

In a Statement Issued on Monday, Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesman Esmaeil Baghaei Iran Offered Congratulations to Bangladesh After the South Asian Country Held Peaceful Parliamentary Elections

IRAN NEWS

VOL. XXIX, No. 8472 TEHRAN Price 50,000 Rials

www.irannewsdaily.com

WEDNESDAY FEBRUARY 18, 2026 BAHMAN 29, 1404

2

DOMESTIC



\$20b in Idle Capacity in Iran's Petrochemical Industry

> SEE PAGE 2

3

INTERNATIONAL

Kremlin Rejects Claim It Poisoned Navalny

> SEE PAGE 3



Full Intelligence Oversight Maintained Over Strait of Hormuz



TEHRAN (Dispatches) - The commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps Navy (IRGCN) has reaffirmed that Iran maintains total, 24-hour intelligence surveillance over the Strait of Hormuz, covering surface, aerial, and sub-surface domains.

Speaking during IRGC naval exercises in the Persian Gulf, Rear Admiral Alireza Tangsiri emphasized that this "complete oversight" is dedicated to ensuring the safety of transit through the strategic waterway.

He noted that the economies of regional states and many extra-regional nations are inextricably linked to the security of this vital maritime artery.

The commander described Iranian islands in the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz as "national honor" and characterized them as "impregnable fortresses and warships."

Tangsiri added that while the maneuvers are routine annual events, this specific exercise stands out due to the introduction of new tactics and specialized hardware.

"We are displaying some of these advancements through media coverage, while a significant portion remains classified for unveiling at a later time."

The first phase of the maneuvers was successfully conducted across Iranian islands in the Persian Gulf on Monday.

15% Increase in Women's Participation in Local Council Elections



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - The spokesperson for the Central Supervisory Board of Iran's Islamic City and Village Council Elections has announced a 15 percent increase in women's participation in the upcoming local council elections, citing significant procedural changes and greater transparency in the oversight process.

Ali Keshvari said that the review of candidates' qualifications for city and village council elections began several days ago at county-level supervisory boards and will continue through February 19. Initial results will be announced after that date.

Candidates whose qualifications are not approved will have four days to file objections, he added.

Keshvari highlighted recent changes to the timetable for reviewing candidate qualifications. Under previous regulations, supervisory boards had 20 days to announce the results of qualification assessments. For the upcoming elections, however, that period has been reduced to 12 days.

He said the adjustment was made in coordination with the Ministry of Interior and supervisory bodies to accelerate the oversight process and facilitate the full electronic administration of the elections.

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - President Masoud Pezeshkian described the provision of security with the least possible harm and incidents as a vital necessity for society, emphasizing that all institutions share responsibility in safeguarding public safety and preventing social disturbances from escalating into crises.

Speaking on Tuesday, at a graduation ceremony for cadets at the Police University and Officer Training Academy, Pezeshkian commemorated those who lost their lives in recent incidents and extended condolences to bereaved families. He stressed that every effort must be made to ensure that communities, cities, and neighborhoods remain safe and peaceful.

"We must not allow events to occur that threaten the security, tranquility, and well-being of our society," the president said. "Security is not merely an institutional responsibility—it is a collective duty."

The president underscored the importance of preventing incidents and crises before they escalate. He stated that social abnormalities, if left unaddressed, could develop into larger crises that endanger public order and safety.

"We must act in such a way that irregularities in society do not turn into crises," Pezeshkian said. "Through proper planning, preventive measures, and timely treatment of social problems, we can protect both public safety and societal health."

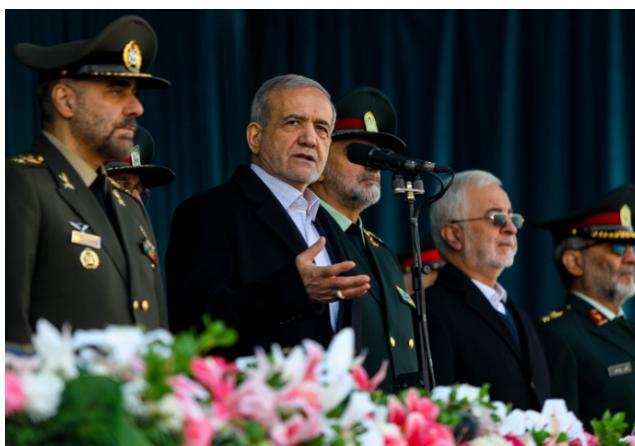
He outlined four key missions necessary to ensure the health and security of society. The first step, he explained, is building healthy communities and neighborhoods. According to Pezeshkian, when the foundation of society—its neighborhoods and cities—is sound and stable, the likelihood of security disruptions diminishes significantly.

"When our neighborhoods and cities are healthy, events that undermine security are far less likely to occur," he noted, calling for coordinated efforts across institutions to strengthen social cohesion and public trust.

The president identified prevention as the second major step. He stressed that authorities must respond swiftly to emerging issues—whether social dissatisfaction, public health concerns, or other disruptions—to prevent them from intensifying.

"If illness, disaster, dissatisfaction, or social disorder arises, we must ensure it does not develop into a full-blown crisis," he said. "Problems must be contained, prevented, and treated in their earliest stages."

In cases where incidents do occur, Pezeshkian emphasized that crisis management must aim to minimize harm to all parties involved. He called on the government to equip law enforcement and security forces with modern tools, advanced technologies, and updated operational techniques to



enable them to manage disturbances effectively without causing unnecessary injury to themselves or others.

