

VP: Drafting free trade regulations necessary for ECO

International Desk

Iran's Vice President Mohammad Reza Aref said that drawing up of free trade regulations is a necessity for the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), based on which the member states should conduct their trade. The Iranian official made the remarks in a meeting with the ECO Secretary General Asad Majid Khan on the sidelines of the International Conference on Glaciers Preservation in Tajikistan's capital, Dushanbe. Aref called free trade regulations, transportation, and advanced technologies as three key areas for expansion of cooperation between the member states. Iran's first vice president referred to some ECO member countries being landlocked, saying that Iran is ready to increase and facilitate member states' access to high seas. Aref also said that Iran has made re-

markable achievements in the field of advanced technologies in recent years and is ready to generously share them with the organizations' member states. Highlighting the importance of cyberspace in modern world, the Iranian official said that the ECO members are vulnerable to cybersecurity threats and are exposed to cyberattacks. "We can pass on our experience in enhancing cybersecurity to the member countries," the vice president said. Aref said a broad agenda aimed at convergence and solidarity of member states, and resolution of their existing disputes should be taken into consideration. "We believe that member countries should have a serious and friendly presence, not a competitive one, in order to attain ECO's goals. "The Islamic Republic of Iran is ready to host expert and specialized ministerial meetings of the Economic Cooperation

Organization," he added. For his part, Khan pointed to Iran's emphasis on the principle of good neighborliness among the ECO members and the importance of inspiring member states to strive for the welfare of regional governments and nations. "Iran, as one of the founders of ECO, plays a prominent role in strengthening convergence and solidarity among its member countries," he stated. The ECO, whose members are Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Turkey and Uzbekistan, promotes regional trade and economic development. Iran's vice president also held separate meetings with Tajikistan's officials, including President Emomali Rahmon and signed four cooperation agreements. During the meeting with Tajikistan's president, Aref said that there is no obstacle for further expansion of Teh-



Iran's First Vice President Mohammad Reza Aref (R) shakes hands with Secretary General of the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) Asad Majeed Khan in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, on May 30, 2025. [fvpresident.ir](#)

ran-Dushanbe relations. Rahmon expressed his satisfaction with the growing relations between the two

nations and emphasized the importance of swiftly implementing agreements signed between the two countries.

Iran urges explanation from Austria over 'fake' report on nuclear program

International Desk

Iran's Foreign Ministry's spokesman Esmail Baqaei on Friday termed as "fake" an Austrian intelligence report that said Tehran is seeking atomic weapons, demanding an explanation from the Austrian government. In its annual report on global threats, Austria's domestic intelligence service (DSN) said Monday that Iran's "nuclear weapons development program is well advanced." "All efforts to prevent Iran's armament through sanctions and agreements have so far proved ineffective," the Austrian report claimed. Baqaei condemned "the fake information" disseminated in the report and demanded an explanation from the Austrian government. He said the report is solely produced to create "media hype" against Iran and thus it "lacks any validity or credibility." The Foreign Ministry spokesman also urged the Austrian

government to explain the "irresponsible, provocative, and destructive" behavior of the DSN, which is spreading lies about Iran. He further highlighted Iran's membership of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), saying the country's nuclear program has been subject to the heaviest scrutiny by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). Austria's anti-Iran intelligence report undermines the credibility of the IAEA, the UN's nuclear agency, the spokesman noted. He also said, "Austria and some other European countries are deceitfully silent about the arming of the Zionist regime with all kinds of weapons of mass destruction and prevent the realization of a West Asia free from WMDs through their all-out support for the genocidal and occupying [Israeli] regime." However, Iran as a "staunch opponent of nuclear weapons and other WMDs, is a founder and steadfast supporter of the



Esmail Baqaei
● IRNA

idea of freeing the region from weapons of mass destruction, Baqaei added. The Iranian Foreign Ministry also summoned Austria's chargé d'affaires to convey Tehran's protest to Vienna over the hostile move. The United States, Israel and other Western countries have repeatedly accused Iran of seeking to acquire a nuclear weapon. Iran has categorically denied the claims, instead arguing that it is pursuing a nuclear program for civilian purposes alone.

Iran manifested the peaceful nature of its nuclear program to the world by signing the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) with six world powers in 2015. The landmark deal was derailed in 2018 by the US, which unilaterally walked out of the accord and launched its so-called campaign of maximum pressure against Iran. Since April 12, Iran and the US have begun new negotiations to reach a deal on Tehran's nuclear program. Both countries have described the talks as "positive and constructive."

