

Ebrahim Azizi, Chairman of the Iranian Parliament's National Security and Foreign Policy Commission, Is Leading a Parliamentary Delegation on an Official Visit to Saudi Arabia for Talks With Saudi Official

IRAN NEWS

The 16th Specialized Wound Treatment Clinic Based on Cold Plasma Technology Was Inaugurated in Firouzabad in the Presence of Head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) Mohammad Eslami

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No Threats of Submission in Talks With the U.S.



ISNA PHOTO
Ahmed Mousavi

IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Seyed Abbas Araghchi, Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister, stated that Tehran's upcoming negotiations with the United States will focus solely on reaching a fair and balanced nuclear agreement, emphasizing that submission under threat is not on the agenda. Araghchi is in Geneva to participate in indirect talks between Iran and the U.S., facilitated by Oman, aimed at resolving outstanding nuclear issues and regional tensions.

In a post on his official social media account, Araghchi said he would meet with Rafael Grossi, Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency, for technical discussions with Iranian nuclear experts. Prior to the diplomatic consultations with the U.S., scheduled for Tuesday, he will also meet with Badr Al-Busaidi, Oman's Foreign Minister.

"Real initiatives to reach a fair and balanced agreement brought me to Geneva," Araghchi said. "Submission in the face of threats is absolutely not part of the agenda."

The second round of indirect talks comes seven months after a period of heightened tension, during which U.S. actions in support of Israel included attacks on Iranian nuclear facilities while Oman mediated earlier nuclear discussions. According to Iranian officials, these talks aim to resolve remaining issues around Iran's nuclear program and the lifting of international sanctions.

Iran's Deterrence Has Made U.S. Think Twice Before Taking Any Action



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's civil defense chief says the country has devised effective measures to deter any hostile scenarios being planned by the United States.

Brigadier General Gholamreza Jalali, who leads Iran's National Organization for Passive Defense, said on Monday that the country's robust defense strategies have compelled the US and the Israeli regime to think twice before taking any potential military action against Iranian territory.

"By designing credible defense equations, the Islamic Republic of Iran has managed to control the threats posed by the United States and the Zionist regime at a deterrence level and force the enemy to calculate the costs and benefits of any action against the country," Jalali said during a speech in southern Iran.

His remarks come amid a significant buildup of US military assets in regional waters near Iran, which has heightened the potential for a military confrontation between the two countries.

Tensions de-escalated earlier this month when delegations from Iran and the United States held an initial round of nuclear talks in Oman.

Tehran Ready for Fair Nuclear Talks

IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Ali Larijani, Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, has stated that Tehran is prepared for fair and constructive nuclear negotiations that address international concerns while safeguarding the country's national security. In an extensive interview with Al Jazeera, Larijani emphasized that Iran is open to dialogue that is both "reasonable and equitable," provided it does not serve as a tool to delay progress or introduce extraneous issues beyond the nuclear framework.

He clarified that, contrary to some reports, Iran has not submitted any formal written response to U.S. demands. Instead, discussions remain ongoing and are focused on exchanging views. According to Larijani, regional countries support reaching a political solution to the nuclear issue and encourage dialogue over confrontation.

"Iran evaluates negotiations positively, but only if they are fair, reasonable, and do not endanger our national security," Larijani said. He stressed that any negotiation must remain within the nuclear framework and not be used to pressure Tehran on unrelated issues.

Larijani reaffirmed Iran's commitment to the oversight of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) under the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. He argued that calls for "zero enrichment" are unrealistic, pointing out that Iran's nuclear knowledge cannot be erased politically and that the country has legitimate medical and research needs.

He cited the Tehran research reactor as a case in point, which requires 20 percent enriched uranium to produce radiopharmaceuticals for cancer patients. "The Agency can inspect this reactor," Larijani said. "There is nothing secret here. These processes should not be politicized or presented as mysterious; they are transparent and verifiable by international oversight."

He added that enrichment is essential for legitimate purposes, highlighting that eliminating uranium enrichment entirely would make no technical sense.

Addressing regional security, Larijani stated that Iran's missile program was not discussed in recent negotiations but remains an essential element of the country's national defense. "Defensive deterrence is non-negotiable," he said.

He also warned that Israel's actions in the region aim to provoke conflict and claimed that targeted assassinations of Iranian commanders and scientists had failed to weaken Tehran's military capabilities. "Israel assassinated some of our leaders, but our missile systems remain fully operational. Attacks, no matter how intense, cannot eliminate ideology or dismantle our strategic structures," Larijani asserted.

Larijani stressed the strength and resilience of Iran's regional allies. He stated that Lebanon's Hezbollah has restored its capabilities and possesses significant capacity to counter Israel. On Gaza, he highlighted that despite Israel's extensive bombardment, Hamas continues to govern the territory effectively. He noted that prolonged attacks have failed to



dismantle the organization, emphasizing that the resilience and operational capacity of these groups remain intact.

Regarding broader conflict, Larijani downplayed the likelihood of a major regional war. He said past experiences indicate that escalations rarely benefit aggressors and argued that Iran is fully prepared for any scenario without seeking to ignite conflict. "Iran is not pursuing war, but we will not succumb to threats," he said. "Our strategy combines negotiation with credible deterrence. Recent confrontations only strengthened the axis of resistance, allowing us to reorganize and consolidate rather than weaken."

Larijani praised the mediation efforts of Qatar and emphasized that consultations with Doha reflect a shared commitment to preventing

escalation. He highlighted the importance of expanding trade ties and regional cooperation with Qatar and Oman, including in economic matters, regional diplomacy, and broader international issues.

