

The Head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran Says Infiltration and Sabotage Carried Out by the Israeli Regime Against the Islamic Republic's Nuclear Energy Program Pushed the Country to Build a Fully Indigenous Nuclear Industry

The Head of Iran's Interests Section in Egypt Says Tehran and Cairo Have Definitively Decided to Exchange Ambassadors, Describing Bilateral Ties as Having Entered an Advanced and Expanding Phase

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Mismanagement at Root of Country's Problems; Improving Livelihoods Is Top Priority



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - President Masoud Pezeshkian has directly blamed government managers for many of the country's current problems, urging officials to prioritize improving citizens' livelihoods and enhancing public satisfaction.

Speaking during the 19th provincial trip of his administration in Lorestan, Pezeshkian addressed the provincial Planning and Development Council, emphasizing transparency, accountability, and respectful engagement with the public. "Answering people's questions and treating them with respect costs nothing," he said. "Yet, we are failing even in this basic duty, which must be corrected."

Pezeshkian identified the biggest challenge in Iran's administrative system as ignoring the needs of clients and visitors. He questioned whether officials truly prioritize resolving citizens' issues when they go to work, stressing that adopting this perspective is key to national development and public satisfaction.

"If we focus on addressing people's problems, solutions will emerge," he said. "If we remain entrenched in daily meetings and routine tasks, no issues will be solved. By reforming management, reducing costs, and improving efficiency, we can tackle a significant portion of the country's challenges."

Iran Warns U.S. of Strong Retaliation in Letter to UN Secretary-General

IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Iran has formally warned the United States of severe consequences in the event of any military aggression, in a strongly worded letter addressed to the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the President of the UN Security Council. The letter, delivered by Iran's representative to the United Nations, asserts that all U.S. bases, facilities, and assets in the region would be considered legitimate targets under Iran's defensive response, while holding Washington fully accountable for any unpredictable outcomes of military action.

According to Iran's diplomatic statement, the correspondence follows prior communications regarding ongoing threats from the United States to resort to force against the Islamic Republic. The letter cites multiple prior notes from December 30, 2025, and January 2, 9, 13, 22, and 28, 2026, expressing Iran's concerns over continuous U.S. threats of military intervention.

The letter explicitly references recent remarks made by the President of the United States, who publicly suggested the potential use of Diego Garcia military base as a launch point for possible operations against Iran. Tehran described such statements as violations of the UN Charter and international law, warning that they risk plunging the region into a new cycle of crisis and instability.

In the letter, Iran emphasizes that it is not seeking war but is prepared to respond decisively if attacked. "We will not be the initiators of any conflict, but if Iran faces military aggression, it will respond firmly, and all bases, facilities, and assets of the hostile forces in the region will be considered legitimate targets," the letter states. The communication underlines that any consequences resulting from such military confrontations would fall directly upon the United States.

Iran's representative further stressed that the recent U.S. threats cannot be dismissed as mere rhetoric, given the fragile security situation in the region and the continuous deployment and movement of U.S. military assets. "Such belligerent statements by the President of the United States reflect a real danger of military aggression with potentially disastrous consequences for regional stability, peace, and international security," the letter says.

The Iranian letter also highlighted the country's ongoing engagement in constructive nuclear dialogue with the United States. It stressed that Iran has participated in these talks in good faith to address concerns regarding its peaceful nuclear program. Tehran reiterated its commitment to pursuing mutually acceptable, result-oriented solutions fully compliant with recognized



international legal frameworks, including the Non-Proliferation Treaty, while ensuring that no state's sovereign rights are violated.

Iran's envoy emphasized that a sustainable and balanced solution remains possible if the United States approaches negotiations sincerely and demonstrates tangible respect for the UN Charter and binding international law. In this context, Iran has requested that the UN Secretary-General and the Security Council exercise their primary responsibility under the UN Charter to preserve international peace and security. Tehran urged immediate action to compel Washington to cease illegal threats of force, adhere to its obligations under Article 2(4) of the UN Charter, and refrain from any measures that could escalate tensions or trigger military confrontation.

The letter underscores that any failure to respond to unlawful U.S. threats could set a dangerous precedent, potentially normalizing the use of force as an acceptable tool of foreign policy. Tehran warned that continued impunity could eventually endanger other independent states.

Reaffirming its stance, Iran declared that it is neither seeking tension nor war and will not initiate hostilities. However, the country will respond decisively, proportionally, and within the framework of its inherent right to self-defense under Article 51 of the UN Charter if subjected to military aggression. All military installations, facilities, and assets of hostile forces in the region would, in such a scenario, become legitimate targets of Iran's defensive operations.

In conclusion, the letter places full responsibility for any unpredictable consequences squarely on the United States, emphasizing the serious risks of conflict for regional and global peace. Tehran called on the UN Security Council and the Secretary-General to act promptly, warning that delays in addressing the threat could have irreversible consequences.

This letter represents the latest in a series of tense diplomatic exchanges between Iran and the United States, highlighting growing international concern over the potential for escalation in the Middle East. It underscores Iran's insistence on defending its sovereignty while engaging diplomatically to prevent further crises, even as it holds Washington accountable for provocative statements and actions.

The correspondence arrives amid ongoing discussions regarding Iran's nuclear program and the broader geopolitical dynamics in the region, reflecting the persistent fragility of international security architecture and the critical role of the United Nations in conflict prevention.

Negotiating for the Sake of Negotiation

By: Hamid Reza Naghashian

The second round of negotiations between the unofficial, unassigned American team and the fully official team of the Islamic Republic of Iran, led by Foreign Minister Seyyed Abbas Araghchi, was relocated—without any explanation—from Muscat to Geneva. This geographical shift fueled speculation that the Americans, due to simultaneous negotiations with the Russians over the Ukraine war, had caused the move. We, without offering any explanation to the public, accepted this change behind a veil of non-transparency, and the Tuesday session on 28 Bahman was held at the Omani Consulate in Geneva.

