

Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister Kazem Gharibabadi Said the United States Is the Main Factor Behind the Collapse of the International Order Based on International Law, Warning Against Washington's Systematic Disregard for Core Legal Principles

IRAN NEWS

On Monday Night, Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi and His UAE Counterpart, Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Held a Phone Conversation to Discuss Latest Regional and International Developments

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Iran Targets 15m Tons of Transit Cargo in West Wing of North-South Corridor by 2030



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Iran plans to increase transit cargo volumes to 15 million tons annually by 2030 in the western wing of the North-South transport corridor, while also expanding bilateral trade with Azerbaijan to about \$650 million, the Minister of Roads and Urban Development said.

Speaking at the opening ceremony of the 17th Joint Economic Cooperation Commission meeting between Iran and Azerbaijan, Farzaneh Sadegh said the draft memorandum of understanding covers cooperation in trade, investment, industry, electricity, transport, infrastructure, agriculture, culture, and tourism.

The minister highlighted the deep historical, cultural, and religious ties between the two countries, describing them as unique in the region. She said expanding relations to a strategic level remains a priority within Iran's neighborhood diplomacy.

Following the 2024 visit of Masoud Pezeshkian to Baku, new horizons have opened for bilateral cooperation, helping deepen engagement across multiple sectors.

Trade volume between Iran and Azerbaijan has reached approximately \$650 million over the past two years, showing an upward trend. Officials believe that developing a structured trade roadmap can create clearer long-term economic prospects.

Gov't Supports Investors and Economic Frontline Fighters



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - The Iranian government fully supports investors and production activists, who are considered "frontline fighters" in the country's economic battle, as strengthening domestic production is the key solution to unemployment, poverty, and rising prices, said Mohammad-Jafar Qaim Panah, Iran's Executive Deputy President.

During a visit to industrial projects in Kermanshah Province, Qaim Panah said the current administration's provincial trips are not limited to announcing approvals but focus on continuous monitoring and implementation of commitments until final results are achieved.

He described support for producers as a national strategy. "In a country engaged in economic warfare, investors and entrepreneurs are at the forefront and must receive serious backing," he said. Successful industrial development, he added, helps reduce unemployment, control inflation, and improve public welfare.

Qaim Panah highlighted several ongoing industrial projects in the province. He said that during the Iranian president's spring visit, a memorandum was signed to establish the Salar Bakhtar Sugar and Sugar Factory plant, and construction work has now begun.

Iran Declares Peaceful Nuclear Energy an "Inalienable and Non-Negotiable Right"

IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister for Legal and International Affairs, Kazem Gharibabadi, has reaffirmed that the country's right to benefit from peaceful nuclear energy is "inherent and non-negotiable," emphasizing that such a right is guaranteed under international law and cannot be suspended or revoked as a precondition for negotiations.

Speaking on Monday at a high-level segment of the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva, Gharibabadi outlined the principled positions of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran and called for a renewed international commitment to effective multilateralism, genuine disarmament, and unconditional respect for international law.

In his address, Gharibabadi described the current international security climate as "complex and deeply concerning." He pointed to the persistence of armed conflicts, ongoing occupations, and what he characterized as crimes committed in the West Asia region by the Government of Israel as among the most pressing threats to global peace and security.

He further warned that the erosion of the foundational principles of the United Nations Charter has compounded instability worldwide. According to the Iranian diplomat, the weakening of multilateralism and the expansion of unilateral approaches have revived a dangerous cycle of arms races, particularly in the nuclear domain.

"The continued reliance by certain states on nuclear weapons in their security doctrines stands in clear contradiction to their international obligations," Gharibabadi said. "Such policies undermine both the moral and legal foundations of the global non-proliferation regime."

Reiterating Iran's longstanding position, Gharibabadi described nuclear weapons as the gravest threat to humanity and human civilization. He urged all nuclear-armed states to commit immediately to the complete, irreversible, and verifiable destruction of their nuclear arsenals.

He stressed that meaningful progress in non-proliferation can only be achieved through balanced, reciprocal, and legally binding commitments. In particular, he called on nuclear-weapon states to fulfill their obligations under Article VI of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), which requires signatories to pursue negotiations in good faith toward nuclear disarmament.

Gharibabadi also advocated for the commencement of negotiations on a comprehensive nuclear weapons convention that would provide binding security assurances to non-nuclear-weapon states.

In addition to nuclear disarmament, the Iranian official warned against the increasing militarization of outer space. He criticized attempts by certain countries to define space as a domain for military confrontation, calling such efforts a threat to the shared heritage of humanity.

"Outer space must be preserved exclusively for peaceful purposes," he said, urging the international community to prevent its weaponization and ensure that space remains a domain for cooperation rather than conflict.

Gharibabadi described the NPT as the cornerstone of the global non-proliferation and disarmament architecture. He asserted that Iran has consistently honored its obligations under



the treaty. "The Islamic Republic of Iran has always remained committed to its obligations under the NPT," he stated. "Our right to benefit from peaceful nuclear energy is inherent, non-negotiable, and guaranteed within the framework of international law."

He underscored that this right cannot be made conditional in negotiations nor subject to suspension or deprivation. According to Gharibabadi, peaceful nuclear technology is essential for Iran's development and energy security.

The deputy foreign minister categorically rejected allegations that Iran's nuclear program has military objectives. "The Islamic Republic of Iran neither possesses nuclear weapons, nor has it sought to acquire them, nor does it have any intention of doing so," he said.

He emphasized that Iran's nuclear program is entirely peaceful and guided not only by its legal commitments but also by its religious and ethical

principles, which reject weapons of mass destruction.

Gharibabadi criticized what he described as double standards in the implementation of disarmament commitments, arguing that selective enforcement undermines trust and weakens the global non-proliferation regime.

Referring to recent diplomatic developments in Geneva, Gharibabadi suggested that a new opportunity has emerged for resolving disputes through dialogue.

"Any sustainable negotiation must be based on mutual respect, equal treatment, and the non-selective implementation of international rules," he said.