On the international stage, Larijani reaffirmed Iran's cooperation with China and Russia, describing it as mutually beneficial. He noted that support from these countries in the United Nations Security Council reflects a political partnership and added that Tehran's pivot toward the East resulted from what he described as breaches of commitment by Western powers following the 2015 nuclear agreement.

Larijani stressed that future talks with the United States should focus exclusively on the nuclear file. He rejected including Iran's missile program or other security matters in negotiations, describing such issues as integral to national security and non-negotiable. "If the U.S. wants assurance that Iran will not develop nuclear weapons, we fully agree. This establishes a reasonable and shared basis for discussion," he said.

He reiterated Iran's commitment to transparency and compliance with IAEA inspections, highlighting that nuclear activities are conducted under full international oversight. "The production of nuclear technology cannot be hidden; it is subject to inspection, and we accept this monitoring," Larijani said.

Larijani concluded by reiterating that Iran is prepared for all potential scenarios. He emphasized that the country seeks stability and negotiation rather than conflict but will continue to maintain credible deterrence to safeguard its security. "The axis of resistance has proven its resilience against shocks, assassinations, and attacks. Recent confrontations did not weaken our position; they strengthened our organization and preparedness," he said.

Overall, Larijani presented Tehran as committed to constructive nuclear dialogue, emphasizing fairness, reasonableness, and security, while underscoring Iran's resilience, regional partnerships, and readiness to respond to any contingency without pursuing unnecessary conflict.

President Warns of Economic Pressure Campaigns by Foreign Adversaries Amid Domestic Challenges

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - President, Masoud Pezeshkian, warned that the country is facing both domestic economic hardships and external pressures deliberately designed to foster public discontent. Speaking during the 152nd session of the Cabinet on Sunday, he emphasized that foreign adversaries openly acknowledge attempts to intensify economic strain on Iran to generate dissatisfaction toward government officials.

The meeting, held under the presidency of Pezeshkian, included reports from cabinet members on cultural, economic, foreign policy, and energy sectors. The session highlighted the intersection of domestic economic challenges and international efforts to exacerbate societal tensions.

Addressing the role of culture and the arts, the Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance, along with the Deputy for Cinema Affairs and Shahsavari, Secretary of the Fajr Film Festival, reported on recent national cultural events. They noted that 145 theater groups with approximately 1,000 artists participated in the national theater festival, while 60 music groups with 800 artists performed in the national music festival.

President Pezeshkian praised the continued engagement of artists despite challenging conditions. "In this foggy and turbulent environment, many unfortunate events have occurred, yet our artists showed up and performed. This dedication is highly commendable," he said. He stressed that Iranian society is "wounded" and that these wounds must be addressed to prevent broader societal harm.

On the economic front, Pezeshkian acknowledged the severe pressures on ordinary citizens. "People are suffering from economic hardships, and on top of that, external pressures exist. Our adversaries openly state that they intend to increase economic pressure to foster dissatisfaction against our officials," he noted.

The President also reiterated the importance of government support for cultural initiatives. He instructed relevant ministries to provide necessary assistance and urged agencies to submit reports for further follow-up. He highlighted the large turnout of citizens in the recent 22 Bahman (February 11) rallies, describing public



participation as unprecedented in recent years. He expressed gratitude to the Iranian people and to the Supreme Leader for their ongoing support.

Pezeshkian further ordered the Minister of Intelligence to review cases involving detained artists to ensure their issues are resolved appropriately. In addition, the Minister of Culture provided updates on nationwide ceremonies marking the 40th day memorials for recent casualties, including events in Tehran, Mashhad, and across all provinces.

The session also addressed cultural heritage and tourism plans for the upcoming Nowruz (Persian New Year) holidays. President Pezeshkian emphasized respect for public traditions and highlighted the government's readiness to provide facilities for gatherings and travel during these cultural celebrations.

Foreign policy discussions included a report by Abbas Araghchi on the latest developments in negotiations between Iran and the United States, reflecting ongoing diplomatic efforts mediated by Oman.

Energy coordination was another key agenda item. The head of the energy working group reported on electricity, water, and diesel consumption across residential, industrial, and power generation sectors, noting improved reserves compared to previous years due to enhanced management.

Finally, the head of IRIB provided a report on the successful launch and orbital stabilization of the national satellite, marking a significant technological achievement for Iran's state media network.

Throughout the session, President Pezeshkian underscored that domestic stability, cultural vitality, and economic resilience remain priorities, especially amid external attempts to manipulate public sentiment through heightened economic pressures. He stressed that government institutions must act responsibly to support citizens, preserve cultural traditions, and maintain national resilience in the face of both domestic and international challenges.

Any Confrontation With Iran Will Teach U.S. President a Harsh Lesson



TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Iran's top military official has warned US President Donald Trump against any confrontation with the Islamic Republic, saying such action would serve as a harsh lesson for Washington.

"Trump should know that he would be entering a confrontation that gives harsh lessons, the outcome of which would ensure that he no longer bellows threats around the world," Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces Major General Abdolrahim Mousavi said on Sunday.

He added that statements of the president of the United States, which claims to be a superpower, are "reckless" and "not befitting of a president."

The top military commander also cast doubt on Trump's war rhetoric, asking, "If Trump truly intends to wage war, why does he speak of negotiations?"

Mousavi's warning comes after months of escalating rhetoric from President Trump, who has repeatedly threatened military action against Iran.

Trump has deployed military forces to the region, heightening concerns about possible new military action. US officials said on Friday that the Pentagon was sending an additional aircraft carrier to the region, adding thousands more troops along with fighter aircraft and guided-missile destroyers.

