

IRAN NEWS

Iranian Parliament Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf Has Vowed to Support Syria in Its Fight Against Terrorists After the Resurgence of Takfiri Terrorism in the Arab Country

The International Criminal Court (ICC) Prosecutor Stated That Israel's Appeal of the Arrest Warrants for Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu and His Former Defense Minister Yoav Gallant Should Be Dismissed and the Appeal Proceedings Discontinued

VOL. XXIX, No. 8144 TEHRAN Price 50,000 Rials

www.irannewsdaily.com

SUNDAY DECEMBER 01, 2024 AZAR 11, 1403

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Iran Calls for Expulsion of Israel From UN Commission on Status of Women



TEHRAN (IRNA) - The secretary of Iran's Human Rights Headquarters has called for the expulsion of the Zionist regime from the UN Commission on the Status of Women over the regime's killing of civilians, especially women and children, in the Gaza Strip.

Kazem Gharibabadi made the plea in separate letters to UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, President of the UN Economic and Social Council Bob Rae, Chair of the UN Commission on the Status of Women Abdulaziz M. Alwasil, and UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Turk.

"The presence of the criminal Zionist regime, which, according to international human rights authorities, independent UN experts, and independent human rights activists has turned Gaza into a slaughterhouse for civilians, especially women and children, in the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, whose nature is to promote the rights of women and girls and to prevent violence and discrimination against them, is an end to the credibility of international institutions and hopes of their effectiveness during crises and humanitarian threats," Gharibabadi wrote.

He called for attention to some of the published statistics about the scope and dimensions of the Zionist regime's brutal crimes against civilians, especially women and children, in Gaza and Lebanon, asking how such a major violator of human rights can be present in an international body that monitors, supports, and promotes the rights of women and girls.

At least 44,363 Palestinians, mostly women and children, have been so far killed in the Israeli regime's war on Gaza since October 7 last year. Also, 105,070 others have been injured while thousands more are missing and presumed dead under rubble.

Gharibabadi pointed out that 70 percent of these deaths are women and children, and about 80 percent of the victims lost their lives during attacks on residential buildings and similar places.

"The child-killing Zionist regime kills a child in Gaza every 10 minutes, and so far more than 17,000 Palestinian children have been martyred in this brutal massacre, and more than 255,000 Palestinian children in Gaza have lost their fathers or mothers," he added.

Saudi Arabia Urgently Seeks to Boost Ties With Iran Before Trump's Return



RIYADH (Dispatches) - Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman is "urgently" looking to strengthen ties with Iran before US President-elect Donald Trump returns to the White House, according to a report.

The New York-headquartered news agency, Bloomberg, citing people with knowledge of the kingdom's moves, said bin Salman had made an "offer of increased trade" to Iranian officials in recent weeks in the hope of ratcheting down tension with the West.

The offer would build on a March 2023 Chinese-brokered rapprochement between the two countries as Tehran and Riyadh are pushing to forge closer ties amid escalated tensions in the region, Bloomberg added.

The news agency said it was unclear what bin Salman had offered to Iran, but a person who worked on the 2023 detente between the two sides said trade could initially focus on products in the food and medical sectors that would not breach European and US sanctions against Tehran.

The news agency pointed to Trump's victory in the US election earlier in the month and the prospect of a renewal of the West Asia policies introduced in his first term, which may include his maximum pressure campaign against the Islamic Republic.



Iran Can No Longer Host Foreign Nationals

TEHRAN - The Iranian Minister of Interior, Esfandiar Momeni, announced that the country can no longer accommodate foreign nationals, citing the presence of over 6 million foreign nationals in Iran.

Speaking to reporters during the introduction of the new governor of Mazandaran, Momeni emphasized that managing the situation with foreign nationals begins at the border and that efforts to block illegal entry points are already underway. He mentioned that significant progress has been made in reinforcing border controls and building barriers.

"One of the key challenges is the frequent movement of unauthorized foreign nationals across the borders, and the physical blocking of these areas is part of our strategy to prevent illegal entry," Momeni stated.

He further expressed concerns about the minimal support Iran has received from international organizations in addressing the influx of foreign nationals, emphasizing the need for stricter enforcement of employment regulations for foreign workers by employers.

"We are currently hosting millions of foreign nationals, many of whom are unauthorized," Momeni said. "It is beyond the capacity of our country to continue providing subsidies and job opportunities to foreign nationals, especially with 6 million of them currently residing here, including a significant number who are undocumented."

This statement highlights the ongoing strain Iran faces as it manages its borders and the presence of foreign nationals in the country.

Meanwhile Abdul-Fazl Abutorabi, a member of the Iranian Parliament's Committee on Councils, has revealed that certain foreign nationals have returned to Iran despite being expelled up to 21 times. He emphasized that simply expelling foreign nationals will not solve the problem, citing that Iran has deported 42 million Afghan nationals since the revolution, even though Afghanistan's population is only 35 million.

Abutorabi, who is also the architect of a proposal for establishing a National Migrant Organization, noted that while the government has detailed data on bread consumption across the country, including consumption by province, it also faces challenges. The government has allocated 250 trillion rials in the upcoming budget for bread and flour subsidies, a large amount by any measure. He pointed out that Iran has some of the lowest bread prices globally, and that just 5% of bread consumers—roughly 35% of the country's population—consume the bulk of bread, with their subsidy amount estimated at 80 trillion rials.

According to Abutorabi, the study indicates that a significant portion of this consumption is linked to undocumented foreign nationals and livestock feed. He called on the Minister of Interior,

who is also the head of the National Council for Foreign Nationals and the Council for Bread and Flour Coordination, to take action to address the situation of these 5%, who are consuming a third of the bread subsidy budget.

Abutorabi suggested that if this substantial amount of subsidy were redirected to completing infrastructure projects, it could help solve many of the country's issues, including job creation and economic growth.