At the same time, he reaffirmed Iran's readiness to defend its sovereignty and territorial integrity. "While we have chosen the path of diplomacy, the Islamic Republic of Iran remains fully prepared to defend its sovereignty, territorial integrity, and its people," he stated, adding that Iran would exercise its inherent right to self-defense under the UN Charter if necessary.

Gharibabadi also reiterated Iran's long-standing initiative to establish a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction. He argued that achieving this objective requires universal adherence to the NPT and the placement of all nuclear facilities in the region under comprehensive safeguards.

He identified Israel's alleged possession of weapons of mass destruction and what he described as repeated nuclear threats as major obstacles to realizing such a zone.

Concluding his remarks, Gharibabadi stressed that sustainable peace cannot be achieved through pressure or threats, but rather through dialogue, mutual respect, the rule of law, and genuine multilateralism.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran stands ready to cooperate with states to strengthen the international disarmament architecture and move toward a world free of nuclear weapons," he declared.

His speech at the Conference on Disarmament signals Tehran's continued effort to frame its nuclear activities within the bounds of international law while pressing nuclear-armed states to meet their disarmament obligations. As diplomatic efforts continue in Geneva, Iran has made clear that while it is open to dialogue, its claim to peaceful nuclear energy remains, in its view, beyond negotiation.

Africa a Strategic Priority as Iran Seeks Deeper Ties with Burkina Faso

IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - President Masoud Pezeshkian has reaffirmed that Africa holds strategic priority in Iran's foreign policy, stating that Tehran is pursuing comprehensive cooperation with African nations within a framework of balanced diplomacy and mutual interests.

According to a statement released Monday by the Presidential Office, Pezeshkian made the remarks during a meeting with Celestin Simpore, Minister of War and Defense of Burkina Faso, in Tehran.

The Iranian president emphasized Iran's interest in expanding and deepening relations with African countries, particularly Burkina Faso. He described Iran's view of Africa as "strategic, long-term, and based on mutual benefit," adding that the Islamic Republic is prepared to deploy its extensive capacities to enhance bilateral ties.

Pezeshkian highlighted the importance of exchanging high-level political, defense, and economic delegations, saying continued official visits and specialized consultations could strengthen mutual trust and broaden cooperation in economic, scientific, industrial, and defense fields.

He also expressed appreciation for what he described as the principled positions and positive stance of Burkina Faso's president toward Iran in international forums. Expanding ties with Burkina Faso, he said, aligns with Iran's broader Africa policy and could contribute to stronger cooperation with other countries across the continent.

The president further praised what he called the independence-seeking and anti-dominance approach of



Burkina Faso's government and people, voicing confidence that the country would succeed in combating terrorism and extremism through national unity and determination.

Pezeshkian declared Iran's full readiness to transfer technical expertise and experience in scientific, industrial, and defense sectors, noting that bilateral cooperation could be strengthened through sharing successful development experiences, particularly in industrial infrastructure and technological capacity-building.

For his part, Simpore congratulated Iran on the upcoming holy month of Ramadan and commended the Iranian people's resilience in the face of decades of sanctions and external pressure.

He described Iran's progress over the past four decades—especially in defense industries and advanced technologies—as a symbol of national strength, strategic self-reliance, and effective management under international constraints.

Simpore said Burkina Faso has faced terrorism and security instability for more than a decade and argued that the roots of insecurity in his region are similar to those exerting pressure on Iran. He asserted that "dominant powers" seek to maintain dependency and prevent genuine national sovereignty.

Expressing his country's interest in expanding ties with Iran across various sectors, Simpore described Iran as a nation with a proud record of supporting the independence and territorial integrity of other countries. He added that Burkina Faso believes national sovereignty is achieved through perseverance and collective effort rather than granted by external actors.

IRGC's Shahid Mahdavi Warship Completes First Long-Duration Mission



TEHRAN (PressTV) - A domestically-developed oceangoing warship operated by the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Navy has entered Iran's territorial waters after completing a long-term voyage to participate in joint naval drills with BRICS nations.

The Shahid Mahdavi, which is a multipurpose vessel designed for long-range operations, returned home following more than 57 days of voyage and was welcomed by IRGC Navy Commander Rear Admiral Alireza Tangsiri.

Addressing a ceremony to welcome the warship, Tangsiri said the Iranian Armed Forces are ready to sail the oceans with steadfast resolve and in line with the directives of Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei.

The Shahid Mahdavi took part in the BRICS naval exercises off the coast of South Africa, marking an important step in expanding Iran's presence beyond the region.

It succeeded in conducting a long-term maritime mission that covered nearly half of the globe and was the eighth warship dispatched to the oceans by the IRGC Navy.

It traveled approximately 10,700 nautical miles—nearly 18,000 kilometers—as a part of Iran's 103rd flotilla, comprising of the Army's Shahid Naqdi destroyer and the Makran forward base ship.

This mission marked the IRGC Navy's first naval presence in the Southern Hemisphere, as well as its first experience navigating the Atlantic Ocean.

The Shahid Mahdavi warship is capable of carrying a large number of reconnaissance and strike drones and is equipped with cruise missile launch systems with a range of approximately 1,000 kilometers. It serves as a floating naval base to support the offensive fleet of the IRGC Navy.

In May 2024, the Shahid Mahdavi crossed the line of zero degrees latitude, the Equator, and sailed into the Southern Hemisphere.

The 2,100-tonne vessel, which is 240 meters in length and 27 meters in width, joined the IRGC's naval fleet in March 2023.

The oceangoing warship is equipped with a three-dimensional phased array radar, sea-to-air and sea-to-air missiles, and sophisticated telecommunication systems for electronic warfare.

The Shahid Mahdavi is capable of carrying various types of attack helicopters, combat drones, and fast attack craft.

Investigating January Incident Factors, Working to Reduce War Risks



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Government spokesperson Fatemeh Mohajerani said that a thorough investigation into the causes of the January incidents is underway, stressing that the administration remains accountable and committed to transparency. Speaking at her weekly press conference in Tehran, she noted that more than 40 days have passed since the tragic events, adding that the wounds of society are still fresh.