In late January, Trump spoke of "another beautiful armada" of warships heading toward Iran and claimed that failure to reach a deal would bring consequences "far worse" than the June strikes on Iranian nuclear facilities.

Anti-war organizations, however, caution that another confrontation would be disastrous, pointing to the 12-Day War in June 2025 as a stark example.

Any Sustainable Iran-U.S. Deal Must Deliver Economic Benefits for Washington



TEHRAN (PressTV) - A senior Iranian diplomat has said that any sustainable agreement between Iran and the United States must provide clear and tangible economic benefits for both Washington and Tehran as indirect talks are set to resume next week.

Deputy Foreign Minister for Economic Diplomacy Hamid Ghanbari made the remarks during a meeting of the Council of Heads of Commissions of the Iranian Chamber of Commerce on Sunday.

Ghanbari went on to say that under the previous agreement between Tehran and Washington, the United States did not derive sufficient economic benefit, which he described as a factor contributing to its lack of durability.

"For an agreement to be sustainable, the US must also be able to gain economic benefits," he said.

Ghanbari emphasized that such benefits should be defined in sectors offering high economic returns and relatively rapid implementation.

He further warned that proposals that are complex, low-yielding, or politically sensitive domestically could once again complicate efforts to reach a durable accord.



Caspian Port Sees 181% Increase in Exports

TEHRAN (IRNA) - The Caspian Port has witnessed a remarkable 181% growth in exports during the first 10 months of the current Iranian calendar year (beginning March 21), according to a senior official from the Anzali Free Zone Organization in Iran. Meysam Mohammadjadeh, Deputy Director for Ports and Caspian Basin Affairs, announced on Monday that more than 310 thousand tons of goods were exported in the past 10 months, a significant jump compared to the same period last year. Referring to operational indicators and the role of this port in foreign trade and import of basic goods to Iran, he reported that the amount of unloading and loading there exceeded 978 thousand tons, registering a 53 percent growth.

Agricultural and Quarantine Cooperation Between Iran and Tanzania to Expand



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The head of Iran's Plant Protection Organization has emphasized the shared agricultural and plant protection capacities of Iran and Tanzania, calling for expanded bilateral cooperation, particularly in plant quarantine, control of common pests, and facilitation of agricultural trade.

Maryam Jalili-Moqaddam made the remarks during a meeting with Azim Doji, a Tanzanian economic and scientific figure. The meeting was coordinated by the International Scientific and Technological Cooperation Development Organization of the Iranian Presidency.

Expressing hope for strengthening relations between the two countries, Jalili-Moqaddam stated that the Islamic Republic of Iran is interested in expanding its trade relations—especially in the agricultural sector—with friendly countries, including Tanzania.

Referring to shared pests such as the desert locust, she noted that since both Iran and Tanzania are members of the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC), the two countries could sign a plant quarantine memorandum of understanding between their respective plant protection organizations. Such an agreement would enable the design and implementation of joint training programs on monitoring, early warning, and control of desert locust infestations.

The head of Iran's Plant Protection Organization also stressed the importance of transferring technical knowledge in pest monitoring systems, modern technologies, and laboratory diagnostic techniques. She added that organizing joint training courses in plant quarantine could play an effective role in enhancing the specialized capacities of both sides.

Iran Ranks as World's Second-Largest Date Producer



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - As the holy month of Ramadan approaches, Iranian authorities and industry representatives have moved to ensure stable supply and pricing of dates, one of the most widely consumed foods during the fasting month. The head of the National Date Association of Iran announced that the price of Mazafati dates for distribution through municipal markets and official supply networks has been set at approximately 310,000 toman per kilogram.

Rashid Farrokhi, speaking to ISNA, said the price was determined in coordination with the Ministry of Agriculture Jihad to regulate the market and prevent price volatility during the high-demand Ramadan period.

Despite concerns earlier this year over climate-related challenges—including water shortages, power outages, and other environmental constraints—Farrokhi said national production has reached an acceptable level. He estimated total date output for the current year at between 1.35 million and 1.4 million tons.

“From a production standpoint, there is no significant problem,” he said, adding that current reserves are sufficient to meet domestic demand not only during Ramadan but also until the next harvest season.

Farrokhi described dates as one of the most affordable staples in the household food basket, noting that although overall inflation has ranged between 40 and 50 percent—figures acknowledged by the government—such increases have not been fully reflected in date prices. As a result, he said, both pricing and supply conditions remain relatively stable.

To further safeguard the market, chain stores, municipal fruit and vegetable markets, and rural cooperative distribution networks have purchased dates in advance for off-season storage. These stocks will be released during Ramadan to prevent shortages.

Iran to Become Regional Food Hub Through North-South Corridor

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Minister of Agriculture Jihad has announced that the country, by leveraging its strategic position along the International North-South Transport Corridor, is poised to become a major regional food hub and a key center for the exchange of essential commodities in the near future.

Speaking at a specialized meeting held Sunday in Sari, the capital of Sari, Gholamreza Nouri Ghezeli highlighted Iran's extensive agricultural and infrastructural capacities. The session focused on reviewing obstacles and proposing solutions for the import of essential goods and livestock feed inputs.

The meeting was attended by senior provincial officials, including the governors of Mazandaran Province, Golestan Province, and Gilan Province, along with high-ranking local authorities and representatives of the private sector.



Emphasizing Iran's geographical advantage, Nouri Ghezeli stated that the country's location along the North-South Corridor, combined with rising food demand in Africa, positions it to become a central food distribution point for the region. He noted that the corridor enhances connectivity between South Asia, the Middle East, Russia, and Europe, creating new opportunities for trade in essential agricultural commodities.

