

Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Rafael Grossi Toured Iran's Key Nuclear Sites of Fordow and Natanz Where He Was Accompanied by Behrouz Kamalvandi, Deputy Chairman of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) for International, Legal and Parliamentary Affairs.

# IRAN NEWS

Foreign Ministry Condemned the Israeli Regime's Latest Round of Aggression on the Syrian Territory, Calling on the United Nations Security Council to Take Urgent Measures to Stop the Illegal Entity's "War Crimes" in the Arab Country

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### Iran's Letters Slam UN Inaction on Israeli Crimes Against Its Citizens



TEHRAN - Iran's permanent mission to the UN has urged the Security Council to take concrete action to hold Israel accountable for the crimes it has committed against the Islamic Republic for over four decades.

In letters to UN chief António Guterres, Security Council president Barbara Woodward, and General Assembly head Philemon Yang, the mission stated that Israel's anti-Iran actions are exemplified by its sustained campaign of targeted assassinations and terrorist acts.

It cited Israel's targeting of Iranian nuclear scientists, military advisors, diplomatic premises, and representatives as well as its sabotage of Iran's peaceful nuclear facilities.

"These unlawful and criminal acts which were perpetrated both within Iran and outside its borders began with the abduction of four Iranian diplomats in southern Beirut, Lebanon, on July 4, 1982," it said.

The mission was referring to three diplomats and a journalist kidnapped north of Beirut by Lebanese Christian militiamen during Israel's invasion of Lebanon.

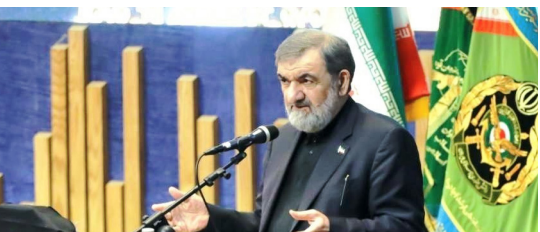
"Most recently, this pattern of aggression has come to include the terrorist attack employing explosive devices against Iran's ambassador to Lebanon on September 17, 2024, the criminal assault on April 1, 2024, where Israel attacked Iranian diplomatic and consular premises in Damascus, the Arab Republic of Syria, and was followed by Israel's act of aggression on October 26, 2024, against Iran's sovereignty and territorial integrity in a gross violation of international law and the Charter of the United Nations," the letters read.

The targeting and assassination of Iranian nationals, particularly those engaged in scientific, diplomatic and defense tasks, the mission said, is a gross violation of Iran's sovereign rights and a serious and flagrant breach of the basic norms and principles of international law and the UN Charter, in particular the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity.

"These murders and terrorist acts are unlawful, targeted assaults that constitute grave breaches of the Geneva Conventions international human rights instruments, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which safeguards the right to life."

The mission said the international community, particularly the UN Security Council, has yet to take concrete action to hold the Israeli regime accountable for its ongoing pattern of aggression, despite repeated reports by the Iranian government detailing these egregious violations.

### Trump's 'Make America Great Again' Shows U.S. Debilitated, Desperate



TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Donald Trump's slogan "Make America Great Again" shows how much the United States has been weakened, says the former chief of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), calling for formation of an "Islamic army" to confront American hegemony.

"In the current regional developments, America's slogan is 'make America great again,' which shows how much they have been humiliated and weakened," Mohsen Rezaei said while addressing an event in the city of Mashhad.

"Today, the region is witnessing unprecedented brutality by the criminal [Israeli prime minister Benjamin] Netanyahu and the Zionist regime," Rezaei, who currently serves as a member of Iran's Expediency Council, added.

He noted that six countries are currently engaged in the war against this regime, including Iran, Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Yemen, and Palestine.

"They have been standing from the depth of their hearts against the bloodthirsty front of the Zionist regime and its supporters," including the US and Britain, noted the major general.

Iran, Rezaei maintained, seeks to prevent a wider war in the region, but this doesn't mean that the Israeli regime and its supporters "can commit any mistake they want and receive no answer."



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

## We've Brought Nuclear Technology into People's Lives

TEHRAN - Mohammad Eslami, Vice President of Iran, during the inauguration ceremony of the first factory for decontamination and processing of dried fruits using plasma technology in Rafsanjan, stated: "One of the focal points of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran is agriculture, food products, and improving their quality as part of ensuring food security. Cold plasma technology has been identified as one of the impactful technologies. It has vast potential applications in areas such as medicine, agriculture, food products, industry, and in water, soil, and environmental domains."

He emphasized that the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran has a special commitment to using nuclear technology to solve problems and to integrate the benefits of nuclear technology into people's lives.

Eslami noted: "In the esteemed province of Kerman, one of the country's most important products—pistachios—is produced. Rafsanjan is the central hub for pistachio production. To address the challenges faced by pistachio production and local farmers, we prioritized this region in the Atomic Energy Organization's programs. Over the past two years, we studied the issues and completed the design and planning phases of this project, and today we witness the establishment and operational launch of this factory. This facility, which had been abandoned for years, was acquired and handed over to the Plasma Technology Company to implement plasma technology on-site."

He added: "Today, with the presence of the honorable Minister of Agriculture, the Governor, and other officials, we are witnessing the launch of this technology in the industrial sector of Kerman province. This step can serve as a pioneering effort to promote the use of this technology."

The Head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran remarked: "Today, this technology is being

introduced to stakeholders in the field. They can utilize this capability to decontaminate dried fruit products, particularly pistachios. By eliminating contamination and pests, these products can be prepared for export to global markets."

The Vice President stated: "We are witnessing the inauguration of the country's first plasma-based decontamination center. The installed capacity at this factory can increase up to threefold. However, the expansion of this industry depends on the active involvement of pistachio producers. The Minister of Agriculture and the Governor of Kerman have issued directives in this regard, and we hope for strong adoption of this technology."

He continued: "Wherever capacity building is needed, with the guidance of the honorable Minister of Agriculture or the Governor of the province, the necessary steps will be taken."

Eslami added: "Our primary priority is to ensure that this facility provides services to farmers and producers, operating at maximum capacity. This will reveal its critical role in the province's industry and agriculture. As the factory's services gain traction, its appeal for investment will grow, further paving the way for the widespread introduction of this technology."