Mohajerani emphasized that the government believes in rationality and collective trust to overcome the crisis. She stated that hostile groups and unrealistic expectations from outside forces aim to weaken and divide the country, but Iran will pass this sensitive stage with public cooperation and wisdom.

She underlined that the government and the wider state apparatus are working to keep the threat of war away from the country and to prevent plans that may appear to promote development but could ultimately weaken national unity. Efforts are focused on creating a calmer social environment amid regional and international tensions.

Addressing university issues, the spokesperson said students have the right to express their opinions, but red lines such as national sanctities and the national flag must be respected. She stressed the importance of dialogue over anger and called for effective communication between students and authorities. The government is prepared to listen directly to student voices and engage in open discussions inside universities.

Mohajerani also thanked university officials for helping reopen campuses and stressed that continuing education is a public demand. While most classes are running, she acknowledged that some sessions are not held due to student absences.

IRAN NEWS



Iran Gets 3-Year Extension for Regional Center of Ramsar Convention

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iran will host the regional center of the Ramsar Convention for three more years, maintaining its position as one of four international hubs serving West and Central Asia and engaging countries in educational and research activities. Iran secured the extension with the continuous and joint efforts of the Department of Environment and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands was signed in the Iranian city of Ramsar in 1971, the first international treaty on the protection of wetlands of global ecological, economic, and cultural importance. This is known as the first successful model of global cooperation in the field of environment.

Iran, Azerbaijan Sign Broad Economic Cooperation Agreement Covering 10 Key Areas



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Iran and the Republic of Azerbaijan have signed a memorandum of understanding at the 17th meeting of their Joint Economic Cooperation Commission, outlining collaboration across 10 major sectors including transport, energy, electricity, water resources, and other economic, cultural, and social fields.

According to a report from Iran's Ministry of Roads and Urban Development, the agreement was signed Monday by Farzaneh Sadegh, Iran's Minister of Roads and Urban Development, and Shahin Mustafayev, Deputy Prime Minister of the Republic of Azerbaijan. The document establishes a framework for bilateral cooperation in infrastructure, energy, water management, and broader economic and social sectors.

In the transport sector, the two sides reached understandings on road transportation, border management, and railway development.

Key infrastructure projects highlighted in the agreement include: Construction of the Kalaleh-Aghband Bridge; the Astara border bridge; Widening of the Kalaleh-Jolfa road; Rail connection from Kalaleh to Siahroud; and launch of the Astara rail terminal at the shared.

Both parties emphasized accelerating the implementation of these projects.

In the energy sector, the two countries agreed to cooperate on oil Blocks 1 and 2 and to establish a joint working group to follow up on and implement related memoranda.

In electricity, agreements were reached on connecting the power grids of Iran, Azerbaijan, and Russia, as well as facilitating electricity exports from Azerbaijan to Iran.

Discussions also covered joint cooperation on the Khoda Afarin and Qiz Qalasi dams and power plants, along with matters related to the Marazad-Ordubad power plant project. Necessary agreements were finalized in these areas.

Beyond infrastructure and energy, the memorandum includes cooperation in sports and youth affairs, cultural and social sectors, tourism, agriculture, customs, industry, investment, and other economic fields.

Official Calls 1404 "Toughest Year" for Tax Collection as Smart Tax System Expands

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The head of the National Tax Administration said this year was the most challenging period for tax collection, but emphasized that taxes were collected from guilds and businesses "calmly" and without major disputes, as Iran's tax system moved further toward smart digitalization.

Seyed Mohammad Hadi Sobhanian, head of the National Tax Administration, said at a press conference reviewing the organization's performance in the Iranian year 1404 that the past year had been "different and difficult" compared to previous years.

"Despite the circumstances, we tried to fulfill our legal duties to the maximum extent," he said, noting that special focus had been placed on taxpayers, guilds, and small businesses. "It appears the measures taken were effective, and we were able to get through this year with the full cooperation of trade associations."

Sobhanian stated that there were no protests in markets or among guilds over tax collection. "Our effort has been to minimize bargaining in tax collection by relying on data-based taxation," he said, adding that extensive meetings had been held with unions, guild representatives, and market traders. "We believe that through dialogue and mutual understanding, tax affairs can be advanced with minimal tension and damage."

He stressed that despite the country's particular conditions, tax collection was carried out smoothly in consideration of economic activists, small businesses, and guilds. "What was especially important for us was the smartization of the tax system, which we have pursued in recent years and whose results are now materializing," he said.

Sobhanian explained that the organization's recent performance reports reflect the outcomes of this digital transformation. "This does not mean 100 percent satisfaction, but compared to the past, there has been a noticeable change," he noted. He added that while securing government revenue remains the primary goal, his personal priority is eliminating discrimination and improving tax justice.

The official outlined five major challenges under the traditional tax system, including: Lack of high-quality and standardized audits due to a mismatch between the volume



of tax files and the number of tax officers. Economic unpredictability caused by the heavy role of human discretion.

A focus on post-detection enforcement against tax evasion due to structural gaps in the paper-based system.

The potential for collusion between tax officers and taxpayers.

Complex laws and business diversity that hindered effective auditing.

Data-Centered Taxation and Pre-Filled Returns.

Under the new system, Sobhanian said, data plays a central role. The administration now prepares pre-filled tax returns rather than leaving taxpayers with a blank form.

"In fact, based on the taxpayer's own submitted information, a performance report is generated," he explained. "In many cases, taxpayers approve the pre-

filled return. If they do not, taxes are finalized through systemic auditing, and in cases of significant discrepancies, a formal audit will be conducted."

Sobhanian also reviewed recent legislative developments. The Direct Taxes Law was amended in 2015 (1394 in the Iranian calendar), followed by the approval of the Law on Sales Terminals and the Taxpayer System.

He noted that POS-generated invoices have been extended as electronic invoices through 1405 (March 2027), after initially being scheduled to conclude in 1404.

The deputy economy minister added that value-added tax (VAT) calls under a new framework were approved by the heads of the three branches of government.