The legislator also discussed the government's efforts to organize foreign nationals, which were announced by both the President and the Minister of Interior at the beginning of the current administration. He stated that the issue of foreign nationals cannot be resolved through speeches or merely expelling individuals, but requires a long-term, structured approach.

He emphasized that Iran needs foreign workers in 37 different job categories and that Afghan nationals, due to the lack of security and infrastructure in their home country, are in need of employment and stability in Iran. Therefore, a systematic approach to managing this mutual need is crucial.

Abutorabi proposed a plan to evaluate the number of foreign workers needed in the country and bring in the appropriate number of workers, ensuring they are fingerprinted, registered, and taxed, with their residence locations documented. He noted that Iranians often avoid certain jobs, such as those in stone cutting, poultry farming, and cattle ranching, and if foreign nationals are not allowed to fill these roles, sectors vital to the country's food security could face challenges. For instance, Iran currently controls 17% of the dairy export market in Western Asia, a notable achievement that should not be jeopardized.

He further detailed the proposal for establishing the National Migrant Organization, which would require the Ministry of Labor to create a platform for job listings in the 37 required sectors. If Iranian nationals do not apply for these jobs within 20 days, qualified undocumented foreign workers who have gone through the legal process would be allowed to fill the positions.

Finally, he stated that foreign nationals working in these sectors would be evaluated annually, and those who fail to meet specific criteria would have their residence permits revoked and be expelled from the country.

Abutorabi concluded by reiterating that simply expelling undocumented foreign nationals will not resolve the issue. He pointed out that since the revolution, Iran has expelled 42 million Afghan nationals, even though Afghanistan's population is only 35 million, highlighting that expulsion alone is not the answer.

Iran, E3 Agree to Pursue Dialogue in Near Future

TEHRAN (PressTV) - A senior Iranian diplomat says Tehran and the European troika - France, Germany and Britain - have agreed to pursue dialogue "in the near future" following "candid" talks in Geneva.

Kazem Gharibabadi, Iran's deputy foreign minister for legal and international affairs, said the Iranian delegation held another round of "candid" discussions with political directors of the three European countries, also known as the E3 on Friday.

He added that the sides "discussed and took stock of recent bilateral, regional and international developments, particularly nuclear and sanctions lifting issues."

"We are firmly committed to pursue the interests of our people, and our preference is the path of dialogue and engagement," the Iranian diplomat emphasized.

On Thursday, Enrique Mora, Deputy Secretary General of the European External Action Service, held talks in Geneva with Gharibabadi and Majid Takht Ravanchi, Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister for Political Affairs.

Mora, the EU's second highest-ranking diplomat, said on X that he had a "frank



exchange" with Gharibabadi and Takht Ravanchi.

Earlier on Friday, Gharibabadi wrote on X that the Iranian delegation "had a frank discussion" with Mora on "a variety of issues, including the perspective of nuclear and sanctions lifting negotiations in light of recent developments."

He urged the European Union to change its "self-centered and irresponsible" behavior towards issues and challenges of this continent and international matters.

Earlier, Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baghaei had reaffirmed Iran's principled stance on interaction and cooperation with other countries based on dignity, wisdom and expediency.

Tensions between Iran and European countries have escalated over the past two years due to European accusations.

European countries claim Iran has supplied ballistic missiles to Russia for use in the Ukraine conflict, an allegation that Tehran has categorically rejected.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has also stated that no such missiles were delivered to Russia.

Iran Reaffirms Commitment to Active Participation in Regional, Int'l Anti-Corruption Efforts



TEHRAN - The Secretary of the National Focal Point for the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) stated that the Islamic Republic of Iran has shown its firm determination to actively participate in regional and international anti-corruption mechanisms. This commitment is reflected through its membership in the GLOBE network and the BRICS Anti-Corruption Working Group.

According to a report from the Ministry of Justice, Seyed Ali Kazemi, speaking at the Second Ministerial Conference of National Anti-Corruption Authorities of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) member states in Doha, stated: "The discovery, handling, and prosecution of corruption due to the complexity of the relationships of the perpetrators, their use of advanced technologies, the transnational nature of corruption, and the transfer of its proceeds across borders, has made international cooperation to find solutions and create mechanisms to combat corruption an unavoidable necessity for societies."

Kazemi continued: "The Makkah Convention, adopted by OIC member states, is a valuable initiative for cooperation among law enforcement agencies in the fight against corruption. It symbolizes meaningful and fraternal collaboration among member states in achieving the goal of Islamic solidarity, promoting integrity, and fighting corruption."

He added: "The Makkah Convention provides a specialized legal framework for utilizing national, regional, and international capacities, expanding bilateral and multilateral cooperation among member states in effectively combating corruption based on the luminous principles of Islamic law and the commitments of the United Nations Convention against Corruption. We welcome the accession of countries to this instrument and its implementation."

Kazemi emphasized that the Islamic Republic of Iran has played an active role in drafting the Makkah Convention, which enhances the exchange and sharing of information among law enforcement authorities efficiently and timely. This facilitates the prevention, detection, investigation, and prosecution of crimes, aiding in the recovery of stolen assets.

Hezbollah Leader Hails Great Sacrifices



BEIRUT (Dispatches) - Hezbollah's secretary general hails the Lebanese resistance movement's fighters over their stellar performance in the face of months-long deadly Israeli escalation.

"The sacrifices that were made in the face of the enemy's violations were very great [in number]," Sheikh Naim Qassem said on Friday in his first televised speech following the ceasefire between Lebanon and Israel.

"You exercised patience and Jihad. Your sons fought off the enemy in the valleys so they can crush the enemy. We thank God that this patience bore fruit," he added, addressing the Lebanese people.