Regarding the cost of plasma technology in product pricing, he explained: "The cost of using plasma technology is, at most, equivalent to 5% of the product's price. However, this depends on the type of product entering the facility, the tests conducted, and the services provided. This cost constitutes a minimal fraction of the product's final price."

The Head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran stressed: "The key benefit of this technology is enhancing product capabilities. Plasma technology ensures that products are pest-resistant and have a longer shelf life."

## Larijani Asserts Iran's Support for Resistance

TEHRAN - An advisor to Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei asserts that Iran continues to support the regional Front of Resistance under all circumstances.

Ali Larijani made the remarks to reporters in the Lebanese capital Beirut on Friday following a meeting with the country's Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri.

In response to a question about whether the Islamic Republic had given up on its support for the resistance, Larijani said, "I suppose that you take joking remarks very seriously. Who has said these?"

"We support the resistance under all circumstances," he added, noting that his underway trip to Lebanon was meant to convey this message.

"We consider it to be our responsibility to support the Lebanese people and their demands, and hope that the country's conditions be ameliorated as soon as possible."

The former parliament speaker further hoped that the people, who have been displaced amid incessant Israeli attacks on southern Lebanon, would be able to return to their places of residence soon.

The Israeli regime has markedly ramped up its deadly attacks against Lebanon since last October, killing more than 3,360 people and damaging some 100,000 houses.

The Iranian official, however, expressed confidence in the Lebanese resistance movement of Hezbollah's capability to defend the country, saying, "Hezbollah is a stalwart movement. The Lebanese nation is a stalwart nation too."

Larijani said both the movement and the Lebanese people were well aware of how they had to act in defense of the country in the face of the atrocities that were being perpetrated by the Israeli regime and its allies.



IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

The official also said he had conveyed a message from Ayatollah Khamenei to Berri, but did not provide any information on its contents.

Larijani commented on an announcement made by Lebanese Prime Minister Najib Mikati earlier in the day, in which he said Lebanon "prioritized" implementation of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1701.

Adopted to end the Israeli regime's 2006 war on Lebanon, the resolution has trusted preservation of security in southern Lebanese areas with UN peacekeepers.

"We support whatever important issue that is accepted by the Lebanese authorities and resistance," Larijani said.

The official was also asked whether Iran sought to "disrupt" an alleged truce proposal that was forwarded on Thursday by the US ambassador to Lebanon to Berri.

Hezbollah has been staging hundreds of retaliatory operations in the face of the Israeli aggression, which has claimed thousands of lives in Lebanon.

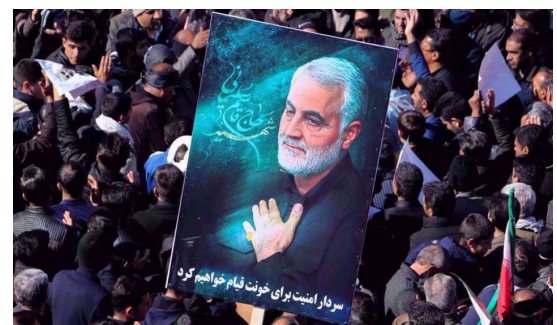
"We are not after disrupting anything. We are after resolving issues. We are supportive of the Lebanese people under all circumstances," Larijani said.

"Those who disrupt situations are [Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin] Netanyahu and his henchmen. You should be able to tell your friends and enemies apart."

Larijani also met with President Bashar al-Assad in the capital Damascus on Thursday. The two sides underscored the need for putting an end to Israel's genocide in Gaza and carnage in Lebanon.

Larijani also held a meeting with the leaders of Palestinian resistance groups in the Syrian capital and expressed the Islamic Republic's staunch support.

### Iran Resolved to Legally Pursue Gen. Soleimani Assassination Case



TEHRAN (PresTV) - Iran has reaffirmed its commitment to pursuing legal and judicial action regarding the US's assassination of top anti-terror commander General Qasem Soleimani.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran has announced for years that it is pursuing the assassination case of General Soleimani through legal and judicial resources," Iran's permanent mission to the United Nations said on Friday.

The Iranian mission made the announcement in response to a question regarding a Friday report by the Wall Street Journal. The report cited sources claiming that Iran had given "written assurances" to the Biden administration last month, indicating that it would not attempt to assassinate current US President-elect Donald Trump.

The "secret exchange" was meant to cool tensions between Tehran and Washington amid growing instability in the region, claimed the report.

The US has repeatedly accused Iran of attempting to assassinate American officials in retaliation for the assassination of General Soleimani, the commander of Iran's Quds Force, along with Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, the second-in-command of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Units (PMU), and their companions.

The anti-terror commanders were assassinated in a US drone strike authorized by then-President Trump in Iraq on January 3, 2020.

The Iranian mission emphasized that it does not make any comment about the details of the official messages between the two countries.

In pursuing General Soleimani's assassination case, Iran is completely committed to the recognized principles of international law, it added.

Back in June, Iran issued an indictment against the US government and military officials in the case of General Soleimani's assassination.

It came following the Iranian Foreign Ministry's second official notice to the US administration in January, in which it sought arbitration regarding the assassination of the top Iranian anti-terror commander.

### Iranian Railways CEO Calls for Freight Wagon Operations in Uzbekistan



TEHRAN - The CEO of Iran Railways has called for permission to operate Iranian freight wagons within Uzbekistan's territory during a meeting with the Chairman of Uzbekistan Railways on the sidelines of the CIS Railway Council meeting.

According to a report by the Islamic Republic of Iran Railways, Jabbar Ali Zakeri met with Zulfar Nazrullaev, Chairman of Uzbekistan Railways, during the 81st CIS Railway Council meeting. The discussions centered on the operation of Iranian freight wagons on Uzbekistan's rail network and the organization of container transport along the China-Kazakhstan-Uzbekistan-Turkmenistan-Iran corridor.

Zakeri, who also serves as Iran's Deputy Minister of Roads and Urban Development, emphasized the need for coordinated planning for the corridor, which currently handles approximately 500,000 tons of freight.

