

Iranian Foreign ministry Spokesman Hailed a Recent Decision by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to Add Mehregan Festival to Its Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity

IRAN NEWS

President Masoud Pezeshkian in Meeting With Chinese Vice President Zhang Guoqing in Tehran Expressed His Administration's Determination to Promote Cooperation With China and Russia in Countering the U.S.' Unilateral Policies

2 DOMESTIC

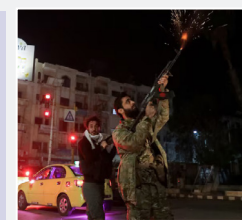


Iran and Russia to Ditch the Dollar Soon

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Syrian Rebels Capture Key City of Hama



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Iran Calls on Ukraine to Stop Arming, Supporting Anti-Syria Groups



TEHRAN (PressTV) - The Iranian Foreign Ministry has strongly warned Ukraine against supporting anti-Syria armed groups as reports run rife about Kiev's providing military assistance and training for the outfits. "Experience shows that coalescence with terrorism only promotes expansion of insecurity and violence across the world, and would afflict its (terrorism's) supporters sooner or later," said Mojtaba Damirchiloo, Head of the ministry's Eurasia Department, on Friday.

He underlined the dangerous nature of the armed outfits in Syria, which were blacklisted by the United Nations Security Council a long time ago, saying deploying such groups towards destabilizing the West Asia region amounted to adoption of an immoral policy that contradicted all the principles of the international law.

In September, an informed Syrian source told Russia's Sputnik news agency that a group of 250 Ukrainian forces had reached the Idlib Province in northern Syria to train the armed groups.

According to the source, the Ukrainian instructors were set to train members of the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) group in production and modernization of drones. "More than 250 unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) were delivered to HTS in Idlib in batches in the form of components along with civilian goods," it added.

Damirchiloo pointed to such accounts as well as some other reports about a number of Ukrainian officials engaging in "illegal arms trade" involving the weapons that have been delivered to the European country by the United States, describing such illegal activity as Kiev's clear violation of its commitments to "preventing and confronting terrorism," and demanding immediate cessation of such measures.

Earlier this week, members of the HTS were reported to have overrun many government-controlled areas and killed dozens of soldiers in northern Syria.

The Syrian military and its allied Russian forces then began extensive operations against the outfit, reportedly managing to reverse some of its gains.

Damirchiloo, meanwhile, decried Ukrainian officials' "repetitive and unfounded" claims about, what they describe as, Iran's role in the underway conflict in the European country.

NATO Chief Should Answer for Growing Global Insecurity



TEHRAN - Iran has criticized the new secretary general of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) for "weirdly" setting the agenda for the incoming US administration, advising him instead to answer for increasing global insecurity due to policies of certain member states of the Western military alliance.

"The new secretary general of #NATO, who claims to have a way with US president-elect, insists weirdly in setting the agenda for the upcoming US administration," Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baghaei said in a post on his X account on Thursday.

He said the new NATO chief's prescription is based on only inciting more "militancy" by framing a "polarized" picture of world politics which is "far from benign & responsible."

The new secretary general of NATO, who claims to have a way with the U.S. president-elect, insists weirdly in setting the agenda for the upcoming U.S. administration.

The Iranian spokesperson emphasized that "egocentric and totalitarianist policies" of certain NATO members have led to the growing insecurity that has plagued the world, including Europe.

The NATO secretary general "should feel accountable to answer" the mounting insecurity across the world, Baghaei said. His post came after NATO's new Secretary General Mark Rutte in an interview with the Financial Times warned US President-elect Donald Trump about what he claimed to be a "dire threat" from China, Iran and North Korea if Ukraine is pushed to sign a peace agreement on terms favorable to Russia.

IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK



Iranian, Iraqi, Syrian FMs Hold Talks in Baghdad Amid Onslaught

TEHRAN - The foreign ministers of Iran, Iraq, and Syria have met in the Iraqi capital Baghdad to discuss the latest developments in Syria.

Talks began on Friday afternoon at the Iraqi Foreign Ministry building with Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi, Iraqi Foreign Minister Fuad Hussein, and Syrian Foreign Minister Bassam Sabbagh exchanging views on the situation in Syria.

Speaking to reporters, Araqchi said the unfolding developments in the Arab country necessitate protracted and serious negotiations.

He emphasized that his visit to Baghdad comes as part of his regional tour addressing the recent uptick in acts of terror in northwestern Syria.

Araqchi said the status quo in West Asia, particularly in Syria, is very sensitive, requiring consultations and coordination among all concerned countries.

Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia Al-Sudani later received Araqchi, saying Iraq's official and consistent position is to support Syria's unity, security, and stability.

Sudani said Iraq continues to make vigorous diplomatic efforts to contain the crisis in Syria due to the direct impact which it has on its security.

"What is happening in Syria is inseparable from the events that took place in Gaza and Lebanon, which have threatened the security and stability of the region," he said.

Iranian Ambassador to Iraq Mohammad Kazem Al-e Sadeq described Araqchi's visit as a regional coordination effort to counteract the "wave of terrorism planned by the United States and the Zionist entity".

"The more coordination and cooperation between the countries of the region, the more limited the scope of the crisis in Syria will naturally be," Al-e Sadeq wrote in a post published on his official X account.

Earlier this week, Araqchi traveled to Damascus to meet with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, reaffirming Iran's commitment to supporting Syria in its fight against terrorism.

He also visited Ankara, where discussions with his Turkish counterpart Hakan Fidan focused on counterterrorism efforts and the broader impact of instability in Syria.

Foreign-backed armed opposition groups led by the Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) Takfiri group carried out a surprise assault in the Aleppo and Idlib countryside last month, and overran a number of villages and towns before entering Aleppo on November 27.

Syria has been gripped by foreign-sponsored militancy since March 2011, with Damascus saying the Western states and their regional allies are aiding terrorist groups to wreak havoc in the Arab country.

On Friday Araqchi said Tehran is fully prepared to support the Iraqi government, people and army "to the extent required."

He made the remarks after a meeting with Iraqi President Abdul Latif Rashid on Friday.

"Our goal is to strengthen consultations and coordination in order to support the Syrian

government and people and to achieve greater coordination on political positions," he said.

He added that in talks with Iraqi officials, the sides plan to discuss the latest developments in Syria, noting that the two countries will continue consultations to improve common coordination. He added that the Iraqi president has welcomed the meeting of the foreign ministers of Iran, Iraq, and Syria in Baghdad which focused on the developments in Syria.

