

Heads of the National Standards Organizations of Iran and Malaysia Met recently on the Sidelines of the Governance Committee of SMIC in Istanbul, Turkey, and Discussed Increasing Cooperation in Standardization and Certification

IRAN NEWS

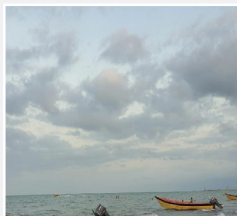
A Top Iraqi Security Official and the Commander of the Islamic Revolution Guard Corps Reviewed Plans to Ensure That the Enemies of Iran Will Be Prohibited From Using the Arab Country's Airspace

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FM Warns U.S. Against Resumption of Maximum Pressure Campaign Against Iran



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's foreign minister has warned the US against the resumption of its so-called "maximum pressure" campaign against Tehran, stressing Washington's previous attempts to oppress Iran have only failed.

On Tuesday, Abbas Araqchi wrote on X that the first version of Maximum Pressure was met with Maximum Resistance from Tehran, resulting in Washington's Maximum Defeat.

"Attempting 'Maximum Pressure 2.0' will only result in 'Maximum Defeat 2.0'. Better idea: try 'Maximum Wisdom'—for the benefit of all," he tweeted.

Maximum Pressure 1.0' compelled 'Maximum Resistance' and ended in 'Maximum Defeat' for the US. The proof? One example: just compare Iran's peaceful nuclear program before and after the so-called 'Maximum Pressure' policy.

Araqchi pointed to Iran's advances in its peaceful nuclear program after the US imposed unilateral sanctions back in 2018.

Instead, he called for a maximum wisdom policy that would benefit everyone.

The warning follows reports that US President-elect Donald Trump is considering imposing further sanctions on Tehran after taking office in January.

He also said there are still means of contact between Iran and the US despite the fundamental differences.

Speaking to reporters on the sidelines of a weekly cabinet session on Wednesday, Araqchi said a series of disagreements between Iran and the US are so foundational that may not be resolved forever.

"However, we need to manage them to reduce the costs and tensions," he added.

The foreign minister noted that the contact channels between Iran and the US are still in place.

Asked about Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency Rafael Grossi's upcoming visit to Iran, Araqchi said Iran and the UN nuclear agency are involved in extensive and age-old cooperation despite a series of problems and differing views on interaction.

Expressing hope that Iran and the IAEA would reach an agreement on a number of differences during Grossi's visit, Araqchi said the UN nuclear chief has reportedly "positive morale".

Although Trump failed to reach his professed goals with his maximum pressure campaign, the bans have badly hurt the Iranian population.

Iraqi Resistance Launches Drone Strikes on Israeli Targets in Occupied Territories



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Fighters from Iraqi resistance groups have launched multiple attacks on strategic sites within the Israeli-occupied territories, marking the latest in a series of operations in retaliation for the Tel Aviv regime's bloody onslaughts against the Gaza Strip and Lebanon.

The Islamic Resistance in Iraq, an umbrella group of anti-terror fighters, in a statement published on its Telegram channel on Wednesday, confirmed a drone strike on a target in the central part of the occupied lands.

It said the attack was carried out in continuation of resistance against the occupying Israeli regime, in support of the Palestinian and Lebanese nations, and in response to the massacres that the Zionist entity is perpetrating against unarmed Palestinian and Lebanese civilians.

The coalition noted that it will continue to target and destroy important installations across the occupied lands.

The resistance group also reported a second drone strike on a key target located in the north of the occupied territories.

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK



TEHRAN - The President stated that internet filtering, initially aimed at solving national issues, has instead worsened conditions, facilitated profiteering through VPN sales, and fueled public discontent. He clarified that the government's plan to lift filtering is not about neglecting cyberspace but rather about strengthening governance and enabling people to make optimal use of it.

Masoud Pezeshkian, speaking at Wednesday's Cabinet meeting, explained that scientific assessments and social impact analyses show that filtering has not met its objectives. Instead, it has brought additional challenges. He questioned why there is continued insistence on a strategy that has proven counterproductive.

The President emphasized that the government's proposal to lift filtering aims to enhance governance, encourage educational and cultural content creation (especially for youth), and expand public services on social media platforms to foster a productive use of the internet.

Pezeshkian also noted the government's intent to work with other state institutions on this issue. He stressed the importance of quickly implementing the recent Supreme Council of Cyberspace's resolution and establishing a special task force to address concerns, conduct a thorough review, and present recommendations at the Council's next meeting for final

decision-making.

Meanwhile highlighting his administration's push to enhance relations with all countries in the world, Pezeshkian said it is inevitable that Iran and the U.S. will have encounters in regional and international spheres.

In a meeting with a group of former Iranian foreign ministers, held in Tehran on Tuesday, Pezeshkian said his administration believes in affinity with friends and showing tolerance towards enemies.

"In order to address the domestic problems and develop the country, we need to, apart from the settlement of the internal affairs, organize the international relations, remove the tensions and improve the conditions for interaction and communication with the regional and world countries," he added.

"I believe that even in regard to the US, whether we like it or not, we will finally have to encounter that country in the regional and international arenas. So we'd better manage this sphere by ourselves," the president added, reaffirming his administration's commitment to the Iranian establishment's major strategies and approaches.

Gov't Emphasizes Exports and Economic Diplomacy in New Term

TEHRAN - The First Vice President of Iran stated that the 14th government places a strong emphasis on exports and the importance of economic and trade diplomacy.

He noted that the petrochemical sector, due to its significant role in non-oil exports, can assist the government in achieving these goals.

In a meeting with CEOs of major petrochemical companies, Mohammad Reza Aref emphasized addressing the issues facing the petrochemical industry. He highlighted the need for this sector's support to implement the Seventh Development Plan, aiming for the projected 8% growth rate.

Aref noted that \$150 billion in foreign investment is needed to achieve the 8% growth target in the Seventh Development Plan.

He stated that the petrochemical industry is a key sector for attracting foreign investment and opening up global markets for Iranian products.