Nazrullaev expressed readiness to hold further discussions with Iran Railways and other CIS member states to enhance cooperation.

The 81st CIS Railway Council meeting, chaired by Oleg Belozorov, CEO of Russian Railways, took place in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, from November 6 to 7.

Zakeri also revealed an agreement during the trip to manufacture freight wagons domestically in Iran for use by a CIS member company. He highlighted this four-party agreement as a significant achievement, with plans to produce 200 wagons under the deal.

Furthermore, Zakeri announced that Iran and Uzbekistan reached agreements on allowing Iranian wagons to operate in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, with a formal protocol signed between the two nations.

Meanwhile the CEO of the Islamic Republic of Iran Railways announced Iran's readiness to annually transport 10 to 15 million tons of goods via the Sarakhs, Incheh Borun, Amirabad, and Bandar-e-Caspian corridors in the east and through Astara in the west.

# IRAN NEWS

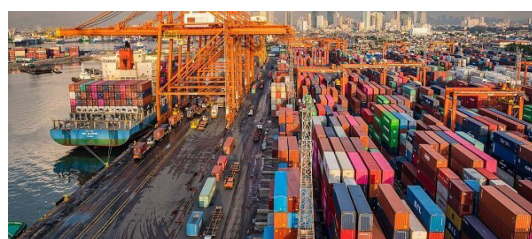


## Armenian parliament Approves Free Trade Deal Between Iran, Eurasian Economic Union

TEHRAN (IRNA) - The Armenian parliament has approved the free trade agreement between Iran and the Eurasian Economic Union.

The agreement was ratified on Friday after 95 Armenian lawmakers voted in favor of the agreement. The agreement is based on an interim free trade deal signed between Iran and the Eurasian Economic Union EEU in 2019, according to Armenian Economy Minister Gevorg Papoyan. He said that the 2019 deal had boosted trade between the union's member states and Iran from \$2.4 billion to \$5.2 billion.

## 39% Growth in Foreign Trade in October



TEHRAN - Seyyed Rouhollah Latifi, spokesperson for the International Relations and Trade Development Commission of the Iranian Chamber of Industry, Mining, and Commerce, announced a significant increase in the country's foreign trade performance for October. Non-oil trade showed remarkable growth in exports, imports, and foreign transit. Over 18.359 million tons of goods, worth \$6.771 billion, were exported in October, reflecting a 58.6% rise in volume and a 62.6% growth in value compared to the same period last year. Latifi described this surge as a promising indicator of the country's export potential and a positive development amid various economic challenges.

In an interview with national broadcaster IRIB, Latifi added that 3.45 million tons of goods, valued at \$6.927 billion, were imported during October. This marks a 2.2% increase in weight and a 21.4% rise in value compared to October 2023.

Latifi highlighted that while China remains the leading destination for Iranian exports over the past seven months, Iraq topped the list in October with \$2.78 billion worth of Iranian goods. China followed with \$1.434 billion, and Turkey (\$925 million), UAE (\$783 million), and Afghanistan (\$249 million) ranked third to fifth, respectively.

Regarding imports, Latifi noted that the UAE was the largest supplier to Iran in October, exporting goods worth \$2.18 billion. China (\$1.755 billion), Turkey (\$1.442 billion), Germany (\$200 million), and Russia (\$161 million) were the other major trade partners.

Latifi also shared statistics on foreign transit. According to customs data, 13.239 million tons of foreign goods transited through Iran in the first seven months of the Iranian calendar year, representing a 48% increase compared to the same period last year. In October alone, 1.723 million tons of foreign goods passed through the country. He estimated that by the end of the next calendar year (March 2025), transit volumes could exceed 22 million tons, potentially setting a new national record. However, Latifi emphasized that significant efforts are needed to reach the goals outlined by Iran's Supreme Leader for trade and transit.

## Gov't Urged to Transfer Loss-Making Enterprises to the Private Sector



TEHRAN - The President of the Iran Chamber of Commerce emphasized the importance of supporting economic actors as a key factor in job creation and improving societal welfare. Speaking at the 28th National Conference on the Development of Non-Oil Exports, Samad Hasanzadeh highlighted the challenges posed by sanctions and ongoing economic concerns, emphasizing the need for specialized meetings and conferences to address these issues effectively.

During his address, Hasanzadeh called for decisive action on state-owned loss-making enterprises, describing it as a critical demand. He pointed out that nearly two decades have passed since the issuance of the general policies of Article 44 of the Constitution by the Supreme Leader, aimed at privatizing the economy. Despite repeated reminders from the leadership to successive administrations, the expected privatization has not materialized. Instead, the government still controls approximately 75% of the economy.

He questioned, "How long must the people bear the burden of accumulating losses amounting to thousands of billions caused by a state-controlled economy?"

Hasanzadeh urged accountability from officials and stated that if the government cannot manage these enterprises, it should allow the private sector to step in and resolve the issues.

The chamber president also addressed unresolved employment challenges affecting both employers and workers, emphasizing that solutions are still lacking. Referring to discussions with the Central Bank and the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Finance on currency issues, Hasanzadeh announced that a new foreign exchange agreement system will soon be implemented by authorized banks. The system aims to ensure that foreign exchange earned from exports is offered at reasonable rates, facilitating access for both exporters and importers.

He stressed that resolving currency challenges is essential to maintaining production and export momentum. However, regulatory obstacles and legal barriers have sidelined genuine exporters, leading to a surge in the use of single-use trade licenses, which have caused significant harm to the economy.

IRANNEWS/ECONOMIC DESK

## Increase in Production Growth Will Boost Real Purchasing Power

TEHRAN - Minister of Economic Affairs and Finance, Abdolnasser Hemmati, stated that real purchasing power will not improve unless there is substantial growth in production, a key macroeconomic variable.

Speaking at the "Financing Production: From Enterprise Management to Enterprise Development" conference on Saturday, Hemmati emphasized the critical role of production in economic stability. He described the event as a significant step toward fostering production growth.

"If production does not grow, people's purchasing power will continue to decline," Hemmati warned, highlighting the negative trajectory of real economic growth, which has not surpassed 3% in recent years.