The Iraqi president on Friday vowed to continue to work tirelessly to promote international peace and security.

In a meeting with a high-level Iranian delegation led by Araqchi, Latif Rashid reiterated Iraq's dedication to fostering a stable and peaceful environment.

"Iraq is committed to preventing further regional turmoil. The situation in Syria is not only a grave concern globally but also poses significant implications for the Middle East," the president said.

He stressed the need to intensify collective efforts and strengthen coordination to achieve security and stability across the region.

"It is imperative that we stand united to protect Syria's unity, sovereignty and the safety of its people," he said.

"Regional and international consultation must remain ongoing as we develop strategic plans to mitigate the impact of rapidly unfolding events."

According to the report, the Iranian foreign minister commended Iraq's efforts to promote stability and resolve conflicts in the region.

Araqchi highlighted the positive ripple effects of Iraq's leadership in fostering security, political stability and economic prosperity for the people of the West Asia region.

The report said Iraq's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Fuad Hussein was also present in the meeting, which centered on strengthening regional collaboration to address pressing political and security challenges.

It noted that the talks focused on recent developments in the region, with particular attention to the escalating conflict in Syria.

The Iraqi president and Iranian foreign minister expressed their commitment to fostering joint solutions for the region's most critical issues.

In a meeting with the Iranian foreign minister, Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia' Al Sudani said the ongoing developments in Syria are not separated from the events in Gaza and Lebanon which aim to destabilize the region.

"Iraq's official, fixed stance is in support of Syria's unity, security and stability," Sudani added, according to a statement from his office.

The Iraqi prime minister highlighted the importance of respecting Syria's territorial integrity.

He said Baghdad was pressing diplomatic efforts aimed at "containing the crisis in Syria due to its clear impact on Iraqi security."

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - In a milestone for Iran's space sector, a space tug domestically designed and manufactured by Iranian experts and technicians has been launched into space aboard a homegrown satellite launch vehicle (SLV).

The Saman-1, along with a CubeSat and a research payload, was successfully sent into space from the Imam Khomeini Space Launch Terminal, southeast of Semnan, on Friday morning using a Simorgh launcher.

The payloads were placed in an orbit around the Earth, with an apogee of 410 kilometers and a perigee of 300 kilometers.

Simorgh is a two-stage SLV with liquid fuel developed by the Iranian Ministry of Defense.

In its eighth launch, the Simorgh set a new record for the liftoff of payloads. During this multi-phase mission, it successfully placed the Saman-1 orbital transfer block and two other research payloads, weighing nearly 300 kilograms, into orbit.

Designed and developed by technicians from the Iranian Space Research Center (ISRC), the Saman-1 system is designed to place satellites in higher orbits, reducing costs and eliminating the need for large launch vehicles with high fuel consumption.

The space tug was test-launched in October 2022. Reflecting on the system, Hassan Salaryeh, chief of Iran's space agency said that the system "means a quicker and



smoother process of obtaining the orbital point synchronized with the Earth once a satellite elevates its orbital height from the geostationary orbit to the operational one."

One of the payloads of today's launcher was, according to Iranian media, the Fakhr-1 communication satellite. This satellite, developed by experts from the Ministry of Defense's Iran Electronics Industries, was placed into a 410-kilometer orbit.

The nano-satellite, named in honor of the martyred scientist Dr. Mohsen Fakhri-zadeh, has a 3U size and weighs less than 10 kilograms.

One of the goals of this space mission, according to Tasnim News Agency, was to validate the multi-payload

launch capability of the Simorgh launcher.

Key subsystems used in the Fakhr-1 include the central computer, power and energy management, radio communications, and flight dynamics. Most of these components have been indigenously developed by domestic knowledge-based companies and are being launched into space for the first time.

After separation from the launch vehicle, the satellite transmitted telemetry data, including information from its subsystems and sensors. During its first pass, the satellite correctly received and executed commands from ground stations.

Despite sanctions imposed by Western countries in recent years, Iran has taken giant strides in the civilian space program.

Iran Envoy Condemns Israel's Use of White Phosphorus



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's permanent representative to the United Nations has denounced Israel for its use of phosphorus bombs in its wars against Lebanon and Gaza.

Amir Sa'ed Iravani on Thursday asserted that such actions amount to a war crime, urging the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) to initiate an international investigation against the Zionist entity.

He also reaffirmed Iran's commitment to supporting the independent, impartial, and professional work of the OPCW.

"We call for the full, effective, and non-discriminatory implementation of the Convention. Iran will spare no effort to realize the objectives of this vital instrument," Iravani said.

"Second, the Syrian Arab Republic has complied with its obligations under the Convention, having destroyed its chemical weapons stockpiles and production facilities. Also, it continues its constructive engagement with OPCW, demonstrating its steadfast dedication to transparency and full compliance with its responsibilities," he stated.

"In this context, the Syrian National Committee has submitted three comprehensive reports over the past three months. It has participated in the 28th round of consultations with the Declaration Assessment Team and provided requested information, documents, and clarifications to facilitate the resolution of outstanding issues," he added.

"As such, Syria has extended the tripartite agreement with the OPCW and the United Nations Office for Project Services for an additional six months," he said.

"It is essential to recognize the significant progress in Syria's cooperation with the OPCW and ensure that such developments are evaluated fairly and without politicization or bias," he said.

Furthermore, Iravani emphasized Syria's substantial cooperation with the OPCW, which reflects its commitment to transparency and full compliance.

He called upon it to conduct its operations with strict neutrality, professionalism, and a consistent, evidence-based approach to establish facts and reach credible conclusions.

Hezbollah Will Be by Syria's Side Against Aggression



BEIRUT (Dispatches) - The new leader of Lebanon's Hezbollah resistance movement has vowed to continue to support Syria to thwart the recent onslaught launched by the "US-backed" Takfiri terrorists.

"The assault against Syria is sponsored by the US and Israel, the Takfiri groups have always been their tools since 2011 when the crisis began in Syria," Sheikh Naim Qassem said on Thursday.

It came after "their failure in Gaza... and after the agreement on ending the aggression on Lebanon and the failure of the attempts to neutralize Syria," he added.

Sheikh Qassem said the terrorists are trying to overthrow the government in Syria and cause chaos in the country over its support for the resistance, but they "will not be able to achieve their goals despite what they have done in past days."

"We as Hezbollah will be by Syria's side in thwarting the goals of this aggression as much as we can," he added.