The comments followed thousands of retaliatory operations by Hezbollah against Israeli targets, which forced the regime to enter a ceasefire agreement with Lebanon.

This occurred approximately 13 months after Israel intensified its aggression, claiming the lives of at least 3,961 people.

Sheikh Qassem referred to the regime's ramping up the deadly aggression even further over the past 63 days with the aim of "destroying" Hezbollah and stopping its strikes that had driven hundreds of thousands of illegal settlers from the occupied Palestinian territories.

Besides seeking to eliminate the movement, the additional escalation was aimed at enabling the settlers to return to the occupied territories as well as being an attempt at "creating a new Middle East," he noted.

"The Israeli regime expected to realize its goals in short term after delivering blows to our leadership and equipment," the resistance leader stated, referring to the regime's assassinating several high-ranking Hezbollah officials, including his predecessor, Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah.

Hezbollah, however, managed to persevere and resist on the frontline and began "crushing the enemy's interior front to the point that it forced it into a defensive position," he said.

IRAN NEWS



Joint Working Group Discusses Facilitating Transit via Chabahar Port

TEHRAN (IRNA) - The third Joint Working Group of Iran, India, Afghanistan, and Uzbekistan convened to discuss ways to enhance trade exchanges and address issues related to transportation and transit of goods via Chabahar Port. The meeting was held in Mumbai, India, with the participation of Hossein Shahdadi, Deputy for Port and Economic Affairs of Chabahar. Discussions centered on the transportation infrastructure, capacity, and challenges in this sector. Proposals aimed at facilitating trade through Chabahar Port were presented, along with in-depth discussions on transportation and transit matters.

Without Lifting Sanctions, Foreign Direct Investment Will Remain Limited



TEHRAN - Abdolnaser Hemmati reflected on Iran's participation in the 28th Global Investment Meeting in Riyadh, emphasizing the importance of the country's presence at such events.

In a statement following the meeting, Hemmati wrote, "Attending the 'Global Investment Meeting' in Riyadh and engaging with participating ministers offered an opportunity to better understand global investment trends and opportunities."

He highlighted that the paradigm shift in global investment and its impact on the relationship between industrial policy and investment promotion strategies will not only determine the future of the global economy but also shape international cooperation and the quality of life worldwide.

According to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), global foreign direct investment (FDI) in 2023 amounted to \$1.3 trillion. However, Iran's share of this figure was less than one-thousandth, reflecting the country's marginal position in global investment flows.

Hemmati noted the critical role of FDI in global value chains and emphasized that policymaking in developing countries like Iran must consider multinational corporations' trade strategies, pathways for internationalizing domestic firms, and creating an environment conducive to both.

"My serious assessment is that despite Iran's significant potential in energy reserves, mineral resources, and a well-educated, skilled, and creative workforce, the unresolved issue of sanctions, along with the country's inclusion on the FATF blacklist, severely limits smooth financial and banking exchanges at regional and global levels. This has significantly slowed the pace of investment attraction and the country's integration into global value chains, despite its importance," he stated.

Despite these limitations, Hemmati emphasized that the Ministry of Economy and the Iranian Investment Organization are intensifying efforts to attract more investments.

He concluded by highlighting constructive discussions with the executive head of the World Association of Investment Promotion Agencies (WAIPA) in Riyadh. These engagements aim to foster active collaboration with the association, introduce Iran's investment opportunities, and enhance the knowledge and experience of Iran's public and private sectors in attracting foreign investments.

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Iran and China Strengthen Cultural and Tourism Ties

TEHRAN - In a meeting at the office of Iran's Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts, Seyyed Reza Salehi Amiri, Chinese Ambassador to Tehran Zong Peiwu and Cultural Counselor Josie Hao discussed the enhancement of cultural and tourism cooperation between the two nations.

Salehi Amiri emphasized the importance of deepening the strategic partnership between Iran and China beyond the economic and commercial spheres. He highlighted the rich cultural and historical heritage shared by both countries, while acknowledging the lack of mutual awareness, which could serve as a starting point for fostering stronger relations.

The minister noted the success of past exhibitions such as Magnificent Iran held in Beijing and Shanghai, which attracted daily visits from over 80,000 people. He described this enthusiasm as a clear indication of the Chinese public's interest in Iranian culture, underscoring the need for further cultural and tourism collaboration.

Salehi Amiri called for the removal of travel restrictions to Iran imposed by Chinese authorities. He outlined Iran's tourism strategy, which focuses on Gulf states, Central Asia, and neighboring countries, while prioritizing Chinese visitors for 2025. Plans include collaborative efforts to attract Chinese tourists and expand infrastructure, such as four- and five-star hotels, supported by investment from Chinese stakeholders.

Other initiatives discussed included: Facilitating tourist exchanges and expanding airline cooperation; Strengthening Iran's involvement in the Silk Road initiative under the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and BRICS; Preparing for bilateral technical meetings on tourism and cultural cooperation.

Ambassador Zong Peiwu praised Iran's historical and cultural significance and noted the extensive political, economic, and educational collaborations between the two countries. He highlighted opportunities for cultural partnerships, including joint efforts in heritage conservation.

Zong proposed establishing a technical tourism committee to boost visitor numbers and extended an invitation for Salehi Amiri to visit China to discuss further cooperation.

The ambassador suggested designating 2026 as the Year of Cultural and Tourism Exchange to deepen mutual understanding and celebrate centuries of interaction via the Silk Road. He reiterated China's respect for Iran's historical sites and the potential for mutual efforts in heritage preservation.

Zong also acknowledged Iran's numerous tourist attractions, expressing optimism about increasing collaboration in tourism and cultural promotion. He noted Chinese investors' interest in Iran's tourism infrastructure development, signaling a promising outlook for bilateral ties.