The minister underscored the detrimental impact of economic uncertainty on production and the broader economy, urging efforts to mitigate these effects. He acknowledged the country's high inflation and pointed out that the current economic structure hinders progress.

"With the existing structure, halting inflation stops growth, and resuming growth rekindles inflation. This issue can be resolved through reforms," he asserted.

Hemmati praised the parliament's approval last year of a new law aimed at resolving financial bottlenecks and supporting production financing. Previously, funding relied heavily on bank resources, but the new law provides alternative pathways to alleviate pressure on banks.

The minister noted that Iran has yet to fully utilize its financial instruments and available capital. He said the recently enacted legislation emphasizes the importance of both physical and institutional capital, aiming to reduce dependence on banking systems while maintaining their primary role in financing.

"This law empowers the Financing Council to design necessary tools for

improving financial mechanisms," he explained. Over the past three months, the council has introduced initiatives such as project funds and upstream oil and gas investment frameworks to address funding challenges.

Hemmati highlighted changes in liquidity levels, noting that while liquidity volume stood at approximately \$360 billion in 2017 when the exchange rate was around 30,000 rials per dollar, it has now dropped to \$140 billion due to the current exchange rate. This, he said, contributes to the perception of liquidity shortages.

"The government is aware of these financial constraints and has taken necessary steps," Hemmati reassured. He acknowledged the liquidity challenges faced by production units and noted the Central Bank's measures to curb inflation by reducing liquidity.

The minister emphasized the need for economic growth independent of oil revenue, advocating for the strengthening of non-oil financial instruments.

"Our business environment does not align with investment requirements," he admitted, adding that current bank lending restrictions aimed at controlling balance sheets and liquidity have not resolved the underlying issues.

Hemmati declared that banks must divest from enterprise ownership by the end of the year, with state banks under strict supervision to comply with legal mandates.

"Incentives have been introduced to encourage banks to exit enterprise ownership, redirecting the proceeds toward productive and profitable sectors," he stated.

The minister concluded by expressing optimism about the new production financing law, which aims to move away from inflationary funding mechanisms and break free from the 3% average growth trap of the past three decades. He stressed that this growth must be achieved without fueling inflation.

## Malaysian Embassy in Tehran Successfully Hosts Annual MTCP Alumni Gathering



TEHRAN - The Embassy of Malaysia in Tehran successfully organized its annual Malaysian Technical Cooperation Programme (MTCP) Alumni gathering on Friday, November 15. The event, held at Nakaya Restaurant, brought together approximately 50 distinguished alumni, alongside some distinguished guests and media persons. This highly anticipated event reinforced the enduring Malaysia-Iran partnership, nurtured through the MTCP initiative.

The MTCP, established in 1980, is a cornerstone of Malaysia's foreign policy, focusing on advancing technical cooperation and capacity-building. To date, it has benefited over 35,000 participants from 144 countries, offering training in diverse areas such as public administration, Islamic finance, disaster management, and sustainable development. Iran stands as one of the program's most active partners, with over 440 Iranian alumni contributing significantly to their respective fields.

In his address, His Excellency the Ambassador of Malaysia to Tehran Khairi bin Omar commended the remarkable achievements of MTCP alumni, emphasizing their role in fostering cross-border collaboration and strengthening Malaysia-Iran relations. "The MTCP

is more than a training program; it is a bridge of knowledge, innovation, and friendship. Our alumni embody the spirit of this partnership, making a lasting impact in their communities and beyond," said the Ambassador.

The gathering featured a lively discussion among alumni, where participants shared their experiences, highlighted successful projects, and explored potential avenues for future collaboration. Special recognition was given to alumni who have leveraged MTCP training to drive meaningful change in Iran's public and private sectors. The Embassy also unveiled plans to expand the program's focus on emerging fields such as digital transformation and climate resilience, aligning with global priorities.

This year's event further underscored the MTCP's enduring legacy as a platform for international cooperation and capacity-building. By fostering meaningful connections and providing opportunities for knowledge exchange, the program continues to empower individuals and strengthen bilateral ties between Malaysia and its global partners, particularly Iran.

## South Pars Gas Production Surpasses 600m Cubic Meters Daily



TEHRAN - The South Pars Gas Complex, the world's largest gas processing facility, has reached a significant milestone, with its daily natural gas production exceeding 613 million cubic meters, according to the complex's acting director, Gholamabbas Hosseini. He noted that this figure marks a dramatic increase from the initial 40 million cubic meters per day when the second refinery (phases 2 and 3) of the complex began official operations in 2001.

Since the start of the Iranian calendar year 1403 (March 2023), the complex has focused on major maintenance efforts and innovative practices, utilizing collaborations with domestic firms and knowledge-based companies. Hosseini highlighted the role of these efforts in supplying sweet gas to the national grid, providing feedstock to petrochemical plants, and boosting exports, thus contributing significantly to Iran's economic growth.

Over the 26 years since its inception, South Pars has sweetened and injected over 2,126 billion cubic meters of natural gas into Iran's national grid. The initial daily gas feed from shared offshore fields was 50 million cubic meters, which has now expanded to over 613 million cubic meters across the complex's 13 refineries.

Gas Processing and Supply: Over 130 billion cubic meters of gas were received from offshore platforms in 2023, with more than 113 billion cubic meters sweetened and supplied to the national grid.

Production Highlights: The complex also produced 1.1 million tons of ethane, 139 million barrels of gas condensate, 1.9 million tons of propane, and 370,000 tons of sulfur.

Petrochemical Support: More than 2.2 million tons of feedstock were sent to regional petrochemical plants, and over 100 million barrels of gas condensates were supplied to the Persian Gulf Star Refinery.

Comprehensive maintenance efforts were completed for all refineries in 2023, spanning 189 days and involving inspections, repairs, and upgrades of over 22,000 pieces of equipment. These measures aimed to ensure the reliability of gas supplies during peak winter demand.

Hosseini reported significant progress in reducing gas flaring emissions. The daily flared gas volume has decreased to 7.4 million cubic meters from 8.7 million cubic meters and is expected to drop further to 5.3 million cubic meters by 2024. Long-term projects aim to reduce this to 3 million cubic meters daily by 2025.