Sheikh Qassem warned the Arab regimes which remained silent on the aggression on Gaza and now on the onslaught against Syria that "every gain for Israel is a loss for you as well, and not only a loss for Palestine, Syria and Lebanon and others."

"We are facing a very dangerous expansionist Israeli project in the Middle East."

Terror outfits led by the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) have launched a large-scale assault in Syria, occupying some territories in the northwest of the Arab country.

Syria's armed forces continue to fight the foreign-backed terrorists, inflicting heavy losses on them.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Qassem reiterated that Hezbollah remains "powerful", despite 14 months of fighting with the occupying regime of Israel.

IRAN NEWS



Iran, Turkey Agree Not Only on Syria, But on Many Other Regional Issues

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi in an interview with Al-Arabi Al-Jadeed newspaper, said that Iran and Turkiye agree not only on Syria, but also on many other region issues and beyond, and it is natural to have differences of opinion. "The two countries discuss two types of situations, where we have a consensus, we cooperate. Where we have a difference of opinion, we try to find a solution through dialogue, or if we don't have a solution, we finally understand each other well to avoid misunderstandings," Araqchi said. "I will continue to contact other countries that have influence, or have legitimate and common interests, or common concerns, such as the presence of their nationals in Takfiri groups," he added.

Foreign Investors Require Economic Security, Regulatory Assurance for Investment in Iran



TEHRAN - The President of the Iranian Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines, and Agriculture emphasized the necessity of economic security and regulatory assurance for attracting foreign investors to the country. These factors, he noted, are essential for fostering trust and confidence in Iran's investment environment.

Speaking on Thursday morning at a joint meeting with senior judiciary officials, economic stakeholders, and representatives of specialized commissions at the Mashhad Chamber of Commerce, Samad Hassanzadeh stated that longstanding economic challenges could be resolved through collaboration between government authorities and the private sector.

He acknowledged the consistent efforts of Iranian officials across different administrations in addressing shortcomings and delivering significant services. In the current period, he added, the heads of the three branches of government are working together to minimize the country's economic problems.

Hassanzadeh highlighted the issue of foreign exchange commitments as a major concern for economic actors. He revealed that during a recent meeting with the Central Bank's governor at the Chamber of Commerce, the launch of a foreign exchange trading market in Iran was announced. This initiative aims to allow exporters to sell their currency at fair rates while enabling importers to access needed funds without prolonged delays at the Central Bank.

Addressing issues related to trade regulations, Hassanzadeh stressed the importance of implementing laws and guidelines systematically to prevent misuse of trade licenses, which disrupts the import and export market. He urged for the inclusion of private sector perspectives in drafting regulations and bylaws, highlighting the Chamber's readiness to contribute with its extensive network of 34 provincial chambers, 20 specialized commissions, 49 joint chambers with foreign countries, 260 industry associations, and its economic research center.



Iran and Russia to Ditch the Dollar Soon

TEHRAN - Vladimir Abedinoff, the representative of the Russian Chamber of Commerce in Iran, announced plans to move away from the use of the US dollar in trade between Iran and Russia. Speaking at the first joint session of the Tehran Cooperative Chamber and the Russian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, he highlighted the growing economic collaboration between the two nations and the potential for broader integration through platforms like BRICS.

Abedinoff noted that BRICS members account for 40% of global trade and emphasized the group's aspiration to establish a unified currency. "Iran, alongside other BRICS members, is striving to achieve this goal. We hope to abandon the dollar soon," he said.

Addressing recent developments, Abedinoff acknowledged historical challenges, such as financial and logistical hurdles, that hindered direct cooperation between Iranian and Russian businesses. However, he pointed out that trade between the two countries has grown significantly in recent years, with additional opportunities for expansion on the horizon.

"Iran's membership in BRICS and the 2023 free trade agreement with the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) have created new avenues for collaboration," he said.

The Russian official mentioned that while there is rising demand for Iranian products, logistical and regulatory barriers remain. He cited the high customs tariffs on Iranian carpets in Russia and the re-export of Iranian pistachios through Kazakhstan, which are eventually consumed in the Russian market.

Abedinoff also highlighted the competitive edge of Iranian agricultural products, such as bell peppers and kiwis, which are well-received in Russia. However, he stressed the need to meet Russian standards for appearance and shelf life to compete with exporters from Turkey, Egypt, and South Africa.

When asked about eliminating the US dollar in bilateral trade, Abedinoff described it as a political rather than purely economic decision. "For two years now, we have been conducting official transactions in Iranian rials and Russian rubles, facilitated through the Mir payment system. The move to abandon the dollar aligns with broader BRICS goals of financial independence."

Abedinoff highlighted logistical advancements, noting a 36% increase in

transportation between Iran and Russia through the Astrakhan port in 2024. He expressed optimism about the growing trade volumes and emphasized the importance of overcoming logistical challenges posed by the lack of a shared border.

In conclusion, the Russian Chamber of Commerce representative reaffirmed the commitment of both nations to deepen their economic ties while addressing existing barriers, signaling a shift toward a more diversified and dollar-independent trading framework.

Meanwhile in the meeting, Vahid Hasanzadeh, Secretary of the Tehran Province Cooperative Chamber, stated: "Iran and Russia have developing economies, and both are in need of production. In our country, every year, the Supreme Leader names the year. This year in the Islamic Republic of Iran has been designated as the 'Year of Production Leap,' and our economic growth strategy is focused on production."

He added: "Iran and Russia share a maritime border, and there are significant capacities for transportation in the cooperative sector between the two countries. The door for negotiations is open, and the Cooperative Chamber utilizes its capacities in trade exchanges with Russia."

The Secretary of the Tehran Cooperative Chamber further noted: "In the first quarter of 2024, economic exchanges between the two countries increased by 48%. However, about five countries account for 70% of Russia's trade, and Iran is not among them. Thus, the potential for trade between the two countries has not yet been fully realized. Even activating a small percentage of these untapped potentials would mark a significant step forward in bilateral trade."

Hassanzadeh emphasized: "Russia plans for foreign investment to make up 30% of its GDP by 2027. Considering the importance of investments in both Iran and Russia, the Cooperative Chamber is prepared to send and receive mutual benefits."

He suggested: "It is proposed that a task force be formed to address each economic program individually, with final decisions derived from these task forces. Additionally, Iranian knowledge-based companies possess significant capacities for accessing technology."

