

Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi Met His Swiss Counterpart Ignazio Cassis on Tuesday to Discuss the Latest Status of Indirect Nuclear Negotiations Between Iran and the United States

# IRAN NEWS

President Masoud Pezeshkian Has Emphasized the Need to Deepen Historical and Friendly Relations Between Tehran and Tokyo and to Expand Bilateral and International Cooperation

## 2 DOMESTIC



### Iran, Russia Target \$10b Trade as Business Leaders Call for Easing Customs Barriers

> SEE PAGE 2

## 3 INTERNATIONAL

### U.S. Accuses China of Secret Nuclear Blasts



> SEE PAGE 3

### Joint Iran-Russia Naval Drill to Be Held Tomorrow



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - The spokesperson for the joint naval exercise between the naval forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Russian Federation announced that the drill will be held tomorrow (Thursday) in the Sea of Oman and the northern Indian Ocean.

Rear Admiral Hassan Maqsoodlou, spokesperson for the joint naval exercise between the Navy of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Russian Federation Navy, stated that the exercise will be hosted by the First Naval District of the Iranian Army Navy in Bandar Abbas. He said the main objective of the drill is to enhance maritime security and promote sustainable maritime interactions in the Sea of Oman and the northern Indian Ocean.

Maqsoodlou added that expanding joint maritime cooperation and strengthening relations between the two navies in the design and execution of combined operations are among the other key goals of the exercise.

He further noted that creating convergence and coordination in joint actions to counter activities threatening maritime security and safety—particularly in protecting commercial vessels and oil tankers, as well as combating maritime terrorism—are central components of the joint drill.

The spokesperson emphasized that the exercise is also aimed at deepening friendly relations, increasing regional cooperation with a priority on neighboring countries, and strengthening the role of regional states in ensuring and maintaining maritime security and navigation.

### Tehran Summons German Envoy Over Berlin's Anti-Iranian Stances, Measures



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - The Foreign Ministry has summoned Germany's ambassador to Tehran over the recent back-to-back adversarial stances and measures that have been adopted by German authorities versus the Islamic Republic.

Axel Dittmann was summoned by Alireza Yousefi, director-general for Western Europe at the ministry, on Tuesday, and formally notified of the Islamic Republic's strong protest.

The ministry identified the reason behind the summoning as "anti-Iranian actions in Germany and destructive positions taken by German officials against the Islamic Republic in violation of the international law."

During the meeting, Yousefi condemned the stances and activities "particularly the hosting and support of violent and terrorist elements and groups" that are hostile towards Tehran.

He emphasized that such positions and measures contradicted the fundamental principles of the international law and the United Nations Charter, and entailed international responsibility for Berlin.

The German ambassador undertook to convey Tehran's protest to relevant German authorities.



### U.S. Warships Can Be Sent to the Seabed

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - The Leader of the Islamic Revolution, Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, said that while a warship is a dangerous instrument, "more dangerous than a warship is the weapon that can send it to the bottom of the sea."

Ayatollah Khamenei made the remarks during a large gathering of thousands of people from Tabriz and East Azerbaijan Province, held on the eve of the anniversary of the historic February 18, 1978 uprising of the people of Tabriz.

The Leader described the current year as "unusual and full of events," citing what he called "the nation's victory in the 12-day war," "the suppression of the significant and heavy sedition of Dey," and the "magnificent public participation" in the January 12 and February 11 rallies as signs of the Iranian nation's vitality and strength.

He stressed the need to preserve and strengthen "preparedness, vigilance, and national unity," adding that, except for the ringleaders and elements connected to hostile forces, all those killed during the unrest—including security personnel, innocent bystanders, and even those "deceived into joining the sedition"—are considered "our own children," and the nation mourns them all.

Ayatollah Khamenei rejected characterizations of the unrest as spontaneous protests by angry youth, instead describing it as a "planned coup" that was ultimately defeated by the Iranian people. He alleged that U.S. and Israeli intelligence services, along with intelligence agencies from other countries, had recruited, trained, armed, and funded individuals abroad to carry out acts of sabotage and attacks on military and government centers inside Iran.

According to the Leader, trained elements pushed inexperienced and emotional individuals to the forefront, while themselves engaging in violent actions, including arson and destruction, with the aim of destabilizing the Islamic Republic. He said security forces, the Basij, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, and many ordinary citizens confronted the unrest, leading to its failure.

In another part of his speech, Ayatollah Khamenei addressed what he described as "arrogant threats" from U.S. officials and media outlets regarding a potential attack on Iran.

He said U.S. leaders themselves know they lack the capacity to carry out such threats, adding that even "the army that considers itself the strongest in the world" could suffer a blow so severe that it would be unable to recover.

Referring to reported deployments of U.S. naval forces toward Iran, he said: "A warship is

indeed a dangerous instrument, but more dangerous than it is the weapon capable of sending it to the depths of the sea."

He added that Iran's institutions responsible for countering threats are fully prepared, and that the public should continue their daily lives with calm and confidence.

The Leader described what he called numerous economic, political, and social problems in the United States as signs of the decline of the American empire. "America's issue with us is that it wants to swallow Iran," he said, adding that the Iranian people and the Islamic Republic stand in the way of that objective.

He criticized U.S. positions on Iran's missile and nuclear programs, calling them examples of "illogical interference." He defended Iran's right to possess deterrent weapons, stating that any country lacking deterrent capabilities would be crushed by its enemies.

Regarding nuclear energy, he emphasized Iran's right to peaceful nuclear technology for medical, agricultural, and energy purposes, noting that such rights are recognized under international regulations, including those of the International Atomic Energy Agency.