The complex prioritizes the use of locally-produced equipment and supports knowledge-based companies. In 2023, the maintenance operations were conducted with 100% reliance on domestic products. The complex collaborates with over 120 Iranian knowledge-based companies and has integrated more than 11,589 Iranian-made items into its operations.

## Increase in Demand for Iranian Goods in Iraqi Kurdistan



TEHRAN - Mustafa Abdulrahman Abdullah, President of the Exporters and Importers Union of Iraqi Kurdistan, discussed trade relations between Iran and the Kurdistan region in an interview with ILNA. He explained that every product entering the Kurdistan region incurs customs duties. However, goods transported through Kurdistan to Iraq face additional informal charges collected by inspectors at Iraqi entry points.

Highlighting the diversity of products in Kurdistan's markets, Abdullah stated that Turkish goods dominate, with Iranian products ranking second. He emphasized that demand for Iranian goods is especially high in the provinces of Sulaymaniyah and Erbil. Annually, Iranian imports to the Kurdistan region exceed \$6 billion.

Food products, household appliances, and construction materials are the primary Iranian exports to Kurdistan, Abdullah said. He described Turkey as Iran's main competitor in the region's market. While the quality of Iranian goods is generally good, Abdullah noted that consumers in Kurdistan are increasingly demanding higher-quality products. He added that Iranian products available domestically often surpass the quality of those exported to Kurdistan.

Regarding foreign investments in Kurdistan, Abdullah explained that Turkey and Russia are the most active investors, with Saudi investments limited to a few hotels. He welcomed Iranian investors, particularly in sectors like manufacturing, encouraging them to establish factories similar to those in Iran within the region.

## Honduras Battles Flooding as Tropical Storm Sara Unleashes Heavy Rainfall

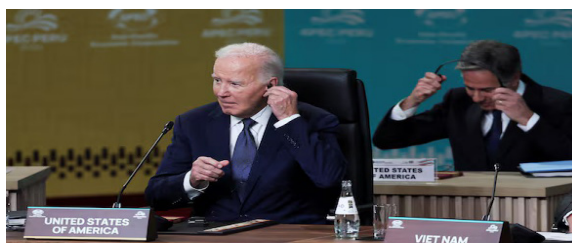
TELA (Dispatches) - Wading through waist-deep water, residents along the northern coast of Honduras trudged through the streets on Friday carrying their belongings and pets, as heavy rains from Tropical Storm Sara caused widespread flooding across the area. Sara churned menacingly near the Caribbean coast of Honduras, close to beach resorts and ancient Maya ruins popular with tourists, as the storm also took aim at neighboring Belize and Guatemala.

The U.S. National Hurricane Center forecast between 15 and 25 inches (38-63 cm) of rain in northern Honduras over the next few days, with up to 35 inches striking isolated areas.

Sara was located 35 miles (56 km) southwest of Honduras' Guanaja island.



## Biden Meets South Korea, Japan Leaders for Pre-Trump Huddle on Risk



LIMA (Dispatches) - U.S. President Joe Biden met with Japanese and South Korean leaders on Friday as they sought to cement their diplomatic progress ahead of a new Trump administration that many fear could upend alliances worldwide.

The meeting between Washington and two of its closest Asian allies came as U.S. relations with Beijing are expected to grow more confrontational after Donald Trump's Jan. 20 inauguration, given his promises of sharp tariff hikes that could hobble China's economy.

North Korea's deployment of troops to Russia to support Russia's war in Ukraine, as well as North Korea's nuclear weapons program and dimming prospects for a peaceful resolution to a decades-long conflict with South Korea are also raising tensions in Asia.

"Japan, the ROK, and the United States strongly condemn the decisions by the leaders of the DPRK and Russia to dangerously expand Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine," said a joint statement, referring to South Korea and North Korea by their official names, the Republic of Korea and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

The meeting on the sidelines of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Summit in Lima, Peru, brought Biden, South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol and Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba, who assumed office in October, together in person for the first time.

After the meeting the three countries announced the creation of a Trilateral Secretariat designed to formalize the relationship and make sure it was not just "a series of meetings," national security adviser Jake Sullivan told reporters traveling with Biden aboard Air Force One on Thursday.

Getting South Korea and Japan to work together is considered one of the diplomatic achievements of Biden's soon-to-end four-year term as president. The two countries have a long history of mutual acrimony stemming from Japan's harsh 1910-1945 colonial rule of Korea.

Biden sees close ties among the three as a hedge against aggressive steps by China in the region, a view Beijing rejects. Yoon met with Chinese President Xi Jinping on Friday, with Ishiba and Biden also set to hold their own one-on-ones with Xi during the APEC summit.

## China's Xi Warns Against Protectionism at APEC Summit Under Trump Cloud



BEIJING (Dispatches) - Chinese President Xi Jinping warned Friday the world was entering an era of harmful "protectionism," in remarks to an Asia-Pacific summit in Lima overshadowed by fears of new trade wars under Donald Trump.

On the eve of what will be his final official face-to-face with outgoing US President Joe Biden, Xi raised concern about "spreading unilateralism and protectionism," China's state news agency Xinhua reported.

He also cautioned against "fragmentation of the world economy" in a written speech prepared for a meeting of CEOs on the sidelines of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit, Xinhua said.

Xi and Biden are in the Peruvian capital for a two-day meeting of heads of state of the 21-member APEC grouping.

On Saturday, the sitting leaders of the world's two largest economies were to have their final official encounter before Trump takes office in January.

APEC, created in 1989 with the goal of regional trade liberalization, represents about 60 percent of world GDP and more than 40 percent of global commerce.

The summit program was to focus on trade and investment for what proponents dubbed inclusive growth.

But uncertainty over Trump's next moves clouds the agenda -- as it does for the COP29 climate talks underway in Azerbaijan, and a G20 summit in Rio de Janeiro next week.

The Republican president-elect has signaled a confrontational approach to Beijing for his second term, with threatened tariffs of up to 60 percent on imports of Chinese goods to even out what he says is a trade imbalance.

In his prepared remarks, Xi said the world had "entered a new period of turbulence and transformation," Xinhua reported.

Summit host President Dina Boluarte of Peru told leaders gathered for the summit opening Friday that economic cooperation must be bolstered as the world faces increased "levels of uncertainty (for) the immediate future."