Peace: A Pillar for Sustainable Development and Natural Resource Preservation



TEHRAN - The Minister of Agriculture, Jihad of Iran emphasized that terrorism, war, and conflict not only devastate natural resources but also harm human societies, asserting that peace is essential for sustainable development and the preservation of natural resources.

In a statement released by the Ministry of Agriculture, Jihad, during the 16th session of the Conference of the Parties (COP16) to the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) held in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, Minister Gholamreza Nouri expressed his gratitude to the Saudi government and people for hosting this significant event in the beautiful city of Riyadh. He also extended thanks to the convention's secretariat for organizing the conference.

Nouri highlighted the growing challenge of land degradation and desertification globally, stating that effective actions to combat desertification, drought, and the impacts of climate change are more critical than ever. He praised the UNCCD for providing a robust framework for collective international efforts in addressing these global challenges and reaffirmed Iran's commitment to implementing the convention.

As a country in the arid and semi-arid region prone to desertification and drought, Iran has taken significant measures to protect its natural resources. According to Nouri: Approximately 9 million hectares of desert land have been rehabilitated; Iran has created 1.5 million hectares of man-made forests in desert areas, controlled critical wind erosion zones, and implemented watershed management projects across 32 million hectares; and Commercial and industrial exploitation of the Caspian Hyrcanian forests has been prohibited in collaboration with local communities.

Iran's 30-Year Lag in Global Production Chains



TEHRAN - Mirhadi Seyedi, the Advisor for International Affairs and Trade Agreements at Iran's Trade Promotion Organization, emphasized the need to lift sanctions and expand Iran's global relations to modernize its production capabilities. He explained that over the past 30 years, the world has become interconnected, and production processes are now fragmented across multiple countries. Unlike earlier eras when up to 90% of production occurred within a single country, global supply chains now distribute various stages of production to specialized locations worldwide.

Seyedi highlighted that no country can independently manufacture complex products, such as a washing machine, due to the global division of labor. To remain competitive, countries must rely on specialized components from others, as producing everything domestically is often economically unviable.

"The issue is not about lacking the knowledge or skills for production. It's about how economical the production is and whether the product can compete in global markets. Insisting on producing an entire industrial product domestically can push costs higher, making it uncompetitive internationally," he said. Seyedi stressed that mutual collaboration in production is essential, and without facilitating international cooperation, achieving world-class production standards is impossible.

He further pointed out that Iran faces dual challenges: restrictive domestic regulations and international sanctions that hinder global connectivity. Over the past three decades, while global value chains have evolved, Iranian producers have struggled due to limited international access, which hampers their ability to easily collaborate with other countries. Seyedi argued that lifting sanctions and creating a more conducive environment for global cooperation are crucial for Iran to adapt to modern production trends.

When asked whether this perspective challenges the principle of self-sufficiency, Seyedi responded unequivocally: "It absolutely does. In today's world, self-sufficiency holds no value. The focus should be on fostering collaboration and enabling the seamless export and import of goods. In the modern era, self-sufficiency is akin to a self-inflicted wound."

SEO Welcomes Belarusian Investors



TEHRAN - The head of the Securities and Exchange Organization of Iran has announced the readiness of Iran's capital market to welcome Belarusian investors and facilitate the listing of Iranian and Belarusian companies on stock exchanges in both countries.

Hojjatollah Seydi made this announcement during the signing ceremony of a memorandum of cooperation between the Securities and Exchange Organization of Iran and the Belarusian Currency and Stock Exchange on Wednesday. The event, held at the Iranian Securities and Exchange Organization headquarters, highlighted the capabilities and programs of Iran's capital market.

Seydi explained that every investor in the Iranian capital market—whether local or foreign—is assigned a unique stockholding code. Foreign nationals, after completing the necessary procedures and providing their passport details, can apply for this code to participate in trading.

He also announced plans to organize sessions introducing Belarusian investors to Iran's stock exchanges. These sessions, which can take place in either Iran or Belarus, aim to familiarize Belarusian citizens with the four active stock exchanges in Iran and the participating Iranian companies.

Seydi added that Belarusian companies with the potential to list and trade their shares in Iran would also be invited to these discussions. He proposed creating project-specific funds for joint ventures between the two nations, enabling shareholders to benefit from the profits

generated after project completion.

Pavel Limikh, Belarusian Deputy Minister of Finance, expressed strong interest in collaborating with Iran's capital market. He suggested that direct investments by investors in both the Belarusian and Iranian stock exchanges could significantly improve the commercial relationship between the two countries.

Dmitry Koltsov, Belarusian Ambassador to Tehran, echoed this sentiment, stating Belarus's readiness to sign the memorandum and host joint sessions in both countries. He emphasized that this agreement aligns with Belarus's economic development plans, which aim to attract various types of investments.

Koltsov described Iran-Belarus relations as friendly and highlighted the importance of collaboration between their stock exchanges in fostering closer economic ties. The signing of this memorandum, he noted, represents a concrete step toward achieving this goal.

At the conclusion of the ceremony, the Securities and Exchange Organization of Iran and the Belarusian Ministry of Finance signed a memorandum of cooperation. The agreement aims to support investors, enhance capital market synergy, collaborate on derivatives and other financial instruments, exchange expertise, and improve overall market efficiency.

This partnership is expected to strengthen economic ties between the two nations and pave the way for broader investment opportunities.

Efforts Needed to Reduce Iran-Vietnam Trade Costs through Alternative Mechanisms



TEHRAN - The Vice President of Iran's Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines, and Agriculture highlighted that issues in banking exchanges and transportation between Iran and Vietnam have increased the cost of trade between the two countries.

Speaking at the Iran-Vietnam Business Forum, hosted by the Vietnam Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Hanoi, Ghadir Ghiyafeh stated that utilizing alternative mechanisms could help overcome the existing trade barriers.

Referring to the \$200 million trade volume between Iran and Vietnam, he emphasized that this figure has the potential to increase significantly given the capacities of both countries. However, this requires comprehensive planning, the facilitation of information exchange, and the adoption of modern technologies.

As the leader of the Iranian trade delegation to Vietnam, Ghiyafeh outlined the key objectives of the visit, including identifying economic and legal opportunities, drafting new strategies, and fostering joint ventures. He elaborated that both nations possess significant prospects for cooperation in renewable energy, technology transfer, technical training, food and agricultural industries, as well as boosting production and exports of complementary products, promoting tourism, expanding technical and engineering services, encouraging joint investments, and establishing manufacturing units to export to regional and global markets.