According to Sobhanian, the rollout of sales terminal systems has led to significant achievements, including improvements in the business environment and a fairer increase in tax revenues. "This benefits the public, as the government is not relying on inflationary resources to generate income," he said.

One key indicator of the law's implementation is the number of taxpayers using electronic invoices. "This year, 1.5 billion electronic invoices have been issued," he reported.

Port Congestion Caused Temporary Delays in Maritime Trade



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Iranian officials have clarified that recent reports claiming a halt in vessel traffic from the United Arab Emirates to Iran were inaccurate, stating that maritime trade was never suspended and that temporary delays were caused by cargo congestion at regional ports.

According to a report by the Trade Promotion Organization of Iran, official reviews and correspondence show that shipping routes between the UAE and Iran remained operational. The brief delays were attributed to increased cargo volumes and operational congestion at major regional ports.

Concerns were initially raised following a letter from the head of the Industry, Mine and Trade Organization of Bushehr Province, which suggested that vessel movements from Jebel Ali Port and other regional hubs to Iranian ports appeared to have stopped. The news, circulated by some media outlets and on social networks, sparked concern among traders and economic activists.

However, the Secretary-General of the Iranian Shipping and Related Services Association formally denied the reports in a letter to the head of the Trade Promotion Organization. Subsequently, the Bushehr provincial official issued a revised letter clarifying that shipping traffic from UAE ports and other Persian Gulf countries to Iran had not ceased and that no interruption had occurred in the overall transport process.

The clarification was particularly significant given the strategic importance of Port of Jebel Ali, one of the main hubs for supplying and transshipping goods destined for Iran. The port, along with other UAE facilities, serves as a critical logistics gateway for Iranian imports.

Iran Eyes Contract Farming in Afghanistan

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Iran is preparing to expand its economic footprint in Afghanistan through contract farming and broader trade cooperation, as discussions intensify over the possible formal recognition of the Taliban administration by Tehran, a senior business official said.

Mahmoud Siadat, head of the Iran-Afghanistan Joint Chamber of Commerce, said that official recognition of the Taliban government—referred to by its authorities as the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan—would significantly strengthen commercial relations and provide greater confidence for long-term investments and private-sector engagement.

His remarks followed recent statements by Alireza Bigdeli, Iran's ambassador in Kabul, who indicated that Tehran may soon formally recognize the Taliban-led administration.

In an interview, Siadat said there is no certainty yet regarding recognition, but noted that Iran's relations with Afghanistan's current authorities have steadily improved across multiple sectors.

"Fortunately, relations between Iran and the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan are improving day by day in various fields," he said.

According to Siadat, official recognition by Tehran would create greater stability and reassurance for private-sector actors seeking to engage in Afghanistan. This would be particularly important for long-term projects such as railway connectivity linking Iran to China through Afghan territory, as well as major public and private investment initiatives.

"When it comes to long-term contracts and strategic infrastructure projects, recognition would make it easier to rely on agreements and move forward with confidence," he said.

Siadat described current economic relations between the two countries as strong and friendly, but emphasized that formal diplomatic recognition would further enhance both the perception and practical realities of cooperation.

Citing Iranian customs data, he said Iran's annual exports to Afghanistan exceed \$2.5 billion. However, Afghan customs authorities report even higher figures, estimating imports from Iran at more than \$3 billion per year.

In total, Siadat estimated that Iran's combined exports of goods and services to Afghanistan amount to approximately \$3.5 billion annually.

By contrast, Afghanistan's exports to Iran remain limited, totaling around \$100 million per year.

A significant portion of Iran's exports to Afghanistan consists of technical and engineering services, which Siadat said exceed \$500 million annually. However, he acknowledged that there is no comprehensive database tracking these activities.

He attributed the lack of accurate data to insufficient government support and incentives. In the past, Iran's Trade Promotion Organization provided bonuses of up to five percent of contract values to exporters of technical and engineering services, encouraging companies to formally register their overseas activities.

"Today, not only are there no incentives, but exporters are concerned



about potential penalties, taxes, and social security obligations," Siadat said. "As a result, many prefer not to register their activities."

He added that Afghanistan's most pressing needs go beyond goods and include technical services, consultancy, knowledge transfer, and technology—areas in which Iran has considerable capacity but has underperformed in terms of policy support.

Looking ahead, Siadat highlighted agriculture as a key area for expanding bilateral cooperation. He said Iran has already imported cotton, legumes, and certain agricultural products from Afghanistan this year, along with limited quantities of zinc ore, lead, and other minerals.

However, industrial and mining imports from Afghanistan currently face logistical and structural challenges. As a result, Iranian policymakers and business leaders are increasingly turning their attention to agricultural cooperation.

"We are seeking to implement contract farming in Afghanistan," Siadat said. "Given that more than 50 percent of Afghanistan's economy and workforce is engaged in agriculture, livestock, fisheries, and horticulture, this sector offers significant potential."

Under contract farming arrangements, Iranian companies would invest in Afghan agricultural production, providing technology, expertise, and guaranteed purchase agreements. The harvested products—such as legumes, meat, and other agricultural goods—would then be exported to Iran.

Siadat suggested that such cooperation could reduce Iran's dependence on more distant suppliers.

"Instead of importing legumes from Canada, we can source them from Afghanistan," he said. "Through contract farming and the transfer of knowledge and technology, we can import agricultural products and meat from Afghanistan in a structured and mutually beneficial way."

Siadat also noted that remittances sent by Afghan nationals residing in Iran likely exceed the value of Iran's total exports to Afghanistan. Millions of Afghans live and work in Iran, sending portions of their earnings back home to support their families.

This flow of funds, he said, underscores the deep economic interdependence between the two neighbors.

While formal recognition of the Taliban government by Iran has not yet been confirmed, Siadat made clear that such a move would mark a turning point in economic relations. It would not only solidify existing trade flows but also pave the way for expanded infrastructure projects, agricultural investment, and long-term strategic cooperation.