She added: "We need more contribution, collaboration and understanding, and less fragmentation."

Xi was not present for the opening, but Biden attended with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, whom Trump will seek

to replace with Senator Marco Rubio, a China hawk.

US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said Saturday's Xi-Biden meeting was an opportunity to "mark the progress that we've made in the relationship and also to manage it through this delicate period of transition."

The goal was to "maintain a degree of stability, even as we continue to compete vigorously with the PRC (People's Republic of China). We need to manage that competition so it doesn't veer into conflict," he told reporters on Air Force One Thursday.

Trump's "America First" agenda is based on protectionist trade policies, increased domestic fossil fuel extraction and avoiding foreign conflicts.

It threatens alliances Biden has built on issues ranging from the wars in Ukraine and the Middle East to climate change and trade.

Economists say punitive levies on China would harm not only China's economy but also that of the United States and its trading partners.

It could also threaten geopolitical stability.

China is an ally of Western pariahs Russia and North Korea, and is building up its own military capacity while ramping up pressure on self-governed Taiwan, which it claims as part of its territory.

Xi is set to meet his Chilean counterpart Gabriel Boric Friday, while Biden will hold talks with Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba and South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol -- key US allies in Asia.

China isn't the only APEC economy in Trump's crosshairs.

The incoming US leader has threatened tariffs of 25 percent or more on goods coming from Mexico unless it stops an "onslaught of criminals and drugs" crossing the border.

The APEC summit is also attended by Japan, South Korea, Chile, Canada, Australia and Indonesia, among others.

Russia is also part of APEC but President Vladimir Putin was absent.

## Le Pen Allies Decry Witch-Hunt as Prosecutors Threaten Her French Presidential Hopes



PARIS (Dispatches) - Allies of French far-right leader Marine Le Pen have accused the judiciary of a witch hunt and undue meddling in democracy after prosecutors requested she face an obligatory five-year ban from public office if convicted of misusing European Union funds.

The prosecutors' move to seek a "provisional execution" on the public office ban - a tough, rarely used tool that means the ban would stand irrespective of any appeal - casts doubt on Le Pen's chances of running in the 2027 presidential election.

Le Pen and co-accused members of her National Rally (RN) party deny using EU funds to pay party workers in France. They denounce the case as a politically motivated attempt to keep the RN from power.

"The goal is to attack a political opponent. It is a very violent attack on democracy. It's my political death that being requested," Le Pen told TF1 television on Friday, reacting to the prosecutors' request.

The furious response echoes the frequent attacks by U.S. President-elect Donald Trump against the U.S. judicial system over the legal woes he has faced since his first term.

## Zelenskiy Says Scholz-Putin Phone Call Opens "Pandora's Box"

KYIV (Dispatches) - President Volodymyr Zelenskiy said the German chancellor's phone call with Russia's leader opened a "Pandora's box" that undermined efforts to isolate Vladimir Putin and end the war in Ukraine with a "fair peace".

A German government spokesperson said Olaf Scholz urged Putin to begin talks with Kyiv that would open the way for a "just and lasting peace" as the leaders held their first phone call since December 2022 as the war in Ukraine rages on.

"Olaf's call, in my opinion, is a Pandora's box. Now there may be other conversations, other calls," Zelenskiy said.

"... this is exactly what Putin has long wanted: it is extremely important for him to weaken his isolation and to conduct ordinary negotiations that will not end in anything."

Kyiv says Russia is not prepared to negotiate an end to the war in good faith and that Ukraine needs robust security guarantees before there is any ceasefire in hostilities to prevent a future Russian offensive.

Zelenskiy said Moscow had repeatedly used negotiations to advance its interests at Ukraine's expense, alluding to numerous rounds of talks over the war with Russian-backed paramilitaries that erupted in Ukraine's east in 2014 before the 2022 invasion.

"This gave Russia the opportunity not to change anything in its policy, not to do anything in essence, and this is exactly what led to this war," he said in his evening address.

Berlin is a major Ukrainian financial backer and its largest provider of



weapons after the United States, whose future support for Kyiv appears uncertain following Donald Trump's victory in the U.S. presidential election.

The victory of Trump, who has said he will end the war in Ukraine swiftly without saying how, has spurred fears in Europe that he will cut vital assistance to Kyiv and push for a peace that costs Ukraine dearly.

Though Germany has been a vital ally for Ukraine, its hesitance to provide long-range Taurus cruise missiles has been a source of frustration in Kyiv as it battles a foe armed with a powerful array of long-range weaponry.

In the one-hour phone conversation with Putin, Scholz demanded the withdrawal of Russian troops from Ukraine and reaffirmed Berlin's continued support for Ukraine, the German spokesman said.

The Kremlin said Putin told Scholz during the conversation that any agreement to end the war must take Russian security interests into account and reflect "new territorial realities".

The Kremlin described the fact of the call happening as "extremely positive". Zelenskiy was informed in advance of the call and cautioned Scholz against telephoning Putin, according to a source in Zelenskiy's office.

Putin has said Ukraine must drop its ambitions to join the NATO military alliance and also retreat its forces from four Ukrainian regions that his troops partially occupy. Kyiv says that is tantamount to capitulation.

With Kyiv preparing to mark 1,000 days since the full-scale invasion, the Kremlin's forces are on the offensive on multiple sections of the sprawling front line and Russian drones attack Ukraine's big cities nightly.

## Protesters Demand Leader's Ouster in Russian-Backed Breakaway Region of Georgia

TBILISI (Dispatches) - Protesters stormed the parliament of the Russian-backed breakaway Georgian region of Abkhazia on Friday and demanded the resignation of its leader over an unpopular investment agreement with Moscow.

The self-styled president of the region, Aslan Bzhania, said he had no intention of stepping down or fleeing. He said talks were proceeding with opposition representatives.

But opposition representatives rejected the president's statement and news reports said they had broken off the talks.

Russia said it was following the "crisis situation" with concern and urged its citizens to avoid travel to Abkhazia.

Russia recognized Abkhazia and another breakaway region, South Ossetia, as independent states in 2008 after it defeated Georgia in a five-day war. It maintains troop bases in both regions and props up their economies.