The Vice President also stressed the importance of advanced technologies in the petrochemical sector. With rapid technological advancements worldwide, he warned against outdated practices, which would hinder competitiveness in global markets. He emphasized the need for cutting-edge technology, including artificial intelligence, to enhance efficiency and reduce costs.

He underscored the necessity of research and development (R&D) as a critical investment in the industry, pointing out that successful global companies, such as major automakers, allocate 3% of their revenue to R&D. He noted that Iran's industry has often neglected R&D, and a

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more serious approach in this area is essential.

Aref also referenced the government's plan to train 1,000 skilled professionals, as advised by Iran's Supreme Leader, including 100 individuals for senior management positions. This initiative aims to involve skilled professionals in both the private sector and government, providing solutions for challenges in key industries like petrochemicals.

He emphasized the central role of the petrochemical industry in generating wealth, boosting national employment, and enhancing the economy, affirming that reaching a top position in regional petrochemical exports is a priority for Iran. Aref noted that Iran's pool of scientific expertise is a strategic advantage in the region.

Reflecting on previous neglect of trade diplomacy, Aref stressed that the current administration is committed to

prioritizing exports and economic diplomacy. He reiterated the petrochemical sector's critical role in non-oil exports as a strong support to government efforts.

At the end of the meeting, the Vice President directed the formation of a new task force to support the petrochemical industry. This task force will include representatives from the Ministry of Industry, Trade, and Economy, the Central Bank, and top petrochemical companies to address key issues and provide solutions.

Additionally, Mehdi Mahdavi Abhari, Secretary-General of the Petrochemical Employers Association, presented a report on the industry's role in Iran's economy, while CEOs from leading petrochemical firms shared their challenges and concerns.

Iran to Expatriate Thousands of Prisoners to Afghanistan



TEHRAN (IRNA) - The Iranian deputy Minister of Justice says that thousands of Afghan prisoners will be expatriated to their country within the next two months. Askar Jalalian made the remarks to IRNA before his departure for Kabul, Afghanistan, on Wednesday.

Jalalian, who also acts as chairman of the committee on transfer of convicts, said the Afghan prisoners will be returned to serve their prison terms in their own country.

The decision is based on the human rights principles and laws; however, the prisoners will be transferred only if they are consent to it, he underlined.

Iran and Afghanistan signed a prisoners transfer treaty about two decades ago, and the current ruling government (Taliban) in the neighboring country has remained committed to the deal, Jalalian noted.

About the Tehran-Kabul ties, the official said the two enjoy good relations in various areas as they speak the same language and have numerous commonalities.

Some ill-wishers might be unwilling to see Iran's deep cooperation with its neighbors, so Tehran and Kabul should try to keep their ties cordial, he added.

He went on to say that the neighboring states have no choice but to cooperate with each other to overcome existing obstacles.

Iran, UN Weigh Plans to Assist Syria



TEHRAN (Tasnim) - A senior adviser to the Iranian foreign minister and the UN Special Envoy for Syria discussed the latest developments in the Arab country and mulled over the plans to assist the Syrian people.

In a meeting on the sidelines of the 22nd round of the international expert meetings of the Astana Process in Kazakhstan's capital, Ali Asghar Khaji and Geir O. Pedersen talked about the latest developments regarding the political, operational, and humanitarian conditions in the region and Syria.

The Iranian diplomat strongly condemned the ongoing Israeli genocidal crimes in Gaza and its aggression against Lebanon and Syria.

Khaji denounced the Israeli strikes on Syria as a serious threat to peace and stability in the Arab country and the broader region.

He also expressed Iran's readiness to assist in the establishment of peace and stability in Syria, stressing the need for the United Nations and its relevant bodies, particularly the Security Council, to adopt a responsible and proactive stance to halt the Israeli crimes and violation of peace.

At Least Three Killed, Several Injured in U.S. Strikes on Syria Military Positions



TEHRAN (PressTV) - U.S. occupation forces have carried out deadly strikes against Syrian military for the second day in a row, as Washington is scrambling to deter the resistance front's retaliations against the Israeli regime's genocide in the besieged Gaza Strip and carnage in southern Lebanon.

Lebanon's al-Mayadeen television network said the American aggression in the early hours of Wednesday hit positions on the outskirts of the city of al-Bukamal in Syria's eastern province of Dayr al-Zawr near the Iraqi border.

The television network said the airstrikes targeted sites of the Syrian army's auxiliary forces in al-Jam'iyyat area in the city of al-Bukamal and the al-Bukamal Desert, adding that three people were killed and five others injured.

IRAN NEWS



Iran and Malaysia’s National Standards Organizations Emphasize Enhanced Collaboration

TEHRAN (IRNA) – The heads of Iran and Malaysia’s national standards organizations met on the sidelines of the SMIC Governance Committee meeting held in Istanbul, Turkey, where they highlighted the importance of strengthening bilateral cooperation. According to a report from the National Standards Organization, Mehdi Eslam Panah, head of Iran’s National Standards Organization, noted that his organization is the only official and legal body for issuing Halal certification and labels in the Islamic Republic of Iran. He stressed the significance of standardization and quality control, describing standards as a “safe harbor” for both exports and imports. Eslam Panah added that the Halal certification and label serve as a reliable anchor, providing authenticity and compliance for this safe haven.

Eight Iranian Banks Connect to Russia’s Card Payment Network



TEHRAN - In a significant development, eight Iranian banks are now connected to Russia’s card payment network, allowing smoother transactions for tourists and strengthening financial ties between the two countries. According to the Central Bank of Iran, the first phase of this initiative has been implemented, enabling Iranian tourists in Russia to withdraw cash from ATMs. In the second phase, Russian tourists in Iran will be able to make purchases using Iran’s point-of-sale (POS) terminals.

Dr. Noushafarin Momen Vaghefi, a member of the Central Bank of Iran’s executive board, highlighted the partnerships behind the project, noting that the National Informatics Center of Iran and a Russian company collaborated on it. Bank Saderat of Iran and Russia’s VTB Bank are acting as intermediaries.