Ayatollah Khamenei also criticized what he described as contradictory calls from U.S. officials for negotiations while predetermining the outcome. "They say let us negotiate about nuclear energy, but the result must be that you do not have nuclear energy," he said, calling such an approach misguided.

Turning to domestic issues, the Leader called on government officials to intensify efforts to resolve economic problems, curb inflation, and stabilize the national currency. He described current inflation and currency depreciation as "illogical" and expressed hope that they would be corrected.

He urged officials to continue ongoing initiatives carefully and seriously, improve the business environment, and ensure public confidence. While acknowledging external threats, he said Iran possesses the means to neutralize them and that citizens should focus on work, education, business, and trade without anxiety.

The gathering concluded with remarks from East Azerbaijan's representative of the Supreme Leader, who highlighted the province's historical role in national events and reaffirmed the people's continued support for the Islamic Republic.

### Iran's Right to Nuclear Enrichment Non-Negotiable

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi has declared that Iran's right to peaceful nuclear energy is "inherent and non-negotiable," while simultaneously confirming that a "new window of opportunity" has opened for diplomacy with the United States.

Araghchi made the remarks in an address at the United Nations Conference on Disarmament on Tuesday, which came minutes after he concluded a second round of indirect negotiations with US officials in Geneva.

In a firm defense of Tehran's nuclear program, Araghchi emphasized that the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) explicitly recognizes the inalienable right of states to produce and use nuclear energy.

"This right is inherent, non-negotiable, and legally binding," Araghchi told the plenary meeting. "It is not conditional upon political considerations, nor can it be suspended or reinterpreted arbitrarily."

The foreign minister reiterated that nuclear weapons have "no place" in Iran's security doctrine, citing religious boundaries and a defensive policy that prohibits weapons of mass destruction.

However, he warned that lasting agreements can only be achieved through "mutual balanced commitments."

Araghchi credited "friendly countries in the region," notably Oman, for facilitating a renewed diplomatic channel.

"A new window of opportunity has opened," he said. "We are hopeful that negotiation will lead to a sustainable and negotiated solution."



The speech contained sharp criticism of Western powers, specifically the United States, for its 2018 withdrawal from the JCPOA and its participation in the June aggression against Iran.

Araghchi described the attacks on Iranian nuclear facilities as "war crimes" and accused the US of "colluding with a non-party to the NPT, a reference to Israel, against a state party."

He further condemned what he termed "double standards" regarding Israel's nuclear capabilities and its regional military actions, stating that the silence of international institutions in the face of such violations signals a "serious erosion of the global non-proliferation regime."

The minister also touched upon the technical complexities of inspections following the military strikes of 2025.

He pointed out that he held technical discussions on Monday with Rafael Grossi, Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

Araghchi noted that because attacks on safeguarded installations are "entirely unprecedented," Iran and the Agency are working to identify a "mutually agreed framework" for inspections that accounts for the current state of the facilities.

He concluded his address by urging the Conference on Disarmament to overcome its long-standing "paralysis" and begin negotiations on a comprehensive nuclear weapons convention.

"The choice before us is clear," he warned. "Either we dismantle nuclear weapons, or they will one day dismantle us."

### President Underlines Leader's Oversight of Nuclear Negotiations; rules out 'talks for the sake of talks'



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - President Masoud Pezeshkian has underlined Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei's comprehensive oversight of indirect nuclear negotiations with the US, while dismissing the notion of Iran's participation in "talks for the sake of talks."

"These negotiations are being conducted with full coordination and authorization from the Leader," the chief executive said during a meeting with a number of clergymen in Tehran on Tuesday.

"Our goal is to genuinely resolve issues, not to engage in talks for the sake of talks. We are seriously pursuing tangible results and hope this process will lead to concrete outcomes," Pezeshkian added.

Also on Tuesday, the second round of renewed nuclear negotiations between Iran and the US concluded in Geneva.

The Iranian side cited "good progress," while underlining the need for the process to result in verifiable removal of the illegal and unilateral American sanctions targeting the country.

Addressing the talks on the same day, Ayatollah Khamenei denounced Washington's attempts at imposing any certain outcome, noting, "To predetermine the outcome before talks even begin is wrong and foolish."

"This is precisely the foolish approach being taken by American presidents, certain senators, the current president, and others," the Leader added.

Ayatollah Khamenei warned that the United States was "seeking to dominate the Iranian nation," asserting, however, that the people, in light of their lofty culture, historical precedence, and values, would "never pledge allegiance to corrupt figures like those currently in power in the United States."

### No Plans to Raise Bread or Gasoline Prices in 2026 Budget



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Majlis Speaker, Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf, emphasized that the 2026 budget is designed to protect household purchasing power and should not be interpreted as a program to increase prices. He confirmed that there is no obligation or plan to raise the prices of bread or gasoline next year due to resource shortages.

Speaking during the parliamentary session, while reviewing the budget tables for the 2026 fiscal year, Qalibaf addressed concerns that the government intends to hike gasoline prices. "Yesterday, I spoke about gasoline, and some have assumed that the government plans to raise the price to 60,000 rials per liter based on a daily consumption of 25 million liters next year. This is not correct," he said.

According to the Speaker, the 2026 budget allocates 322 trillion rials (approximately \$2.7 billion) and 416 trillion rials (about \$3.4 billion) for gasoline, but these figures do not indicate a step increase in domestic fuel prices. "We have no program to increase gasoline prices," he stressed, while highlighting the importance of managing fuel consumption efficiently.