For now, trade between the two countries remains robust despite the absence of formal recognition. But business leaders argue that a clearer diplomatic framework could unlock further growth—particularly in sectors such as rail connectivity, agriculture, engineering services, and cross-border investment.

As discussions continue, Iran appears poised to deepen its economic engagement with Afghanistan, with contract farming emerging as a central pillar of its evolving strategy.

Iran Plans Up to 80,000 Rental Units with Private Sector Participation



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Iran's Ministry of Roads and Urban Development says it aims to facilitate the construction of up to 80,000 rental housing units over the next three years through private sector participation, as part of a broader strategy to address housing shortages without direct government involvement in development.

Speaking at a meeting of the Technical and Engineering Services Commission of the Iran Chamber of Commerce, Lahon Asadi, Director General of the Building Engineering Development Office at the ministry, said the government has concluded that parallel solutions are needed alongside ongoing housing projects. These include supported housing and rental housing schemes.

Asadi explained that two main models have been designed for rental housing development. In the first model, the ministry plans to purchase around 10,000 units and hand them over to operators for rental management. However, he stressed that the government does not intend to expand direct ownership, acknowledging that "the government is not a good landlord."

The primary policy, approved by the Supreme Housing Council, focuses on constructing new rental units through private investment. Under one model, the government will provide land on the condition that units remain rental properties for at least five years. During that period, the state will introduce tenants for 50 percent of the units, while private investors will manage the remainder.

In the second model, private developers will supply both land and capital, with government incentives designed to encourage participation and potentially shorten mandatory rental periods.

Iran to Finance Rail Projects Through Mineral Barter and \$500m State Loan



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Iran plans to finance major railway development projects through a combination of government-to-government loans, foreign financing agreements, and barter arrangements involving mineral resources, a senior transport official said.

Jabbarali Zakari, CEO of the Islamic Republic of Iran Railways and Deputy Minister of Roads and Urban Development, said part of the funding will be secured through a government-backed (G2G) loan valued at approximately \$500 million.

"In addition, we are pursuing other projects through finance agreements, for which understandings have been reached and banking procedures between the countries are progressing well," Zakari said. He added that this portion of foreign financing amounts to roughly \$2 billion.

Beyond traditional loans and finance mechanisms, Zakari noted that alternative funding models are also under consideration. These include barter arrangements—primarily involving oil swaps as well as other commodities—with a ceiling of about \$1 billion.

Asked which goods, aside from oil, could be used in barter deals, Zakari said mineral resources offer significant potential.

North Korea to Develop Economy Over Next 5 Years

SEOUL (Dispatches) - North Korean leader Kim Jong Un said the country will solidify and develop the quality of its economy over the next five years, state media KCNA said on Tuesday.

Since last week, North Korea has been holding the Ninth Party Congress of the Workers' Party which sets out major policy goals for the next five years.

The Congress was ongoing on Monday, with members starting to set plans and goals for the next five years by sectors including military, foreign policy, industry and agriculture, KCNA said.

Calling the next five years a "full-scale progress phase" in a speech on Monday, Kim called for revolutionising thought, technology and culture so new projects will be well-managed over time, KCNA said.



France Curtails U.S. Ambassador Gov't Access



PARIS (Dispatches) - U.S. Ambassador Charles Kushner "did not appear" after being formally summoned over comments the Trump administration made about the killing of a far-right activist in France, the foreign ministry said on Monday. Kushner will no longer have direct access to government ministers but will be allowed to perform certain diplomatic duties, the ministry said.

"In light of this apparent failure to grasp the basic requirements of the ambassadorial mission and the honour of representing one's country, [Foreign Minister Jean-Noël Barrot] has requested that he no longer be allowed direct access to members of the French government," the ministry stated.

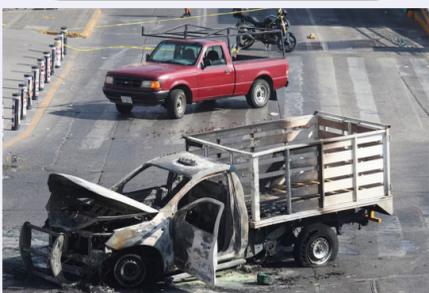
Kushner will no longer have access to government ministers but would be permitted to continue his diplomatic duties and have certain "exchanges" with officials, the ministry said.

"Following the publication by the US embassy of comments on a tragedy that occurred in France and concerns only our national public debate - which we refuse to allow to be exploited - ambassador Charles Kushner was summoned today to the ministry. He did not show up," a diplomatic source told Reuters.

The ambassador - whose son, Jared, is married to Trump's daughter, Ivanka - sent a senior official from the embassy in his place, citing personal commitments, a source told AFP.

The ministry, however, left the door open for reconciliation.

New U.S. Military-Led Group Aided Mexico's Hunt for 'El Mencho' Cartel Boss



WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - A new U.S.-military-led task force specializing in intelligence collection on drug cartels played a role in the Mexican military raid on Sunday that killed the Mexican drug lord known as 'El Mencho,' a U.S. defense official told Reuters.

The Joint Interagency Task Force-Counter Cartel, which involves multiple U.S. government agencies, was formally launched last month with the goal of mapping out networks of drug cartel members on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border, U.S. officials said.

The U.S. official, who spoke to Reuters on condition of anonymity, did not offer further details on any information that the U.S.-military-led task force may have offered Mexican authorities. The official stressed the raid itself was a Mexican military operation.

A former U.S. official, speaking on condition of anonymity without referring specifically to the task force, said the U.S. compiled a detailed target package for El Mencho and provided it to the Mexican government for its operation.

This detailed dossier included information provided by U.S. law enforcement, U.S. intelligence, the former official said.

The former official added El Mencho was very high, if not at the top, of a list of U.S. targets in Mexico.

Hungary Blocks Russia Sanctions, EU Cash for Kyiv on Eve of Ukraine War Anniversary

BRUSSELS (Dispatches) - Hungary maintained its veto on new EU sanctions on Russia and a huge loan for Ukraine amid a dispute over oil supplies, in a blow to Europe's pro-Ukrainian consensus on the eve of the war's fourth anniversary.