"We must not allow the lives and health of our security personnel to be endangered while they are carrying out their missions," he stated. "Although confrontations may carry inherent risks, preserving the lives and safety of our forces must remain the central principle of all planning."

At the same time, the president stressed that individuals responsible for disturbances must be apprehended with authority and professionalism and handed over safely to the judiciary for due legal process.

Addressing security forces directly, Pezeshkian said that peace and stability are achieved through their dedication and cooperation. He described

their presence in the field as a source of reassurance for citizens.

"Our people and our society have a vital need for security," he said. "Security enables every individual—regardless of social class or position—to carry out their responsibilities properly."

He expressed hope that through cooperation between law enforcement, security institutions, public organizations, and citizens, the country could manage challenges with minimal damage while demonstrating national pride on the global stage.

"As you begin your professional careers and move forward in your responsibilities, I hope you will carry out your missions with strength, dignity, and success," he told the graduating cadets.

The president reaffirmed the government's commitment to supporting security forces in all areas possible. "We are responsible for backing you in every way we can, and we will do so with determination," he said.

Pezeshkian praised security personnel as a source of pride for the nation, saying that both the country and its people take pride in those who safeguard order and stability. "You are the adornment of this society," he remarked, expressing hope that Iran's path of development and progress would continue with honor and distinction.

In closing, the president thanked the commanders and families of fallen security personnel who sacrificed their lives for the country's independence and values. He also expressed appreciation to citizens for their participation in national events, stating that public presence and engagement reflect unity and resilience.

"The efforts and presence of our people deserve gratitude," he concluded, emphasizing that collective cooperation between the public and security institutions remains the cornerstone of lasting peace and stability.

European Parliament Resolution Holds No Legal Value



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Asghar Jahangir, spokesperson for Iran's judiciary, addressed a press conference Tuesday, highlighting both domestic and international issues. The event, attended by journalists and media representatives, was broadcast live via Justice TV's online platform.

At the start of the conference, Jahangir praised the Iranian people for their participation in the 22 Bahman (February 11) national rallies, describing the demonstrations as a reaffirmation of loyalty to the ideals of Imam Khomeini and the Supreme Leader. He recalled that over the past month, two major mass mobilizations—on 22 Dey (January 11) and 22 Bahman—had demonstrated national unity, pride, and resilience, frustrating adversaries.

"The rallies showed that the revolution, Islamic values, and Islam itself remain alive," he said. "The people will not allow anyone to challenge the revolution, the country, or the system. Resistance is our nation's strength, and this resistance will defeat any adversary." Jahangir emphasized that citizens' support for the revolution increases responsibility for officials and calls for a united effort among government, judiciary, legislature, and private sector actors to reduce problems and mitigate the impact of sanctions.

Jahangir highlighted the upcoming holy month of Ramadan as an opportunity to promote moral and spiritual growth alongside legal prevention. "During Ramadan, crime decreases while social goodwill and personal self-improvement rise," he said, stressing the need to strengthen charitable programs and prisoner pardons. He also suggested offering discounted goods and services to ease economic pressure on citizens.

World Bears Responsibility to Counter Israel's Rights Violations in West Asia



TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi of Iran says the international community shoulders the responsibility to confront the Israeli regime's continued gross violations of humanitarian law in West Asia.

Araghchi made the remark in a meeting with the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Mirjana Spoljaric Egger in the Swiss city of Geneva on Monday.

The Iranian foreign minister is in Geneva to take part in a second round of indirect nuclear negotiations with the United States.

Araghchi said all countries need to make serious efforts to safeguard the principles of international humanitarian law.

The Israeli regime and the United States, he said, clearly violated human rights by killing Iranian people and hitting civilian targets and infrastructure during the military aggression of June 2025.

The United Nations and relevant international bodies, including the ICRC, bear the responsibility to take a clear stance in this regard, Araghchi said.

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK



He characterized the country's intellectual and professional elites as the "main engine" of national brand reconstruction, rather than the government alone.

Saeed Shojai, deputy minister at the Ministry of Industry, Mine and Trade, highlighted structural challenges in Iran's economy that hinder the emergence of strong national brands at regional and global levels.

He pointed to weak property rights protections, fragmented regulations, and the concentration of production at lower levels of the value chain as major obstacles. According to Shojai, more than 92 percent of the country's production is concentrated in lower and middle tiers of the value chain, while for years the economy has relied heavily on raw material exports for foreign currency earnings.

"Accepting shortcomings and reforming industrial policy are prerequisites for improving the national image," he said. Without changes in management approaches and stronger legal security for businesses, he added, a leap in Iranian brand competitiveness will not be possible.

Shojai noted that adjustments to industrial policy under the Seventh Development Plan signal a more realistic approach to economic reform.

Ali-Aghar Shalbafan, head of the Investment and Economic Affairs Center at the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts, described the national image as the "breathing air" of a country.

He said tourism is one of the most effective tools for improving a national brand because direct visitor experiences can transform official narratives into personal ones.

Referring to visa waiver policies for citizens of certain countries and the expansion of land-based tourism, Shalbafan emphasized the need for greater international marketing and professional tourism promotion to compete globally.

Ahmad Norouzi, deputy head of international affairs at the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB), said national branding is not merely a media project but a tangible national issue. He cautioned that storytelling detached from lived realities would ultimately prove counterproductive.