The outcome of the three-and-a-half-hour meeting, as presented to public opinion, was described by both sides as "desirable progress." The very use of the word "desirable" itself gave rise to several concerns.

First – Confidentiality versus Transparency:

There is a specific international standard practice in sensitive negotiations whereby negotiating teams require a secure environment to bargain in order to reach a final framework, protected from media sensationalism and pressure from interest groups.

Domestic critics in Iran have repeatedly criticized the nuclear negotiating team for not publicly announcing certain technical details or side agreements (such as the level of cooperation with the Agency or expanded access). This issue has consistently turned into speculation, investigative reporting, and serious debate in Iran's internal discussions.

However, it must be noted that confidentiality versus transparency in diplomacy creates a permanent tension between the need for secrecy to ensure successful negotiations and the obligation of transparency toward public opinion.

Negotiating teams usually argue that disclosing step-by-step details can weaken bargaining power.

A large portion of the negotiations concerned technical nuclear issues that were not understandable to the general public and likely required interpretation—ambiguities such as the disastrous experience of the snapback mechanism triggered by an unknown individual named Francesco as a result of the treacherous JCPOA.

Fundamental difference in legal and security status:

The Francesco case is generally defined within the framework of intelligence and security operations. Such cases typically have operational and espionage aspects, and the failure to disclose them in a timely manner often stems from legal violations or espionage concerns.

The main debate inside Iran concerns the transparency of the negotiating team toward governing institutions and the people; otherwise, Muscat or Geneva makes little difference in terms of preserving negotiation objectives.

Second – Concern about the unofficial status of the American team:

This raises the question of why we, too, did not introduce an unofficial team. When negotiations continue with an unofficial team—whose presence in talks of such importance has no documented proof beyond media announcements—while Marco Rubio and Vance, who are official members of Donald Trump's government, each present their own interpretations of the negotiations in the media, ambiguity is inevitable.

Third – Contradictory signals in the media:

On one hand, we hear about the sensational transfer of warships and aircraft to the region during the negotiations, creating the impression that Iran has come to the negotiating table out of fear and compulsion, speaking under fire. On the other hand, there appears to be a retreat by Trump's team from all previous propaganda and an acceptance of only one of the twelve previously declared conditions—limited solely to the nuclear issue.

This ambiguous retreat suggests that the American team's intention may be to buy time and resolve its own domestic issues. Otherwise, what is the meaning of negotiations that are first indirect, second limited solely to the nuclear framework, and third conducted without the presence of official authorities?

Fourth – The authority to lift sanctions:

Everyone knows that lifting a large portion of the sanctions is essentially not within the direct authority of the U.S. government in a way that could serve as a basis for diplomatic bargaining. Before entering the session, the Iranian delegation should have clarified the scope of authority regarding sanctions relief under the Trump administration and brought the nation into alignment on this issue, so that we would not later be accused of negligent bargaining.

During the JCPOA era, the lengthy duration of negotiations led to accusations that the Foreign Ministry team was manufacturing trips for the sake of per diem benefits. Given Abbas Araghchi's vague remarks after each session, there is concern that once again we may spend another two years in trip after trip, meeting after meeting, turning this chess game into a fruitless exercise and a mental preoccupation for nations both in the region and in Iran.

The Revolutionary Guard's military maneuvers during the negotiations were a reciprocal response to America's show of force. Indeed, it was a proper action, and certainly one of the IRGC or Army generals should have been present in a negotiating team so that diplomacy and the battlefield could be presented in a comprehensible balance. This did not happen—perhaps it will in later stages.

Based on past experience, including the JCPOA and these recent sessions, one might conclude that we approach negotiations with optimism, while the enemy pursues them with deceptive intent—using negotiations for the sake of negotiations and to shape the media environment in the domain of soft warfare. Ultimately, if an agreed-upon text is not published, this process could turn into a prolonged chess game marked by media checkmates and public negligence.

An example of such negligence was the revelation of Wendy Sherman's Jewish identity and Abbas Araghchi's inattention during the JCPOA negotiations, which portrayed our team as passive.

Sherman, in her book, refers to a sensitive moment during the final days of the Vienna negotiations. According to her account, after hours of exhausting talks and sleeplessness, just when an agreement seemed near, Araghchi once again raised an issue that had previously been settled. Sherman, extremely tired and angry, began shouting at Araghchi. She writes that her anger uncontrollably turned into tears. Sherman was shocked that she had cried in front of the Iranian team, but she believes that this display of sincerity and frustration led Araghchi and his team to retreat from their position.

Psychological operations have been, are, and will remain one of the enemy's tactics. In conclusion, if I were the one conducting these negotiations, I would most certainly propose—and firmly insist—that the talks remain indirect but be conducted in front of the cameras of one hundred selected journalists from Iran, America, and the region, so that the unforgivable secrecy of the past would not be repeated.



Tehran Mayor Urges Activists to 'Stand Where the Enemy Is Disturbed'



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Tehran Mayor Alireza Zakani has called on grassroots and volunteer groups to take positions that "disturb the enemy," saying that efforts leading to national progress and transformation represent true "jihad" work.

Speaking at the closing ceremony of the "Jaryan" event in Tehran's District 20, Zakani said hostile forces are attempting to portray the Islamic system and religion as ineffective in order to prevent what he described as the export of Iran's governance model. The event aimed to harness the capacity of volunteer and community-based jihadi groups to address neighborhood issues.

"The enemy's main strategy is to depict the path taken as unsuccessful and to spread despair among the people," Zakani said. "In contrast, jihadi activists keep hope alive by serving society and presenting a clear vision of the future."

Referring to recent meetings with senior clerics ahead of the holy month of Ramadan, the mayor described the period as a time for self-improvement. He outlined different concepts of "jihad" in Islamic teachings, including struggle against external enemies, resistance through refusing to trust adversaries, and the greater internal struggle focused on self-reform.

Iran and Russia Announce Major Energy and Infrastructure Agreements

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Iran's Oil Minister and Russia's Energy Minister announced a series of major economic developments on Wednesday, including the planned transfer of development rights for an Iranian oil field to Russia, the imminent signing of a gas import agreement, and the start of the Rasht-Astara railway project in April.