In Abkhazia's capital Sukhumi, protesters used a truck to smash through the metal gates surrounding parliament. They then climbed through windows after wrenching off metal bars.

An opposition leader, Temur Gulia, said protesters initially demanded to scrap the investment agreement, which critics feared would allow wealthy Russians and businesses to buy up property in the lush Black Sea region, pricing out locals.

But now, he said, the protesters wanted to oust the president. Protesters also broke into presidential administration offices located in the same



complex as the parliament. Emergency services said at least nine people were taken to hospital.

Bzhania, writing on the Telegram messaging app, said he and other leaders were "staying in place and will keep on working".

"I ask you not to give in to panic. I am staying in Abkhazia and will work as I have done," Bzhania wrote, saying that the first task was to clean up after the unrest.

"At this time, talks are going on with the opposition."

Opposition activist Akhra Bzhania rejected the statement, telling Reuters the president had "lost his legitimacy. His refusal to resign today does not change anything."

TASS news agency quoted opposition representative Kan Kvachia as saying all talks had been broken off.

President Bzhania's office later said the president, a former chief of the state security service who became head of state in 2020, was in his coastal home village of Tamysh.

Another opposition leader, Eshou Kakalia, told Reuters the protesters would not leave the government complex until Bzhania agreed to resign.

The presidential administration said in a statement that authorities were preparing to withdraw the investment agreement.

Olesya Vartanyan, an independent regional expert, said the crisis was the culmination of mounting Russian pressure to get more from Abkhazia in return for its financial support.



## Portugal Thrash Poland; Spain Defeat Denmark

LONDON (Dispatches) - Portugal sealed a Nations League quarter-final berth after a Cristiano Ronaldo double with a penalty and an overhead kick helped them hammer visiting Poland 5-1 in Group A1. Rafael Leao broke the deadlock just before the hour with a header before Ronaldo doubled the lead from the spot in the 72nd minute with a confident strike down the middle of the goal. The hosts then scored three goals in eight minutes through Bruno Fernandes, Pedro Neto and Ronaldo's clever strike before Dominik Marczuk got a consolation for Poland in the 88th. "The first half was very bad for what we wanted to do, we lost focus and got frustrated. But the second half was the best I've seen," said Portugal coach Roberto Martinez. "We've changed the mentality and increased the intensity and mutual support. We didn't let Poland play." Unbeaten Portugal top the group with 13 points, six ahead of Croatia, who lost 1-0 away to a Scotland side who are still bottom but now level on four points with third-placed Poland. Poland host Scotland on the final matchday on Monday when Portugal travel to Croatia. Portugal, who snapped Poland's two-year unbeaten home run when they won the reverse fixture in Warsaw 3-1 last month, had trouble taming the visitors in the first half. Poland were without their all-time top scorer Robert Lewandowski, who is sidelined with a back injury, but were quick to create danger and had three attempts on target before the break compared to none by the hosts. Both Leao and Ronaldo sent good chances above the bar just before the break before the tables turned for Portugal after the restart. Clearly fired up, the hosts dominated possession and Leao recovered the ball inside their own box before he raced through the pitch to find Nuno Mendes on the left flank who then set the forward up with a perfect lofted pass. Portugal were then awarded a penalty for a handball, expertly converted by Ronaldo, as they continued

growing in strength and Fernandes struck from a distance to make it 3-0 when the ball bounced in off the inside of the bar. Neto added another one in the 83rd minute, scoring inside the near post, before Ronaldo netted his 135th goal for the national side with an acrobatic finish in the 87th. Distraught Poland pulled a late goal back through halftime substitute Marczuk, who scored his first international goal. The 2019 winners Portugal, who dropped their first points last time out when they were held to a goalless draw in Scotland on Oct. 15, secured a fourth successive top-two finish in the competition. Meanwhile Spain's Mikel Oyarzabal and Ayoze Perez scored to secure a 2-1 victory over hosts Denmark on Friday and clinch top spot in Nations League Group A4 after they secured a place in the quarter-finals last month. Spain were missing several players from the 2-1 victory over England in the Euro 2024 final but opened the scoring with a strike from inside the box by Oyarzabal after 15 minutes with Perez extending their lead on the counter in the 58th. A mistake by Spain substitute Fabian Ruiz gifted Denmark's Gustav Isaksen a late consolation after a poor pass back. "We came here with the objective of winning. We knew we were going to have to suffer a bit but we're happy with the result, the first place," Oyarzabal told TVE. With one round left, Spain have 13 points, six ahead of Denmark, with bottom side Switzerland relegated after a 1-1 draw with Serbia left them on two points. Serbia have five points. The Danes travel to Serbia on Monday needing at least a draw to secure second place and a spot in the quarter-finals.

## Daniels, Hawks Extend Wizards' Losing Streak



NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Dyson Daniels scored a game-high 25 points, helping lead the Atlanta Hawks to a 129-117 victory over the visiting Washington Wizards in NBA Cup pool play. De'Andre Hunter added 22 points off the bench as the Hawks won their second straight East Group C game. Jalen Johnson tallied 18 points, 13 rebounds and seven assists, while Trae Young added 18 points and nine assists. Atlanta's Onyeka Okongwu had 13 points and 13 boards, Garrison Mathews scored 12 points, Zacharie Risacher had 11 and Clint Capela recorded 10 points and 13 rebounds. Playing in its first NBA Cup game, Washington lost its seventh straight overall. Kyle Kuzma led the Wizards with 24 points and nine rebounds. Jordan Poole contributed 22 points, Alexandre Sarr chipped in 20, Corey Kispert scored 16 and Kyshawn George had 13. After Atlanta outscored Washington 30-11 in the second quarter to take a nine-point halftime lead, Daniels' 3-pointer stamped an 8-3 Hawks run to begin the second half, extending the lead to 67-53. Washington answered with a 7-0 run before Risacher's layup and another Daniels 3-pointer forced a Washington timeout with 7:13 left in the third quarter. Sarr sank two free throws, but a 10-0 Hawks run, capped by a layup from Daniels, extending Atlanta's lead to 82-62 at the 3:19 mark. Hunter's mid-range jumper with eight seconds left in the period gave Atlanta a 94-72 lead before Poole's step-back triple beat the third-quarter buzzer, cutting Washington's deficit to 94-75. From there, Atlanta's lead ballooned to 28. Kispert's pullup 3-pointer beat the first-quarter buzzer, giving Washington a 39-29 lead.