Norouzi stressed that presenting a professional, transparent narrative rooted in authentic Iranian identity would be more effective internationally than concealing realities or artificially reshaping the country's image.

Participants at the conference also highlighted the role of city diplomacy, intersectoral cooperation, and transforming national branding into a broad-based discourse involving government, the private sector, academia, and media.

The first National Conference on "Iran's National Brand" focused on examining the theoretical and policy dimensions of national branding and identifying requirements for enhancing the international image of the Islamic Republic of Iran.



Possibility of Exchanging Over 2,000 Types of Goods Between Iran and Russia



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The Russian Secretary of the Iran-Russia Joint Economic Commission announced that more than 2,000 types of goods and services can potentially be exchanged between the two countries, stating that the volume of bilateral trade has reached \$4.7 billion, according to the latest figures.

Speaking on Monday at the opening ceremony of the 19th meeting of the Iran-Russia Joint Economic Commission, Khalimat Budunova expressed appreciation for Iran's hospitality. She noted that this year's Russian delegation consists of representatives from various government bodies and companies.

Budunova said economic and trade relations between Iran and Russia are on a growing trajectory, adding that recent statistics show trade between the two countries has reached \$4.7 billion.

She emphasized that the signing of a free trade memorandum between Iran and the Eurasian Economic Union has played a significant role in expanding commercial interactions. The agreement enables the exchange of more than 2,000 categories of goods, services, and products, demonstrating the considerable potential for cooperation.

Budunova added that, as previously mentioned by the Iranian secretary of the Joint Economic Commission, 17 expert committees are active during the meeting. She said extensive coordination and actions by experts from both countries are expected over the two-day session.

She expressed hope that expert-level discussions would yield concrete results and that provisions requiring mutual understanding would be agreed upon. The final text, she said, will be drafted after consolidation and submitted to the secretariat.

Iran Congratulates Gov't and Nation of China on Chinese New Year

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Foreign Ministry spokesperson Esmaeil Baqaei has congratulated the government and people of China on the Chinese New Year (Spring Festival). The Spring Festival is a reminder of the deep cultural ties and the continued solidarity between the two ancient civilizations of Iran and China, Baqaei wrote on his X account on Monday. The horse, as this year's symbol in Chinese culture, represents dynamism, wisdom, true friendship, moving forward, and prosperity, he added.

\$20b in Idle Capacity in Iran's Petrochemical Industry

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The Secretary-General of the Employers' Association of Iran's Petrochemical Industry announced that despite cooperation between the private sector and government entities, approximately \$20 billion of the industry's production capacity remains unused due to a lack of feedstock.

Speaking on Monday on the sidelines of the 7th Oil, Gas, Petrochemical and Refining Exhibition in Kish, Ahmad Mahdavi Abhari told IRNA that authorities must work to activate this idle capacity by relying on domestic knowledge-based companies, increasing national gas production, and manufacturing more efficient locally made equipment.

He noted that two newly discovered gas fields, Gardan and Pazan, if brought into operation, could produce around 30 million cubic meters of gas per day. Bringing these fields into the production cycle would not only meet the needs of petrochemical industries but also help ease the country's gas supply imbalance.

Mahdavi Abhari emphasized that the petrochemical industry's service to the country during years of sanctions would be recorded in history. Under a new decision, he said, there are plans to invest \$8 billion in the newly discovered gas fields.

He stressed that energy is Iran's competitive advantage and that even within the petrochemical sector—where hydrocarbon resources are used—greater added value is generated.

According to Mahdavi Abhari, the petrochemical industry, relying on the country's energy and gas advantages, has played a key role in Iran's economy and foreign currency earnings during the intensification of external sanctions over the past seven years.

He added that petrochemical plants are the country's largest non-oil exporters and play a significant role in the capital market. The industry also contributes more than \$8 billion to supplying raw materials for domestic production units. Without it, domestic manufacturers would need to import raw materials worth the same amount.

The Secretary-General stated that the petrochemical industry accounts for approximately 6 percent of Iran's Gross Domestic Product, adding that \$110 billion has been invested in the sector so far.



He said \$12 billion of that investment occurred during the Seventh Development Plan, with another \$12 billion scheduled during the same program. A further \$30 billion is planned for investment in the petrochemical industry under the Eighth Development Plan.

Mahdavi Abhari acknowledged that investment targets under the Seventh Development Plan were ambitious, with 35 percent of total petrochemical industry investment projected for this period alone. However, only half of the anticipated investment goals have been realized to date.

He also stated that petrochemical companies have exceeded their foreign currency repatriation commitments. He stressed that these companies are not seeking cheap feedstock or special privileges, but rather request that feedstock pricing and delivery be handled in line with international standards.

According to IRNA, the 7th Specialized Oil, Gas, Petrochemical and Refining Exhibition opened yesterday at the Kish International Exhibition Center with a focus on supporting domestic production. The event hosts 250 active companies in the sector.

Now in its seventh year, the exhibition spans 20,000 square meters and features more than 250 companies involved in oil, gas, petrochemicals, refining, and related industries.

Participants include over 50 petrochemical and refining complexes, oil and gas holdings, industry associations, exploration and production companies, refining contractors, knowledge-based equipment manufacturers, banks, insurance firms, financing companies, the Innovation and Prosperity Fund, and the Vice Presidency for Science and Technology.