At a joint press conference following the 19th session of the Iran-Russia Joint Economic Cooperation Commission in Tehran, Iran's Oil Minister, Mohsen Paknejad, and Russia's Energy Minister, Sergei Tsivilev, outlined the latest agreements and cooperation initiatives between the two countries.

Paknejad said that one cooperation document and four memorandums of understanding were signed during the commission's latest meeting. He described the key achievement as moving "from understanding to implementation."

He noted that specialized working groups held intensive discussions to finalize the agreements and emphasized that the joint commission serves as a platform to fully utilize the significant economic cooperation potential between Tehran and Moscow.

Calling the outcomes of the meeting particularly important under current sensitive international conditions, Paknejad thanked his Russian counterpart and his team for their constructive cooperation in finalizing agreements and resolving outstanding issues.

He stressed that although cooperation capacity between the two countries is substantial—particularly in energy and oil and gas field development—there remains considerable room to maximize these opportunities. He added that collaboration also extends to finance, banking, transportation, agriculture, education, and standardization.

Paknejad confirmed that discussions are underway to transfer the development of one of Iran's major oil fields to Russia.

He also said negotiations on Russian gas exports to Iran have been largely finalized, with only one or two clauses remaining before the agreement is signed.

Despite increased domestic gas production under Iran's 14th administration—including a recent production record at the South Pars gas field—Paknejad acknowledged that supply-demand imbalances persist, making gas imports from Russia necessary.

He added that the comprehensive cooperation agreement between Iran and Russia provides a solid legal framework for expanding economic ties and clarifies the mechanisms for collaboration across various sectors.

Russian Energy Minister Sergei Tsivilev expressed sympathy with the Iranian people over recent incidents in the country and stated that Russia understands these events to be the result of external interference.

He praised the strengthened coordination between working groups within the joint commission and thanked Iran's Oil Ministry for its cooperation. According to Tsivilev, project performance over the past 11 months has been 13 times more successful compared to the previous year.

Marking the beginning of what he described as the 20th year of joint economic cooperation, Tsivilev said he expects even greater achievements at the commission's next session.



On peaceful nuclear cooperation, he confirmed that Russia continues close collaboration with Iran on multiple projects, including the construction of Units 2 and 3 at the Bushehr Nuclear Power Plant. He added that additional reactor units are under review, with a working group expected to present a summary of its discussions within three months.

Tsivilev also announced that documentation for the Rasht-Astara railway project is being finalized and is expected to be signed during Railway Week in April in St. Petersburg. Implementation will begin immediately after the agreement is signed.

He emphasized the railway's importance for agricultural exports and imports and said Russia has developed a food security plan for Iran, with a dedicated working group overseeing the initiative. Large-scale wheat exports from Russia to Iran are also under discussion.

Tsivilev concluded by highlighting broad prospects for bilateral cooperation, including in the space sector, predicting that Iran could soon emerge as a significant space power. He also noted the opening of a Russian cultural center in Tehran, which will be accessible to the public.

Meanwhile during the 19th session of the Iran-Russia Joint Economic Cooperation Commission, one cooperation document and four memorandums of understanding were signed between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Russian Federation.

Following two days of expert-level meetings between Iranian and Russian delegations in Tehran, the joint commission session was held on Wednesday at the Ministry of Oil in Tehran. The meeting was co-chaired by Iran's Oil Minister Paknejad and Russia's Energy Minister Tsivilev.

A memorandum of understanding on an executive cooperation program between the National Standards Organization of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Federal Agency for Technical Regulation and Metrology of the Russian Federation for the years 2026-2028 was signed by Farzaneh Ansari, Vice President of Iran and head of the National Standards Organization, and Anton Pavlovich Shalaev, head of Russia's Federal Agency for Technical Regulation and Metrology.

Another memorandum of cooperation between the Federal Service for Accreditation of the Russian Federation and the National Accreditation Center of the Islamic Republic of Iran was signed by Mehdi Alipour, head of Iran's National Accreditation Center, and Dmitry Valeryevich Volvach, head of Russia's Federal Service for Accreditation.

Parvaneh Rezaei, Iran's Deputy Minister of Cooperatives, Labour and Social Welfare, and Mikhail Yuryevich Ivankov, head of the Federal Service for Labour and Employment of the Russian Federation, signed a memorandum of cooperation on employment development and labor inspection between the Russian Federal Service for Labour and Employment and Iran's Ministry of Cooperatives, Labour and Social Welfare.

The final memorandum of understanding, signed between Joint Stock Company RT-Khimia and Iran's Research Institute of Petroleum Industry, was endorsed by Azim Kalantari-Asl, head of the Research Institute of Petroleum Industry, and Andrei Vladimirovich Shpak, CEO of RT-Khimia.



Iran Sees 15% Drop in Mobile Phone Imports

TEHRAN (ILNA) - Iran's Customs Administration announced a 15% decline in mobile phone imports during the first ten months of the current year, with both the quantity and value of imports showing significant decreases compared to the previous year. According to ILNA, from the beginning of the year until the end of Dey month (January 20), a total of 7,498,000 mobile phones were imported into Iran, with a total declared value of \$1.457 billion. Customs data indicate that compared to the same period last year, the number of imported mobile phones fell by 15%, while the total value of imports decreased by 21%.

In the first ten months of 1403 (March 2024-January 2025), Iran had imported 9 million mobile phones, worth \$1.8 billion.

Russia-Iran Gas Deal Nears Completion



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Iran's Deputy Oil Minister and Managing Director of the National Iranian Gas Company (NIGC) announced that the technical and contractual aspects of a gas agreement between Iran and Russia have been finalized, with only pricing and payment mechanisms pending high-level approval.

In an interview with IRNA, Saeed Tavakoli outlined the latest developments regarding gas cooperation between the two countries. He said that in recent days, alongside the 19th session of the Iran-Russia Joint Economic Cooperation Commission chaired by Iran's oil minister, multiple technical and contractual meetings were held, focusing in part on Russian gas exports to Iran.