The minister underscored that Iran has already developed infrastructure well beyond its domestic needs in several key sectors. “In flour milling, oilseed processing, and animal feed production, we have built infrastructure equivalent to three times the country's current requirements,” he said.

According to the minister, Iran's flour industry has a total installed capacity of 30 million tons, yet only about 10 million tons are currently utilized. In the oil extraction sector, he added, the country is capable of processing up to five million tons annually. These figures, he said, reflect the country's readiness to expand its role as a processing and re-export hub for agricultural commodities.

Addressing food security concerns ahead of the holy month of Ramadan and the Persian New Year (Nowruz), Nouri Ghezeli confirmed that the government has secured and stored three times the projected domestic demand for essential goods. In a first-time development, he noted, 25,000 tons of goods were simultaneously handled at northern ports alongside southern ports, signaling improved logistical coordination and enhanced trade flows.

The minister also stressed the importance of granting greater executive authority to

provincial governors in order to resolve economic and commercial bottlenecks more efficiently. He revealed that specific operational barriers have been identified in alternative import mechanisms, including imports without foreign currency transfer and barter trade arrangements. He issued directives for serious follow-up measures to address these challenges.

Providing further context, Nouri Ghezeli stated that Iran currently faces an approximately \$8 billion trade deficit in the agricultural and food sector, with \$16 billion in imports compared to \$8 billion in exports. To address this imbalance, the government had introduced several measures aimed at facilitating imports. These included small-scale border trade mechanisms such as sailor imports and cross-border portage, as well as larger frameworks like imports without currency transfer and barter agreements.

However, the minister acknowledged that the performance of these mechanisms—particularly the import schemes without foreign currency transfer and barter arrangements, which had been emphasized by the president—has fallen significantly short of expectations. “Despite the approvals and efforts made, we have not witnessed substantial progress in this area,” he said, adding that a portion of imports has instead shifted toward traditional methods such as small-vessel trade.

He further announced that, by order of the president, regional meetings with governors across the country have been placed on the agenda to conduct a thorough assessment of the issue and evaluate the reasons behind the shortfall in achieving set targets.

Referring to the government's earlier decision in recent months to lift certain restrictions on the import of essential goods until the end of the year, Nouri Ghezeli emphasized the need for a detailed review of why the announced processes—particularly imports without currency transfer and barter trade—have not delivered the anticipated results.

Concluding his remarks, the minister reiterated that strengthening Iran's logistical capabilities through the North-South Corridor, maximizing idle industrial capacity, and removing trade bottlenecks would play a crucial role in transforming the country into a regional hub for food production, processing, and distribution.

Russia's Share in Iran's Oil Production to Increase

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - A senior official at Iran's Ministry of Oil has announced that major Russian companies are currently investing in seven Iranian oil fields and account for approximately six percent of the country's total oil production, with projections indicating that this share could rise to 12 percent in the coming years. The official also highlighted expanding bilateral cooperation in the construction of nuclear power plants and large-scale energy projects.

Mostafa Barzegar, Director General for Europe, America and the Commonwealth of Independent States at the Ministry of Oil's International Affairs Department, made the remarks Monday during a televised interview on the occasion of the 19th session of the Iran-Russia Joint Commission on Economic Cooperation.

Barzegar stated that the three-day commission, held this week in Tehran, brings together senior officials from both countries with the aim of strengthening cooperation across key sectors including energy, agriculture, transportation and trade. He noted that the opening ceremony began on Monday, February 16, with the participation of Iran's deputy oil minister. Expert-level meetings are being held during the first two days, while Russia's energy minister, heading a high-ranking delegation, is scheduled to hold discussions with senior Iranian officials. The final document of the commission is expected to be drafted and signed on the concluding day, alongside several side agreements.

Referring to the 18th session of the commission, which was held in Moscow in May, Barzegar explained that the 19th session is taking place only about 10 months later—earlier than the usual annual schedule—due to the strategic importance of bilateral issues and the strong political will at the highest levels to expand cooperation.

He revealed that during the previous session, 193 provisions were approved to structure joint activities between the two sides. More than 75 percent of those commitments have either been implemented or completed, he said, while some remaining items require parliamentary approval due to legal considerations.

In the energy sector, Barzegar described oil and gas cooperation as one of the central pillars of Iran-Russia relations. He stated that major Russian firms have invested in seven oil fields in Iran and currently contribute around six percent of the country's oil production. “The projected outlook foresees an increase of this share to 12 percent,” he said, signaling deeper upstream collaboration between Tehran and Moscow.

Beyond hydrocarbons, nuclear cooperation also featured prominently in his remarks. Barzegar pointed to ongoing collaboration with Russia



in the development of nuclear energy infrastructure in Iran. He announced that a memorandum of understanding valued at \$25 billion has been concluded for the construction of new large-scale and small-scale nuclear power plants in the Sirik region in southern Iran, as well as additional electricity generation facilities.

He explained that Russia has already made investments during the first phase of nuclear cooperation, while the second and third phases are currently underway. Given that five years have passed since the launch of certain projects, he said, the current commission session is expected to address outstanding issues and determine the next steps for

implementation.

Gas imports from Russia were another major topic. Barzegar stated that in the first phase of the planned arrangement, annual imports of 55 billion cubic meters of Russian gas are envisaged, with an additional 55 billion cubic meters projected in the second phase. He added that electricity imports from Russia, routed through Azerbaijan, are also on the agenda as part of broader regional energy connectivity efforts.