Iran Establishes Undersea Power Link with Qatar



TEHRAN - Mostafa Rajabi-Mashhadi, Managing Director of Tavanir (Iran's Power Generation, Transmission, and Distribution Company), announced significant advancements in Iran's power network connections with neighboring countries.

Rajabi-Mashhadi highlighted the strategic importance of linking power grids between nations. Globally, electricity exchanges with neighboring countries generally account for less than 15% of total capacity due to technical and economic constraints. Despite these limitations, Iran aims to enhance its power exchange capacity, currently limited to three times its existing levels.

He noted that Iran is importing 500 megawatts of electricity from Turkmenistan and Armenia during the winter months. Additionally, under agreements such as AIR and AGIR, Iran can receive 300 megawatts of electricity from Azerbaijan and Russia. With improved political relations, this capacity could increase to 1,000 megawatts, necessitating the expansion of transmission lines.

Efforts are underway to convene a trilateral meeting between the energy ministers of Iran, Russia, and Azerbaijan. This meeting aims to strengthen the infrastructure for power exchange among these countries. The interconnection, Rajabi-Mashhadi emphasized, could significantly enhance Iran's ability to transmit electricity from the north to neighboring regions.

Rajabi-Mashhadi also announced plans to establish an undersea power connection with Qatar. Preliminary coordination has been completed, and a virtual meeting was held last week. A follow-up in-person session is scheduled in Qatar next month to finalize technical studies and begin operational preparations.

Addressing Armenia's recent announcement of its readiness to increase electricity exports to Iran by 400 megawatts, Rajabi-Mashhadi stated that this would be feasible upon completing Armenia's third transmission line, which is 90% finished. He described this project as a significant step toward strengthening energy cooperation between the two nations.

This series of developments underscores Iran's commitment to expanding regional energy partnerships and reinforcing its electricity infrastructure.

\$50m in Handicrafts Exports Predicted



TEHRAN - According to the Public Relations Office of the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Maryam Jalali, Deputy Minister of Handicrafts, highlighted the significant achievements of the 37th National Handicrafts Exhibition. She announced that participating artists and exhibitors achieved a total sales volume of 1 trillion rials (approximately \$20 million).

Jalali explained that the sales figures were based on self-reported data from the artists and participants at the event. Additionally, orders worth 150 billion rials (around \$3 million) were recorded during the exhibition, further boosting opportunities for artisans, producers, and craftsmen.

She also noted that traders and merchants attending the exhibition contributed to export opportunities, with an estimated \$50 million in exports projected for member countries of the Arab Handicrafts Union.

The exhibition saw active participation from 1,038 artists and attracted over 80,000 visitors during its four-day run, held from November 13 to November 16, 2024, at the Tehran International Permanent Fairground.

This significant turnout and commercial success underline the growing demand for Iranian handicrafts both domestically and internationally.

Iran's Renewable Energy Capacity Surpasses 1,300 MW



TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iran's renewable energy capacity reached 1,317 MW by the end of October 2024, marking a significant milestone in the country's clean energy development.

According to IRNA's economic correspondent, the Ministry of Energy under the 14th government is committed to expanding renewable energy power plants. Numerous initiatives have been planned to achieve this goal.

President Masoud Pezeshkian has also emphasized the importance of addressing barriers to the development of renewable energy.

Latest statistics from the Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Organization of Iran (SATBA) reveal that the country's renewable energy capacity increased to 1,317.12 MW by late October. Iran's renewable energy portfolio currently includes solar, wind, small-scale hydropower, expansion turbines, and biomass energy.

Breakdown of Renewable Energy Sources: Solar Energy: Leading the renewable mix with a 60% share, solar power contributes 608.03 MW; Wind Energy: The second-largest

contributor, with 376.3 MW, making up 29%; Small Hydropower Plants: Providing 103.73 MW, accounting for 8%; Biomass Power: Adds 22.13 MW, representing 2%; Expansion Turbine Plants: Contribute 9.6 MW, comprising 1%.

Future Projections: Deputy Minister of Energy, Mohsen Tarzatab, announced that an additional 3,500 MW of renewable power plants will be connected to the national grid by next year's peak electricity demand period.

SATBA's president underscored the urgent need for serious efforts in renewable energy development. The organization is expected to help achieve over 30,000 MW of renewable capacity in a short time to address the country's energy imbalance.

Call for Investment: Seyyed Hamid Hosseini, spokesperson for the Oil, Gas, and Petrochemical Exporters Union, advocated for prioritizing investments in renewable energy plants over thermal power stations. He stated that the move toward renewable energy is the best strategy to reduce and eliminate electricity supply imbalances.

4.7m Tons of Transit Carried on Iran's Roads



TEHRAN - According to the Ministry of Roads and Urban Development, 4.7 million tons of goods were transported via trucks across Iran's roads during the first 100 days of the 14th government's tenure. This extensive road transit operation utilized 26 active terminals.

During the same period, 167.5 million tons of goods were transported using official transport documentation. The country's road transport infrastructure included 567,518 active drivers, 4,693 transportation companies, and 684,893 active vehicles.

In addition to cargo transport, 34.4 million passengers were moved across the country with official documentation during this period, supported by 2,454 passenger transportation companies.

Efforts to maintain and improve the country's roadways resulted in 6,115 kilometers of major and arterial roads undergoing asphalt resurfacing, protective sealing, patchwork, and crack sealing. Additionally, 919.6 kilometers of rural roads were constructed, upgraded, or asphalted. Experts predict that the second phase of bitumen allocation will further accelerate rural road paving projects, especially in warmer provinces.

Between August 1 and November 11, 284 high-risk accident zones were identified and eliminated to enhance road safety.

In the realm of infrastructure modernization, 2,414 traffic violation monitoring systems were installed and activated within the same 100-day period, marking progress toward smarter road management and enforcement.