# IRAN NEWS



## Head of Iran TPO Departs for Tajikistan

TEHRAN (IRNA) - The head of the Trade Promotion Organization of Iran has traveled to Tajikistan alongside Iran's minister of industry, mine and trade to expand and facilitate industrial, mining, and commercial cooperation between the two countries. According to the organization's public relations office, Mohammad-Ali Dehghan Dehnavi accompanied Mohammad Atabak on an official visit to Dushanbe at the invitation of Sherali Kabir, Tajikistan's Minister of Industry and New Technologies. During the visit, the Iranian delegation is scheduled to hold talks with several Tajik economic ministers and tour selected industrial units and production facilities. Key agenda items for Dehghan Dehnavi include strengthening trade cooperation in pharmaceuticals, medical equipment, and construction materials, as well as reviewing the potential signing of a preferential trade agreement.

## Iran-Russia Cooperation in Oil and Gas Field Development Yields Tangible Results



### IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Iran's Oil Minister said cooperation between Iran and Russia in the development of oil and gas fields has produced tangible results, describing the 19th session of the Joint Economic Cooperation Commission between the two countries as an important opportunity to maximize bilateral capacities, particularly under sensitive international conditions. Oil Minister Mohsen Paknejad made the remarks on Wednesday during the 19th meeting of the Joint Commission on Economic Cooperation between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Russian Federation. The session was attended by Russia's Energy Minister Sergey Tsvilev. Paknejad expressed satisfaction over the opportunity to hold the latest round of talks, noting that the commission and its related meetings—along with joint monitoring conducted throughout the year by the secretariat—actively follow up on agreed issues and provisions. Referring to the short interval between the 18th and 19th sessions, both held within the same Iranian calendar year, he said the timing—one meeting in Ordibehesht (April-May) and the other in late Bahman (late February)—has created a valuable opportunity to make maximum use of the existing capacities in Iran-Russia interactions across various sectors. He stressed that such engagement is particularly significant given the current sensitive international environment, adding that enhanced cooperation carries meaning and importance on the global stage. The oil minister also expressed appreciation for efforts by the Russian side, especially Energy Minister Tsvilev, stating that joint follow-up measures have helped move parts of previously discussed understandings into the implementation phase. He described this progress as a notable achievement for the joint commission. Turning to the main agenda, Paknejad highlighted cooperation in the oil and energy sectors. He said that under four contracts, the two sides are jointly implementing development projects in seven oil fields with Russian companies.

# Iran, Russia Target \$10b Trade as Business Leaders Call for Easing Customs Barriers

### IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Senior Iranian and Russian business officials have called for removing customs restrictions and accelerating trade procedures between the two countries, setting a target of \$10 billion in bilateral trade within the next three years. The remarks were made during a meeting at the Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture between its vice president, Qadir Qiafeh, and Leonid Lozhzhko, head of the Russia-Iran Business Council. Opening the session, Qiafeh highlighted the significant trade potential between Iran and Russia, noting that despite both countries' large markets, trade volumes have not reached levels commensurate with their capacities since the collapse of the Soviet Union. He said bilateral trade has improved in recent years, particularly following the implementation of the free trade agreement between Iran and the Eurasian Economic Union. According to him, trade exchanges under the agreement reached approximately \$4 billion in the first nine months of the current Iranian year (ending March 2026), with expectations for further growth by year-end. Despite this progress, Qiafeh said a considerable gap remains between current trade volumes and the estimated potential of \$10 billion to \$30 billion. Achieving the lower \$10 billion target over the next three years, he stressed, requires a stronger focus on removing practical and administrative barriers. Qiafeh identified the application of preferential tariffs, limited familiarity among traders with tariff schedules, and delays in information exchange as key challenges in implementing the Eurasia agreement. Customs procedures, including slow responses from relevant agencies, have particularly affected perishable goods, he added. Logistical and infrastructure limitations were also cited as major obstacles. Qiafeh emphasized that restricted regular shipping services and underutilization of the International North-South Transport Corridor have doubled transport time and costs. Completing and fully operationalizing the corridor, he said, would significantly enhance transit capacity and reduce delivery times for goods moving between the two countries. Financial constraints also remain a shared problem. Both Iran and Russia face limited access to international financial systems, and mechanisms for settlements in national currencies are not fully established. Currency volatility in both countries has further increased operational costs for traders. Qiafeh noted that discussions on linking Iran's Shetab banking network with Russia's Mir system have been ongoing for over six years. Although pilot programs have been conducted, full implementation has yet to be achieved, limiting large-scale trade transactions. He also criticized the slow flow of information between the two sides and pointed to structural challenges stemming from state-dominated economic systems in both



countries. Qiafeh stressed the key role of chambers of commerce in facilitating trade and information exchange, arguing that closer cooperation between Iranian and Russian business institutions could help accelerate progress. While acknowledging that numerous memoranda of understanding have been signed, he said only two major achievements have emerged so far: eased business visa procedures and the establishment of a "green corridor" to streamline trade procedures. Both initiatives were driven largely by the private sector, he noted. He called for expanded cooperation in joint investment and technology transfer, particularly in oil, gas, petrochemicals, mining, and logistics. Roushan-Ali Yekta, vice president of the Iran-Russia Joint Chamber, highlighted disputes over customs valuation of Iranian goods in Russia as a major hurdle. He proposed utilizing guarantee funds to support Iranian traders and facilitate smoother investment and trade flows.