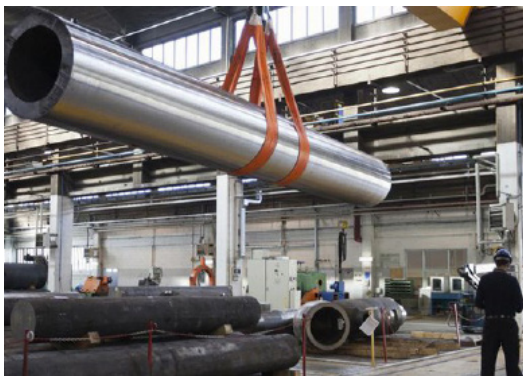
Turning to trade and logistics, Barzegar identified transportation infrastructure as one of the most significant challenges facing bilateral economic expansion. He stressed the importance of the International North-South Transport Corridor as a key platform for boosting cooperation. However, he noted that incomplete railway links—particularly the Rasht-Astara rail segment—have limited the corridor's full operational capacity, resulting in a greater reliance on road transport. Efforts are underway, he said, to enhance rail and maritime capabilities to facilitate smoother transit flows.

Barzegar also highlighted positive trends in agricultural cooperation, stating that trade in agricultural products and essential goods between the two countries has recorded significant growth compared to last year.

In concluding his remarks, he noted that Iran currently maintains around 50 active joint commissions with various countries. Despite what he described as strategic and friendly relations between Tehran and Moscow, bilateral trade volume currently stands at approximately \$5 billion—far below its potential. The two sides have set a short-term target of increasing annual trade to \$20 billion.

The 19th Iran-Russia Joint Commission is expected to serve as a critical platform for accelerating cooperation in energy production, nuclear development, transportation infrastructure, and trade, reflecting a broader strategic alignment between the two countries across multiple sectors.

Iran Steel Chain Exports Surpass Entire Previous Year in Value



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The Iranian Steel Producers Association has announced that the value of the country's steel chain exports during the first 10 months of the current Iranian year (1404) has exceeded the total export value recorded in the previous year, signaling strong growth across much of the sector.

According to data released by the association, the volume of iron and steel exports rose by 27 percent during the 10-month period compared to the same timeframe last year. Overall export volume across the entire steel value chain—including raw materials and finished products—posted an even stronger increase of 38 percent year-on-year.

In value terms, exports of products within the iron and steel chain grew by 22 percent, surpassing \$6.5 billion. Notably, this figure exceeds the total export value achieved during the whole of the previous year (1403), underscoring the sector's expanding role in Iran's non-oil trade portfolio.

The upward trend in exports of upstream raw materials continued throughout the reporting period. Export volumes of iron ore concentrate and iron ore pellets increased significantly compared to the first 10 months of last year, rising by 68 percent and 28 percent, respectively. The association attributed this growth to sustained external demand and expanded production capacity in mining and processing.

However, export performance varied across product categories. The volume of long steel products declined by 10 percent compared to the same period last year. Among long products, steel beams experienced the sharpest drop, with exports falling by 33 percent. Rebar exports also declined, recording a 17 percent decrease year-on-year.

Economic Pressure on Households Intensifying



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The Vice President of the Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture has warned that mounting economic pressures are being directly felt by households across the country, stressing that removing barriers to domestic production must become a national priority.

Speaking Sunday at a meeting of the Chamber's Board of Representatives, Mohammadreza Bahraman outlined ongoing efforts to address private sector challenges and improve coordination with government institutions. He pointed to a recently signed memorandum of understanding between the Chamber of Commerce and the State Inspectorate Organization as a practical step toward resolving the concerns of business operators.

According to Bahraman, the agreement establishes two parallel channels for pursuing economic grievances—through provincial chambers and via the central headquarters in Tehran—allowing for more structured and efficient follow-up. He said that sustained cooperation between the government and the private sector could prevent many economic problems from deepening in the future.

Emphasizing the broader economic climate, Bahraman said the country is facing serious internal challenges, particularly in the areas of livelihood and public welfare. “Economic pressure on people's tables is clearly tangible,” he said, referring to the rising cost of living and its impact on families.

China Confirms 30-Day Visa Waiver for UK and Canada Citizens

BEIJING (Dispatches) - China confirmed that Canadian and British citizens will be able to visit the country visa-free from Tuesday, after the two countries' leaders had announced such agreements following official trips to Beijing. British and Canadian prime ministers Keir Starmer and Mark Carney both visited Beijing in January, seeking to bolster relations with China and pivot from the increasingly mercurial United States. Both leaders had hailed progress following meetings with top Chinese leaders such as President Xi Jinping, including on issues like visa-free access for their citizens to China. Beijing's foreign ministry confirmed these agreements on Sunday, saying Canadian and British citizens will be able to travel to China visa-free from Tuesday, with the policy in effect until December 31.



Russia's Army Chief Claims Capture of 12 Villages in Eastern Ukraine



MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russia's army chief Valery Gerasimov visited Moscow's troops in Ukraine and said the Kremlin's forces seized a dozen eastern villages in February, the defense ministry said Sunday.

Gerasimov visit comes days before US-mediated talks with Kyiv in Geneva on ending almost four years of war and ahead of the fourth anniversary of Moscow's full-scale offensive against Ukraine.

"In two weeks of February, despite severe winter conditions, combined forces and military units of the joint task force liberated 12 settlements," Gerasimov said. AFP could not independently verify these claims.

The pace of Moscow's advance picked up in Autumn, but Russia has not reached its goal to seize the Donetsk region in four years of war.

Russia demands that Kyiv withdraw from the Donetsk region for any deal to end the conflict — terms unacceptable to Ukraine.