On the ground in Ukraine, Kyiv claimed a rare frontline advance, though Moscow continued its campaign of targeting Ukrainian cities, killing two people in drone strikes in the south.

The diplomatic spotlight was on Brussels, where European foreign ministers tried unsuccessfully to persuade Budapest not to punish Ukraine for delays restarting the flow of Russian oil to Hungary via a Soviet-era pipeline.

Soon after, another of Ukraine's EU neighbours, Slovakia, said it would refuse any requests from Kyiv for emergency electricity supplies from Monday until oil flows resume via the Druzhba pipeline.

Potentially escalating the crisis further, Ukraine said its drones struck a Russian pumping station overnight serving the pipeline. It was set up to supply Moscow's crude through Ukraine to eastern Europe, but shipments to Slovakia and Hungary have been cut off since January 27.

"We have not reached an agreement on the 20th sanctions package," EU foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas told reporters. "This is a setback and a message we didn't want to send today, but the work continues."

European Council President Antonio Costa urged Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban to honour an EU deal for a 90 billion euro (\$106.11 billion) loan to Ukraine.

But he replied in a letter seen by Reuters that Ukraine could restart the oil flows if it wanted and: "I am not in a position to support any decision whatsoever favourable to Ukraine until they return to normality."

Ukraine says the oil flows stopped after a Russian attack on pipeline infrastructure in January and it is fixing the damage as fast as it can.

But Slovakia and Hungary - who have the EU's only two refineries that still rely on oil via Druzhba - say Ukraine is to blame for the outage, in one of the angriest disputes yet between the three neighbours.

Hungary and Slovakia both have leaders who have bucked the European consensus by maintaining close relations with Moscow, but have previously stopped short of blocking EU sanctions on Russia or loans to Ukraine.

Russian President Vladimir Putin's decision to send his forces into Ukraine on February 24, 2022, triggered Europe's deadliest conflict since World War Two. Russian forces have killed tens of thousands of Ukrainian civilians and destroyed Ukrainian cities. Hundreds of thousands of soldiers on both sides have died or been wounded.



and Hungary put that consensus in jeopardy.

Four diplomats in Brussels told Reuters that Hungary's Foreign Minister Peter Szijarto drew sharp criticism from EU colleagues behind closed doors in Brussels, with some ministers accusing Orban's government of using the issue for political gain ahead of a tough election in April.

Russia has been relentlessly targeting Ukraine's power grid and energy system in nightly drone and missile attacks, arguing such infrastructure is a legitimate target because it helps the war effort. Kyiv, which has also struck Russian oil infrastructure, says Moscow's aim is to break the national will by freezing Ukrainians in their homes.

Ukraine's emergency services said two people were killed and three wounded overnight in the latest drone attacks that hit the southern Odesa region. Ukraine's Infrastructure Minister Oleksiy Kuleba said Russia had attacked port infrastructure there.

Russian state news agency RIA, citing the country's Defence Ministry, said Moscow's forces had carried out successful strikes on Ukrainian transport, energy and fuel infrastructure.

Trump Warns Countries That Play Games With U.S. Trade Deals

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - U.S. President Donald Trump warned countries against backing away from recently negotiated trade deals with the U.S. after the Supreme Court struck down his emergency tariffs, saying that if they did, he would hit them with much higher duties under different trade laws.

Trump, in a series of social media posts, said he also may impose license fees on trading partners as uncertainty over his next tariff moves gripped the global economy and sent stocks lower.

"Any Country that wants to 'play games' with the ridiculous supreme court decision, especially those that have 'Ripped Off' the U.S.A. for years, and even decades, will be met with a much higher Tariff, and worse, than that which they just recently agreed to. BUYER BEWARE!!!" Trump wrote on Truth Social.

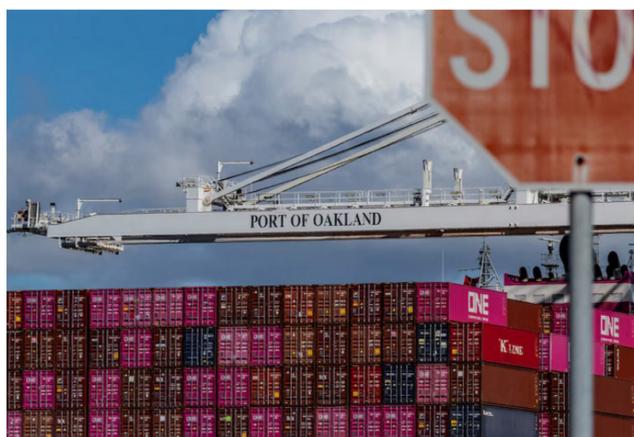
Trump said that despite the court's decision to invalidate his tariffs under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act, its decision affirmed his ability to use tariffs under other legal authorities "in a much more powerful and obnoxious way, with legal certainty, than the Tariffs as initially used."

He suggested that the U.S. could impose new license fees on trading partners, but did not provide any details.

A spokesperson for the U.S. Trade Representative's office did not immediately respond to a request for further comment on Trump's plans.

In Brussels, the European Parliament decided on Monday to postpone a vote on the European Union's trade deal with the U.S. after Trump imposed a new temporary import duty of 15% on imports from all countries.

EU goods under the deal would face a 15% U.S. tariff, with exemptions



for hundreds of food items, aircraft parts, critical minerals, pharmaceutical ingredients and other goods, while the EU would remove duties on many imports from the U.S., including industrial goods.

Trump on Friday initially announced the temporary duty under Section 122 of the Trade Act of 1974 at 10%, but raised it to 15%, the maximum allowed under the statute, on Saturday.

The new duty is set to take effect at 12:01 a.m. EST (0501 GMT) on Tuesday. At that same moment, the U.S. Customs and Border Protection

agency said it would stop collecting the now-illegal IEEPA duties, more than three days after the Supreme Court's ruling.