Tavakoli noted that while elements of the cooperation had previously been addressed in a memorandum of understanding, extensive expert-level and contractual discussions over the past year have led to the finalization of most provisions. "The contract framework has been closed," he said, adding that only two issues—price and payment mechanism—require decisions at the macro level.

The deputy oil minister also reported a new national gas production record. He said that on February 16 (28 Bahman), gas deliveries from the South Pars field to refineries reached 730 million cubic meters per day—an unprecedented level. The same volume was processed and injected into the national grid, helping maintain network stability.

Addressing concerns about Iran's energy imbalance and potential imports, Tavakoli said the country faces structural imbalances in gas consumption. Approximately one-third of domestic gas consumption is used by power plants, one-third by industries, and the remaining third by the residential, commercial, and public sectors.

Responding to questions about how imported Russian gas would be utilized if the agreement is finalized, Tavakoli explained that during the cold season, the Oil Ministry prioritizes supply to residential and commercial consumers, sometimes imposing restrictions on industries and power plants.

Iran's Exports to Qatar Surge 34% as Trade Balance Turns Positive



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Trade between Iran and Qatar has shown notable growth over the first ten months of 2025 (1404 in the Iranian calendar), with Iran's non-oil exports rising significantly in both volume and value, according to the Director General of the West Asia Office at the Trade Promotion Organization of Iran (TPO).

Abdulamin Rabihavi, citing the latest customs data from Iran and Qatar, reported that Iran exported approximately 580,000 tons of goods to Qatar, valued at over \$122 million during this period. In comparison, exports in the same timeframe last year totaled 432,000 tons worth \$113 million. This represents a 34% increase in volume and an 8% increase in value, underscoring a substantial expansion of Iran's export market in Qatar.

Rabihavi highlighted that the majority of Iran's exports to Qatar remain in agricultural products, foodstuffs, construction materials, and select minerals. Key items include eggs, tomatoes, watermelons, powdered milk, flooring materials, dried fruits, cement, clinker, and construction stones. These products demonstrate Iran's role in meeting part of Qatar's import needs and reflect the complementary nature of the trade relationship.

On the import side, Iran's purchases from Qatar remain comparatively lower. Total imports from Qatar during the ten-month period reached approximately 101,000 tons valued at \$111 million, compared with 145,000 tons worth \$175 million in the same period last year. This reflects a 30% drop in volume and a 37% decrease in value. Imported goods mainly include industrial raw materials, livestock feed, industrial equipment, and chemicals, indicating that Qatar's role in Iran's supply chain is limited and largely focused on niche items rather than bulk trade.

Iran Calls for Direct Trade with Saudi Arabia



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The head of Iran's Chamber of Commerce, Samad Hassanzadeh, has called for the establishment of direct trade between Iran and Saudi Arabia and highlighted the need for an independent financial exchange platform for Islamic countries during a high-level meeting in Mecca. The proposals were made during discussions with Sheikh Saleh Kamel, President of the Islamic Chamber of Commerce and Chairman of the Federation of Saudi Chambers of Commerce.

Hassanzadeh, who was in Mecca to attend the 41st General Assembly of the Islamic Chamber, emphasized the importance of direct trade channels between Iran and Saudi Arabia. He proposed the reciprocal dispatch and reception of trade delegations and the organization of a dedicated trade exhibition in Saudi Arabia to showcase Iranian commercial capacities. "Currently, Iran and Saudi Arabia do not have direct commercial exchanges," he said, stressing the need to remove intermediaries and establish a direct trade framework between the two countries.

The Iranian official highlighted the country's capabilities in food industries, which meet international standards and are exported worldwide, as a potential area for expanding trade with Saudi Arabia. He also suggested using the Port of Dammam, Saudi Arabia, as a primary entry point for Iranian goods, citing its strategic proximity for facilitating commerce.

Hassanzadeh further proposed organizing a dedicated Iranian trade exhibition in Saudi Arabia alongside the visit of a Saudi trade delegation to Iran. He extended an invitation to Sheikh Kamel to visit Iran to gain firsthand familiarity with the country's economic and industrial capacities.

During the meeting, Hassanzadeh stressed the broader potential of Islamic

countries to develop an independent trade route among themselves through the creation of a shared financial exchange center. "Islamic countries have the capacity to establish an independent trade mechanism and strengthen their collective economic resilience," he said. He urged that such cohesion would allow member countries to respond collectively to external pressures or economic attacks, reducing their vulnerability on the global stage.

Sheikh Saleh Kamel welcomed the proposals, underlining the importance of establishing direct commercial ties between Iran and Saudi Arabia. He assured that the idea would be raised with senior officials in Saudi Arabia for follow-up. Kamel also expressed support for the exchange of trade delegations and the organization of the Iranian trade exhibition in Saudi Arabia, describing these measures as an opportunity to facilitate bilateral negotiations and enhance cooperation between the two countries' business communities.

The meeting included board members of the Saudi Chambers Federation and emphasized strengthening collaboration across various economic sectors, including industrial production, trade facilitation, and logistics. Both sides agreed on the strategic importance of expanding bilateral trade and fostering closer economic ties between Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the broader Islamic world.

The discussions reflect growing interest in leveraging economic diplomacy to reinforce ties within the Islamic world and to overcome barriers imposed by intermediaries, sanctions, or other global trade restrictions. Establishing direct trade and a dedicated financial exchange platform is seen as a key step toward increasing regional self-reliance and economic integration.

Iran, Tajikistan Target \$1b in Trade and Plan Joint Industrial Plants



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Iran's Minister of Industry, Mine and Trade announced plans to increase bilateral trade with Tajikistan to \$1 billion and establish joint industrial plants, following talks with Tajik Prime Minister Qohir Rasulzoda.

According to the Ministry of Industry's official news portal, Seyed Mohammad Atabak met with Prime Minister Rasulzoda on the second day of his visit to Tajikistan.