Ghiyafeh emphasized Iran's strategic geographic location, large market, and proximity to 15 neighboring countries, which offer considerable potential in diverse sectors such as energy, petrochemicals, mining, agriculture, tourism, medical equipment, and advanced technologies. Meanwhile, Vietnam, with its successful transition from a centralized to a free-market economy and its rapid growth in international trade, has become a regional hub for electronic and industrial production. This diversity creates unique opportunities for economic collaboration.

Mexico Seeks Deal With Trump

MEXICO CITY (Dispatches) - Mexico is seeking an agreement with U.S. President-elect Donald Trump to ensure it does not receive deportees from third countries in case of large-scale deportations of migrants from the United States, President Claudia Sheinbaum said on Thursday.

The Bahamas rejected taking third-country deportees if Trump carries out his promised vast crackdown on immigrants in the U.S. illegally after he comes to office on Jan. 20. Trump's incoming vice president, JD Vance, has floated the possibility of deporting 1 million people a year.

The Trump transition team has discussed deporting migrants to places other than their home country if those nations will not accept them, two sources familiar with the matter told Reuters.



IRAN NEWS

Lavrov Signals Readiness to Use Any Means in Ukraine Conflict



VALLETA (Dispatches) - Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, in an interview broadcast on Thursday, said the use of a hypersonic missile in the Ukraine war sought to make the West understand that Moscow was ready to use any means to ensure no "strategic defeat" would be inflicted on Moscow.

Russia deployed the Oreshnik hypersonic missile against the Ukrainian city of Dnipro last month in what Kremlin leader Vladimir Putin described as a test of a missile he said could not be brought down. He said Russia could bring other such missiles into action in "combat conditions" if required.

"The message is that you, I mean the U.S. and the allies of the U.S., who also provide these long-range weapons to the Kyiv regime - they must understand that we would be ready to use any means not to allow them to succeed in what they call a strategic defeat of Russia," Lavrov told U.S. journalist Tucker Carlson.

"They fight for keeping their hegemony over the world, on any country, any region, any continent. We fight for our legitimate security interests."

Speaking in English, Lavrov said the West had refused to discuss upholding security guarantees for Russia in the weeks and months before the February 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine, called a "special military operation" in Moscow.

As Russian troops massed on the Ukrainian border in early 2022, Western leaders urged Moscow not to invade its smaller neighbour. French President Emmanuel Macron met Putin three weeks before the invasion, saying he had received assurances that Russia would take no action to worsen the situation.

In his comments, Lavrov said Ukraine had lost the opportunity to maintain its territorial integrity by twice rejecting proposals for a deal, once before the full-scale war began and then in talks in April 2022 in Turkey.

"We did not start this war. We had been for years and years and years sending warnings that pushing NATO closer and closer to our borders is going to create a problem," he said.

Thousands Rally in Romania in Support of Pro-European Presidential Candidate



BUCHAREST (Dispatches) - Several thousand rallied in Romania on Thursday in support of a pro-European presidential candidate a few days before key elections, fearing their democratic rights were under threat.

Around 3,000 gathered at University Square in the capital Bucharest, waving European Union flags and chanting "Freedom" and "Europe".

In the first-round on November 24, far right outsider Calin Georgescu, a past admirer of Russian President Vladimir Putin, took the most votes, sparking fears about the future of the EU and NATO member and triggering protests especially among young people.

Georgescu is to face Elena Lasconi, the leader of the centrist, pro-EU USR party, in a run-off on Sunday.

"I fear that democracy is going to disappear in this country and this is what I don't want," said Liliana Rotaru, who works in the banking sector.



AMMAN (Dispatches) - Syrian rebels captured the city of Hama on Thursday, a major victory in a week-old lightning advance across northern Syria and a devastating new blow to President Bashar al-Assad.

After years locked behind frozen frontlines, the rebels have burst forth to mount the swiftest battlefield advance by either side since a rebellion against Assad descended into civil war 13 years ago. The capture of Hama gives them control of a strategic central city they never managed to seize before.

The Syrian army said it was redeploying outside the city "to preserve civilian lives and prevent urban combat" after what it called intense clashes.

Rebels were seen on television parading through Hama into the evening to the sound of celebratory gunfire. Other footage showed detainees pouring out of the city prison after rebels freed them.

The insurgents said they were ready to march on south towards Homs, a crossroads city that links the capital Damascus to the north and to the coast. "Your time has come," said a rebel operations room in an online post, calling on Homs residents to rise up in revolution.

Al Jazeera television broadcast images of rebels inside Hama, some of them greeting civilians near a roundabout while others drove in military vehicles and on mopeds.

The rebels took the main northern city of Aleppo last week and have since pushed south from their enclave in northwest Syria. Fighting has raged around villages outside Hama for two days but once rebels entered the city the battle ended in hours.

The collapse of Syrian government control in the north has sharply illustrated a shift in the balance of power since Lebanon's Hezbollah group, a lynchpin of Assad's battlefield force, suffered catastrophic losses in its war with Israel.

Russia has been focused on the war in Ukraine since 2022, and many in the top leadership of Hezbollah, the most powerful Iran-aligned force, were killed by Israel over the past two months. The group's new leader, Naim Qassem, pledged to stand by Syria in a television statement.

The main insurgent commander, Abu Mohammed al-Golani, declared full rebel control over Hama on Thursday and issued a video statement warning against any involvement by another Iran-aligned force - Iraq's Hashd al-Shaabi paramilitary coalition.

Some Iraqi fighters entered Syria early this week to support Assad, Iraqi and Syrian sources said. The Hashd al-Shaabi has mobilised along the border with Syria, saying this was purely preventative in case of spillover into Iraq.

"We urge him (Iraq's prime minister) again to keep Iraq away from entering into the flames of a new war tied to what is happening in Syria," Golani said.

Hama lies more than a third of the way from Aleppo to Damascus and its capture will hinder any quick attempt by Assad and his allies to launch a counteroffensive against rebel gains of the past week.

A rebel advance on Homs, 40 km (24 miles) south of Hama, could meanwhile cut Damascus off from the coastal region, a stronghold of Assad's Alawite sect and where his Russian allies have a naval base and airbase.

"Assad now cannot afford to lose anything else. The big battle is the one coming against Homs. If Homs falls, we are talking of a potential change of regime," said Jihad Yazigi, editor of the Syria Report newsletter.

Hama is also critical to control of two major towns with big minority communities. Muhrada, home to many Christians, still held out against rebels on Thursday. Salamiya, where there are many Ismaili Muslims, accepted rebel control, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights war monitor said.