These advancements underscore the government's commitment to enhancing road safety, transportation efficiency, and infrastructure development.

China Finds World's Largest Gold Deposit Worth Over £63b

BEIJING (Dispatches) - China says it has discovered the world's largest known deposit of gold, estimated to be worth over \$80bn (£63bn).

The deposit at the Wangu goldfield in central China could yield more than 1,000 tons of gold, the Geological Bureau of Hunan was quoted as saying by Chinese state media.

The bureau announced the detection of 40 gold veins, which are long and narrow openings in rocks filled with the metal, around a mile deep in Hunan province's Pingjiang county. These rocks alone may have 300 tons of gold and there could be more reserves at deeper layers, geologists said.



Saudi Arabia Abandons Pursuit of U.S. Defense Treaty Over Israel Stalemate



RIYADH (Reuters) - Saudi Arabia has abandoned its pursuit of an ambitious defense treaty with Washington in return for normalizing relations with Israel and is now pushing for a more modest military cooperation agreement, two Saudi and four Western officials told Reuters.

In a drive to get a wide-ranging mutual security treaty over the line earlier this year, Riyadh softened its position on Palestinian statehood, telling Washington that a public commitment from Israel to a two-state solution could be enough for the Persian Gulf kingdom to normalize relations.

But with public anger in Saudi Arabia and the wider Middle East at fever pitch over Israel's military actions in Gaza, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman has again made recognition of Israel conditional on it taking concrete steps to create a Palestinian state, two Saudi and three Western sources said.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is still eager to secure normalisation with the Saudi powerhouse as a historic milestone and a sign of broader acceptance in the Arab world, Western diplomats said.

But he faces overwhelming opposition at home to any concessions to the Palestinians following the Oct. 7 Hamas attacks and knows any gesture in the direction of statehood would fracture his ruling coalition, they said.

With both leaders shackled for now by their domestic powerbases, Riyadh and Washington hope a more modest defense pact could be sealed before President Joe Biden leaves the White House in January, the sources said.

A full-blown U.S.-Saudi treaty would need to pass the U.S. Senate with a two-thirds majority - and this would be a non-starter unless Riyadh recognizes Israel, the six sources said.

The pact now under discussion would involve expanding joint military exercises and drills to address regional threats, mainly from Iran. It would foster partnerships between U.S. and Saudi defense firms, with safeguards to prevent collaboration with China, the sources said.



AMMAN (Dispatches) - Syrian authorities closed Aleppo airport as well as all roads leading into the city on Saturday, three military sources told Reuters, as rebels opposed to President Bashar al-Assad said they had reached the heart of Aleppo.

The opposition fighters, led by the Islamist militant group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, carried out a surprise sweep through government-held towns this week and reached Aleppo nearly a decade after having been forced out by Assad and his allies.

Russia, one of Assad's key allies, has promised Damascus extra military aid to thwart the rebels, two military sources said, adding new hardware would start arriving in the next 72 hours.

The Syrian army has been told to follow "safe withdrawal" orders from the main areas of the city that the rebels have entered, three army sources said.

The rebels began their incursion on Wednesday and by late Friday an operations room representing the offensive said they were sweeping through various neighbourhoods of Aleppo.

They are returning to the city for the first time since 2016, when Assad and his allies retook it, with the insurgents agreeing to withdraw after months of bombardment and siege.

Mustafa Abdul Jaber, a commander in the Jaish al-Izza rebel brigade, said their speedy advance this week had been helped by a lack of Iran-backed manpower in the broader Aleppo province. The opposition fighters have said the campaign was in response to stepped-up strikes in recent weeks against civilians by the Russian and Syrian air force on areas in rebel-held Idlib, and to preempt any attacks by the Syrian army.

Opposition sources in touch with Turkish intelligence said Turkey, which supports the rebels, had given a green light to the

offensive.

But Turkish foreign ministry spokesperson Onu Kececi said on Friday that Turkey sought to avoid greater instability in the region and had warned recent attacks undermined de-escalation agreements.

The attack is the biggest since March 2020, when Russia and Turkey agreed to a deal to de-escalate the conflict.

On Friday, Syrian state television denied rebels had reached the city and said Russia was providing Syria's military with air support.

The Syrian military said it was fighting back against the attack and had inflicted heavy losses on the insurgents in the countryside of Aleppo and Idlib.

David Carden, U.N. Deputy Regional Humanitarian Coordinator for the Syria Crisis, said: "We're deeply alarmed by the situation unfolding in northwest Syria."

"Relentless attacks over the past three days have claimed the lives of at least 27 civilians, including children as young as 8 years old."

Syrian state news agency SANA said four civilians including two students were killed on Friday in Aleppo by insurgent shelling of university student dormitories. It was not clear if they were among the 27 dead reported by the U.N. official.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said on Friday that Moscow regarded the rebel attack as a violation of Syria's sovereignty.

"We are in favour of the Syrian authorities bringing order to the area and restoring constitutional order as soon as possible," he said.

Israeli Strikes Kill Dozens in Gaza



CAIRO (Dispatches) - Israeli military strikes killed at least 40 Palestinians overnight and on Friday in the Gaza Strip, medics said, as efforts to revive Gaza ceasefire talks received a boost with officials from the Palestinian group Hamas headed to Cairo for a new round of talks.

Medics said they had recovered 19 bodies of Palestinians killed in northern areas of Nuseirat, one of the enclave's eight long-standing refugee camps.

Later on Friday, an Israeli air strike killed at least 10 Palestinians in a house in Beit Lahya in northern Gaza, medics said.

Others were killed in the northern and southern areas of the Gaza Strip, medics added. There was no fresh statement by the Israeli military on Friday, but on Thursday it said its forces were continuing to "strike terror targets as part of the operational activity in the Gaza Strip".