Leonid Lozhzhko, head of the Russia-Iran Business Council, acknowledged ongoing settlement and trust issues, despite 89 percent of bilateral trade reportedly being conducted in national currencies. A significant share of financial transactions still passes through third countries, including Turkey and Azerbaijan, he said. He estimated that \$5.5 billion in trade could be routed through Turkey over the next four years, while \$180 million in agricultural trade currently transits through Azerbaijan and Turkey. Both sides, he stressed, should work to reduce dependence on intermediary countries. Lozhzhko said the opening of a branch of Russia's MTS Bank in Iran could significantly lower transaction costs. He also noted that VTB Bank has allocated \$2 billion to provide financial services to Iranian traders. On transport cooperation, he reported that 28 vessels have been added to Caspian Sea shipping routes between the two countries since last year, with 30 more ships planned by 2035. Rail transport capacity is also being expanded, with new freight arrangements through western and eastern corridors to accelerate deliveries to Moscow. However, customs procedures remain problematic, particularly for food exports. Goods transiting through Azerbaijan face multiple inspections, while errors in valuation documentation can cause costly delays and reduce product quality. Lozhzhko said training workshops are being planned to help Iranian traders better navigate customs requirements. Both sides concluded that resolving customs bottlenecks, strengthening financial connectivity, and improving logistics infrastructure are essential steps toward achieving the \$10 billion trade target.

## Russia's Trade with Iran Up 22%



### IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Russia's Deputy Prime Minister announced that trade between Tehran and Moscow increased by 22 percent in 2025 following the implementation of the free trade agreement between Iran and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), of which Russia is a member. Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexey Overchuk made the remarks Tuesday during a meeting in Moscow titled "Architecture of the Future: Russia's Trade on Key Multilateral Platforms." He stated that since the free trade agreement between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Eurasian Economic Union came into force in May 2025, bilateral trade between Tehran and Moscow has grown by 22 percent compared to the previous year, based on 2025 statistics. "We are working to minimize the remaining barriers to our mutual trade," Overchuk said. The Russian deputy prime minister also expressed optimism about the prospect of signing a preferential trade agreement with India. He noted that negotiations are currently underway and that the first phase has been completed. If the anticipated agreement is signed, Russian businesses would gain access to India's 2.2-billion-person market, he said. Overchuk recalled that Russia has already signed preferential trade agreements with the Commonwealth of Independent States, the Eurasian Economic Union, Iran, Vietnam, and Serbia.

## Iran Values Expansion of Ties with Pakistan



### IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The Minister of Agriculture Jihad of the Islamic Republic of Iran said Tehran places great importance on expanding relations with Pakistan, stressing that Iran is determined to safeguard its national interests under all circumstances. Gholamreza Nouri Ghezlehjeh made the remarks during a joint meeting with Pakistan's ministers of agriculture and commerce in Islamabad. He underscored the Islamic Republic's strong commitment to broadening bilateral cooperation. Nouri Ghezlehjeh stated that the government and people of Iran hold special regard for Pakistan, noting that this stems from deep cultural ties, close people-to-people connections, and shared borders. He added that expanding bilateral relations—particularly in the economic sphere, which falls within the responsibility of the two sides—can pave the way for further strengthening overall ties. The minister emphasized that Iran's Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, and President Masoud Pezeshkian have both strongly stressed the importance of consolidating relations between Iran and Pakistan. He noted that President Pezeshkian's recent visit to Islamabad, the signing of cooperation agreements, and the subsequent visit of Pakistan's agriculture and commerce ministers to Iran have helped expand this path of engagement. Condemning a recent terrorist incident in Islamabad and extending condolences to the government and people of Pakistan, Nouri Ghezlehjeh said such events demonstrate the need to strengthen cooperation, particularly in combating terrorism. He asserted that foreign actors are undoubtedly involved in such actions and emphasized the importance of enhancing regional collaboration.

# Tourism Industry Representatives Warn of Uncertain Future

### IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Representatives of Iran's tourism associations have warned of the industry's unprecedented fragility, citing declining demand, tax and insurance pressures, weak infrastructure, and political uncertainties as major threats to its survival. The concerns were raised during a session of the Tourism Commission at the Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture, where leaders and representatives of tour guides, hoteliers, and tour operators discussed the ongoing recession and crisis facing the sector. Akbar Ghamkhar, head of Iran's Tour Guides Association, said tourism officials in the government, private sector, and parliament must prepare for three possible scenarios: war, peace, or a prolonged "neither war nor peace" situation. He expressed hope for peace, saying it could usher in a "good spring" for tourism and help lift travel warnings issued by foreign embassies, including in friendly countries. However, he described the "neither war nor peace" situation as the worst outcome, leaving the sector in a state of damaging uncertainty. Ghamkhar recounted his participation in the EMITT tourism exhibition in Turkey, where foreign counterparts expressed surprise that he was able to travel from Iran, reflecting what he described as a troubling global perception of the country. He stressed that tourists seek enjoyment, security, and reasonable prices. Although Iran is considered one of the world's cheapest destinations due to currency depreciation and boasts numerous attractions, he said the "sense of security" has not been established in the minds of foreign travelers — an issue beyond the control of the private sector and requiring high-level national decisions. According to Ghamkhar, 90 percent of travel agencies operating in inbound, outbound, and domestic tours have suffered severe setbacks, as declining purchasing power and a lack of public appetite for travel have hit the market. Even advertising travel services online now draws negative reactions, he added. He criticized the lack of government support for tourism during crises, noting that while other industries have received relief packages and exemptions, tourism businesses are still facing tax claims — including those dating back to the COVID-19 period — and insurance penalties despite reduced or halted operations. Ghamkhar also cited weak internet services and restricted access to international booking platforms such as Booking.com as additional challenges. He urged the government to design a special support package for what he called the "most politically fragile industry," warning that mounting tax and insurance pressures have forced some agencies to close or request voluntary suspension. He further criticized a recent parliamentary measure imposing a €5