Although rebels had not previously taken control of Hama, it was historically a centre of opposition to the Assad dynasty. In 1982 Muslim Brotherhood activists rose up in revolt against Assad's father there and the military launched a devastating three-week counter-assault that killed more than 10,000 people.

Golani referred to that bloody episode in his statement: "The revolutionaries have begun entering the city of Hama to cleanse that wound that has persisted in Syria for 40 years."

However, he added that rebels taking Hama would not exact revenge for the events of 1982.

The most powerful rebel faction is Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), a former al Qaeda affiliate in Syria that is still listed as a terrorist group by Turkey and the West. Golani, its leader, has vowed to protect Syria's religious minorities and has urged them to abandon Assad, but many remain fearful of the insurgents.

In public remarks clearly intended to soften his image and reassure foreign countries, Golani has also emphasized his split years ago with Al Qaeda and Islamic State, and said he has always opposed attacks outside Syria.

HTS and the other rebel groups are trying to consolidate their rule in Aleppo, bringing it under the administration of the so-called Salvation Government they established in their northwestern enclave.

Aleppo residents have said there are shortages of bread and fuel, and that phone services have been cut. The U.N. food agency said the latest bout of fighting had displaced 280,000 people.

South Korea's Ruling Party Demands President Yoon Step Down

SEOUL (Dispatches) - South Korea's ruling party chief demanded Friday that President Yoon Suk Yeol step down over his martial law attempt, warning he posed a great danger to the country.

The stunning comments from Han Dong-hoon, the head of Yoon's People Power Party, almost guarantees enough lawmakers will vote to impeach the president on Saturday.

Han's comments were a U-turn from Thursday, when he said he would block the impeachment, and another party leader insisted all 108 members of the PPP would unite to support Yoon in Saturday's vote.

But Han said Friday that Yoon's refusal to acknowledge he had done anything wrong in declaring martial law on Tuesday night had prompted his change of position.

"Considering the newly emerging facts, I believe that a swift suspension of President Yoon Suk Yeol's duties is necessary to safeguard the Republic of Korea and its people," Han said.

Han said Yoon had not taken any personnel actions against military officials who had "illegally intervened".

"Furthermore, he does not acknowledge that this illegal martial law is wrong," he said.

"Therefore, if President Yoon continues to hold the office of the presidency, there is a significant risk that extreme actions similar to the current state of emergency could be repeated, which could put the Republic of Korea and its citizens in great danger."



Yoon suspended civilian rule late Tuesday and deployed troops and helicopters to parliament only for lawmakers to vote down the measure and force him into a U-turn in a night of protests and drama.

Seoul's allies were alarmed -- Washington said it found out via television -- and the opposition quickly filed an impeachment motion saying Yoon "gravely violated the constitution and the law". A vote is set for Saturday at around 7:00 pm (1000 GMT).

The opposition holds a large majority in the 300-member legislature and requires only a handful of defections from the PPP to secure the two-thirds majority needed for impeachment.

According to a poll issued Thursday by Realmeter, 73.6 percent of respondents supported the impeachment.

Thousands of protesters continued to rally in central Seoul and near the parliament on Thursday evening demanding the president step down.

If the impeachment motion passes, Yoon will be suspended pending a verdict by the Constitutional Court. If the judges give the nod, Yoon will be impeached and new elections must take place within 60 days.

Yoon, who has lurched from crisis to crisis since taking office in 2022, has not been seen in public since his televised address in the early hours of Wednesday.

On Thursday, his office said that Defence Minister Kim Yong-hyun had resigned, but other key allies, including Interior Minister Lee Sang-min, remain in office.

Prosecutors have also banned Kim from leaving the country, Yonhap news agency reported.

Lawmakers on Thursday grilled senior figures, including army chief of staff General Park An-su, who acted as Yoon's martial law commander.

Park said he was kept in the dark until after the president had announced the imposition of martial law on live television late Tuesday.

It was the first such declaration in more than four decades in South Korea and brought back painful memories of its autocratic past.

The move was to "safeguard a liberal South Korea from the threats posed by North Korea's communist forces and to eliminate anti-state elements plundering people's freedom and happiness," Yoon said.

Macron to Appoint a New PM in the Coming Days

PARIS (Dispatches) - French President Emmanuel Macron will appoint a new prime minister in the coming days whose top priority will be getting a 2025 budget adopted by parliament, he said on Thursday after the government was toppled by lawmakers.

Michel Barnier, a veteran conservative, became the shortest-serving prime minister in modern French history when he resigned on Thursday after parliament voted him out over his fiscal plans, barely three months after he was appointed.

In a televised address to the nation, Macron said he would name a successor to Barnier "in the coming days."

"The priority will be the budget," Macron said.

A special law to roll over the 2024 budget and avoid any gap will be put forward by mid-December. Then the new government will prepare a full budget early next year, in particular to account for inflation, for a vote by parliament.

Macron, whose ill-fated decision to call a snap ballot in June delivered a much-divided parliament, denied he was responsible for the political crisis.

The president, who represents a centrist party, said the far-right and left-wing parties united in an "anti-republican front" to create "a mess" by ousting Barnier.

Macron has been weakened by the crisis but resisted calls by some in the



opposition for him to resign. He reaffirmed that he will stay in office until his term ends in May 2027.

"The mandate you have given me is for five years and I will fulfil it until the very end," he said.

In a 10-minute speech, he added that the new government should represent a variety of parties willing to take part in it or at least agree not to censure it. He did not say which ones.

Meanwhile, Macron has asked Barnier and his government to stay in a caretaker capacity until a new government is formed.

It was unclear if a new government will be in place before a ceremony on Saturday to reopen Notre-Dame Cathedral, which has been renovated after a devastating fire. World leaders including U.S. President-elect Donald Trump are expected to attend.

Macron cited the rebuilding of the Gothic cathedral and successful Paris Olympics over the summer as evidence that France can deliver.

"They are proof that we can do great things. We can do the impossible," he said. "The world admires us for that."

Macron had lunch on Thursday with Francois Bayrou, whose name has been cited by French media as a possible successor to Barnier, Le Parisien newspaper reported. An aide to Bayrou did not respond to a request for comment.