Twenty specialized panels and side conferences are also scheduled, focusing on domestic manufacturing development in the oil, gas, petrochemical, and refining industries, as well as other related topics and strategies for expanding Iran's oil and gas sector. Several sessions were held today, with additional meetings set to take place tomorrow at the Razi Hall of the Kish International Conference Center.

The three-day exhibition will run through February 16 and is open daily from 5 p.m. to 10 p.m. at the Kish International Exhibition Center.

Iran to Reach 11,000 MW of Clean Electricity Capacity by Next Summer



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - A senior official at the Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Organization (SATBA) has announced that Iran's clean electricity generation capacity will reach 11,000 megawatts (MW) by the end of next summer, while also outlining conditions for renewable power exports.

In an interview with ILNA, Jafar Mohammadzadeh Sigaroudi, Deputy for Investment at SATBA, detailed the current status of renewable energy plants and their role in addressing the country's electricity imbalance.

He said that current installed capacity includes more than 22 MW from biomass power plants, 26 MW from expansion turbines, 114 MW from small hydropower plants, and 372 MW from wind farms. The remaining share—approximately 4,000 MW—comes from solar power plants. He added that total renewable capacity is projected to reach the targeted 11,000 MW by the end of next summer.

Mohammadzadeh noted that solar and wind power plants play a defined role in the country's electricity supply mix. A solar power plant, he explained, can generate electricity from around 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. during peak summer months, while wind power plants—of which 1,000 MW is expected to come online by next year—can produce electricity during certain hours of the day and night.

He emphasized that electricity sector authorities must maximize the production advantages of these plants, particularly during peak summer demand when consumption surges due to high temperatures.

Farzad Field Jacket to Be Transported to Iran-Saudi Maritime Border



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The project manager for the development of the joint Farzad gas field has announced the successful loading of the first jacket structure for the Farzad "B" development project, stating that the massive offshore structure will soon be transported for installation in the waters of the Persian Gulf.

According to ILNA, citing Pars Oil and Gas Company, Keyvan Tarighati said the loading operation of the first jacket (four-legged platform base) for the Farzad B gas field development project was successfully completed today (Monday, February 16). The structure, weighing 2,600 tons and standing 63 meters tall, was loaded at the Valiasr yard of the Iran Marine Industrial Company (SADRA) in Khorramshahr.

He noted that the large steel structure was constructed relying on the expertise of specialists from the National Iranian Oil Company and Pars Oil and Gas Company, with Petropars as the main contractor and Iran Marine Industrial Company serving as the subcontractor. The construction process of the WHP1 jacket was completed over 14 months in accordance with offshore industry standards.

Referring to the distinctive nature of the loading operation, Tarighati explained that the process was carried out for the first time using the "lift and slide" method. Hydraulic jacks—previously used for loading offshore platforms—were employed to transfer the jacket from the dock onto the Abuzar 110 barge.

According to him, this method was selected after detailed engineering studies and a comprehensive review of operational procedures, taking into account the structure's weight, dimensions, and operational conditions.

Iran, Qatar to Facilitate Trade and Technical Cooperation in the Veterinary Sector

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Trade and technical interactions between Iran and Qatar in the veterinary sector are set to be facilitated following agreements reached during the 13th Qatar International Agricultural Exhibition (AgriteQ 2026), attended by the head of Iran's Veterinary Organization.

The 13th edition of AgriteQ opened on February 12, 2026, and runs through February 16 at Katara Cultural Village in Doha.

The 2026 exhibition focuses on food safety and sustainable agriculture and plays a significant role in Qatar's National Food Security Strategy (2024-2030). The event serves as a strategic platform for knowledge exchange, the formation of international partnerships, and the presentation of innovations addressing regional challenges such as water scarcity and climate change.

On the first day of the visit, Iran's Deputy Agriculture Minister and Head of the Veterinary Organization, Alireza Rafiepour, met with Iran's Ambassador to Doha to review avenues for expanding veterinary and agricultural cooperation between the two countries.

Rafiepour, heading an official delegation from Iran's Ministry of Agriculture Jihad, toured the specialized agricultural and livestock exhibition and held talks with senior Qatari veterinary officials on expanding technical, health, and trade cooperation in livestock and animal products.

During joint visits, accompanied by Deputy Minister for Livestock Production Improvement Ebrahim Hassannejad and Ali Dorjani, CEO of the Agricultural Services Holding Company, the Iranian delegation assessed potential capacities for boosting Iran's livestock-related exports.

The head of Qatar's Veterinary Organization, referring to his familiarity with Iran's technical and production capabilities, called for expanded cooperation and for part of Qatar's livestock and poultry sector needs to be supplied by Iran. He stressed Qatar's readiness to enhance collaboration in the supply of veterinary medicines, vaccines, and other specialized inputs.

The Iranian delegation outlined the country's capabilities in



producing livestock products, including hatching and table eggs, honey, raw milk and dairy products, poultry meat, red meat, and aquatic products. They also highlighted Iran's extensive capacity in manufacturing veterinary medicines, animal vaccines, biological materials, supplements, and micronutrients.

Under preliminary agreements, both sides will appoint special representatives to follow up on implementing the outcomes of the visit in Tehran and Doha. A proposal was also put forward to establish a "Qatar Desk" in Iran and an "Iran Desk" in Qatar within the veterinary sector to facilitate and accelerate trade and technical exchanges.