During the meeting, the two sides highlighted the extensive existing capacities for cooperation and set a target of raising bilateral trade to \$1 billion in the near future. They also agreed to expand joint investments and establish shared manufacturing plants across various industrial sectors.

The discussions further emphasized accelerating the implementation of cooperation agreements in mining, steel, pharmaceuticals, and other industries, while creating conditions for a more active role by private sector stakeholders and business communities in both countries.

Atabak described export development, technology transfer, and strengthening bilateral cooperation infrastructure as key pillars of economic relations between Tehran and Dushanbe.

Earlier Atabak stressed the importance of expanding joint production between Iran and Tajikistan through the establishment of joint industrial park during a meeting with Tajikistan's Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Iran, Pakistan Aim for \$10b Trade by 2028



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Iran's Minister of Agriculture, Gholamreza Nouri, emphasized comprehensive agricultural, livestock, and trade cooperation with Pakistan during official meetings with Pakistan's Minister of Food Security and National Research, Rana Tanveer Hussain, and Minister of Commerce, Jam Kamal Khan. Both sides agreed on a target of achieving \$10 billion in bilateral trade by 2028.

According to the Ministry of Agriculture, Nouri thanked Pakistan for its unwavering support during the recent 12-day conflict and described Tehran-Islamabad relations as strategic, sustainable, and rooted in deep cultural, historical, and regional ties. He highlighted the negative impact of foreign interventions in the region and stressed the importance of strengthening regional cooperation, citing the guidance of Iran's Supreme Leader to develop robust ties with neighboring countries.

Nouri emphasized the continuation of ongoing technical dialogues between Iran and Pakistan in agriculture, livestock, and food products, underscoring the mutual benefits of these exchanges. During his visit, he met with Pakistan's Commerce Minister to further discuss trade initiatives.

Highlighting domestic economic reforms in Iran, Nouri announced that previous restrictions on imports, particularly in essential food items, have been removed, allowing import volumes to potentially double. "Pakistan is a country of special importance and priority for us. Given its recent support, we are ready to expand trade with Pakistan," he said.

Iran Calls for Expanded Multilateral Cooperation in AI Governance at Global Summit

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Iran's Minister of Communications and Information Technology has underscored the need to expand multilateral cooperation in artificial intelligence (AI) governance, promote knowledge exchange, and strengthen communications infrastructure as key priorities for the Islamic Republic of Iran.

According to the Ministry of Communications' Public Relations Center, the second day of the Global "AI Impact 2026" Summit in India officially opened under the leadership of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The event brought together more than 20 presidents and prime ministers and over 40 ministers from around the world.

The summit, held from 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., focused on AI governance, international regulation, responsible technological development, and the role of developing countries in the value chain of this strategic technology.

Iran's communications minister attended a special leaders' session hosted by Prime Minister Modi and later participated in the general meeting of ministers.

In his remarks, the minister highlighted Iran's capabilities in developing digital infrastructure and stressed the importance of structured cooperation among regional and global partners in the field of artificial intelligence. He described joint utilization of scientific capacities, data exchange, and the development of smart services as essential to achieving balanced growth in the digital economy.

On the sidelines of the official opening ceremony, participating heads of state and ministers posed for a group photo and held bilateral consultations.

Following the ministerial session, the Iranian minister traveled to Hyderabad to visit one of India's leading technology centers. The visit includes tours of high-tech complexes, meetings with innovation



ecosystem stakeholders, and discussions with local officials.

Hyderabad, recognized as one of India's main hubs for information technology and artificial intelligence, hosts hundreds of knowledge-based companies and international research and development centers. During the visit, opportunities for cooperation between Iranian and Indian companies are set to be explored.

On the first day of the summit, the minister attended the opening panel sessions and delivered a speech. He also toured the specialized AI exhibition, which featured more than 500 companies active in the sector, and met with executives of leading technology firms.

In addition, he held bilateral talks with India's Minister of Information Technology to discuss cooperation in information technology, artificial intelligence, knowledge exchange, and joint project development.

During an official reception hosted by Prime Minister Modi, the Iranian minister met with Aleksandar Vučić, President of Serbia; Abdullah bin Sharaf Alghamdi, head of the Saudi Data and AI Authority (SDAIA); and Zhaslan Madiyev, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Digital Development and Artificial Intelligence of Kazakhstan.

The meetings focused on expanding bilateral cooperation in AI, sharing policy and regulatory experiences, joint investment in data infrastructure, and strengthening innovation ecosystems. Participants also emphasized the importance of regional synergy in data governance, facilitating the exchange of experts and knowledge-based companies, and designing joint projects in public AI applications, particularly in smart government, digital health, and smart agriculture.

Ex-Philippine Leader Duterte Faces Pre-Trial ICC Hearing

THE HAGUE (Dispatches) - Former Philippine president Rodrigo Duterte faces a pre-trial hearing at the International Criminal Court from Monday over crimes against humanity allegedly committed as part of a brutal crackdown on drugs. The "confirmation of charges" hearing, taking place over four days, will determine whether there is enough evidence against Duterte to proceed to a trial.

The 80-year-old is unlikely to be present at the hearing in The Hague, after his defence filed a request to waive his right to appear, despite judges ruling that he was fit to take part.

Following the hearing, the judges will have 60 days to issue a written decision.



Ukraine's 2026 Defense Exports Could Hit Several Billion Dollars



KYIV (Dispatches) - Ukraine could export several billion dollars of military goods and services this year after authorizing its first wartime foreign sales and is considering introducing a tax on those exports, a senior Ukrainian defense official said.

Earlier this month, the state commission handling related licenses in wartime approved the majority of 40 applications from defense sector producers for exports of material and services, Davyd Aloian, deputy secretary of Kyiv's National Security and Defense Council, told Reuters in an interview.

Ukraine halted weapons exports following Moscow's February 2022 invasion and has relied heavily on partners' arms supplies to defend itself against Russian forces.