fee on incoming foreign tourists, describing it as a counterproductive step at a time when other countries are offering travel incentives. A representative of Iran's Hoteliers Association said that over the past two months alone, hotel owners have incurred losses totaling 170 trillion rials (17 "hemats") in lost room revenues. He added that energy incentives have been cut and gas has been reclassified outside the service sector, increasing operational costs. Alireza Vafa pointed to what he described as the weak structural position of tourism in parliament, arguing that the industry lacks a powerful commission to defend its interests. He warned that failure to declare force majeure conditions amid ongoing tensions could deepen losses. Veteran tour operator Ali Sadriya criticized the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts for introducing new regulations that, in his view, have complicated rather than facilitated operations. He said tour operators have brought tourists to Iran "with blood, sweat, and tears" over the past 30 years without meaningful support and should not be expected to shoulder additional tax burdens. Mustafa Sarvi, vice president of the Iranian Tour Operators Association, noted that 14 support packages were drafted during what he referred to as the "12-day war," but none were implemented. He warned that failing to officially declare force majeure conditions would exacerbate the crisis. Meanwhile, Mohsen Fathi, head of the Tourism Faction in Iran's parliament, announced that the parliamentary approval of a €5 levy on inbound foreign tourists in the 2026 budget bill has been returned to the integration committee for reconsideration and possible removal. Fathi acknowledged that the tourism industry is under severe strain, saying the sector is being "crushed" under current conditions. He noted that hotel occupancy rates in Kish Island — typically a peak-season destination — are currently around 30 percent. While admitting that large-scale short-term interventions may be limited, Fathi said parliament has reinstated certain tax exemptions for the tourism sector in the upcoming budget and is considering allocating low-interest loans to support infrastructure and active tourism businesses. He also spoke of efforts to elevate tourism's structural standing within the government, including discussions to strengthen its institutional authority and potentially upgrade the Tourism Deputy to an independent organization. Participants at the meeting concluded by stressing that without urgent and coordinated action, the country's tourism industry risks deeper and potentially irreversible decline.

## Iran Stresses Practical Implementation of Industrial and Trade Agreements With Tajikistan



### IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Minister of Industry, Mine and Trade emphasized the need to put bilateral memoranda of understanding and agreements with Tajikistan into practical effect in order to reduce administrative procedures and accelerate trade and industrial relations between the two countries. Mohammad Atabak made the remarks Tuesday during a meeting with Sherali Kabir, Tajikistan's Minister of Industry and New Technologies. He stressed the importance of expanding industrial and commercial cooperation as well as broader economic ties between the two nations. Atabak, expressing Iran's readiness to expand trade exchanges with Tajikistan, said increasing Iran's level of trade is a priority emphasized by the country's president. He noted that Iran possesses extensive capabilities and capacities in various sectors, including mining, mineral processing, pharmaceuticals, textiles, and other industries. He added that with its significant mineral reserves and advanced expertise in industries such as textiles and pharmaceuticals, Iran is prepared to deepen interactions by expediting the implementation of existing agreements. Atabak described the presence of senior officials from Iran's Trade Promotion Organization, the Iranian Mines and Mining Industries Development and Renovation Organization, the CEO of Mobarakeh Steel Company, and a group of private sector representatives at the meeting as a promising sign of practical and field-level follow-up on bilateral cooperation.

## Philippines VP Sara Duterte Announces 2028 Presidential Run

MANILA (Dispatches) - Philippine Vice President Sara Duterte announced Wednesday she will run for president of the Southeast Asian nation of 116 million in 2028.

Duterte, who is embroiled in a bitter feud with President Ferdinand Marcos, was impeached last year only to see the country's Supreme Court throw the case out over procedural issues.

"I offer my life, my strength, and my future in the service of our nation," she said Wednesday, while assailing Marcos's record. "I am Sara Duterte. I will run for president of the Philippines."

The daughter of former president Rodrigo Duterte accused Marcos of corruption in her brief speech, saying he had failed to live up to his word during the brief alliance that saw them storm to a landslide victory in the 2022 presidential election.



## More Than 80 States at UN Condemn Israel's Plans to Expand in Occupied West Bank



NEW YORK (Dispatches) - UN missions from 85 member states on Tuesday condemned what they described as Israel's expanding control in the West Bank, warning it could amount to de facto annexation. In a joint statement, they said unilateral measures violated international law and urged Israel to reverse them immediately.

"We strongly condemn unilateral Israeli decisions and measures aimed at expanding Israel's unlawful presence in the West Bank," the statement reads. "Such decisions are contrary to Israel's obligations under international law and must be immediately reversed."

"We underline in this regard our strong opposition to any form of annexation." Last week, Israel's security cabinet approved a series of measures backed by far-right ministers to tighten control over areas of the West Bank administered by the Palestinian Authority under the Oslo accords, in place since the 1990s.

On Sunday, Israel's government also approved a process to register land in the West Bank as "state property" in a move that drew further international condemnation.

"We reiterate our rejection of all measures aimed at altering the demographic composition, character and status of the Palestinian Territory occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem," the statement continued.

## Zelenskiy Says Trump Exerting Undue Pressure on Him



KYIV (Dispatches) - Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy said U.S. President Donald Trump was exerting undue pressure on him in trying to secure a resolution to the nearly four-year-old war pitting Kyiv against Moscow.

Zelenskiy, in an interview with U.S. website Axios published on Tuesday, also said any plan requiring Ukraine to give up territory that Russia has not captured in the eastern Donbas region would be rejected by Ukrainians if put to a referendum.

Axios quoted Zelenskiy as saying it was "not fair" that Trump kept publicly calling on Ukraine, not Russia, to make concessions in negotiating terms for a peace plan.

"I hope it is just his tactics and not the decision," Axios quoted Zelenskiy as saying in the interview, conducted by phone as Russian, Ukrainian and U.S. negotiators held talks in Geneva.