As part of the field visits, the Iranian delegation toured a major poultry production chain in Qatar that supplies over 40-45 percent of the country's chicken meat demand. They also visited an industrial slaughterhouse and a livestock terminal where light and heavy livestock—including sheep, goats, cattle, calves, and camels—are imported from various countries, processed in accordance with health regulations, and distributed to the market.

Assessments indicated that Qatar imports most of its livestock, poultry, aquatic products, and related inputs from various countries worldwide. This situation presents a significant opportunity for expanding Iranian exports of livestock products, veterinary medicines, and vaccines to the Qatari market.

Currently, Iran exports a limited range of veterinary pharmaceutical products to Qatar, but officials said that with proper planning, broader cooperation can be achieved.

Iran's Ambassador to Qatar, Ali Salehabadi, welcomed the expansion of specialized cooperation and underscored the embassy's support in facilitating official communications, following up on agreements, and removing potential obstacles.

One of the key issues discussed was Qatar's strong interest in importing Iranian light livestock. It was agreed that the matter would be pursued through relevant authorities and senior officials at Iran's Ministry of Agriculture Jihad in Tehran.

Iranian Agricultural, Seafood Exports Gain Ground in Qatar as Currency Reform Eases Trade



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Khurshid Gazderazi, head of the Iran-Qatar Joint Chamber of Commerce, has described Qatar as a suitable market for Iranian agricultural and seafood products, outlining key principles needed to optimize export opportunities in the Qatari market.

Speaking in an interview, Gazderazi announced that Iran's exports to Qatar increased by approximately 14 percent this year. He said that during the first nine months of the current year, exports to Qatar reached \$115 million, compared to about \$101 million during the same period last year.

According to Gazderazi, the growth in exports is not limited to Qatar but also includes other Persian Gulf countries such as the United Arab Emirates and Oman. He emphasized that these countries are not merely end consumers of Iranian goods; rather, they also serve as transit hubs, re-exporting Iranian products to other destinations.

"This creates an important opportunity for Iranian exporters that can significantly contribute to boosting the country's overall exports," he said.

Gazderazi added that in recent years, countries such as Qatar and the UAE have also become destinations for Iranian mineral products, offering further potential for export growth. He noted that Iran's Bushehr Province has been able to take advantage of this opportunity through mineral exports.

Nigeria Says 100 More U.S. Military Personnel Arrive to Tackle Islamists

DAKAR (Dispatches) - About 100 U.S. military personnel have arrived in Nigeria as Washington scales up an operation to target Islamist insurgents, a Nigerian defence spokesperson said.

U.S. President Donald Trump has accused Nigeria of failing to protect Christians from Islamist militants in the northwest. Nigeria denies discriminating against any religion, saying its security forces target armed groups that attack both Christians and Muslims.

The U.S. carried out strikes targeting Islamic State-linked militants in December, and a small U.S. military team has been operating on the ground to boost Nigeria's intelligence capabilities.



IRAN NEWS

Rubio Says Trump Is Committed to PM Orban's Success



BUDAPEST (Dispatches) - U.S. President Donald Trump is committed to the success of Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban because his leadership and rapport with Trump are crucial to U.S. interests, U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio said on Monday, offering a robust endorsement of the nationalist leader as he faces a tough election in April.

Speaking at a news conference with Orban in Budapest, Rubio said U.S. ties with Hungary were entering a "golden era" but appeared to suggest that this depended on Orban being re-elected. He also indicated that Washington would be willing to help Budapest financially if needed.

"President Trump is deeply committed to your success, because your success is our success," Rubio said, standing next to Orban.

"It's because we want you to continue, because we want this economy to prosper, we want this country to do well. It's in our national interest. Especially as long as you're the prime minister and the leader of this country, it's in our national interest that Hungary be successful," Rubio said.

Trump has already publicly endorsed Orban, calling him "a truly strong and powerful Leader" in a social media post last week. The Republican leader has repeatedly thrown his weight behind conservative leaders worldwide, most recently by supporting Argentina's Javier Milei and Japan's Sanae Takaichi.

Trump to Make Call on Taiwan Weapons Package as China Urges Caution



WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - U.S. President Donald Trump said yesterday he would decide soon on whether to send more weapons to Taiwan, after Chinese President Xi Jinping warned him not to.

"I'm talking to him about it. We had a good conversation, and we'll make a determination pretty soon," Trump said, adding that he has a "good relationship" with the Chinese leader, whose country claims the self-ruled island of Taiwan as its territory.

In a phone call with Trump on February 4, Xi called for "mutual respect" in relations with the United States, while warning Washington about arms sales to the democratically run island.

"The Taiwan question is the most important issue in China-US relations... The US must handle arms sales to Taiwan with caution," Xi said, according to China's state broadcaster.

China's Communist Party has never ruled Taiwan, but Beijing claims the island of 23 million people is part of its territory and has not ruled out the use of force to annex it.

Washington does not officially recognize Taiwan, but is the island territory's main military backer—although the tone of that support has softened slightly under Trump.



Kremlin Rejects Claim It Poisoned Navalny

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - The Kremlin flatly rejected accusations from five European countries that the Russian state had killed Alexei Navalny two years ago using toxin from poison dart frogs, but his widow said the truth had finally been proven.

Navalny, President Vladimir Putin's most prominent domestic critic, died on February 16, 2024, in the "Polar Wolf" penal colony north of the Arctic Circle about 1,900 km (1,200 miles) northeast of Moscow. He was 47.