Dr. Momen Vaghefi explained that the “MirShetab” project leverages Iran’s and Russia’s banking capacities with concepts like tokenization and NFC (Near-Field Communication) for efficient payments. The project incorporates Iran’s “Kahroba” payment scheme to streamline payment processes and cut costs. By the end of the year, NFC payments via mobile phones are expected to be available.

Dr. Mohsen Karimi, an advisor to the Central Bank of Iran, shared the background and vision behind this project, noting that the idea of linking Iran’s Shetab network with Russia’s Mir network was conceived three years ago. Although initially challenging, the project has now come to fruition, thanks to the efforts of the Central Bank, the Iranian ambassador to Russia, and other officials.

One primary objective of this project is to facilitate currency exchanges without relying on Western-operated platforms. Dr. Karimi mentioned two main obstacles: first, many countries—even those with their own payment infrastructure—often use Western platforms for cross-border payments. Second, the technological gap between Iran’s Shetab network and international standards had to be addressed, which was achieved through local expertise and creativity within the Central Bank of Iran.

Kazem Jalali, the Iranian ambassador to Russia, also spoke at the launch event, praising the technical work by the Central Bank in establishing the connection between the Mir and Shetab networks. Jalali noted that this move will ease some banking and financial hurdles in trade between Iran and Russia, especially in promoting tourism.

Iran to Participate in Tajikistan’s First Digital Innovation Conference



TEHRAN (IRNA) - A delegation of directors and experts from Iran’s Ministry of Communications and Information Technology will participate in the first international conference on digital innovation and technology, “Digital Tajikistan.”

According to the Ministry, this decision was reached following the first joint working group session on communications, information technology, and postal services between Iran and Tajikistan, held virtually.

The joint working group was chaired by Ali Sanaeian, Director General of the Office for International Affairs and Export Development, and Mortezaazadeh, Deputy of the Ministry of Communications (State Communications Service) of Tajikistan, with corresponding representatives from both countries attending online.

During the session, Sanaeian proposed several initiatives aimed at exploring opportunities and fostering practical cooperation for digital economic development. He expressed Iran’s interest in expanding partnerships in the communications and IT sectors.

Tajikistan’s representative outlined the services provided by the Ministry of Communications, distinguishing them from the country’s Digital Innovation and Technology Agency. He also highlighted Tajikistan’s interest in utilizing Iran’s expertise and capabilities to advance its digital economy strategy.

With the inaugural “Digital Tajikistan” conference scheduled for November 25 in Dushanbe, and with other prominent countries competing for access to Tajikistan’s digital economy infrastructure, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs emphasized the importance of using this event to showcase Iran’s capabilities and achievements. Consequently, it was decided that a delegation of Iranian communications and IT officials would attend the conference.



TEHRAN - Masoumeh Bani Hashemi, Director of the Caspian Sea National Studies and Research Center at the Water Research Institute, detailed troubling declines in the Caspian Sea’s water levels, calling for urgent action. Data from the past 28 years reveals a drop of 210 centimeters in water levels, with one-third of this decline occurring in the last three years alone (2021–2023), amounting to a 70-centimeter decrease.

Bani Hashemi shared that projections for 2024 indicate the Caspian Sea will see another 15 to 30 centimeters drop, marking a fourth consecutive year of decline. Studies attribute this trend primarily to rising temperatures, which accelerate evaporation, and decreasing rainfall across the Caspian basin. Combined, these factors indicate that the sea’s water level could fall drastically by the end of the century, with some scenarios projecting declines of up to 30 meters.

While rising global temperatures typically lead to rising sea levels, the Caspian Sea faces the opposite threat. Unlike open seas and oceans, landlocked seas like the Caspian are experiencing falling water levels due to heightened evaporation and reduced rainfall, compounded by declining inflows from its main tributaries.

Bani Hashemi warned that continued warming, driven by greenhouse gases, could significantly reduce the Caspian Sea’s water levels. High temperatures contribute directly to evaporation, with studies projecting that the region may see average annual temperature increases of 3–4 degrees Celsius by century’s end. This change not only accelerates evaporation but could also heighten drought conditions in surrounding areas.

The Caspian’s water levels heavily depend on inflows from rivers across nine countries: Iran, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Russia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Armenia, and Turkey. The Volga River, flowing primarily through Russia, accounts for roughly 80% of the Caspian’s freshwater inflow. However, recent decreases in the Volga’s water discharge have directly impacted the Caspian’s levels, particularly noticeable from 2021 to 2023.

Aside from the Volga, two other major rivers play significant roles: the Kura, originating in Turkey and flowing through Georgia and Azerbaijan, and the Ural, which spans parts of Russia and northwestern Kazakhstan. The Kura’s flow rate has shown a steady decline, especially since 2010, as has the Ural, whose discharge rates have been decreasing since 2017. These trends, linked to both climate change and water management policies in these regions, highlight how the Caspian’s river inflows have been insufficient to counter the rate of evaporation.

Bani Hashemi emphasized the severe consequences of falling water levels for ecosystems, coastal infrastructures, and economic sectors across Caspian littoral states. The diminishing water volume endangers wetlands, bays, and coastal ecosystems, affecting biodiversity and increasing pollution

concentration. Further, with projections of up to a 28% reduction in rainfall along the Caspian coastline by the end of the century, pressures on the environment will likely intensify, resulting in an expanded shoreline prone to human encroachment.

In terms of infrastructure, the impact of receding waters could be catastrophic. Coastal cities, ports, fisheries, and energy facilities, including power plants reliant on Caspian waters, face disruptions. These changes threaten water supply sources and will likely increase saltwater intrusion into coastal aquifers, disrupting ecosystems and industries.

Recognizing the transnational nature of these issues, Bani Hashemi underscored the importance of international collaboration. Given the Volga River’s pivotal role, Iran and other Caspian states must actively negotiate with Russia, urging coordinated water management policies. Russia’s cooperation will be essential in mitigating the adverse impacts of water level declines in the Caspian Sea, and past experiences underscore the necessity of regional agreements to protect shared resources.