Gerasimov said Moscow's troops were moving in the direction of Sloviansk — an industrial hub that briefly fell to pro-Russian separatists in 2014 and which has been under frequent Russian attack.

Moscow's forces are around 15 kilometres (nine miles) from the city.

Moscow claims the Donetsk, Lugansk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson regions as its own.

But it has also advanced into other Ukrainian regions.

Japan's Junior Coalition Head Warns Against Political Meddling in BOJ Policy



TOKYO (Dispatches) - Japan's government must avoid meddling in monetary policy and focus on steps to build an economy strong enough to weather the potential pain from any further interest rate hikes, the leader of the ruling coalition's junior partner told Reuters.

Japan must also proceed with a two-year suspension to the 8% sales tax on food at the earliest date possible and consider tapping its huge foreign exchange reserves as among sources of revenue, said Hirofumi Yoshimura, who heads the Japan Innovation Party, or Ishin, which is a coalition partner of Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi's Liberal Democratic Party. Yoshimura's comments appeared to play down the view held by some analysts that Takaichi may back down on her pledge to roll out the plan sometime during the fiscal year beginning in April.

"As for rate hikes, that's something the BOJ ought to decide. Politicians shouldn't intervene. The BOJ would make a decision looking at various market environments and through dialogue with markets. I think the government shouldn't meddle in detail," Yoshimura said in an interview on Sunday, when asked about the possible timing of the next rate hike.

EU's Top Diplomat Rejects U.S. Talk of Civilizational Erasure



BRUSSELS (Dispatches) - EU foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas pushed back against what she described as "European bashing" in a speech at the Munich Security Conference on Sunday. Kallas welcomed the message of unity delivered by US Secretary of State Marco Rubio at the annual gathering but dismissed the Trump administration's talk of Europe's "civilizational erasure".

EU top diplomat Kallas pushed back on Sunday against Europe "bashing" by the United States.

"Contrary to what some may say, 'woke, decadent Europe' is not facing civilizational erasure," Kallas said on the last day of the Munich Security Conference.

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio on Saturday reassured allies by saying Washington and Europe "belong together" — but insisted the continent must defend against mass immigration to protect its "civilization".

"The message that we heard is that America and Europe are intertwined, have been in the past and will be in the future. I think this is important," Kallas said.

But she added: "It is also clear that we don't see eye to eye on all the issues, and this will remain the case."

Officials in the Trump era have repeatedly extended their own heightened fears of immigration to Europe, often borrowing language from "replacement theory", the brainchild of a French novelist that has become a rallying cry for the global far right.

In a National Security Strategy document published on December 5, the US administration warned against European "migration policies that are transforming the continent and creating strife". "Should present trends continue, the continent will be unrecognizable in 20 years or less," the document predicted.

Europeans "were shocked to read that they were engaged in 'civilizational erasure'," French daily Le Monde wrote at the time.

The US document went on to warn that "censorship of free speech and suppression of political opposition" was taking place in Europe — despite European nations occupying all top 15 spots on the 2025 global Press Freedom Index from Reporters Without Borders while the US fell to a historic low at 57th place.

Kallas went on to say that Russia must be forced to make concessions in talks to end the Ukraine war.

"Let's be clear-eyed about Russia. Russia is no superpower," she said, saying the country was "broken".

"The greatest threat Russia presents right now is that it gains more at the negotiation table than it has achieved on the battlefield."

The annual security gathering in Munich has seen European officials insist the continent must take the lead on its defense in the face of an aggressive Russia and doubts over the reliability of the United States as President Donald Trump upends ties.

"There is an urgent need to reclaim European agency," Kallas said.

She said European defense "starts in Ukraine" and will depend on how the war ends. The top diplomat called for the size of Russia's military to be capped while adding that Moscow must pay for the damage it has caused and must be held accountable for war crimes.

France's Minister for European Affairs Benjamin Haddad said there was no time to wait in increasing European independence, saying it should pay less attention to what US officials say and focus on bolstering its capabilities.

"I think the worst lesson we could draw from this weekend is to say, well, I can cling to some love words that I heard in part of his speech and push the snooze button," Haddad said of Rubio's address.

Instead, he said Europeans should "focus on what we can control, focus on our rearmament, on the support for Ukraine and the threat that Russia poses to all of our democracies".

Kim Jong Un Unveils New Flats for Families of Soldiers Killed in Ukraine Campaign

SEOUL (Dispatches) - North Korean leader Kim Jong Un touted a newly built street of flats for families of soldiers killed supporting Russia's war against Ukraine, state media reported Monday, with photos showing him accompanied by his daughter.

North Korea has deployed thousands of troops to fight for Russia, according to South Korean and Western intelligence agencies, and Seoul has estimated that around 2,000 have been killed.

Analysts say North Korea is receiving financial aid, military technology and food and energy supplies from Russia in return.

"The new street has been built thanks to the ardent desire of our motherland that wishes that... its excellent sons, who defended the most sacred things by sacrificing their most valuable things, will live forever," Kim said in a speech released by the official Korean Central News Agency.

The report on Monday did not mention Russia, but Kim last week pledged to "unconditionally support" all of Russian President Vladimir Putin's policies and decisions.

"Before their death, the heroic martyrs must have pictured in their mind's eye their dear families living in



the ever-prospering country," he added.

Photos released by KCNA show Kim touring the new homes built for the families on Saeppyol Street, alongside his teenage daughter Ju Ae, widely viewed as his heir apparent.

Seoul's spy agency said last week she had now been clearly "designated as a successor", citing her participation in high-profile events with her father.