His death, which the Russian state said was from natural causes, occurred a month before Putin was re-elected for a fifth term in a landslide vote which Western nations said was neither free nor fair due to censorship and a crackdown on opponents.

Britain, France, Germany, Sweden and the Netherlands said on Saturday that analyses of samples from Navalny's body had "conclusively" confirmed the presence of epibatidine, a toxin found in poison dart frogs in South America and not found naturally in Russia.

"Navalny died while held in prison, meaning Russia had the means, motive and opportunity to administer this poison to him," they said.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov rejected the allegations.

"Naturally, we do not accept such accusations. We disagree with them. We consider them biased and not based on anything. And we strongly reject them," Peskov told reporters.

Maria Zakharova, a spokeswoman for the Russian Foreign Ministry, previously said Moscow would provide relevant comment if and when the countries making the allegations released and detailed their test results.

Until then, the state TASS news agency cited her as saying, the allegations were "merely propaganda aimed at diverting

attention from pressing Western issues".

The British government on Saturday declined to respond to a Reuters query about how the samples from Navalny's body were obtained or where they were assessed.

The European joint statement referenced the 2018 Novichok poisoning in Salisbury, England, of former Russian agent Sergei Skripal and his daughter, suggesting that Moscow has form when it comes to using deadly poisons against its enemies.

Russia denies involvement in the Salisbury incident. It also rejects British allegations that Moscow killed dissident Alexander Litvinenko in London in 2006 by lacing his tea with radioactive polonium-210.

A group of 15 mostly European countries - but also including Australia, New Zealand and Canada - issued a fresh statement on Monday, reiterating their demands for Russia to conduct a transparent investigation into Navalny's death.

The statement, published on the German foreign ministry's website, said that Russian human rights defenders were continuing Navalny's legacy and called on Moscow to release "all political prisoners".

The dart frog toxin allegations were made at the Munich Security Conference ahead of the second anniversary of Navalny's death on Monday.

Yulia Navalnaya, his widow - who had alleged from the outset that her husband had been murdered by the Russian state - said on Monday that the findings provided the necessary proof to back her stance.

"Two years. We have attained the truth, and we will also attain justice one day," Navalnaya wrote on X above a photograph of her late husband smiling.

Zelenskiy Warns of New Russian Strikes Ahead of Geneva Peace Talks



KYIV (Dispatches) - President Volodymyr Zelenskiy said that Ukrainian intelligence showed more Russian attacks on energy targets lay ahead and that such strikes made it more difficult to reach an agreement on ending the nearly four-year war.

"Intelligence reports show that Russia is preparing further massive strikes against energy infrastructure so it is necessary to ensure that all air defence systems are properly configured," Zelenskiy said in his nightly video address.

Ukrainian, Russian and American delegations are gathering in the Swiss city of Geneva for a third round of U.S.-brokered talks on Tuesday focused for the first time on the thorniest question of the war — the fate of Ukrainian territory occupied by Russia.

Zelenskiy said Russian attacks were "constantly evolving" and resorting to a combination of weapons, including drones and missiles, requiring "special defence and support from our partners".

"Russia cannot resist the temptation of the final days of winter cold and wants to strike Ukrainians painfully," he said. "Partners must understand this.

First and foremost, this concerns the United States."

Reuters was not able to immediately reach Russian officials for comment.

The head of Ukraine's delegation, Rustem Umerov, said on Telegram that his team was already in Geneva looking forward "to constructive work and substantive meetings on security and humanitarian issues".

Moscow wants Ukraine to cede the entirety of the Donbas area.

Russian news agencies quoted aviation sources as saying that the Russian delegation had left for Geneva, headed by Vladimir Medinsky, an aide to President Vladimir Putin.

"This time, the idea is to discuss a broader range of issues, including, in fact, the main ones. The main issues concern both the territories and everything else related to the demands we have put forward," Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov told reporters.

He said military intelligence chief Igor Kostyukov would also take part in the talks and that Putin's special envoy, Kirill Dmitriev, would engage in a separate working group on economic issues.

Two earlier rounds of U.S.-backed talks in the United Arab Emirates led to a prisoner swap but no breakthrough toward a settlement.

Bangladesh PM-to-Be Tarique Rahman and Lawmakers Sworn Into Parliament



DHAKA (Dispatches) - Bangladesh's prime minister-to-be Tarique Rahman and lawmakers were sworn into parliament on Tuesday, becoming the first elected representatives since a deadly 2024 uprising.

Rahman is set to take over from an interim government that has steered the country of 170 million people for 18 months since the autocratic government of Sheikh Hasina was overthrown.

The lawmakers, who promised loyalty to Bangladesh, were sworn in by the Chief Election Commissioner AMM Nasir Uddin.

Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) lawmakers are expected to formally elect Rahman as their leader, with President Mohammed Shahabuddin then to administer the oath of office to the prime minister and his ministers later on Tuesday afternoon.

Rahman, 60, chief of the BNP and scion of one of the country's most powerful political dynasties, won a landslide victory in the February 12 elections.

"This victory belongs to Bangladesh, belongs to democracy," he said in his victory speech on Saturday.

"This victory belongs to people who aspire to and have sacrificed for democracy."

But he has also warned of the challenges ahead, including tackling the economic woes of the world's second-largest garment exporter.

"We are about to begin our journey in a situation marked by a fragile economy left behind by the authoritarian regime, weakened constitutional and statutory institutions, and a deteriorating law and order situation," he added in his victory speech.