At the same time, Kyiv poured resources into developing its armaments industry, particularly drones and missiles. Leveraging its vast battlefield experience, Ukraine has in recent years experienced a defence technology boom.

Asked about export potential for this year, Aloian said: "Taking into account ready-made products, spare parts, components, and services that can be provided, it amounts to several billion dollars."

Overall, the potential is "significantly higher" than pre-war exports, he said.

Venezuela Assembly Passes Amnesty Law

CARACAS (Dispatches) - Venezuela's National Assembly on Thursday unanimously approved a long-awaited amnesty law that could free hundreds of political prisoners jailed for being government detractors.

But the law excludes those who have been prosecuted or convicted of promoting military action against the country — which could include opposition leaders like Nobel Peace Prize winner Maria Corina Machado, who has been accused by the ruling party of calling for international intervention like the one that ousted former president Nicolas Maduro.

The bill now goes before interim president Delcy Rodriguez, who pushed for the legislation under pressure from Washington, after she rose to power following Maduro's capture during a US military raid on January 3.

The law is meant to apply retroactively to 1999 — including the coup against previous leader Hugo Chavez, the 2002 oil strike, and the 2024 riots against Maduro's disputed reelection — giving hope to families that loved ones will finally come home.

Some fear, however, the law could be used by the government to pardon its own and selectively deny freedom to real prisoners of conscience.

Article 9 of the bill lists those excluded from amnesty as "persons who are being prosecuted or may be convicted for promoting, instigating, soliciting, invoking, favoring, facilitating, financing or



participating in armed actions or the use of force against the people, sovereignty, and territorial integrity" of Venezuela "by foreign states, corporations or individuals."

Venezuela's National Assembly had delayed several sittings meant to pass the amnesty bill.

"The scope of the law must be restricted to victims of human rights violations and expressly exclude those accused of serious human rights violations and crimes against humanity, including state, paramilitary and non-state actors," UN human rights experts said in a statement from Geneva Thursday.

Hundreds, perhaps thousands, of Venezuelans have been jailed in recent years over plots, real or imagined, to overthrow the government of Rodriguez's predecessor and former boss Maduro, who was in the end toppled in the deadly US military raid.

Family members have reported torture, maltreatment and untreated health problems among the inmates.

The NGO Foro Penal says about 450 prisoners have been released since Maduro's ouster, but more than 600 others remain behind bars.

Family members have been clamoring for their release for weeks, holding vigils outside prisons.

One small group, in the capital Caracas, staged a nearly weeklong hunger strike which ended Thursday.

"The National Assembly has the opportunity to show whether there truly is a genuine will for national reconciliation," Foro Penal director Gonzalo Himiob wrote on X Thursday ahead of the vote.

Trump Launches "Board of Peace" With \$10b and Troop Pledges for Gaza

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - U.S. President Donald Trump on Thursday promised \$10b and Muslim-majority nations offered funding and troops for Gaza as he inaugurated his "Board of Peace," a new institution whose ultimate mission has drawn questions.

Trump brought together allies from around the world — many authoritarians, with few Western democrats who traditionally ally with the United States — to hail his peacemaking just as he sends US military might near Iran and threatens war.

Presiding with a gavel over the meeting in the gleaming Washington building of the former US Institute of Peace, which has been gutted and renamed after the 79-year-old Republican, Trump hailed the "powerful people" who joined his board.

"We will help Gaza. We will straighten it out. We'll make it successful," Trump said, holding up a document with pledges before the disco beats of his adopted theme-song YMCA came on the speakers.

"We will make it peaceful, and we will do things like that in other spots. Spots will come up, things will happen," Trump said.

Trump, who has sharply curtailed foreign aid, said the United States would contribute US\$10 billion to the board.

Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates each promised at least \$1b. White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt said more than \$6.5b was pledged, presumably excluding Trump's offer.

"Together we can achieve the dream of bringing lasting harmony to a region tortured by centuries of war, suffering," said the realtor-turned-president, who has spoken improbably of building tourist resorts in Gaza.

Trump did not explain exactly where the money would go and whether Congress had approved the contribution he announced for the institution, which has drawn criticism for its opaque nature.

Trump will wield veto power over the "Board of Peace" and can remain



ready to send 8,000 troops — nearly half of the 20,000 sought.

Trump hailed Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto, who attended, calling the former military officer accused of human rights abuses in East Timor a "tough cookie."

Nickolay Mladenov, a veteran Bulgarian diplomat named high representative for Gaza by the United States, also announced the beginning of recruitment for a post-Hamas police force in Gaza and said 2,000 people had applied in the first hours.

Despite the truce, Gaza's health ministry, which operates under Hamas authorities, says Israeli forces have killed at least 601 people since it took effect.

Foreign Minister Gideon Saar, representing Israel at the meeting, demanded disarmament of Hamas and "a fundamental deradicalisation process" in Gaza.

In a rambling speech, Trump denounced domestic opponents, highlighted stock market gains and endorsed the political fortunes of several leaders on stage, including populists Viktor Orban of Hungary and Javier Milei of Argentina.

He also issued a new warning to Iran, warning of US strikes in 10 days if the clerical state does not agree to major concessions starting with its nuclear programme.

Few Western nations joined the board. Britain and Germany sent their ambassadors to Washington as observers, while Canada and France shunned the meeting entirely.

French Foreign Minister Jean-Noel Barrot criticized the European Commission for attending as an observer, saying it did not have a mandate to do so.

Prime Minister Edi Rama of Albania, a steadfast US ally, dismissed European concerns that Trump was trying to "replace the UN," to which he drastically cut US support.

"But if it helps shake that agonising giant and, Inshallah, wake it up, then God bless the Board of Peace," Rama said.

Victorious Takaichi Promises Strong and Prosperous Japan



TOKYO (Dispatches) - Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi pledged Friday to make Japan "strong and prosperous", while hitting out at China and pledging to keep "hitting the growth button" following her party landslide election win.