Iran’s Water Research Institute, with a mandate from the Ministry of Energy, is currently researching climate impacts on the Caspian, working on predictive models to help shape strategic responses at both the national and international levels. These initiatives aim to assess the long-term effects of climate and hydrological changes on the Caspian basin and explore methods to stabilize the water balance.

Bani Hashemi proposed forming a coalition among the five Caspian littoral states—Iran, Russia, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, and Kazakhstan. Through joint action, these nations could pursue solutions for managing water resources and reducing environmental risks. Specifically, she suggested that governments develop and implement a framework for regular environmental monitoring, sharing scientific findings, and cooperating on pollution control measures.

In addition, Bani Hashemi advocated for international scientific forums focused on the Caspian’s environmental and water management challenges, bringing together experts to inform policies and help devise sustainable management strategies. Improved data sharing on resource usage among Caspian states is crucial, especially as pressures on these resources grow amid declining water levels.

Beyond scientific research, Bani Hashemi urged countries to leverage diplomatic channels to strengthen regional cooperation on water management. To address pollution and protect biodiversity, she emphasized the need for collaborative response frameworks, particularly to handle potential oil spills and other environmental incidents. As the Caspian’s shrinking waters increase the risks associated with industrial activities, enhanced regional cooperation and disaster preparedness are critical.

Embassy of Pakistan and University of Tehran Commemorate Iqbal Day



TEHRAN – On Tuesday, the Embassy of Pakistan in Tehran, in collaboration with the University of Tehran’s Department of Urdu, celebrated the 147th birth anniversary of Dr. Allama Muhammad Iqbal, affectionately known in Iran as Iqbal Lahori. The ceremony was graced by H.E. Muhammad Mudassar Tipu, Ambassador of Pakistan in Tehran, as the chief guest.

Dr. Abdul Raza Saif, Dean of the Faculty of Literature and Humanities, presided over the event, welcoming esteemed guests and emphasizing the significance of Iqbal’s contributions to Islamic thought and philosophy.

Ambassador Tipu expressed his admiration for the Iranian people’s enduring reverence for Iqbal. He noted that Iqbal, a timeless poet and philosopher, wrote much of his work in Persian, inspiring countless Muslims in the subcontinent with a vision of independence and dignity. The Ambassador highlighted how Rahbar-e-Inqilab Ayatollah Khamenei’s deep appreciation of Iqbal’s work—having committed

2,000 of Iqbal’s verses to memory—resonates profoundly within Pakistan’s literary circles. Iqbal’s universal and metaphysical philosophy, embodied in his concepts of Khudi (selfhood), Shaheen (eagle), and his devotion to Prophet Muhammad, remains unparalleled. In today’s globalized world, where cultural identities often blur, Iqbal’s message serves as a guiding light, encouraging us to stay rooted in our cultural heritage and values. Known as the “Poet of the East,” Iqbal’s poetry encapsulates the essence of Eastern civilizations, including Iran, the Arab world, Turkey, and Pakistan.

The event featured a documentary, Poet of the East, which offered insights into Iqbal’s life and legacy. Students recited verses in both Urdu and Persian to honor this great poet, philosopher, and thinker. An exhibition showcasing rare photographs of Iqbal’s life and career was also held at the University of Tehran. The ceremony was attended by a large gathering of students, scholars, and members of the Pakistani diaspora.

Iran, Azerbaijan Strengthen North-South Corridor with New Rail Connection to Nakhchivan



TEHRAN - In a recent meeting between Azerbaijan’s railway delegation and the Iranian railway company, key agreements were reached to enhance the North-South transport corridor. The discussions concluded with plans to establish a rail link between Baku, Azerbaijan, and Nakhchivan, which will pass through Iran.

Jabar Ali Zakeri, CEO of the Islamic Republic of Iran Railways, stated that agreements to connect the railway from Baku to Nakhchivan were initiated last year. The recent talks were a follow-up to implement those agreements with Azerbaijani railway officials.

Zakeri highlighted that Azerbaijan is constructing a joint railway and road bridge in the Aghband region to accelerate the project. Iran is also working on building related infrastructure, currently overseen by the country’s Transport Infrastructure Development Company.

In addition, a new railway line is planned to be built on the Iranian side of the Aras River in cooperation with Azerbaijan, with the costs covered by Azerbaijan. Zakeri emphasized Iran’s request for faster execution of these projects, and noted that parts of the technical studies are being carried out by Iranian consultants.

This rail connection aims to facilitate the transfer of goods from Nakhchivan to the Caspian Sea, allowing cargo to reach Baku and then be transported via Astara in Azerbaijan to Astara in Iran. This route is expected to significantly boost the North-South transport corridor, enhancing trade and connectivity in the region.

Details on the Import and Supply of Premium Gasoline



TEHRAN - Reza Navaz discussed details on the import of premium gasoline (high-octane), explaining that there is demand for gasoline super, especially with the increase in imported vehicles. According to owners of these imported vehicles, they require premium gasoline to function optimally.

Navaz added that alongside the needs of imported vehicles, domestic gasoline consumption is also increasing. When this happens, refineries prioritize the production of regular Euro-4 and Euro-5 gasoline, which means that the production of premium gasoline fluctuates and often decreases.

The spokesperson for the National Fuel Stations Association stated that, according to a resolution by the Cabinet under the executive bylaw of Article 8 of the Budget Law, companies specializing in import and export, as well as storage and transportation, are permitted to import and distribute premium gasoline.

He added that the current infrastructure is designed for subsidized gasoline through the smart fuel system. However, under the Cabinet’s resolution, imported premium gasoline likely won’t require a smart fuel card or quota, allowing importers to distribute it through fuel stations without such restrictions. Additionally, committees for technical, operational, commercial, and pricing aspects are expected to be formed.

Navaz further explained that the quality of this gasoline will meet Iranian national standards and may not necessarily adhere to European or other foreign standards.

Regarding the price of imported premium gasoline, he noted that gasoline prices in Persian Gulf countries differ from those in Europe and elsewhere. Given current sanctions and economic conditions, the price is likely to be close to Persian Gulf rates.

The spokesperson emphasized that a proper cycle for importing gasoline must be established to foster competitive pricing and quality. It remains to be seen whether domestic refineries will also participate in this cycle.