Israeli tanks had entered northern and western areas of Nuseirat on Thursday. They withdrew from northern areas on Friday but remained active in western parts of the camp. The Palestinian Civil Emergency Service said teams were unable to respond to distress calls from residents trapped in their homes.

Dozens of Palestinians returned on Friday to areas where the army had retreated to check on damage to their homes.

Police and Protesters Clash in Second Day of Demonstrations in Georgia

TBILISI (Dispatches) - Thousands of demonstrators protesting the Georgian government's decision to suspend negotiations to join the European Union rallied outside the parliament and clashed with police for a second straight night on Friday.

The night before, police used water cannons, pepper spray and tear gas to disperse protesters who took to the streets in Tbilisi, the Georgian capital, after Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze of the ruling Georgian Dream party announced the suspension. The interior ministry said it detained 43 people during the protests.

On Friday evening, protesters again swarmed the parliament, with some trying to break the metal gates to the building. Riot police used water cannons to drive them back and later moved to push some of the demonstrators away from the area.

Georgian Dream's disputed victory in the Oct. 26 election, which was widely seen as a referendum on the country's aspirations to join the European Union, has sparked massive demonstrations and led to an opposition boycott of the parliament. The opposition said the vote was rigged under the influence of Russia seeking to keep Georgia in its orbit.

President Salome Zourabichvili joined protesters on Thursday after accusing the government of declaring "war" on its own people. In Friday's address to the nation, Zourabichvili urged police not to use force against protesters.

The Georgian president, who has a largely ceremonial role, has declared that the ruling party rigged the election with the help of Russia, Georgia's former imperial master.

The government's announcement that it was suspending negotiations to join the EU came hours after the European Parliament adopted a resolution that condemned last month's vote as neither free nor fair, representing yet another manifestation of the continued democratic backsliding "for which the ruling Georgian Dream party is fully responsible."

European election observers said October's vote took place in a divisive atmosphere marked by instances of bribery, double voting and physical



violence.

The EU granted Georgia candidate status in December 2023 on condition that it meet the bloc's recommendations, but put its accession on hold and cut financial support earlier this year after the passage of a "foreign influence" law widely seen as a blow to democratic freedoms.

EU lawmakers urged for a rerun of the parliamentary vote within a year under thorough international supervision and by an independent election administration. They also called on the EU to impose sanctions and limit formal contacts with the Georgian government.

The Georgian prime minister fired back, denouncing what he described as a "cascade of insults" from the EU politicians and declaring that "the ill-wishers of our country have turned the European Parliament into a blunt weapon of blackmail against Georgia, which is a great disgrace for the European Union."

"We will continue on our path toward the European Union; however, we will not allow anyone to keep us in a constant state of blackmail and manipulation, which is utterly disrespectful to our country and society," Kobakhidze said. "We must clearly show certain European politicians and bureaucrats, who are completely devoid of European values, that they must speak to Georgia with dignity, not through blackmail and insults."

Kobakhidze also said Georgia would reject any budgetary grants from the EU until the end of 2028.

Critics have accused Georgian Dream - established by Bidzina Ivanishvili, a shadowy billionaire who made his fortune in Russia - of becoming increasingly authoritarian and tilted toward Moscow. The party recently pushed through laws similar to those used by the Kremlin to crack down on freedom of speech and LGBTQ+ rights.

The EU suspended Georgia's membership application process indefinitely in June, after parliament passed a law requiring organizations that receive more than 20% of their funding from abroad to register as "pursuing the interest of a foreign power," similar to a Russian law used to discredit organizations critical of the government.

Zelensky to Be Ready to Give Up Ukrainian Territory to Russia to Achieve Peace

KYIV (Dispatches) - Volodymyr Zelensky said on Friday night that he was willing to cede territory to Russia to end the war for the first time.

The Ukrainian president said his country could give up land temporarily in exchange for a "Nato umbrella" over the territory Ukraine still holds.

He added that after a ceasefire was agreed, Kyiv could "diplomatically" negotiate the return of the territory in the east that is currently under Russian control.

"If we want to stop the hot stage of the war, we should take under [the] Nato umbrella the territory of Ukraine that we have under our control," Zelensky said in an interview with Sky News.

"That's what we need to do fast, and then Ukraine can get back the other part of its territory diplomatically," he added.

The comments represent a considerable shift in his position. Kyiv has previously said it would continue to fight Russia until Ukraine was returned to its internationally recognized borders, which include the four regions annexed by Vladimir Putin in 2022, as well as Crimea.

The shift comes as Donald Trump prepares to take office with a promise to end the war on "day one". Meanwhile, support for a peace deal is also growing among European allies.

Under plans floated by Mr Trump's team, a peace deal would see the current front line frozen in place, and Ukraine agreeing to shelve its ambitions to join NATO for 20 years. If agreed, the US would pump Ukraine with weapons to deter future Russian aggression.

Mr Zelensky hinted in his interview that the "NATO umbrella" would not be full membership of NATO, something Putin has rejected as part of any peace deal.

Rather, it could mean NATO member states, including Britain, the US, France and



Germany, providing individual security guarantees to Ukraine.

Asked in the interview whether Kyiv would be willing to give up territory to Moscow altogether in exchange for full NATO membership, he said: "No one has offered us to be in NATO with just one part or another part of Ukraine."

He added that it "could be possible, but no one offered".

He later said he would be willing to consider ceding the Russian-occupied parts of Ukraine in exchange for the free parts of Ukraine to be brought under the "NATO umbrella".

The inauguration of the Mr Trump on January 20 is expected to accelerate talks over how to end the war.

Mr Trump is thought to be considering a plan that would call on European and British troops to enforce an 800-mile buffer zone between the Russian and Ukrainian armies as part of a plan to end the war.