Wall Street stocks ended lower on Monday as renewed tariff uncertainty following the Supreme Court decision and concerns about artificial intelligence-fueled disruption unnerved investors. The Dow Jones Industrial Average fell 1.65%, the S&P 500 fell 1.02%, while the tech-heavy Nasdaq Composite fell 1.01%. The dollar weakened against the euro and the yen.

The path forward for Trump's foreign trade deals remained uncertain, with China urging Washington to scrap tariff measures, the EU freeze on its approval and India delaying planned talks.

U.S. Trade Representative Jamieson Greer said over the weekend that the Trump administration expected to open new Section 301 unfair trade practices investigations on several countries, a legal step expected to allow it to threaten new tariffs.

A group of 22 Democratic U.S. senators introduced legislation aimed at forcing the Trump administration to issue refunds for all of the now-illegal IEEPA-based tariffs within 180 days, but it faced an uncertain path to a vote.

Trump used his social media post to again lash out against the justices who ruled against him, which included two who he had appointed during his first term in the White House. In its ruling, authored by conservative Chief Justice John Roberts, the court reasserted its power to check the power of the president.

The president also expressed concern that the top court could rule against his administration's bid to restrict birthright citizenship in its forthcoming decision in that case.

Venezuelan FM Calls on UN to Push U.S. for Maduro's Release

CARACAS (Dispatches) - Venezuela's Foreign Minister Yvan Gil Pinto demanded the immediate release of Nicolas Maduro, who was ousted as president in a January 3 raid by the United States.

Maduro, who autocratically ruled Venezuela between March 2013 and his capture by US forces, is in custody in New York along with his wife, awaiting trial.

Maduro, 63, has pleaded not guilty to drug trafficking charges and declared that he was a "prisoner of war."

Addressing the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva, Gil demanded "the immediate release" by the United States of Maduro and his wife Cilia Flores.

"January 3, 2026, marked a turning point of extreme gravity," Gil told the top UN rights body, adding that the "illegal military action" by US forces left over 100 people killed.

"Despite this action, carried out in a context of profound technological and military asymmetry between our country and the nuclear power of the United States...we have chosen to open a diplomatic channel to resolve our differences with that country," he said.



Venezuela's top diplomat stressed that his country was "working toward a process of acknowledging past wounds, forgiveness, and reconciliation," referring to a new amnesty law passed.

The country's legislature unanimously adopted the landmark law last Thursday, and interim leader Delcy Rodriguez hailed its passage, describing it as a step toward "a more democratic, fairer, freer Venezuela."

Rodriguez's brother, parliament chief Jorge Rodriguez, said 1,500 people had applied for the amnesty, which covers a range of charges used to lock up dissidents during 27 years of hardline socialist rule.

Some 600 political prisoners remain behind bars throughout the country, according to Foro Penal - an NGO dedicated to the defence of political prisoners - despite approximately 500 people being released since January.

On Monday, at least 30 prisoners were released from the Rodeo I penitentiary east of Caracas to scenes of rejoicing from waiting relatives.

"We are free," shouted several prisoners with shaved heads as they exited the prison gates, ending an anguished wait by their families.

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Vassell Leads Spurs to Take Down of East-Leading Pistons

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Devin Vassell poured in 28 points, including seven 3-pointers, and the visiting San Antonio Spurs stretched their winning streak to nine games by cooling off the Detroit Pistons, 114-103.

Victor Wembanyama supplied 21 points, 17 rebounds, six blocks and four assists in the matchup between the Western Conference's second-place team and the Eastern Conference leaders.

Julian Champagnie had 17 points and Stephon Castle contributed 16 points and 11 assists. De'Aaron Fox added 10 points, seven rebounds and seven assists.

Jalen Duren led the Pistons with 25 points and 14 rebounds. All-Star Cade Cunningham had 16 points and 10 assists but made just 5 of 26 field goal attempts.

Ronald Holland had 15 points and 11 rebounds off the bench, while Duncan Robinson tossed in 13 points. Paul Reed chipped in 10 points.

The Pistons, who had won five straight, were held to 37.7% shooting, including a 7-for-36 success rate on 3-point attempts (19.4%).

Vassell fired in a trio of 3-pointers before the game was two minutes old. San Antonio was up 12 points after three minutes but Detroit quickly recovered and led 27-24 when the first quarter ended.

San Antonio led 57-55 at the break. Vassell finished the half with 18 points and Champagnie had 12. Holland led the Pistons with 11 points.

A 13-2 run midway through the third quarter gave the Spurs a 74-64 lead. Castle scored eight points

during that span, capping it off with a three-point play. San Antonio carried an 83-75 lead into the fourth.

The Spurs boosted the lead to 15 points by scoring the first seven points of the quarter. Wembanyama made two free throws, Vassell hit another 3-pointer and Castle made a layup during that span.

The Pistons eventually pulled within nine points but another Castle layup nudged San Antonio's advantage to 12, 105-93, with 3:45 remaining.

Wembanyama closed out San Antonio's win with seven points in the last 2:19, including a pair of dunks.

Meanwhile, Desmond Bane scored 36 points on 13-of-19 shooting to lead the Orlando Magic to a 111-109 victory over the Los Angeles Clippers at Inglewood, Calif.

Paolo Banchero had 16 points, eight assists and seven rebounds and Wendell Carter Jr. added 15 points and 14 rebounds for the Magic, who are 2-1 on a four-game trip. Tristan da Silva had 13 points and Anthony Black added 11 for Orlando.

Benedict Mathurin missed a potential game-winning 3-point attempt at the buzzer for the Clippers.

Kawhi Leonard had 37 points on 14-of-25 shooting and collected eight rebounds for Los Angeles while topping 20 points in his 36th consecutive appearance.

West Indies thrash Zimbabwe at T20 World Cup After Piling Up 254-6



MUMBAI (Dispatches) - The West Indies blew away T20 World Cup surprise packages Zimbabwe by a colossal 107 runs in Mumbai as Shai Hope's team opened their Super Eights campaign with a dominant victory.

Shimron Hetmyer blasted 85 off 34 balls as the West Indies piled up 254-6, the second highest total in the history of the tournament.