He said that imported premium gasoline will initially be distributed in Tehran, followed by major cities, and possibly in other areas if demand justifies it.

Navaz also mentioned that there is no strict limit on the amount of gasoline that can be imported, though, given current demand and consumption patterns, the ideal scenario would be around 2 million liters, with daily consumption likely staying below 1 million liters in the best case.

U.S. Aircraft Carrier Joins Military Drills With South Korea and Japan

SEOUL (Dispatches) - South Korea's military said it will hold a three-day joint exercise with the United States and Japan starting on Wednesday, featuring fighter jets and marine patrol aircraft as well as the U.S. nuclear-powered aircraft carrier USS George Washington.

The "Freedom Edge" exercise is a response to what the South Korean military said were threats from North Korea, which recently conducted an intercontinental ballistic missile test, drawing condemnation from Seoul, Tokyo and Washington. It also comes as the U.S. State Department said North Korean troops have started engaging in combat operations in Russia's war with Ukraine.



COP29 Nations Approve New Rules for Creation of Global Carbon Market



BAKU (Dispatches) - Governments at the COP29 talks approved Monday new UN standards for international carbon markets in a key step toward allowing countries to trade credits to meet their climate targets.

On the opening day of the UN climate talks in Azerbaijan, nearly 200 nations agreed a number of crucial ground rules for setting a market in motion after nearly a decade of complex discussions.

COP29 president Mukhtar Babayev hailed the "breakthrough" but said more work was needed.

Other key aspects of the overall framework still need to be negotiated, experts said, but the decision brings closer a long-sought UN-backed market trading in high-quality credits.

"It's hugely significant," Erika Lennon, from the Center for International Environmental Law (CIEL), told AFP in Baku, saying it would "open the door" for a fully-fledged market.

Carbon credits are generated by activities that reduce or avoid planet-heating greenhouse gas emissions, like planting trees, protecting carbon sinks or replacing polluting coal with clean-energy alternatives.

One credit equals a ton of prevented or removed heat-trapping carbon dioxide.

Since the Paris climate agreement in 2015, the UN has been crafting rules to allow countries and businesses to exchange credits in a transparent and credible market.

The benchmarks adopted in Baku will allow for the development of rules including calculating how many credits a given project can receive.

Once up and running, a carbon market would allow countries -- mainly wealthy polluters -- to offset emissions by purchasing credits from nations that have cut greenhouse gases above what they promised.

Purchasing countries could then put carbon credits toward achieving the climate goals promised in their national plans.

"It gets the system a big step closer to actually existing in the real world," said Gilles Dufresne from Carbon Market Watch, a think tank.

"But even with this, it doesn't mean the market actually exists," he added, saying further safeguards and questions around governance still remain unanswered.

Scholz to Face December 16 Confidence Vote Ahead of February Election



BERLIN (Dispatches) - German Chancellor Olaf Scholz will face a vote of confidence in his government on December 16, paving the way for a new parliamentary election in February, the leader of Scholz's Social Democrats (SPD) in parliament said.

"On December 16, at the beginning of the week's session, the confidence vote will be debated and voted on," Rolf Muetzenich told reporters.

The vote in the Bundestag comes well ahead of original plans, marking a step to reach a compromise between Scholz's party, the Social Democrats, and the main opposition party in parliament, the centre-right Christian conservatives.

The vote comes after the collapse of Scholz's three-party coalition last week, at a time when the leaders of Europe's biggest economy have been grappling with ways to revive Germany's anaemic economic growth.



Israeli Strikes Pound Lebanon, Hezbollah Strikes Back

BEIRUT (Dispatches) - The Israeli military pounded Beirut's southern suburbs with airstrikes on Tuesday, mounting one of its heaviest daytime attacks yet on the Hezbollah-controlled area, and struck the middle of the country where more than 20 people were killed.

Smoke billowed over Beirut as around a dozen strikes hit the southern suburbs starting in midmorning. After posting warnings to civilians on social media, the Israeli military said it struck Hezbollah targets in Beirut's Dahiyeh area and later said it dismantled most of the group's weapons and missile facilities.

Israel said it had taken steps to reduce harm to civilians and repeated its standing accusation that Hezbollah deliberately embeds itself into civilian areas to use residents as human shields, a charge Hezbollah rejects.

In northern Israel, two people were killed in the city of Nahariya when a residential building was struck, Israeli police said. Hezbollah later claimed responsibility for a drone attack that it said was aimed at a military base east of Nahariya.

Israelis were forced to take shelter from drone attacks across the north, the military said. One hit the yard of a kindergarten in a Haifa suburb, where the children had been rushed into a shelter, rescue workers said. None were hurt.

In Mount Lebanon province in the middle of Lebanon, Israeli strikes killed eight people in the village of Baalchmay southeast of Beirut and 15 people in Joun village in the Chouf district, Lebanon's health ministry said.

In the south, five people were killed in an Israeli strike on Tefahta, two in a raid on Nabatieh and one in the coastal city of Tyre. Another person was killed in a strike in Hermel in the northeast, the ministry said.

Beirut residents have largely fled the southern suburbs since Israel began bombing there in September. Footage of one strike shared on social media showed two missiles slamming into a building of around 10 stories, demolishing it and sending up clouds of debris.

Ignited by the Gaza war, the conflict between Israel and the Iran-backed Hezbollah had been rumbling on for nearly a year before Israel went on the offensive in September, pounding Lebanon with airstrikes and sending troops into the south.

Israel has dealt Hezbollah heavy blows, killing many of its leaders, including Hassan Nasrallah, flattening large areas of the southern suburbs, destroying border villages in the south and striking more widely across Lebanon.

Israeli military chief Herzi Halevi, visiting troops in southern Lebanon on Tuesday, said Israeli forces were "operating very

strongly" in the country.

Since hostilities erupted a year ago, Israeli attacks have killed at least 3,287 people in Lebanon, the majority in the last seven weeks, according to the Lebanese health ministry. Its figures do not distinguish between civilians and combatants.