Speaking to The Telegraph this week, Boris Johnson, the former prime minister, said that British troops should help defend Ukraine's border as part of any peace deal.

He said that any responsibility to guard a future ceasefire line between Ukraine and Russia should be given to a multinational group of European peacekeeping forces.

"I don't think we should be sending in combat troops to take on the Russians," he told the Telegraph's Ukraine: The Latest podcast.

"But I think as part of the solution, as part of the end state, you're going to want to have multinational European peacekeeping forces monitoring the border [and] helping the Ukrainians.

"I cannot see that such a European operation could possibly happen without the British."



Butler, Heat Add to Raptors' Road Struggles

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Jimmy Butler scored a game-high 26 points as the host Miami Heat defeated the Toronto Raptors 121-111 in an NBA Cup game.

The Heat (2-2) and Raptors (0-3) are out of contention for the NBA Cup. In the overall standings, Miami (9-8) tied its season high at one game over .500. Toronto (5-15) fell to an NBA-worst 1-11 on the road.

Butler missed the fourth quarter of Miami's previous game due to a back injury but hit 8 of 14 field-goal attempts, including 2 of 4 from 3-point range.

For Miami, Bam Adebayo finished with a triple-double (14 points, 10 rebounds and 10 assists) and Tyler Herro contributed 23 points.

South Florida native Scottie Barnes posted a triple-double for Toronto with 24 points, 10 rebounds and 10 rebounds.

Also for the Raptors, RJ Barrett had 25 points, seven assists and six rebounds, and Jakob Poeltl delivered 24 points and 10 rebounds.

The first quarter was tough for both teams as Toronto led 21-20 despite turning the ball over eight times. Miami had just one turnover but shot 2-for-17 from beyond the 3-point arc.

Both teams heated up in the second quarter as Toronto shot 75 percent from the floor and committed just three turnovers, and Miami shot 58.3 percent, including 5-for-10 from long range.

At the break, Toronto led 61-58 as the first half featured six lead changes and six ties. Barnes led the Raptors with 15 first-half points, while Butler scored 13 for Miami.

In the third quarter, Miami surged ahead 77-67, but Toronto responded with a 12-0 run for a two-point advantage. Miami had its own answer, scoring 11 straight for an 88-79 lead on a 3-pointer by Jaime Jaquez Jr.

Miami entered the fourth with a 96-84 lead and held on from there.

For the game, the Heat made 21 of 54 attempts on 3-pointers (38.9 percent) and outscored Toronto 63-33 on made 3-point baskets.

Meanwhile Cade Cunningham returned from an injury to put up 24 points and the Detroit Pistons remained unbeaten in the NBA Cup while also formally eliminating the defending runner-up with a 130-106 road win over the Indiana Pacers.

Malik Beasley paced Detroit with 25 points, while Jaden Ivey chipped in with 23 and Tobias Harris 16 for the Pistons, who will host the Milwaukee Bucks in a duel of 3-0 teams on Tuesday night with the East Group B title on the line.

Pascal Siakam had 21 points and Tyrese Haliburton 19 for the Pacers, who fell behind by as many as 12 points in the first quarter and never caught the visitors en route to a third straight NBA Cup defeat.

Riding 57.8 percent shooting overall and 47.4 percent accuracy on 3-pointers, the Pistons ran out to as much as a 15-point lead in the second period and 21-point advantage in the third before coasting home to just the second win in their last six games.

After sitting out three consecutive games with a strained left hip, Cunningham contributed a game-high 11 assists to record his sixth consecutive double-double. He hit 10 of his 19 shots and four of his six 3-point attempts.

Beasley was even better from the field off the bench, going 10-for-14 overall while connecting five times from deep. The Pistons outscored the Pacers 54-36 from beyond the arc.

Jalen Duran also recorded a double-double for the visitors with a game-high 12 rebounds to complement 14 points and four blocks, while Tim Hardaway Jr. made it all five Pistons starters in double figures with 10 points.

The 130 points were a season-high for Detroit. Ben Mathurin had 16 points, T.J. McConnell 12 and Jarace Walker 10 for the Pacers, who had won the first three contests on a four-game homestand. Walker also found time for five steals.

Myles Turner was Indiana's leading rebounder with 10 to go with nine points.



Halep Slams ITIA Over Iga Swiatek Ban

PARIS (Dispatches) - Romania's Simona Halep yesterday rounded on the International Tennis Integrity Agency (ITIA) for discrepancies in the treatment of world number two Iga Swiatek after testing positive for a banned substance.

The ITIA announced a one-month ban on Thursday for Swiatek after the 23-year-old had tested positive for the heart medication trimetazidine (TMZ) in an out-of-competition sample in August 2024, when the Polish player was ranked number one in the world.

Halep, now 33, returned to tennis in March this year after her own career had been on hold since October 7, 2022, the date of the start of her provisional suspension after testing positive for roxadustat at the US Open.

The winner of the 2018 French Open and 2019 Wimbledon singles titles was then caught up in a second affair, this time "irregularities" in the data of her biological passport.

She was handed a four-year ban by the ITIA, but Halep successfully appealed to the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) in February, arguing her positive test for roxadustat—used to treat anaemia and banned as a blood doping agent—was the result of a tainted supplement.

"I wonder why there is such a difference in treatment and judgment? I don't find and I don't think there can be a logical answer," Halep said in a long message posted in Romanian on her Instagram account.

"It can only be bad will on the part of the ITIA, the organization that did everything to destroy me despite the evidence. It wanted at all costs to destroy the last years of my career."

Halep, now sitting 877th in the world rankings, added: "I suffered, I suffer and I will perhaps always suffer from the injustice that was done to me."