"China is intensifying its attempts to unilaterally change the status quo by force or coercion in the East China Sea and the South China Sea, while also expanding and stepping up its military activities in the areas surrounding our country," Takaichi told parliament in a policy address.

Echoing her predecessor Shigeru Ishiba, Takaichi also said that Japan was facing "the most severe and complex security environment" since World War II, citing not just China but also Russia and North Korea.

As a result, Takaichi said she will aim this year to revise Japan's three key defence policy documents, as "changes in the security environment -- such as the emergence of new ways of warfare and the need to prepare for prolonged conflicts -- are accelerating across a wide range of fields."

She added that she wanted to accelerate discussions on further loosening Japan's self-imposed ban on the export of lethal weapons.

"This will contribute to strengthening the deterrence and response capabilities of our allies and like-minded partners, while also helping to reinforce Japan's defence production base and its foundation of civilian technologies," Takaichi said.

Kim Jong Un Signals Possible Expansion of Nuclear Program

SEOUL (Dispatches) - North Korea's ruling party has opened a landmark congress, state media said Friday, launching a political spectacle expected to unveil the next phase in the nation's nuclear weapons program.

Leader Kim Jong Un took centre stage with a speech to start the Workers' Party congress, a gathering that directs state efforts on everything from house building to war planning.

Party elites packed the cavernous House of Culture in Pyongyang for the once-in-five-years event, which is typically capped with an immense parade flaunting the military's latest weapons.

The congress offers a rare look into the workings of a nation where even mundane details are shrouded in secrecy — and will be closely watched for insights into Kim's long-term thinking.

Kim said North Korea had overcome its "worst difficulties" since the last congress in 2021, and was now entering a new stage of "optimism and confidence in the future".

"Today, our Party is faced with heavy and urgent historic tasks of boosting economic construction and the people's standard of living and transforming all realms of state and social life as early as possible," he said Thursday, according to state media.

He also singled out "deep-rooted defeatism" and "immaturity in leadership ability" that still hindered the party's work, a sign of possible reprisals against officials seen to have fallen short.

Kim has already declared this year's congress will lay out plans to bolster North



Korea's nuclear arsenal.

It has been more than eight years since North Korea's last nuclear test triggered a man-made earthquake underneath the northern Hamyong mountains.

Pyongyang's atomic scientists have worked since then to harness this power in portable warheads that can be attached to long-range missiles.

North Korea's economy has for years languished under heavy Western sanctions that aim to choke off funding for its nuclear weapons program.

Kim is regardless likely to boast of progress on the country's nuclear programme and "strengthened alignment with China and Russia", Yang Moo-jin, former president of the University of North Korean Studies, told AFP.

It is just the ninth time the Workers' Party congress has convened under North Korea's decades-spanning Kim rule.

The meeting was shelved for decades under Kim's father Kim Jong Il, but was revived in 2016.

Kim Jong Un has spent years stoking his cult of personality in reclusive North Korea, and the congress offers another chance to demonstrate his absolute grip on power.

Photos released by state media showed Kim delivering his opening address as senior party officials appeared to take notes in the background.

Analysts will scour photographs to see which officials are seated closest to Kim, and who is banished to the back row.



Alcaraz Strolls, Sinner Shocked Charges in Doha

DOHA (Dispatches) - Czech rising star Jakub Mensik hit 11 aces and rode a dominant third set to a 7-6 (3), 2-6, 6-3 upset of No. 2 seed Jannik Sinner of Italy at the Qatar ExxonMobil Open quarterfinals in Doha.

The sixth-seeded Mensik won 14 of his 16 first-service points in the third set and 49 of 60 overall (81.7%) while saving 5 of 7 break points in the match. Sinner, who fell in the semifinals of the Australian Open, missed the final in back-to-back starts for the first time since the summer of 2024.

No. 1 seed Carlos Alcaraz of Spain now has a clearer path to the title at the ATP 500 event, though he survived a scare of his own in the quarterfinals when he rallied past Russian seventh seed Karen Khachanov 6-7 (3), 6-4, 6-3. Alcaraz had a 41-14 edge in winners to overcome his 34 unforced errors.

Alcaraz's semifinal opponent will be No. 5 seed Andrey Rublev of Russia, a 6-3, 7-6 (2) winner over Greece's Stefanos Tsitsipas. Mensik will battle Frenchman Arthur Fils, who upset Czech eighth seed Jiri Lehecka 6-3, 6-3.

No. 4 seed Learner Tien hit 20 aces among his 51 winners to fight past Serbia's Miomir Kecmanovic 6-4, 6-7 (4), 7-6 (5) in the second round at Delray Beach, Fla.

Kecmanovic saved four match points -- one in the 12th game to force a tiebreaker, then three more after going down 6-2 -- but he could not save a fifth. Tien's quarterfinal opponent, No. 8 seed Frances Tiafoe, also needed three sets to turn back qualifier Zachary Svajda 6-4, 3-6, 7-5, saving 5 of 6 break points along the way.

In the evening matches, No. 1 seed Taylor Fritz and No. 5 seed Tommy Paul swept their opponents. Fritz defeated Rafael Jodar of Spain 7-6 (4), 6-4, and Paul topped Australian Adam Walton 7-6 (11), 6-3, saving five set points in the opening-set tiebreaker. Two days earlier, Paul beat France's Corentin Moutet despite failing to convert on 10 consecutive match points late in the third set.

Portuguese lucky loser Jaime Faria kept his week going by beating Bosnia and Herzegovina's Damir Dzumhur 7-6 (1), 6-4 to advance to the quarterfinals in Rio de Janeiro.

Faria, who hit 26 winners and had to get past 29 unforced errors, is joined in the next round by No. 8 seed Tomas Martin Etcheverry of Argentina, who defeated Lithuanian qualifier Vilius Gaubas by an identical 7-6 (1), 6-4 scoreline.

In the late matches, Peru's Ignacio Buse upset third-seeded Joao Fonseca of Brazil 5-7, 6-3, 6-4 and Italian Matteo Berrettini took down Serbian lucky loser Dusan Lajovic 3-6, 6-4, 6-2.