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Website: <http://www.irannewsdaily.com>
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ISSN 1024-6053 P.O. Box: 15875-8551
Address: No 13, Pajouhesh St., Golestan II St, Golestan

St. Marzadaran Blvd., Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran
Iran Distributed by: Cities of Iran Cultural and Artistic Institute
Managing Director: Fereydoon Taherpour Asl



Liverpool Held in 3-3 Newcastle Thriller

LONDON (Dispatches) - Liverpool's Premier League lead was cut to seven points by Arsenal and Chelsea after the Reds conceded a 90th-minute equalizer in a thrilling 3-3 draw at Newcastle. Chelsea thrashed 10-man Southampton 5-1 to go second on goal difference ahead of Arsenal, who beat Manchester United 2-0. Manchester City snapped their seven-game winless run by beating Nottingham Forest 3-0 to go fourth. Mohamed Salah's second-half double was not enough to extend Liverpool's seven-game winning run in all competitions as they failed to win for just the third time in 21 games under Arne Slot. Twice the league leaders were forced to come from behind at St James' Park as Alexander Isak blasted Newcastle into a 1-0 half-time lead. Curtis Jones levelled before Anthony Gordon restored Newcastle's lead. Salah twice converted Trent Alexander-Arnold assists to turn the game around, taking his tally for the season to 15 goals. However, there was a late sting in the tale as a rare error from Liverpool goalkeeper Caoimhin Kelleher allowed Fabian Schar to squeeze in a late equaliser for the Magpies. "He has done remarkably well for us and even today he was good. Unfortunately, he misjudged the situation," Liverpool boss Slot said of Kelleher's blunder. Arsenal took full advantage by inflicting Ruben Amorim's first defeat as Manchester United boss. Once again, the Gunners were able to rely on their prowess from set-pieces to get the job done. Jurrien Timber broke the deadlock, heading in Declan Rice's corner nine minutes into the second half.

William Saliba did not know much about the second, as he diverted in Thomas Partey's header from Bukayo Saka's corner, but the Frenchman did not care as Arsenal had the breathing space they craved. A fourth consecutive win in all competitions confirmed Arsenal's return to form and applied a little pressure on Liverpool. "A special day. It's a joy to play in this stadium with that energy, it's something incredible," Arteta said. "We scored two set-pieces, but we could've scored from open play many more." Amorim added: "The set-pieces killed the game. They can put a lot of players near the goalkeeper and it's almost impossible to fight for the ball. "We already know we have to be better." Chelsea put bottom-of-the-table Southampton to the sword at St Mary's even before the hosts were reduced to 10 men when Jack Stephens pulled Marc Cucurella's hair. Axel Disasi's early opener for the Blues was cancelled out by Joe Aribo. But Christopher Nkunku pounced on sloppy Southampton passing from the back to make it 2-1 before Noni Madueke added a third. Stephens then saw red in a bizarre incident as he jostled with Cucurella from a Saints corner. Cole Palmer made sure he got in on the act with Chelsea's fourth before Jadon Sancho's first goal since his loan move from Manchester United rounded off the scoring. City bounced back from their barren run thanks to Kevin De Bruyne's return to the starting line-up for the first time in nearly three months.



Dutch Grand Prix to Wrap Up in 2026

THE HAGUE (Dispatches) - The home Grand Prix of Formula One's Dutch World Champion Max Verstappen will come to an end in 2026, organizers said. "We have decided to go out on a high with two more incredible Dutch Grands Prix in 2025 and 2026," GP director Robert van Overdijk said in a statement. The Dutch Grand Prix has been held since 2021 in the windswept seaside resort of Zandvoort on the North Sea coast. Hundreds of thousands of orange-clad Dutch F1 fans cram into the small town to cheer on their hero Verstappen who, until this year, won every race on his home track. This year's edition saw a minor speed bump on his drive towards the World Championship, as he endured a miserable weekend in changeable weather, losing out to McLaren's Lando Norris. Van Overdijk told national broadcaster NOS said there were "various options on the table" to continue holding the Dutch GP, as Formula One looks to expand into new markets. "We could have rotated with other circuits, there was also the possibility to continue annually," said Van Overdijk. But in the end, the decision was taken to end the race after the 2026 edition, he said. "We're going out with a bang. Of course it also makes us a bit sad, but more than anything else, we're proud." He acknowledged the role that Verstappen — "in my mind the greatest Dutch sporting star ever" — had played in the success of the Grand Prix.

Grizzlies' Bench Strength Evident in Victory Over Kings

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - The Memphis Grizzlies got 60 points from their reserves and survived losing star Ja Morant to a late-game ejection in defeating the visiting Sacramento Kings 115-110. Marcus Smart had 18 points off the bench and starter Desmond Bane also scored 18 to lead the Grizzlies, who won their sixth consecutive home game. Santi Aldama contributed 15 points and 10 rebounds, and fellow reserve Jake LaRavia finished with 12 points and eight boards. Sacramento was led by DeMar DeRozan, who had a game-high 26 points, and Malik Monk, who scored 23. De'Aaron Fox had 18 points, six rebounds and six steals, and Domantas Sabonis added 17 points, 13 rebounds and six assists.

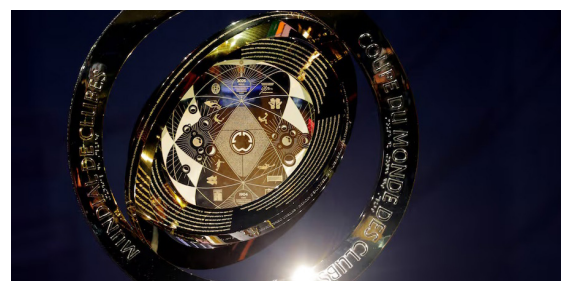


Morant was ejected from the game after his second technical during a span of 82 seconds in the fourth quarter. His second technical came after a questionable Morant shooting foul guarding DeRozan with 6:45 remaining and the Grizzlies leading 98-97. The ejection ended a difficult night for Morant, who went 2-of-13 shooting, including 0 of 6 from beyond the arc, and scored only eight points in 28 minutes. The Kings led early in the fourth quarter, but Memphis rallied late behind Bane and the reserves. Bane hit a pullup jumper for a 112-108 lead with 1:33 to go, and Smart made 3 of 4 free-throw attempts in the final 1:18. Sacramento had its moments earlier in the game. The Kings pushed ahead 78-71 with six minutes to go in the third. The Grizzlies --

powered by their reserves -- then put together a 15-0 run, matching their longest of the season, to go up 86-78. Three-pointers by Bane and Aldama helped power the run. But the Kings closed the quarter strong, reeling off the final eight points to tie the game at 86 entering the final period. The first half was just as close. The Grizzlies trailed by 12 midway through the second quarter after Monk drained a 3-pointer for the Kings for a 56-44 lead. But Smart helped the Grizzlies closed the half on a 16-4 run to give Memphis a 63-62 advantage at the break. Smart had 11 of the bench's 34 first-half points and four assists. The Grizzlies, who didn't have the services of Luke Kennard (illness), were hoping to get 7-foot-4 rookie center Zach Edey back by next week. But after a workout with the franchise's G-League team, the Grizzlies determined Edey's ankle would require additional time to heal.