The new leader has pledged to restore stability and revive growth after months of turmoil that rattled investor confidence in the world's second largest garment exporter.

He has also called for all parties to "remain united" in a country polarised by years of bitter rivalry.

Rahman's win marks a remarkable turnaround for a man who only returned to Bangladesh in December after 17 years in exile in Britain, far from Dhaka's political storms.

The BNP coalition won 212 seats, compared with 77 for the Jamaat-e-Islami-led alliance.

Jamaat, which secured more than a quarter of seats in parliament -- a four-fold increase on its previous best -- have challenged results in 32 constituencies.

LICENCE HOLDER: SOKHAN GOSTAR INSTITUTE

Switchboard: (+98) (21) 44253448
 Public Relations Tel: (+98) (21) 44253450
 Editorial Board: 44253449
 Public Relations Fax: (+98) (21) 44253395
 Advertising Department:

Tel/Fax: (+98) (21) 44253335-9/44253234
 Website: <http://www.irannewsdaily.com>
 E-Mail Address: info@irannewsdaily.com
 ISSN 1024-6053 P.O. Box: 15875-8551
 Address: No 13, Pajouhesh St., Golestan II St, Golestan

St. Marzdaran Blvd., Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran
 Distributed by: Cities of Iran Cultural and Artistic Institute
 Managing Director: Fereydoon Taherpour Asl

4

SPORTS

WEDNESDAY FEBRUARY 18, 2026



Sinner Rolls in Doha Opener

DOHA (Dispatches) - In his first match since losing an epic semifinal at the Australian Open late last month, second-seeded Jannik Sinner dumped Tomas Machac of the Czech Republic 6-1, 6-4 in the first round of the Qatar ExxonMobil Open on Monday in Doha.

Sinner was the two-time defending Australian Open champion before he fell 3-6, 6-3, 4-6, 6-4, 6-4 to Novak Djokovic in Melbourne. The Italian had no such difficulties on Monday, never facing a break point and committing just nine unforced errors.

Fourth-seeded Daniil Medvedev of Russia, the 2023 Doha champion, also posted a comfortable first-round result, a 6-4, 6-2 victory over China's Juncheng Shang.

Sixth-seeded Jakub Mensik of the Czech Republic beat British qualifier Jan Chotkowski 6-7 (6), 6-2, 6-4. Australia's Alexei Popyrin and France's Arthur Fils and Valentin Royer also advanced.

Alex Michelsen won 86% of his service points en route to a 7-6 (4), 6-4 victory over sixth-seeded Valentin Vacherot of Monaco in the first round at Delray Beach, Fla.

Michelsen never ceded a break point and was particularly effective when putting his first serve in play, winning 92.3% of the points (36 of 39).

Eighth-seeded Frances Tiafoe of the U.S., the 2018 Delray Beach champ, pushed past Australian qualifier Rinky Hijikata 6-4, 6-4, and the United States' Marcos Giron knocked out Japanese qualifier Shu Shimabukuro 6-3, 7-5. France's Terence Atmane and Hong Kong's Chak Lam Coleman Wong also won their openers.

All three Brazilians in action fell in the first round at Rio de Janeiro.

Peru's Ignacio Buse rallied past Brazilian qualifier Igor Marcondes 4-6, 7-5, 6-4. The Czech Republic's Vit Kopriva defeated Gustavo Heide 6-2, 7-6 (5), and Germany's Yannick Hanfmann beat Joao Lucas Reis Da Silva 7-6 (3), 6-4.

The only seeded player to hit the court on Monday, seventh-seeded Daniel Altmaier of Germany, lost 6-4, 7-6 (7) to Serbia's Dusan Lajovic, a lucky loser from qualifying.

Chile's Alejandro Tabilo and Argentina's Thiago Agustin Tirante moved on with straight-set wins. Meanwhile Francisco Cerundolo finally claimed an elusive home title by beating Italian Luciano Darderi 6-4 6-2 to win the Argentina Open and banish the ghosts of two previous final defeats in Buenos Aires.

The top seed and hometown hero needed just 97 minutes to overcome second seed Darderi at the clay-court ATP 250 event, securing his fourth career crown and first on Argentine soil in front of friends and family.

"Probably the best moment of my career so far," Cerundolo said after the victory. "I really wanted to win here in my hometown, in my country, with my friends and family and all the people here in Argentina. This feeling is amazing."

The 27-year-old Cerundolo, who had lost the finals in 2021 and 2023, completed the championship without dropping a set.

The world number 19 saved six of seven break points, including all five in the opening set, to become the seventh home champion at the tournament since it began in 2001.

Meillard Crowns Swiss men's Olympic Domination With Slalom Gold

BORMIO (Dispatches) - Loic Meillard won the Swiss men's team their fourth Olympic gold in the five alpine skiing events in Bormio when he streaked to victory in the slalom on Monday.

The 29-year-old world champion clocked a winning time of 1min 53.61sec, with Austrian Fabio Gstrein taking silver at 0.35sec and Norway's Henrik Kristoffersen rounding out the podium (+1.13).

Meillard's gold caps an incredible couple of weeks for the Swiss men's team, Franjo von Allmen having won the downhill and super-G titles before then pairing with Tanguy Nef to win the team combined.

"It's amazing," said Meillard. "With a world title in slalom and an Olympic title this year, it's crazy."