Trump has twice in recent days suggested it was up to Ukraine and Zelenskiy to take steps to ensure the talks proved successful. "Ukraine better come to the table fast. That's all I'm telling you," Trump told reporters aboard Air Force One on Monday.

Zelenskiy, Axios said, suggested it might be easier to put pressure on Ukraine than on Russia.

## U.S. Accuses China of Secret Nuclear Blasts

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - The United States is ready to carry out low-yield nuclear tests to match alleged secret explosions by China and Russia, ending a decades-old moratorium, a senior official said Tuesday.

New START, the last treaty between the United States and Russia that limited deployment of nuclear warheads, expired this month as US President Donald Trump called for a new agreement that also includes China.

Christopher Yeaw, the assistant secretary of state for arms control and nonproliferation, indicated that Trump was serious when he said in October, without giving details, that the United States would resume nuclear testing.

"As the president has said, the United States will return to testing on a -- quote -- 'equal basis,'" Yeaw said at the Hudson Institute, a think tank.

"But equal basis doesn't mean we're going back to Ivy Mike-style atmospheric testing in the multi-megaton range, as some arms control folks would have you believe, hyperventilating about this issue," he said, referring to a massive 1952 thermonuclear detonation in the South Pacific.

"Equal basis, however, presumes a response to a prior standard. Look no further than China or Russia for that standard," he said.

He did not announce timing, saying Trump would make a decision, but added that any test would be at a "level playing field."

"We're not going to remain at an intolerable disadvantage," he said.

China's nuclear arsenal remains far smaller than those of Russia and the United States but it has been growing quickly. China has publicly rejected calls to enter negotiations on a new three-way treaty.

Another senior US official, at a UN meeting in Geneva as New START expired, accused China of carrying out a low-yield nuclear test in 2020 and of preparing more explosions with larger yields.

China said the allegations were "outright lies" and a pretext for the United States to resume nuclear testing.

The State Department in 2024 also alleged low-yield tests by Russia, which has issued veiled threats of using nuclear weapons in its invasion of Ukraine.

Yeaw stood by the charges on China, saying data gathered in nearby Kazakhstan on June 22, 2020 at 0918 GMT



showed a 2.75-magnitude explosion, whose impact was likely muffled by taking place in a large underground cavity.

"There is very little possibility, I would say, that it is anything but an explosion, a singular explosion," he said, dismissing the possibility of an earthquake or mining incident.

In a recent report, the Center for Strategic and International Studies did not find conclusive evidence of an explosion, saying satellite imagery did not show unusual activity at Lop Nur, China's historic testing site in the western region of Xinjiang.

After the US allegations of the Chinese test, Robert Floyd, executive secretary of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization, said the international body also "did not detect any event consistent with the characteristics of a nuclear weapon test."

But he said the group's monitors can only observe explosions when they reach the equivalent of 500 tonnes of TNT -- a small fraction of the US bombs that flattened Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945 in history's only nuclear attacks.

Yeaw heaped scorn on the statement by Floyd, an Australian scientist, saying he should "reassess priorities" from urging an entry into force of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty if his staff cannot notice low-yield tests that nonetheless give knowledge to nuclear states.

"The treaty becomes basically a fig leaf," Yeaw said.

The UN treaty -- which would ban all nuclear explosions -- has not come into force, with France and Britain the only nuclear weapons states to have ratified it.

Former president Bill Clinton signed the treaty but it was rejected in 1999 by the Senate due to opposition from Trump's Republican Party.

The United States last test-detonated a nuclear bomb in 1992. It has since carried out "subcritical" experiments meant to ensure safety without reaching the level to trigger a nuclear chain reaction.

## Canada Launches Huge Defense Plan to Curb Reliance on U.S.

MONTREAL (Dispatches) - Prime Minister Mark Carney on Tuesday launched a multi-billion-dollar plan to strengthen the Canadian military and rely less on the United States.

Carney's announcement of Canada's first defense industrial strategy built on themes he has emphasized during his 11-month tenure as President Donald Trump rips through traditional U.S. alliances.

The prime minister says Canada has not done nearly enough to defend itself in an increasingly dangerous world and counting on US protection is no longer viable.

"We've relied too heavily on our geography and others to protect us," Carney said.

"This has created vulnerabilities that we can no longer afford and dependencies that we can no longer sustain," he added.

Carney has become one of the most prominent global voices criticizing Trump's administration, notably after his speech at the World Economic Forum last month where he said Trump had triggered a "rupture" in the rules-based global order.

On Tuesday, Carney also addressed US Secretary of State Marco Rubio's speech last week to the Munich Security Conference, highlighting what the Canadian leader sees as the widening gap between US and Canadian values.

Carney, addressing reporters after giving a speech on the defence plan, pivoted to Rubio's speech without being asked about it. He cautioned that Trump's top diplomat had spoken of Washington's desire to defend "Christian nationalism."



"Canadian nationalism is civic nationalism" and Ottawa's mandate was to defend the rights of everyone in a vast and diverse country, Carney said.

"There is a rivalry taking place between Canadian nationalism and other forms of nationalism," he added, speaking in French.

In Munich, Rubio said "Western Civilization" was defined by "Christian faith, culture, heritage, language, ancestry, and the sacrifices of our forefathers."

Carney's office said the defence industrial strategy amounts to an investment of "over half a trillion dollars (US\$366 billion) in Canadian security, economic

prosperity, and our sovereignty."

In addition to direct government defence spending of about CANS\$80 billion over the next five years, the plan includes CANS\$180 billion in defence procurement and CANS\$290 billion in defence and security-related infrastructure through the coming decade, Carney said.

The Canadian Chamber of Commerce applauded Carney for having "bet big on Canada."