## Zverev Eliminates Alcaraz From ATP Finals, Ruud Reaches Semis

TURIN (Dispatches) - Alexander Zverev surged into the semi-finals of the ATP Finals after eliminating French Open and Wimbledon champion Carlos Alcaraz with a 7-6(5) 6-4 defeat, while Casper Ruud also advanced with a 6-4 5-7 6-2 win over Andrey Rublev. German Zverev came into the contest as the group leader with two victories from two matches — against Rublev and Ruud - but needed to win at least one set against Alcaraz to book his place in the semis. In a tight opening set momentum swung back and forth before German second seed Zverev came out on top in the tiebreak. He then built a 3-1 lead in the second set before surviving a late Alcaraz fightback. The result handed Zverev a 6-5 lead in his meetings with Alcaraz. It was the world number two's 69th win of the season, the most victories in one season since three-times major winner Andy Murray (78) in 2016. "He (Alcaraz) beat me too many times this year in important matches, so I'm happy that I got this one," Zverev said. "Obviously I feel like we have a pretty good rivalry with a great friendship as well, so it's always nice to play against him... Just



sharing the court with him. He's a great guy and I'm looking forward to the next matches with him as well. "It's been three fantastic matches. I'm happy with being 3-0 in the group for sure, but I think now the semi-final is going to be very difficult. (Taylor) beat me the past few times at the slams, so I'm looking forward to that match." The victory was even sweeter for Zverev as he had come off second best in the French Open final against Alcaraz in June. Second seed Zverev topped the John Newcombe Group and he will next face U.S. Open finalist Taylor Fritz. Since reaching his first semi-final at the ATP Finals in 2018, only record 24-times Grand Slam champion Novak Djokovic (five) has made it to the semis of the tournament more than the 27-year-old German, who has booked his place four times. Alcaraz, who picked up his first win at this year's ATP Finals when he beat Rublev in straight sets on Wednesday, again wore pink nasal tape, having suffered with respiratory issues in recent days.

## India Thump Woeful South Africa to Win T20 Series



NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - Sanju Samson and Tilak Varma smashed scintillating centuries as India thumped South Africa by 135 runs in Johannesburg on Friday to claim the four-match Twenty20 International series 3-1 and inflict a heaviest ever defeat in the format on their hosts. World champions India elected to bat and posted a huge 283 for one in their 20 overs before bowling out their hosts for 148 as they dominated all facets of the game. Samson crashed a third T20 hundred in five innings, his other two scores being ducks, as he blasted an unbeaten 109 from 56 balls, while Varma made it centuries in consecutive innings with 120 not out from 47 balls, including 10 sixes. The pair put on a T20 record second wicket partnership of 210 from 85 balls as they bludgeoned the ball to all parts in the face of poor bowling from the shellshocked home side. "It is difficult for me to choose which is the best between the knocks, both of them were brilliant," India captain Suryakumar Yadav said. "We knew there would be something in this wicket when the lights come on and we stuck to our lines with the ball. It is always a challenging to win in South Africa, so this is a special day that will stay with me forever." South Africa were not helped by several dropped catches in a ragged performance in the field as they conceded a team record number of runs in a T20 international innings. India seamers Arshdeep Singh (3-20) and Hardik Pandya (1-8) reduced the home side to 10-4 to end the contest early as they produced movement off the wicket, something their hosts could not. Tristan Stubbs top scored in the home side's innings with 43 from 29 balls as they fell well short of their target. South Africa's previous biggest T20 loss was by 111 runs against Australia last year. "We were completely outplayed in all three aspects of the game," home captain Aiden Markram said. "You have to give India a lot of credit, with bat and ball they put us under pressure in both innings. We need to have some honest reflections. "We want to get better at executing and moving forward with our skills as a team. Hopefully in the long run we can do that."

## Swiatek Takes Poland Into BJK Cup Quarters

MALAGA (Dispatches) - Poland's world number two Iga Swiatek beat Paula Badosa 6-3 6-7(5) 6-1 to knock out hosts Spain 2-0 and book her country a spot in the Billie Jean King Cup quarter-finals. Poland will face Czech Republic on Saturday following a gutsy performance by Swiatek after Magda Linette had won a tight contest 7-6(6) 2-6 6-4 against Sara Sorribes Tormo. Later, Britain also reached the last eight by beating Germany 2-0 with wins for Emma Raducanu and Katie Boulter and next face defending champions Canada on Sunday. At three hours and 51 minutes, Linette's triumph for Poland was nine minutes shy of the longest game ever in the competition and she was forced to come from 3-0 down in the deciding set. With Poland leading the tie, Swiatek stepped onto court with the chance to send her nation through to their first Billie Jean King Cup quarter-final since 2015. Swiatek returned to competition earlier in November at the WTA Finals two months after deciding to step aside from the WTA tour due to fatigue following her U.S. Open quarter-final exit. The 23-year-old, who lost top ranking to Belarusian Aryna Sabalenka, started well against world number 12 Badosa on Friday



by taking the first set and moving 3-0 ahead in the second. Roared on by the home fans, Badosa managed to recover and took the game to a third set by winning a tight tiebreak but Swiatek came back relentlessly to break Badosa's serve four times and send Poland through to the last eight. "I'm happy that we finally won a tie at the BJK Cup Finals. It's a big step for us," Swiatek said. "My match was super intense. At the beginning I felt like it was my best match since the U.S. Open. Later on she pushed me and there was a lot of pressure." Britain's Raducanu made a triumphant return to court after a two-month injury layoff by securing a 6-4 6-4 win over Germany's Jule Niemeier before world number 24 Boulter wrapped up the tie with a comfortable 6-1 6-2 victory against Laura Siegemund. "I think I played some really good tennis today," former U.S. Open champion Raducanu said. "I haven't obviously played a match in a long time so these are small sharpness things that come the more matches I play. I'm very happy."