"It does feel good to have achieved something like that, but as a team, we haven't really accomplished anything yet," said Hetmyer, who was named player of the match.

"It's just one game, and there's still a long way to go. We're taking it one game at a time and just trying to keep pushing forward."

Zimbabwe, who stunned Australia and Sri Lanka to reach the Super Eights, got off to an awful start chasing a monumental 255.

They were reduced to 20-3 in the third over when two wickets fell to Akeal Hosein's left-arm spin and never threatened to get close.

They were all out for 147 in 17.4 overs with Brad Evans hitting some lusty late blows before being last man out for 43 off 21 balls with five sixes.

Left-armner Gudakesh Motie was the pick of the West Indies bowlers with 4-28 as he found some sharp turn. Hosein took 3-28.

Zimbabwe captain Sikandar Raza won the toss and opted to bowl, then saw his bowlers flogged to all parts of the Wankhede stadium.

Only Sri Lanka, who made 260-6 against Kenya in 2007, have scored more in a T20 World Cup match.

"When everyone is firing like that, it's a real joy to watch," said West Indies captain Hope.

"It's great to see contributions coming from all around. Maybe there's just one more battle left to convert it into a really big score."

"It was a complete performance but you can always improve."

Coming in at 17-1, the left-handed Hetmyer was given a life Zimbabwe would come to regret.

A routine catch at deep fine leg was spilled by Tashinga Musekiwa when the batsman was on nine.

Auger-Aliassime Wins Opener in Dubai Return

DUBAI (Dispatches) - Felix Auger-Aliassime of Canada returned to the Dubai Duty Free Tennis Championships and worked to pull out a 6-3, 7-6 (4) opening-round win over China's Zhizhen Zhang.

Auger-Aliassime was a finalist in 2025 and lost to Greek Stefanos Tsitsipas. On Monday, he saved all four break points he faced but Zhang saved five match points -- two in the 10th game of the second set and three more in the 12th to force the tiebreaker.

Auger-Aliassime's next opponent will be French qualifier Giovanni Mpetshi Perricard, who edged Tunisian wild card Moez Echargui 7-6 (3), 6-7 (3), 7-6 (4). Mpetshi Perricard hit 29 aces in the two-hour, 36-minute marathon.

British No. 4 seed Jack Draper beat French qualifier Quentin Halys 7-6 (8), 6-3, and Swiss wild card Stan Wawrinka beat fellow wild card Benjamin Hassan of Lebanon 7-5, 6-3.

Meanwhile Germany's Yannick Hanfmann won the first seven games of his first-round match and beat Dusan Lajovic of Serbia 6-0, 6-3 in Santiago, Chile.

Hanfmann had a 22-9 edge in winners and overcame 24



unforced errors in a tidy 74 minutes. No. 7 seed Francisco Comesana, meanwhile, needed two hours and 51 minutes to get past Spaniard Pedro Martinez 6-4, 2-6, 7-6 (4). Comesana saved one match point in the third set to stay alive.

Comesana's second-round opponent will be Italian qualifier Andrea Pellegrino, who beat Argentine qualifier Alex Barrena 6-2, 2-6, 6-1. The last match of the day was still going, pitting Chilean Nicolas Jarry against Croatia's Dino Prizmic.

Meanwhile Serena Williams' former coach Rick Macci believes the 23-times Grand Slam champion is certain to return to competitive tennis and said the 44-year-old is "going all out" in training to get herself ready for a return to the sport.

Williams, who won her last Grand Slam singles title in 2017 and has not competed since the 2022 U.S. Open, can officially enter tournaments after rejoining the tennis anti-doping testing pool last year.

Mayweather-Pacquiao Rematch Locked for September in Las Vegas



LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - Floyd Mayweather and Manny Pacquiao will meet in a long-awaited rematch of the highest-grossing clash in boxing history this September at the Sphere in Las Vegas, Netflix announced.

The bout between two of boxing's biggest names — who famously fought a blockbuster clash in 2015, and are now both in their late forties — comes days after Mayweather announced he is coming out of retirement.

It will be broadcast live September 19 on Netflix, as the global streaming platform increasingly moves into live sports with glitzy one-off events.

"Floyd and I gave the world what remains the biggest fight in boxing history. The fans have waited long enough — they deserve this rematch," said Pacquiao, 47, in a joint statement.

Mayweather beat fellow welterweight Pacquiao in their money-spinning 2015 "Fight of the Century," which generated a record 4.6 million pay-per-view buys but largely failed to live up to the hype.

Mayweather is believed to have earned an estimated US\$300 million from the unanimous points victory over the Filipino icon, which remains the most lucrative fight in history and generated more than US\$600 million revenue.

Former multi-weight world champion Mayweather retired from boxing in 2017, unbeaten in 50 bouts, though he has continued to fight in exhibitions since, including an upcoming clash this spring with Mike Tyson.

"Super-Sub" Sesko Seals Man United Win at Everton

LIVERPOOL (Dispatches) - Benjamin Sesko came off the bench to fire Manchester United up to fourth in the Premier League with a 1-0 win at Everton to extend Michael Carrick's unbeaten start in charge of the Red Devils.

Sesko is yet to start in Carrick's six games but has hit top form since Ruben Amorim was sacked in last month.

The Slovenian, who scored just twice in his first 22 appearances after a £74 million move from RB Leipzig, has netted six goals in his last seven games.

Victory lifts United three points clear of Chelsea and Liverpool in the battle for a place in next season's Champions League, with only the top five set to qualify.

The quality of the United move that led to the winner 19



minutes from time was out of character with an otherwise uninspired 90 minutes.

Everton have now failed to win in seven home games as they struggle to adapt to life at their new 52,000 capacity Hill Dickinson Stadium.

David Moyes' men missed the chance to move up to seventh as they remain on the fringes of the fight for a place in Europe next season.

Everton won 1-0 when the sides last met at Old Trafford in November despite playing almost the entire match a man down.

United have been transformed since former midfielder Carrick took the reins, but lacked rhythm as both sides played for the first time in 13 days.