Brighton Climb to Second After 1-1 Stalemate With Southampton

BRIGHTON (Dispatches) - Kaoru Mitoma's first-half header for Brighton & Hove Albion was cancelled out by a Flynn Downes strike just before the hour as the Seagulls drew 1-1 at home with bottom side Southampton on Friday to move up to second in the Premier League table.

Brighton are level on 23 points with champions Manchester City, who face leaders Liverpool on Sunday. Liverpool are eight points ahead.

The visitors made Joe Lumley their third starting goalkeeper of the season and he was immediately under pressure as the home side started strongly.

Mitoma had the first good chance of the game as Brighton broke out from defence at pace in the seventh minute, but with Lumley well off his line, the Japanese winger dragged his shot just wide of the right-hand post.

Two minutes later Georgino cut across the penalty area from right to left, but he too arrowed his shot just wide, and he came even closer in the 16th minute, again cutting in off the wing before smacking his shot off the far post.



Lumley's clean sheet on his Premier League debut lasted only 29 minutes as Brighton's pressure paid off he was finally beaten by Mitoma's well-placed header from a bouncing Tariq Lamptey cross.

Rejuvenated in the second half, Southampton equalized in the 59th minute after Adam Armstrong had two shots blocked in quick succession but midfielder Downes made no mistake with the rebound from the second effort, slamming it home.

Eight minutes later Saints had a Cameron Archer goal controversially ruled out for offside after Adam Armstrong was ruled to have interfered when he flicked his heel at the ball as it passed behind him while in an offside position, allowing Brighton to grab the point they needed to move to second in the standings.

"I respect how difficult the decision is for the referee and the assistant referee. It is really difficult, but I find it hard to accept," Southampton coach Russell Martin told Sky Sports when asked about the disallowed goal.

"The mistake is (that) it's not clear and obvious enough to be corrected, the on-field decision carries weight. I am frustrated, but I am really proud of my players," he added.

Brighton boss Fabian Hürzeler was disappointed with his side, despite their lofty position in the table.

"Not the best game from us regarding intensity, how we pressed out of possession, how we used our chances. We only deserved a draw," he told the BBC.

Struggling Leicester City Name Van Nistelrooy as Manager



LONDON (Dispatches) - Leicester City have appointed Ruud van Nistelrooy as manager to replace the sacked Steve Cooper on a contract until June 2027, the Premier League club announced.

Cooper departed with the Foxes hovering two points above the relegation zone, and the club moved quickly to appoint Van Nistelrooy, who had been assistant manager at Manchester United and took interim charge when Erik ten Hag was fired last month.

"I'm proud, I'm excited. Everybody that I speak to about Leicester City Football Club is enthusiastic," Dutchman Van Nistelrooy said in a statement.

"They have great stories about the quality of the people working at the club, the supporters and, of course, the recent history of the club is impressive."

Leicester enjoyed a stunning Premier League title success in 2015-2016 but were relegated in 2023 before coming straight back up under Enzo Maresca, who then left to join Chelsea. Former Nottingham Forest boss Cooper was appointed in June.

Leicester surprisingly sacked Cooper on Sunday after 157 days in charge following a 2-1 loss at home to Chelsea that left them 16th on 10 points, just above the relegation zone.

Friday's announcement comes two weeks after Van Nistelrooy left his role as interim coach at United, where he led the side to three victories and a draw in all competitions.

The 48-year-old moved on from Old Trafford after the arrival of Ruben Amorim as United's new permanent manager despite the Dutchman expressing interest in remaining at the club.

"Ruud's experience, knowledge and winning mentality will undoubtedly bring great value to us and we look forward to supporting him in achieving success for our fans and our club," said Leicester Chairman Aiyawatt Srivaddhanaprabha.

The former United striker also played for PSV Eindhoven and Real Madrid, scoring 349 goals at club level and 35 in 70 appearances for the Netherlands.

As a coach, Van Nistelrooy previously led PSV in the 2022-23 season, where he won the Dutch Cup, before joining Ten Hag's staff as an assistant coach in July.

Leicester next visit Brentford on Saturday, with caretaker manager Ben Dawson set to lead the team before Van Nistelrooy takes charge when they host West Ham United on Tuesday.

Djokovic Reveals Reasons Behind Perfect Andy Murray Appointment

LONDON (Dispatches) - Novak Djokovic has explained that his and Andy Murray's shared experiences make the Scot the "perfect coach" at this stage of his career.

Djokovic announced a surprise alliance with his former on-court rival earlier this month, with Murray set to oversee the 24-time grand slam champion at the Australian Open.

The pair were born just weeks apart and have maintained a strong friendship having competed against one another at junior and senior level.

It is a first step into professional coaching for Murray, who concluded his playing career last summer after battling injuries towards the end of his career.

And Djokovic believes he has identified an ideal candidate to ensure the twilight of his career is a successful one.

"I was going through a process of thinking about next season, and trying to figure out what I need at this stage of my career," Djokovic told Sky Sports. "I stopped with my coach Goran Ivanisevic that I had been successful with for many years in March. So I took about six months to really think about if I need a coach and, if yes, who that is going to be."



"I was going through different names and I realised that the perfect coach for me at this point would be someone who has been through the experiences that I am going through. Possibly a multiple grand slam winner and a former No 1."

"I was thinking of people and then the Andy Murray discussion appeared on the table. It caught him a little bit off guard, because he wasn't expecting it. But we connected really fast and he accepted after a few days."

Djokovic is hoping to add to his record tally of 24 major titles with victory in Melbourne, where he has won ten times before.

He and Murray will work together in the off-season and in the build-up to the tournament, which takes place between 12 and 26 January.

Djokovic added: "I can't be more excited about it. This collaboration is a surprise to me as well, and to everyone. But it is exciting for tennis. He has been one of my greatest rivals. We are the same age, we've played in all of the biggest stadiums in our sport. I can't wait to get out on the court and prepare for next season."