One photo shows Kim speaking with what appeared to be the family members of a fallen soldier on a sofa, his daughter standing behind them.

Other photos show families checking the utilities in their new flats.

The rollout comes ahead of Pyongyang's biggest political event on the calendar—the party congress—scheduled to take place later this month, although the exact date has not been announced.

Attention is on which foreign and domestic policy directions Kim will declare to set the country's course, as well as whether Ju Ae will be given any official party titles.

The timing of the street inauguration is a "highly calculated political move to justify its soldier deployment" ahead of the party congress, Hong Min, an analyst at the Korea Institute for National Unification, told AFP.

"It visualizes the state providing concrete compensation to the families of fallen soldiers... as a symbolic showcase," he said.

U.S. Conducts First Air Transport of Nuclear Microreactor in Bid to Show Technology's Viability

HILL AIR FORCE BASE (Dispatches) - The U.S. Departments of Energy and Defense on Sunday for the first time transported a small nuclear reactor on a cargo plane from California to Utah to demonstrate the potential to quickly deploy nuclear power for military and civilian use.

The agencies partnered with California-based Valar Atomics to fly one of the company's Ward microreactors on a C-17 aircraft — without nuclear fuel — to Hill Air Force Base in Utah. Energy Secretary Chris Wright and Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition and Sustainment Michael Duffey were on the C-17 flight with the reactor and its components, and hailed the event as a breakthrough for U.S. nuclear energy and military logistics.

"This gets us closer to deploy nuclear power when and where it is needed to give our nation's warfighters the tools to win in battle," Duffey said.

President Donald Trump's administration sees small nuclear reactors as one of several ways to expand U.S. energy production. Trump last May issued four executive orders aimed at boosting domestic nuclear deployment to meet growing demand for energy for national security and competitive AI advancements.

The Energy Department in December issued two grants to help accelerate



development of small modular reactors.

Proponents of microreactors also have touted them as energy sources that can be sent to far-flung and remote places, offering an alternative to diesel generators which require frequent deliveries of fuel. But skeptics have argued that the industry has not proven that small nuclear reactors can generate power for a reasonable price.

"There is no business case for microreactors, which — even if they work as designed — will produce electricity at a far higher cost than large nuclear reactors, not to mention renewables like wind or solar," said Edwin Lyman, director of nuclear power safety at the Union of Concerned Scientists.

The Energy Department plans to have three microreactors reach "criticality" — when a nuclear reaction can sustain itself — by July 4, Wright said.

The microreactor in Sunday's event, a little larger than a minivan, can generate up to 5 megawatts of electricity, enough to power 5,000 homes, according to Valar CEO Isaiah Taylor. It will start operating in July at 100 kilowatts and peak at 250 kilowatts this year before ramping up to full capacity, he said.



India's Cricketers Thump Pakistan to Sail Into Super Eight

COLOMBO (Dispatches) - Defending champions India steamrolled Pakistan by 61 runs in a grudge Group A match at the Twenty20 World Cup to swagger into the Super Eight stage of the tournament on Sunday.

The match between the bitter neighbours did not live up to the hype with India, who now have an 8-1 record against their arch-rivals in the T20 World Cup, maintaining their unbeaten run with another dominant performance.

Opener Ishan Kishan's breakneck 77 powered them to a commanding 175-7 at the R Premadasa Stadium against Pakistan's six-pronged spin attack, which bowled 18 of their 20 overs.

India returned to bundle out Pakistan for 114 in 18 overs to register their third win in a row.

"India v Pakistan is a special game for us and our country. It is a very important game," player of the match Kishan said.

"They had good spinners and we tried to play good shots. It gives us confidence going ahead in the tournament ."

The match went ahead after Pakistan earlier reversed their decision to boycott the game in solidarity with Bangladesh, who refused to tour India over safety concerns and were replaced by Scotland.

Pakistan captain Salman Agha and his India counterpart Suryakumar Yadav did not shake hands at the toss, though.

India were reinforced by the return of Abhishek Sharma, who missed the first two matches with a stomach infection, but the opener could not make it count.

Salman sprang a surprise by opening the attack himself and trapped Abhishek lbw for a duck.

Pakistan used three spinners in the powerplay to try to stem boundary flow and India's score of 52-1 after six overs suggested the ploy worked to an extent.

Kishan could not be contained though and the southpaw tore into the Pakistan attack with his take-no-prisoners batting.

The opener took only 27 balls to race to his second successive fifty of the tournament.

Saim Ayub ended Kishan's match-defining 40-ball blitz but India cruised to 92-2 at the halfway stage of their innings.

Ayub (3-25) dismissed Tilak Varma (25) and Hardik Pandya with successive deliveries to turn the heat back on India.

Suryakumar (32) and Shivam Dube (27) could not quite provide the late flourish but India still posted a total that proved well beyond Pakistan's reach.

Pakistan became the first team to employ six spinners in a T20 World Cup match but the joy of having restricted India to under 200 soon evaporated as they slumped to 13-3 in two overs in their chase.

Pandya removed Pakistan's in-form opener Sahibzada Farhan for a duck and Jasprit Bumrah dismissed Ayub and Salman in the same over to pin down Pakistan.

Babar Azam (five) did not last long either and Pakistan were gasping at 38-4 after the six powerplay overs.

Shelton Takes Dallas Crown

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - American second seed Ben Shelton saved three match points before battling back to defeat top-seeded compatriot Taylor Fritz 3-6, 6-3, 7-5 and capture the ATP Tour's Dallas Open.

Shelton looked to be on the brink of defeat after trailing 15-40 at 4-5 down to the big-serving Fritz in the decisive final set.