Hezbollah attacks have killed about 100 civilians and soldiers in northern Israel, the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights, and southern Lebanon over the last year, according to Israel. Hezbollah late on Tuesday said its forces had killed more than 100 Israeli soldiers since Oct. 1.

In a statement, Hezbollah said that since that date it had forced an Israeli retreat from several towns in southern Lebanon, without naming them, and promised more strikes against Israeli military targets. Israel's military said that Hezbollah fired 55 projectiles into Israel on Tuesday.

The United States has sought to broker a ceasefire in Lebanon, and the outgoing administration of Democratic President Joe Biden hasn't given up hope of reaching a deal in its final months.

White House envoy Amos Hochstein told reporters that he thinks "there is a shot" at a truce in Lebanon soon, Axios reported on Tuesday, a contrast to peace efforts in Gaza where Qatar has suspended its mediation.

Similarly, Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Saar said on Monday there had been "a certain progress" in ceasefire talks for Lebanon.

But Israel's new Defense Minister Israel Katz said on Monday there would be no ceasefire in Lebanon until Israel achieves its goals there, including disarming Hezbollah and returning evacuated Israelis to their homes in northern Israel.

Republican U.S. President-elect Donald Trump on Tuesday chose former Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee, a staunchly pro-Israel conservative, to be ambassador to Israel.

Potentially signaling that the U.S. under Trump will reduce pressure on Israel to restrain its warfare, Huckabee has opposed calls for a ceasefire in Gaza, and Saar on Tuesday praised his nomination.

The Lebanese government, which includes Hezbollah, has repeatedly called for a ceasefire based on the full implementation of a U.N. Resolution that ended a war between the group and Israel in 2006.

Thousands Rally in Georgia to Demand New Election and Push for EU Integration

TBILISI (Dispatches) - Thousands of opposition supporters rallied Monday in Georgia's capital in continuing protests against the ruling party's declared victory in the Oct. 26 parliamentary election amid allegations that Russia helped rig the vote.

The protesters waved Georgian and European Union flags and gathered outside the Georgian parliament. They demanded a new parliamentary election under international supervision and an investigation into the alleged election fraud.

Giorgi Vashadze, leader of Unity National Movement Coalition, vowed that the opposition will "fight until the end."

"Elections were massively rigged, that is why we don't recognise election results," he said. "Our goal is new elections, our goal is to form a new government, which will drive Georgia to European integration."

Opposition leaders have vowed to boycott sessions of parliament and hold regular protests until their demands are met.

The Central Election Commission said the governing Georgian Dream party won about 54% of the vote. Its leaders have rejected the opposition claims of vote fraud.

European election observers said the election took place in a "divisive" atmosphere marked by instances of bribery, double voting and physical violence.

The opposition has accused Georgian Dream, which was established by



Bidzina Ivanishvili, a shadowy billionaire who made his fortune in Russia, of becoming increasingly authoritarian and tilted toward Moscow. It has recently adopted laws similar to those used by the Kremlin to crack down on freedom of speech and LGBTQ+ rights.

President Salome Zourabichvili, who has rejected the official results, says Georgia has fallen victim to pressure from Moscow against joining the EU. Zourabichvili, who holds a mostly ceremonial position, has urged the United States and EU to support the demonstrations.

Officials in Washington and Brussels have urged a full investigation of the election, while the Kremlin has rejected the accusations of interference.

Many Georgians viewed the parliamentary election as a pivotal referendum on the country's effort to join the EU. The EU suspended Georgia's membership application process indefinitely because of its passage in June of a Russian-style "foreign influence law."

Lawmakers from several EU nations attended Monday's rally in a show of solidarity with protesters.

"Somebody is trying to take your freedom, somebody is trying to take your democracy, your country, your membership in EU and NATO," Zygimantas Pavilionis, a Lithuanian parliament member, said at the rally. "Don't give up. Fight for your freedom, fight for your democracy, fight for your country, fight for your membership in EU and NATO."

Trump Names Elon Musk to Role Leading Gov't Efficiency Drive

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - U.S. President-elect Donald Trump on Tuesday named Elon Musk to a role aimed at creating a more efficient government, handing even more influence to the world's richest man who donated millions of dollars to helping Trump get elected.

Musk and former Republican presidential candidate Vivek Ramaswamy will co-lead a newly created Department of Government Efficiency, an entity Trump indicated will operate outside the confines of government.

Trump said in a statement that Musk and Ramaswamy "will pave the way for my Administration to dismantle Government Bureaucracy, slash excess regulations, cut wasteful expenditures, and restructure Federal Agencies."

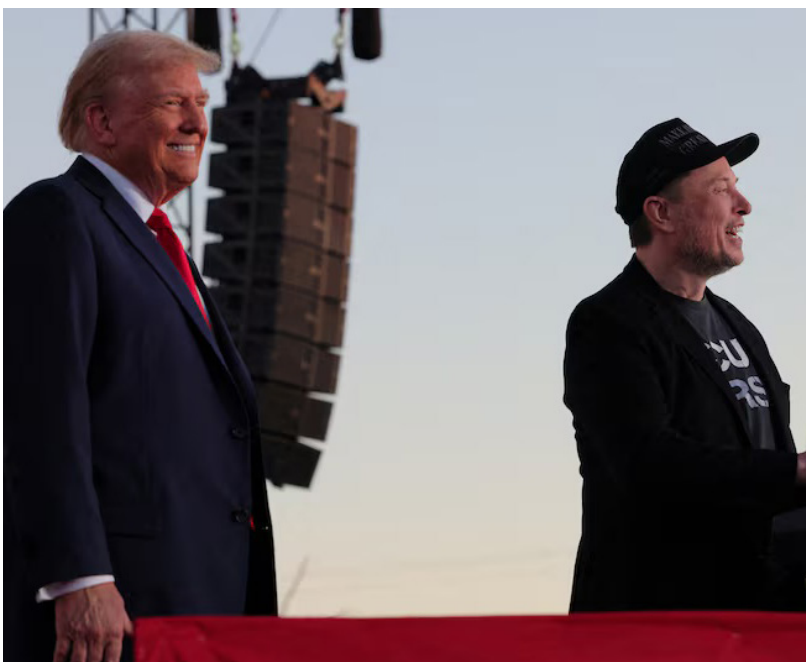
Trump said the new department will realize long-held Republican dreams and "provide advice and guidance from outside of government," signaling the Musk and Ramaswamy roles would be informal, without requiring Senate approval and allowing Musk to remain the head of electric car company Tesla, social media platform X and rocket company SpaceX.