"The scale of new funding is unprecedented," the group's vice president, David Pierce, said in a statement, adding that the plan will be measured by whether the funds produce "a stronger Canadian Armed Forces."

For Carney, the increasingly fragile security relationship with the United States does not mean Canada should go it alone on defence.

His government has pursued closer military ties with the European Union and, at the Munich conference, Ottawa formally joined the EU's Security Action for Europe (SAFE) program -- making Canada the only non-European member of the bloc's defence financing scheme.

The prime minister on Tuesday also talked about hopes for new defence export opportunities in Asia, notably with South Korea.

The goal is to "be strong enough to be a partner of choice," the prime minister said.

Canada should build "a domestic defense industrial base so we are never hostage to the decisions of others when it comes to our security," he said.

Carney also re-emphasized the need to enforce Canadian sovereignty in the Arctic, where warming temperatures caused by climate change are thawing the ice, opening a new era of competition for critical minerals.

## Peru Congress Ousts Interim President Jeri

LIMA (Dispatches) - Peru's Congress on Tuesday voted to remove the interim President José Jeri over the corruption allegations, deepening political uncertainty just weeks before the nation's April presidential and congressional elections. Jeri is under preliminary investigation for alleged influence peddling tied to a series of undisclosed meetings with the two Chinese executives.

Jeri is under a preliminary investigation into corruption and influence peddling, stemming from a series of undisclosed meetings with two Chinese executives.

With 75 votes in favor, 24 against and 3 abstentions, Peru's legislature voted to remove Jeri from the position he had assumed on Oct. 10 when predecessor Dina Boluarte was dismissed as a crime wave gripped the country.

Jeri's removal from office is the latest chapter in a prolonged political crisis in a country that has seen seven presidents since 2016, and is about to hold a general election amid widespread public outcry over the surge in violent crime.

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Lawmakers will choose a new president from among their members to govern until July 28, when the interim leader will hand over the office to the winner of the April 12 presidential election. Jeri will return to his position as a legislator until July 28, when the new Congress also takes office.

A vote on the interim leader will take place on Wednesday, after lawmakers register their candidates.



The accusations against Jeri stemmed from a leaked report regarding a clandestine December meeting with two Chinese executives. One attendee holds active government contracts, while the other is currently under investigation for alleged involvement in an illegal logging operation.

Jeri has denied wrongdoing. He said he met the executives to organize a Peruvian-Chinese festivity, but his opponents have accused him of corruption.

Despite a revolving door of presidents, Peru's economy has remained stable. The Andean nation had a public debt to gross domestic product ratio of 32% in 2024, one of the lowest in Latin America, and the government has welcomed foreign investment in areas like mining and infrastructure.

As Peru heads into this year's general election, Rafael Lopez Aliaga, a conservative businessman and former mayor of Lima is leading a crowded field that also includes Keiko Fujimori, a well known former legislator whose father was Peru's president in the 1990s. If none of the candidates gets 50% of the vote there will be a runoff in June between the top two contenders.

In the department of Madre de Dios, the Guardianes de la Trocha gang has taken over La Pampa, a gold-rich area running alongside the Tambopata National Reserve, one of the most biodiverse regions on the continent. Forbidden Stories and its partner Mongabay Latam reveal how this criminal organization spreads terror, silencing any opposition with the help of rising corruption in the country.



## Vinicius Stunner Helps Real Madrid Edge Benfica in Play-Off

LISBON (Dispatches) - Vinicius Junior scored a sensational goal to earn Real Madrid a 1-0 Champions League play-off first leg victory at Benfica on Tuesday, although the match was marred by apparent racist abuse aimed at the Brazilian.

Having curled a stunning shot into the top corner in the 50th minute, Vinicius argued with Gianluca Prestianni, after which he complained to French referee Francois Letexier, who halted the match for more than 10 minutes as he applied the racism protocol.

Madrid midfielder Aurelien Tchouameni said Vinicius told his team-mates that Prestianni called him a "monkey".

"Vini is doing good, calm," Real Madrid coach Alvaro Arbeloa told Movistar.

"(What happened) is something that nobody likes, you have to ask the Benfica player what he said.

"(Racism) is something we have to eradicate from the world of football and if the players don't fix it then this is very complicated."

Benfica coach Jose Mourinho was sent off in the final stages of a spiky game for complaining too vociferously, meaning he will miss the second leg against his former team at the Santiago Bernabeu next week.

Arbeloa's Madrid earned a narrow and nervy victory at the Estadio da Luz in Lisbon to take an advantage into that clash, as well as avenging their dramatic 4-2 defeat by Benfica in the league phase.

That collapse dragged the record 15-time champions down into the play-off round while helping Mourinho's side reach it by the skin of their teeth.

However, this was a far different affair, with Arbeloa's Madrid much sturdier than a few weeks ago. They were bolstered by French superstar Kylian Mbappe's return after he sat out of their last game because of knee discomfort.

Vinicius, back to his vibrant best since Arbeloa replaced Xabi Alonso at the helm in January, dragged the first good chance of the game inches wide of the far post.

Real goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois made a fine save to keep out Fredrik Aursnes's deflected effort from distance as Benfica held their own.

Madrid's quality began to shine through before the interval, with Benfica goalkeeper Anatoliy Trubin, who scored a stunning late goal when the teams met in January, denying Mbappe and Arda Guler.

The Ukrainian stopper could do nothing, though, about Vinicius's sensational strike after 50 minutes.

On the left of the area, with nothing else on, Vinicius curled a sumptuous effort into the top corner to put Madrid ahead.

The Brazilian was booked for his dancing celebration in front of Benfica's supporters.

That sparked an exchange with Prestianni, who pulled his shirt over his mouth before seeming to say something to Vinicius.