But the 23-year-old from Florida showed superb composure to dig his way out of trouble with a ruthless smash to save the first match point before lasering a forehand into the corner to go to deuce.

Fritz earned a third match point when Shelton sent a forehand into the net, but once again he was unable to convert as his opponent saved again before going on to hold at 5-5.

Fritz's composure on serve then deserted him in the next game, when his first double fault of the match presented Shelton with three break points at 0-40.

Shelton took advantage to secure the break for a 6-5 lead before holding to complete victory and



clinch the fourth ATP title of his career in 1hr 52mins.

Shelton greeted victory by praising Fritz, who has struggled with knee and oblique injuries this season.

"This was a crazy match to be part of," Shelton said, before addressing Fritz. "I thought your level was amazing. What you've done this year, dealing with adversity, fighting through injuries, the competitor you are -- you're an inspiration to all.

"Every kid at home should watch how hard you compete, day in and day out when you're not feeling 100 percent."

Fritz, meanwhile, rued his inability to build on an impressive opening set when he looked in complete control.

"It was a fun match to be a part of up until the end," Fritz said. "But congrats to Ben -- he played the big points and important moments really good."

LeBron Still Unclear on NBA Future

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - LeBron James has no clue if he will play beyond this season, his record 23rd in the NBA, but the superstar has some projects in mind for his retirement days.

The 41-year-old Los Angeles Lakers forward spoke Sunday ahead of the NBA All-Star Game, saying his playing future beyond this season remains uncertain.

"Yeah, I want to live," James said of his post-season plans. "When I know, you guys know. I don't know. I have no idea. I just want to live, that's all."

James, the NBA's all-time scoring leader and a four-time NBA Most Valuable Player, said the uncertainty about his future will not impact his efforts to spark the Lakers to the NBA title, which would be a fifth for "King James" in his landmark career.

"This is beginning towards the post-season so it has nothing to do with that," James said. "Same motivation, same mind factor. We've got past the marathon and now the sprint is about to start. I think everybody understands that."



James has averaged 22.0 points, 7.1 assists, 5.8 rebounds and 1.1 steals a game this season for the Lakers, who rank fifth in the Western Conference at 33-21.

After battling sciatica at the start of the campaign, James says health will be a crucial factor for the Lakers in the remainder of a campaign that has seen star Luka Doncic and other battling injuries.

"Our success is going to come down to obviously I think our health, our coach staff putting us in the right position," James said.

"I think they're going to give us the game plan every night. But when it comes to what we have to work with, we have to actually go out and see it. We haven't been able to have an opportunity much this year."

James has already mentioned that he would like to become an NBA team owner when his playing days are done, but that's far from his only post-playing pursuit.

"There's a lot of things that I have on the table that I can tap into if I would like to, that being one of them," James said of NBA team ownership.

Arsenal Stroll to Wigan Win in FA Cup



LONDON (Dispatches) - Arsenal scored all their goals in the opening 27 minutes of Sunday's 4-0 FA Cup fourth-round win over League One Wigan Athletic, while Leeds United needed penalties and Wolverhampton Wanderers endured a mud bath on a good day for top-flight sides.

Any hopes of a Wigan upset in North London were swiftly ended as Noni Madueke and Gabriel Martinelli both scored from Eberechi Eze assists, before defender Jack Hunt put the ball into his own net.

When Gabriel Jesus netted a fourth just before the half-hour mark it looked as though it would be a rout but Wigan managed to limit the damage as they tightened up at the back and Arsenal took their foot off the pedal.

Second-tier Birmingham City equalised late on at home to Leeds with a Patrick Roberts screamer after Lukas Nmecha had put the visitors ahead shortly after the interval.

Leeds converted all their penalties in the shoot-out while Birmingham's Tommy Doyle had his effort saved by Lucas Perri before Roberts blazed over the bar.

Wolves look condemned to second-tier football next season but they maintained their interest in the Cup with a 1-0 win at in-form fourth-tier Grimsby Town on a quagmire of a pitch resembling those of yesteryear.

With rain falling on an already saturated pitch, the surface churned up, leaving little chance of flowing football. Santiago Bueno scored the only goal on the hour, diverting a Joao Gomes cross past goalkeeper Jackson Smith.

Grimsby, who knocked Manchester United out of the League Cup this season, rarely offered a goal threat and their only effort on target was Andy Cook's late header.

Klaebo Wins Record Ninth Winter Olympics Gold Medal



TESERO (Dispatches) - Norwegian cross-country skier Johannes Klaebo became the first Winter Olympian to win nine gold medals when he led home his country's 4 x 7.5 kilometre relay team.

The Norwegian quartet were so far ahead that Klaebo was able to wave to the crowd before the finish line, where he was greeted by his celebrating teammates in bright sunshine in Tesero.

Klaebo, 29, has won four of his nine golds at the Milan-Cortina Games and he has two more events still to come.

He overtakes three of his compatriots who have won eight golds at Winter Olympics -- former cross-country skiers Marit Bjørgen and Bjoern Daelhlie, and former biathlete Ole Einar Bjørndalen.

"It feels amazing. I'm not sure if I've ever dreamed about it either. It's just something that I'm really proud of for sure," Klaebo said.

"Being able to do it with the team as well, it means a lot. I think it's hard to actually find words for it, because I think it hasn't really sunk in yet."

He said after his history-making moment he had received messages through Norwegian broadcaster NRK from the athletes who had won eight golds.

"It was good to share the top with them for a couple of days. It feels even better to be on the top alone for sure," he said.

"It's a big achievement, and I think it will take some time to let it sink in."