The new department would work with the White House and Office of Management & Budget to "drive large scale structural reform, and create an entrepreneurial approach" to government never seen before, Trump said.

The work would conclude by July 4, 2026 - the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence.

Musk, ranked by Forbes as the richest person in the world, already stood to benefit from Trump's victory, with the billionaire entrepreneur expected to wield extraordinary influence to help his companies and secure favorable government treatment.

With many links to Washington, Musk gave millions of dollars to support Trump's presidential campaign and made public appearances with him.



Adding a government portfolio to Musk's plate could benefit the market value of his companies and favored businesses such as artificial intelligence and cryptocurrency.

"It's clear that Musk will have a massive role in the Trump White House with his increasing reach clearly across many federal agencies," equities analyst Daniel Ives of Wedbush Securities said in a research note.

"We believe the major benefits for Musk and Tesla far outweigh any negatives as this continues to be a 'poker move for the ages' by Musk betting on Trump," Ives said.

The move was criticized by Public Citizen, a progressive consumer rights NGO that challenged several of Trump's first-term policies.

"Musk not only knows nothing about government efficiency and regulation, his own businesses have regularly run afoul of the very rules he will be in position to attack in his new 'czar' position," Lisa Gilbert, co-president of Public Citizen, said in a statement. "This is the ultimate corporate corruption."

Trump likened the efficiency effort to the Manhattan Project, the U.S. undertaking to build the atomic bomb that helped end World War Two, while Musk promised transparency.

"All actions of the Department of Government Efficiency will be posted online for maximum transparency," Musk said on X, inviting the public to provide tips.

"We will also have a leaderboard for most insanelly dumb spending of your tax dollars. This will be both extremely tragic and extremely entertaining," Musk said.

Musk said at a Trump rally at Madison Square Garden in October that the federal budget could be reduced by "at least" \$2 trillion. Discretionary spending, including defense spending, is estimated to total \$1.9 trillion out of \$6.75 trillion in total federal outlays for fiscal 2024, according to the Congressional Budget Office.



Sinner Battles Past Fritz to Claim Second Win in Turin

TURIN (Dispatches) - World number one Jannik Sinner made it two wins out of two at the ATP Finals as he fought off Taylor Fritz in a high-octane clash inside the Inalpi Arena.

In a repeat of September's U.S. Open final, home favorite Sinner delighted a raucous crowd with a 6-4 6-4 victory in the best match of the tournament so far.

American world number five Fritz went toe-to-toe with Sinner throughout a contest ultimately decided by slender margins with one break of serve in each set.

Sinner made the decisive break in the opening set when Fritz served at 4-5, bringing up a set point with a disguised drop shot and then converting at the first opportunity.

Fritz refused to go away in the second set and had a glimpse of a chance at 3-3 when Sinner fell 0-30 down on serve. Sinner averted that danger though with some fearless tennis and then exerted the pressure when Fritz served to stay in the match, clinching victory in one hour 40 minutes.

Sinner, bidding to become the first Italian to win the prestigious year-ending tournament having reached the final last year, tops the Ilie Nastase Group with two straight sets wins and looks odds on to reach the semi-finals.

Fritz is tied on one win with Russian Daniil Medvedev who earlier beat Australian debutant Alex de Minaur to keep himself in contention for a semi-final spot.

"It was a very tough match, we both knew exactly what to expect," Sinner said after his 67th victory of the season.

"He was very aggressive. I managed to serve very well in the crucial moments. I'm happy how I handled the tough situations like at 3-3 in the second set when the momentum could have changed if he had broken me."

Fritz will be hopeful of beating De Minaur in his last group match to reach the semi-finals although world number four Medvedev, the 2020 champion, has it all to do against Sinner.

Medvedev said he was ready to pack his bags after losing to Fritz on Sunday, but produced a serving masterclass to overpower De Minaur 6-2 6-4.

The Russian's tennis and attitude on Tuesday was in stark contrast to Sunday when he looked distracted and disinterested and earned a penalty point for smashing a courtside microphone.

This time he was fully focussed on the job in hand as he made only 10 unforced errors and conceded only nine points on his serve as he extended his record over De Minaur to 7-3.

Medvedev had been booed by fans during his opening loss and celebrated beating De Minaur by putting his fingers in his ears.

"I went into this match blocking the noise, even from myself," Medvedev said. "I really didn't care what was happening on the court, I just tried to play, and it was a good feeling."

"The more popular you become, the more fans you get, the more haters you get, the more attention you get. Sometimes even the good noise can make you off balance."

Musiala Unfazed by Recent Praise, Eyes 2026 World Cup



FRANKFURT (Dispatches) - Germany and Bayern Munich attacking midfielder Jamal Musiala does not spend time reading any of the recent praise for his performances for club and country, he said on Tuesday, instead putting in the work with an eye on the 2026 World Cup.

The 21-year-old Musiala, who scored the winning goal in Bayern's last two matches in all competitions, has already netted five times in the league so far this season and has been arguably the best player for the Bavarians.

"The focus is to get better and keep putting in the work and not look around too much. For me it is important to take steps forward," Musiala told a press conference ahead of Germany's Nations League matches against Bosnia & Herzegovina and Hungary on Nov. 16 and Nov. 19 respectively.

"Last season I did that and maybe the goals and assists were missing a bit. I work on power, to be fit game after game. I want to have as few injuries as possible to make as many matches as possible."

"Over the years I have been looking less and less at all that," he said when asked of recent glowing praise in the media. "I also do not do it when things are not going well. It is important in good times and bad times to have the same routine."

Musiala has been key to Bayern's return to the top of the Bundesliga this season after Bayer Leverkusen's domestic double last season, and Germany coach Julian Nagelsmann is hoping the forward's form will spill over to the national team.