Arsenal Squander Two-Goal Lead Against Wolves



WOLVERHAMPTON (Dispatches) - Arsenal's Premier League title challenge suffered a major blow as they squandered a two-goal lead and conceded a stoppage-time equaliser in a damaging 2-2 draw at rock-bottom Wolves.

Mikel Arteta's side were on course to move seven points clear at the top after Bukayo Saka's early opener and Piero Hincapié's second-half strike put them in control at Molineux.

But Arsenal collapsed in the closing stages as Hugo Bueno reduced the deficit before Riccardo Calafiori turned Tom Edozie's shot into his own net in the final seconds after a mix-up between goalkeeper David Raya and centre-back Gabriel Magalhães, to leave the visitors shell-shocked.

For a second successive league game, the Gunners had failed to hold onto a lead following their 1-1 draw at Brentford last Thursday.

Failing to kill off bottom of the table Wolves was a devastating setback for Arsenal, who have won just two of their last seven league matches, offering renewed hope to second-placed Manchester City in the title race.

City are just five points behind Arsenal and have a game in hand on their rivals, as well as a home game against the Gunners in April.

Having wasted commanding leads in two previous title fights with City, Arteta's men are in danger of being haunted by the ghost of their past failures.

Arsenal looked increasingly nervous as the minutes ticked down against Wolves in a clear sign the league leaders are feeling the pressure of their bid for a first English title since 2004.

Adding to Arteta's anxiety, Saka was forced off in the second half with a possible knee injury.

Losing the England star, who this week signed a new contract making him the club's highest paid player, for a sustained period would be a hammer blow to Arsenal's title dreams.

Cunningham Stars as NBA-Leading Pistons Ease Past Knicks

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - A dominant Cade Cunningham scored 42 points as the NBA-leading Detroit Pistons swatted aside the New York Knicks 126-111 Thursday on the basketball league's return from its brief All-Star Game break.

Billed as a must-watch clash between two Eastern Conference-rying rivals each in red-hot form, the game at Madison Square Garden became an exhibition for Cunningham, who also provided 13 assists and eight rebounds.

The 24-year-old burnished his credentials as a Most Valuable Player contender, helping a young, surprise-package Pistons side to improve the best record in the entire NBA this season so far, to 41-13.

After the game, Cunningham insisted he and his side had proved "nothing" yet.

"It's regular season, so we just have to keep on



chipping at it, keep on growing, keep on getting better and preparing for the postseason," he said.

"We're off to a great start. Obviously, we feel great about that. But everything is to come."

Despite their blistering form, Detroit -- wholly reconstructed after finishing rock-bottom of the Eastern Conference just two years ago -- are still few pundits' top pick to win the title.

They were also without forward Isaiah Stewart and All-Star center Jalen Duren on Thursday, due to suspensions following a brawl with the Charlotte Hornets during game last week.

"Missing Stew, JD, that's a big part of our team. Big part of why we are where we are. So everyone had to step up," said Cunningham.

Hogh Leads Bodo/Glimt to Shock 3-1 Win Over Inter



BODO (Dispatches) - Bodo/Glimt continued their remarkable debut Champions League campaign with a 3-1 victory over Inter Milan in the knockout play-off round first leg, as Kasper Hogh scored once and created two other goals.

The Norwegians only snuck into the knock-out stage with shock victories over Manchester City and Atletico Madrid in their final two league-phase matches.

Kjetil Knutsen's men backed up those performances by adding last season's runners-up Inter to their list of scalps.

Cristian Chivu's Serie A leaders will still be confident of turning the tie around in the second leg at the San Siro next Tuesday, despite struggling on the artificial pitch of the Aspmyra Stadion in northern Norway.

"(Bodo/Glimt) are more accustomed to this pitch, that's not an excuse," Chivu said.

"The tie is wide open, there's the return leg to come. We knew they are a team that can hurt you on the break, now we'll try to advance to the next round at San Siro."

To make matters worse for Inter, captain Lautaro Martinez hobbled off and was replaced by Marcus Thuram in the second half.

"I think he's hurt and he will be out for a while," Chivu said of Martinez.

Bodo/Glimt, Europa League semi-finalists last term, have given themselves a chance of securing a major surprise, and a last-16 meeting with either Man City or Sporting Lisbon.

Shiffrin Ends Medal Drought With Slalom Gold

MILAN (Dispatches) - US ski star Mikaela Shiffrin ended her Olympic medal drought in style with gold in the slalom as snowboarder Su Yiming won China's first title of the Milan-Cortina Games.

Shiffrin is one of skiing's all-time greats, but she has had to wait eight years since the 2018 Pyeongchang Games for the third gold of her glittering career.

In the final alpine skiing event in Italy, her emotional victory brought some solace to a US ski team still reeling from Lindsey Vonn's horrific crash in the downhill.

The 30-year-old led after the first run in glorious conditions in Cortina d'Ampezzo and cruised to victory in a combined time of 1min 39.10sec, an impressive 1.5sec ahead of Switzerland's world champion Camille Rast.

Sweden's Anna Swenn Larsson rounded out the podium to claim the first Olympic medal of her career.

Shiffrin shed a tear after a victory that will help banish the bitter memories of both her last Olympics in Beijing -- where she failed to pick up a single medal from six races



— and her disappointing displays in the team combined and giant slalom in northern Italy.

"I wanted to be free, I wanted to unleash," said the American. "It's not easy to do that, but I've been so focused every single day.

"Through a lot of discussions with my psychologist and my mum and my team, everything we said was that, despite pressure or nerves, I want to feel this skiing.

"In the end, today, showing up — that was the thing I wanted most. More than the medal. Now, to also get to have a medal is unbelievable."

Team China amassed nine gold medals on home soil at the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics, but until Wednesday they were yet to win a single title at the Milan-Cortina Games.

Su changed that, winning the snowboard slopestyle gold after losing his big air crown earlier in these Games — and for good measure, it came on his 22nd birthday and as China celebrates Lunar New Year.