Meillard, who had already taken team combined silver with Marco Odermatt and giant slalom bronze in Bormio, was second fastest in the first leg behind Norway's Atle Lie McGrath and laid down the joint



fastest second leg for victory.

"I had to give it all and try my best. And when I saw some green (for best time), I was like, amazing. A third medal, third race. You never know if it's going to be gold or not," he said.

There was late drama as McGrath bombed out of his second leg, hitting a gate high up the course so hard it knocked him out of his rhythm.

Disgusted, McGrath hurled his poles over the safety netting that lined the Stelvio piste, with nearby Swiss team members embracing each other in celebration.

McGrath then trudged off to the other side of the course, despondent, lying in the snow in angry reflection.

"Atle Lie would've deserved it as well, he was the best skier this season, but that's part of slalom, that's part of sport," Meillard said.

Barcelona Stunned by Girona 2-1 to Leave Real Madrid Top of LaLiga

GIRONA (Dispatches) - Barcelona were stunned by Girona who roared back to win 2-1 at home in a breathless Catalan derby, as last season's champions failed to return to the LaLiga summit, leaving Real Madrid top of the table.

Barcelona struck the woodwork twice in the first half, Raphinha hitting the post before Lamine Yamal fired a penalty against the same upright in added time after Dani Olmo was fouled inside the box.

Pau Cubarsi finally put the visitors ahead in the 59th minute, rising to head home Jules Kounde's cross from a short corner, but Girona levelled three minutes later when Thomas Lemar converted from close range after Vladislav Vanat's cross caused confusion.

Fran Beltran sealed victory in the 87th minute, steering home from Joel Roca's pass as the Montilivi stadium erupted.

Barcelona pushed for an equaliser but could not break through, even after Roca was sent off in added time for a reckless foul on Lamine Yamal.



Barca remain on 58 points, two behind Real Madrid, and have lost successive games in all competitions for the first time since October.

"We lacked a bit of everything. We need to be self-critical. We need to improve things and get our act together," Cubarsi told DAZN.

"After my goal, they scored very quickly to equalise. We got them back into the game too quickly. We need to improve on those goals they score right after we take the lead. Keep your head down and improve."

Hansi Flick welcomed back Frenkie De Jong and Raphinha from injury after their absence in last week's 4-0 Copa del Rey semi-final first-leg loss to Atletico Madrid, and Barca duly dominated possession early in the game.

Yet their finishing deserted them. Raphinha dragged wide after surging in from the left, while Yamal was denied from point-blank range by keeper Paulo Gazzaniga following a sharp counter down the right.

Sri Lanka's Nissanka Leaves Australia on Brink of T20 World Cup Exit



KANDY (Dispatches) - Sri Lanka's Pathum Nissanka scored the first century of the 2026 T20 World Cup on Monday to put his side into the Super Eights and leave Australia on the brink of elimination.

Nissanka scored 100 not out off 52 balls with five sixes and 10 fours as Sri Lanka, chasing Australia's 181, reached 184-2 with two overs to spare in Kandy to win by eight wickets.

A victory by Zimbabwe over Ireland in Group B on Tuesday, or against Sri Lanka on Thursday, will eliminate the 2021 champions.

If Zimbabwe lose both, Australia will need to beat Oman in their final match on Friday by a big margin to get through on net run rate.

"We're in the lap of the Gods now I think," said Australia captain Mitchell Marsh.

"Lot of emotions in the room right now. Haven't been at our best. Disappointed bunch at the moment."

"We shouldn't have lost to Zimbabwe with all due respect to them and then we were under pressure."

"We will be watching the Ireland-Zimbabwe game. However, things are out of our control at the moment."

Nissanka was involved in a 97-run stand off 66 balls with Kusal Mendis for the second wicket with the wicketkeeper-batsman posting his third fifty in the competition.

Nissanka became the first Sri Lankan to score two hundreds in T20 internationals.

After Mendis's dismissal, Nissanka and Pavan Rathnayake put on 76 off 34 balls to see Sri Lanka to victory.

Nissanka played some glorious cover drives off the spinners and played some elegant flicks against the quicks.

"Very happy to score a hundred in a World Cup. It had been one of my dreams to be honest," Nissanka told reporters.

Benfica Coach Mourinho Plays Down Madrid Links



LISBON (Dispatches) - Benfica coach Jose Mourinho insisted he is capable of saying no to Real Madrid president Florentino Perez as he played down rumours of a return to the Spanish giants.

Mourinho's Benfica host Real Madrid in a Champions League play-off round clash today, before the second leg at the Santiago Bernabeu next week.

The 63-year-old Portuguese coach, who led Madrid between 2010-2013, has a clause in his contract with Benfica which would allow him to depart the club, fuelling rumours Perez may turn to him again next season.

Mourinho guided Benfica to a 4-2 victory over Alvaro Arbeloa's Real Madrid in the league phase of the Champions League in January, leading both teams to face each other again in the two-legged play-off round.

"Can you say no? Yes," Mourinho told reporters when asked if he could reject an approach from the Madrid chief. "Yes you can."

Mourinho admitted he has a "great friendship" with Perez and a permanent connection with Madrid, but said the break clause was agreed because of the Benfica presidential elections which were approaching in November 2025, a few weeks after he signed his contract.

"I gave everything to Real Madrid, everything that I had, I did good things, I did bad things, but I gave absolutely everything and that's all," said Mourinho.