Germany, who have already qualified for the Nations League quarter-finals, are hoping to finish top of Group A3 with their last two matches this month.

The Germans are eyeing the 2026 World Cup, with a good showing in the Nations League providing a major boost.

The four-time World Cup winners crashed out of the 2022 World Cup in the group stage and did not go past the quarter-finals in this year's Euros on home soil, in Musiala's first two major tournament participations.

"The Euro was not perfect as we all had wanted but we still see the possibilities that are there," Musiala said. "We have a year and a half until the World Cup and we can take steps forward."

"Learn the lessons from the past two tournaments and hopefully play a good World Cup," he added.

Alpine to Switch to Mercedes Engines From 2026 in Bid to Close Gap on F1 Rivals



PARIS (Dispatches) - The Alpine Formula 1 team announced yesterday it will switch to Mercedes engines from the 2026 season as it bids to keep pace with its rivals.

Alpine's parent company Renault decided in September to end its works engine programme in France, which had been working on developing new power units to comply with F1 regulation changes that come into force in 2026.

The deal with Mercedes that runs until 2030 is aimed at eliminating problems linked to the Renault engines and follows the appointment of former Renault F1 team boss Flavio Briatore as executive advisor.

A statement from the team announced that Alpine, the team previously known as Renault which rebranded in 2021, would also switch to Mercedes gearboxes.

"Alpine, Mercedes-AMG High Performance Powertrains, and Mercedes-Benz Grand Prix have entered into power unit and gearbox agreements from the start of the 2026 world championship," the team said.

Alpine lagged behind the field in the early races of this season but has sped up significantly in recent months, culminating in Esteban Ocon and Pierre Gasly finishing second and third, behind winner Max Verstappen, in the rain-hit Sao Paulo Grand Prix on November 3.

As a result the team leapt from ninth to sixth in the constructors' standings.

Wagner Continues Scoring Surge as Magic Rout Hornets

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - November 13 - Franz Wagner pumped in 32 points as the Orlando Magic cruised past the visiting Charlotte Hornets, 114-89, in NBA Cup action.

Moritz Wagner scored 18 points off the bench and Jalen Suggs tallied all 17 of his points in the first half for Orlando, which has its first three-game winning streak of the season.

Franz Wagner made 14 of 25 shots from the field as the Magic shot 46.2 percent overall. He also led Orlando with eight rebounds and five assists.

LaMelo Ball's 35 points and Grant Williams' 15 points paced the Hornets, who have lost two straight games. Ball, who sank six shots from 3-point range, ended up with seven assists and six rebounds while shooting 13-for-27 from the field.

Moussa Diabate provided 12 points and 15 rebounds, but Charlotte committed 22 turnovers - twice as many as Orlando. All five Hornets starters were charged with at least two giveaways.

Charlotte's Brandon Miller, who had been a recent spark, slogged to an eight-point game after shooting just 3-of-18 and missing 10 of 11 3-pointers.



The Hornets shot just 40.5 percent from the field and struggled at the free-throw line by going 8-for-14.

The Magic carried an 11-point lead into the second half and broke the game open by ending the third quarter on a 21-4 run to stretch its advantage to 89-66. Franz Wagner had nine points in the quarter, while Jonathan Isaac chipped in all seven of his points for the game on 3-of-3 shooting off the bench.

Orlando stretched its lead to as many as 30 points in the fourth quarter.

Franz Wagner, who has now led the Magic in scoring for six consecutive games, went toe-to-toe with Ball early on as each had 23 points by halftime.

Orlando shot 53.3 percent from the field in the first half and benefited from Charlotte's 13 turnovers to lead 58-47 at the break.

OG Anunoby scored 24 points and Josh Hart recorded a triple-double as the New York Knicks spoiled Joel Embiid's season debut with a 111-99 road win over the Philadelphia 76ers.

British Cycling Great Mark Cavendish Wins Final Race in Singapore

LONDON (Dispatches) - Mark Cavendish ended his remarkable 19-year career with a win, taking his final professional race with a sprint finish at the Tour de France Criterium in Singapore.

"I really wanted that so bad," the 39-year-old cycling great from Britain said after the 166th victory of his glorious career.

"I'm terribly emotional."

"I realized in the last five laps that this was the last 15 kilometers of my career and I felt that, but I was so much on the limit."

Coming out of the last bend, Cavendish, who holds the record for most stage wins on the Tour de France, briefly latched onto the wheel of defending champion Jasper Philipsen before pulling away.

Cavendish had time to glance back before raising his arms in triumph one last time, to deafening cheers from the crowd who had gathered for the race.

Philipsen took second place with his Belgian compatriot Arnaud De Lie finishing third.

The criterium, organised by the Tour de France, covered 25 laps of a street circuit in hot and humid Singapore.

"I was nervous about crashing, or something like that," said Cavendish, after the final act in a career spanning 19 years.

"Not that there is anything wrong with that but I really wanted to finish."

"But I was lucky and I gained the wheel and I went past him."



"I couldn't have wished for a better send-off."

Cavendish ended speculation about his cycling future when he announced his retirement from the sport on Saturday.

He made Tour de France history last July when he won a stage for the 35th time to eclipse Eddy Merckx's record which had stood since 1975.

Cavendish made his Tour de France debut in 2008 before becoming world road race champion three years later.

He won an omnium silver medal at the 2016 Olympics.

Since turning professional in 2005 he had won 165 races before Sunday, including 17 stages in the Giro d'Italia and three in the Vuelta a Espana.

He won the points classification in the Tour in 2011 and 2021, in the Giro in 2013 and in the Vuelta in 2010.

The 'Manx Missile' is just 5-foot-9 (1.75m) tall but showed a pure sprinter's ferocious acceleration, courage and aggression and developed a knack for reading how a sprint was unfolding and positioning himself for the final surge.

He intends to stay involved with cycling.

"I love this sport. I've always loved it," he said.

"The Tour de France isn't just a bike race, it's the biggest annual sports event in the world."

"It's what children dream of. It's what adults dream of."