its home... how do you sustain local passion if you trade it away?"

Ceferin, who has been the UEFA president since 2016, said European soccer "will never be closed," in an apparent reference to the proposed European Super League, which had originally proposed a model that guaranteed the participation of some of the most popular clubs.