Iran plays down speculation on 'imminent' US deal

National Desk

Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi stressed Iran's commitment to diplomacy, slamming media disinformation aimed at derailing the ongoing negotiations between Iran and the United States over Iran's nuclear program. Araghchi made the remarks in a post on his X account on Thursday, responding to growing media speculation about an alleged imminent agreement between Tehran and Washington, Press TV reported. "Media is speculating about an imminent Iran-US deal. Not sure if we are there yet. Iran is sincere about a diplomatic solution that will serve the interests of all sides. But getting there requires an agreement that will fully terminate all sanctions and uphold Iran's nuclear rights—including enrichment," he said. Araghchi reiterated that meaningful progress can only be achieved through negotiations, not media narratives, in response to a report by FOX News. The report cited a new intelligence assessment claiming that Iran is continuing its active nuclear weapons program and that the program could be used to launch long-range missiles. However, FOX News acknowledged that the so-called new intelligence contradicts the statement made by US Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard, who told the Senate Intelligence Committee in March that the American intelligence community "continues to assess that Iran is not building a nucle-



Abbas Araghchi

ar weapon." Araghchi also condemned what he described as disinformation aimed at derailing diplomacy, criticizing Israel for using Iran as a tool to discredit American critics, calling such tactics "low," even by Israel's standards, warning that they undermine genuine efforts to resolve tensions through dialogue. "Path to a deal goes through the negotiating table and not the media. As for the latest fake news against Iran-U.S. diplomacy: using Iran to attack American critics is low, even for Israel," he added. The US and Iran have held five rounds of nuclear talks since April 12 and are expected to meet again for negotiations aimed at reaching a new agreement. The two countries have been at odds over the level of uranium enrichment. US President Donald Trump said Wednesday he had personally warned Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu not to disrupt the talks.

'100 percent' of Gazans at risk of famine: UN

Gaza is "the hungriest place on Earth", the United Nations said Friday, warning that the Palestinian territory's entire population was now at risk of famine. Negotiations to end nearly 20 months of war have so far failed to achieve a breakthrough, with Israel resuming operations in Gaza in March, ending a six-week truce, AFP reported. "Gaza is the hungriest place on Earth," said Jens Laerke, a spokesman for the UN humanitarian agency OCHA. "It's the only defined area – a country or defined territory within a country – where you have the entire population at risk of famine. 100 percent of the population at risk of famine," he said, rejecting claims to the contrary by Israeli authorities. At a press briefing in Geneva, Laerke detailed the difficulties faced by the United Nations in delivering humanitarian aid into the Gaza Strip. In recent days, Israel has partially eased a total aid blockade on the Palestinian territory that it imposed on March 2, leading to severe shortages of food and medicine. Laerke said 900 trucks of humanitarian aid had been authorized by Israel to enter the Strip since the blockade was partially lifted. But so far only 600 trucks have been off-loaded on the Gaza side of the border, and a smaller number of truckloads have then been picked up, due to multiple security considerations.

Laerke said the mission to deliver aid was "in an operational strait-jacket that makes it one of the most obstructed aid operations not only in the world today, but in recent history." Once truckloads enter Gaza, they are often "swarmed by desperate people", Laerke said. "I don't blame them, for one second, for taking the aid that essentially is already theirs – but it's not distributed in the way we want." French President Emmanuel Macron said on Friday that European countries should "harden the collective position" against Israel if it does not respond appropriately to the humanitarian situation in Gaza. "There is no humanitarian blockade. That is a blatant lie," Israel's Foreign Ministry said in a statement on X, defending its efforts to allow in aid. During a visit to Singapore on Friday, Macron also asserted that recognition of a Palestinian state, with some conditions, was "not only a moral duty, but a political necessity". The French president later told a top defense forum in Singapore that abandoning war-torn Gaza to its own fate and giving Israel a "free pass" would kill the West's credibility with the rest of the world. Israel's Defense Minister Israel Katz vowed on Friday to build a "Jewish Israeli state" in the occupied West Bank, a day after the cabinet announced the creation of 22 new



A displaced Palestinian ferries a bag of food aid on his shoulders after people stormed a World Food Programme warehouse in Deir el-Balah in the central Gaza Strip on May 28, 2025. [EYAD BABA/AFP](#)

settlements in the Palestinian territory. He said the move was a "clear message" to French president, whom Israel's foreign ministry accused of carrying out a crusade against Israel. Israeli settlements in the West Bank, seen as a major obstacle to lasting peace, are regularly condemned by the United Nations as illegal under international law, and Thursday's announcement drew sharp foreign criticism. "It is also a clear message to Macron and his associates: they will recognize a Palestinian state on paper – but we will build the Jewish Israeli state here on the ground," he added.