The Brazilian then ran over to Letexier and, pointing at Prestianni, said that he had been called "mono", the Spanish word for monkey.

"Vini told us that the guy called him a 'monkey' with his shirt (raised over his mouth)," Tchouameni told Movistar later.

## Doue Inspires PSG to Comeback Champions League Win in Monaco



MONACO (Dispatches) - Paris Saint-Germain recovered from a shambolic start as Desire Doue inspired a comeback from two goals down to beat Monaco 3-2 in the principality in the first leg of their Champions League knockout phase play-off tie on Tuesday.

United States star Folarin Balogun opened the scoring after just 55 seconds and found the net again on 18 minutes to put Monaco in control against their French Ligue 1 rivals at the Stade Louis II.

Vitinha then missed a chance for the reigning European champions to reduce the deficit when he had a penalty saved and last year's Ballon d'Or winner Ousmane Dembele came off injured before the half-hour mark, but his replacement Doue sparked the comeback.

He scored and then helped set up Achraf Hakimi for the equaliser just before the break, and Monaco then had Aleksandr Golovin sent off right at the start of the second half. Doue then got the winner on 67 minutes.

"He is an incredible player and a different player. I am very pleased for him because he deserved it," PSG coach Luis Enrique told broadcaster Canal Plus.

"There is pressure on us to win and we like that pressure, but there are difficult moments in games that are hard to overcome," he added.

The result keeps the tie alive going into the return leg in Paris next Wednesday, but PSG are now strong favorites to seal a place in the last 16.

They came into this game having been knocked off top spot in the French league last weekend following a defeat at Rennes, with Lens replacing them at the summit.

However, they are a huge 20 points clear of Monaco, who find themselves languishing in eighth due to an inability to put together a consistent run of form.

## Alcaraz Battles Into Second Round of Qatar Open

DOHA (Dispatches) - Carlos Alcaraz made a triumphant return to action following his Australian Open success as he beat Arthur Rinderknech 6-4, 7-6 (7/5) in the first round in Doha on Tuesday.

Alcaraz, who became the youngest man to complete a career Grand Slam with his victory in Melbourne, saw off the 30th-ranked Rinderknech in two closely contested sets.

"It was really difficult. Arthur is a really dangerous player. Nobody wants to play against him in the first round," said Alcaraz.

"I'm happy with the level. I'm happy that I got through difficult moments in the match. I'm happy that I stayed calm and positive, and played great tennis."

The world number one will face another Frenchman in round two, 60th-ranked Valentin



Royer. Alcaraz took the first set after breaking in the fifth game but faced dogged resistance from Rinderknech, who brought up his first break points of the match with the top seed serving to force a tie-break in the second set.

The Spaniard saved both and then closed out victory in the tie-break, ripping a forehand down the line on match point.

Alcaraz's chief rival Jannik Sinner is on the other side of the draw. No player other than Alcaraz or Sinner has won a tour-level title at an event featuring both of them since Andrey Rublev lifted the trophy in Madrid in May 2024.

Rublev booked his place in the second round with a straight-forward 6-4, 6-3 victory over Dutchman Jesper De Jong.

## Woods Return Timeline Uncertain, But Won't Rule Out Masters



LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - Tiger Woods says he has no timetable for a return to golf, but the 15-time major champion hasn't ruled out the 2026 Masters even as he ponders the over-50s Champions Tour.

Woods, who turned 50 on December 30, underwent disc replacement surgery in October, the latest in a series of operations and injuries that have kept him sidelined since the 2024 British Open.

"It's just one of those things where it's each and every day, I keep trying, I keep progressing," Woods said Tuesday at The Riviera Country Club, where he hosts this week's PGA Tour Genesis Invitational.

"I keep working on it, trying to get stronger, trying to get more endurance in this body and trying to get it at a level at which I can play at the highest level again," Woods said, adding that he has progressed from chipping and putting practice to hitting full shots.

"I'm able to," he said. "Not well every day, but I can hit them."

Despite the uncertainty, Woods said when asked that the Masters, April 9-12 at Augusta National, was not "off the table."

Woods has won five Masters titles, the most recent an epic 2019 victory that ended his 11-year major championship drought.

## Norway's Frostad Soars to Freeski Big Air Gold in Olympic Thriller

LIVIGNO (Dispatches) - Norwegian freeskiier Tormod Frostad soared to gold in an Olympic men's big air final for the ages on Tuesday, finding an extra gear under the most intense pressure at a snow-swept Livigno.

The 23-year-old posted a remarkable winning total of 195.50 to top the podium, with America's Mac Forehand just behind him on 193.25.

But the scores alone do not tell the story of a gripping competition that set new standards for an Olympic big air final.

"I can't wait to watch it back and see how it all looked, because it's impossible to tell when you're doing it," said Frostad.

"The level was just insane. It feels crazy. The level was extremely high, and I'm beyond happy to showcase my skiing."

Half of the 12 competitors scored more than 90.00 in their first run, with Frostad leading the way on 95.25, just 0.25 points ahead of defending champion Birk Ruud and



Forehand. Despite the snow, the freestyle skiers were performing aerial tricks off the huge ramp that had never been seen in an Olympic final.

Frostad upped his game still higher in his second run, posting 97.00 to put the rest of the field under huge pressure.

Ruud, next to go, knew he had to go for broke but fell and Forehand climbed into second place ahead of the final round.

Norway's Ruud, who won gold in the slopestyle event earlier in the Milan-Cortina Games, came to grief again in his final run, putting him out of contention for a medal.

Forehand, the reigning X Games champion, and Frostad were the last two athletes to ski.

The American, who topped qualifying, notched an incredible 98.25 to move into the gold medal position and must have believed he had done enough.