Meanwhile Nikola Vucevic poured in a season-high 39 points and Ayo Dosunmu added a season-best 27 points to go with 11 assists and 10 rebounds for his first career triple-double as the visiting Chicago Bulls defeated the San Antonio Spurs 139-124. The Bulls led by 11 points heading into the fourth quarter after fending off a tepid San Antonio run late in the third period. The Spurs pared the margin to 130-122 on two Keldon Johnson free throws with 3:18 remaining, but Chicago reeled off nine straight points, capped by Vucevic's banked layup with 1:31 left, to cement the win. Talen Horton-Tucker scored 13 points for the Bulls, who won their second game in a row. Zach LaVine had 11 points, nine rebounds and nine assists, Dalen Terry hit for 12 points and Matas Buzelis added 11. Johnson logged 28 points off the bench for the Spurs. Devin Vassell had 17 points, Jeremy Sochan amassed 16 points and 14 rebounds, and Chris Paul, Stephon Castle and Julian Champagne scored 12 points apiece. Paul dished out nine assists. San Antonio played without star center Victor Wembanyama (sore back) and dropped its second straight game and third in its past four. The Bulls owned the first quarter, taking a 36-22 lead behind 11 points from Dosunmu. Chicago pushed the gap to 20 points on Buzelis' dunk with 2:43 remaining in the second quarter. Charles Basssey's floating jumper with 14.9 seconds left brought the Spurs to within 14, before Vucevic's putback layup in the final second granted the visitors a 73-57 advantage at the break.

Man City to Face Juventus in Club World Cup Group Stage



LONDON (Dispatches) - Premier League champions Manchester City were drawn on Thursday with Juventus, Wydad AC and Al Ain in Group G for next year's FIFA Club World Cup in the United States. Lionel Messi and Major League Soccer's Inter Miami are in Group A and will face Al Ahly in the opening match of the expanded 32-team tournament before games against Porto and Palmeiras. The tournament, featuring top teams from around the world, will be held in 12 stadiums around the country from June 15-July 13 and serve as a dress rehearsal for the 2026 World Cup co-hosted by the U.S. Mexico and Canada. Manchester City won the most recent Club World Cup in 2023 under the old format and sit fourth in the Premier League after being hit hard by injuries to key players such as Spanish midfielder and Ballon d'Or winner Rodri. City, who this year won an unprecedented fourth straight English top-flight title, will face Wydad AC in their opening match and Al Ain before closing out the group stage against Juventus.

Miami were the penultimate team added to the tournament after winning the "Supporters' Shield" for finishing top of the MLS standings in the regular season before losing in the first round of the MLS playoffs last month. European champions Real Madrid will face Al-Hilal, Pachuca and Red Bull Salzburg in Group H while Bayern Munich were placed in Group C along with Auckland City, Boca Juniors and Benfica. Three-times European champions Inter Milan landed in Group E along with River Plate, Urawa Red Diamonds and Monterrey while Paris St Germain, who this year won a third consecutive French top-flight title, are in Group B with Atletico Madrid, Botafogo and Seattle Sounders. Brazilian side Botafogo only secured the final spot in the tournament last week by winning their first Copa Libertadores title. Chelsea will begin Group D play against Leon before facing Flamengo and Esperance, while Group F is made up of Fluminense, Borussia Dortmund, Ulsan HD and Mamelodi Sundowns. The draw, conducted by Italian World Cup winner and former Juventus great Alessandro Del Piero, included a recorded message from U.S. President-elect Donald Trump in which he complimented FIFA President Gianni Infantino. "The event is going to be incredible. I will try and be there. If I can I would, we'll see what happens," Trump said.

Accusations Fly as Russell and Verstappen Row Rocks F1

ABU DHABI (Dispatches) - Simmering bad blood between Formula One rivals Max Verstappen and George Russell exploded into angry accusations of bullying and lying ahead of the season-ending Abu Dhabi Grand Prix. Verstappen said in Qatar last weekend that he had lost all respect for Russell after stewards stripped Red Bull's quadruple champion of pole position and promoted his Mercedes rival to the top slot. In one of the sport's biggest driver bust-ups in years, likely to be lapped up by fans of the Netflix 'Drive to Survive' docu-series, the Dutch 27-year-old accused Russell, 26, of lying to secure an advantage. Dutch reporters said Verstappen, who ultimately won Sunday's race with Russell fourth, also referred to the Briton as a 'loser'. Russell responded in an extraordinary session with reporters inside the Mercedes hospitality at Yas Marina, with team boss Toto Wolff standing at his side and throwing his own barbs at Red Bull boss Christian Horner. The angry Mercedes driver accused Verstappen of threatening behaviour, said he had crossed a line and it was time to stand up and set the record straight "about someone who thinks he's above the law." "I've known Max for a long time and I know what he's capable of," said Russell. "He said to me he's going to purposely go out of his way to crash into me. Russell said he had thought it was a heat of the moment thing but the next day felt Verstappen meant it when he saw "the fire in his



eyes. "Someone needs to stand up to a bully like this -- and so far people are letting him get away with murder," he told Sky Sports television separately. Russell said team mate Lewis Hamilton, who was denied an eighth world championship by Verstappen in a controversial 2021 finale in Abu Dhabi, was the kind of champion he aspired to be. He suggested former FIA race director Michael Masi, who lost his job after changing the safety car procedure at the end of the 2021 race, would have feared for his life had Verstappen not won that day. "I'm not questioning his driving abilities one single bit. But the second, he does not have the fastest car -- let's take Budapest as an example. He crashes into Lewis, he slams his whole team and he loses the plot," he said. Russell also said he "knew for a fact" that a quarter of Verstappen's engineering team had sent out their CVs to Mercedes-powered rivals. Verstappen said Russell's behaviour in the stewards' room had shocked him. "I just never expected someone to really try and actively get someone a penalty that badly, and lying about why I was doing what I was doing," he said. "It was just really not nice and actually really shocking what was going on there."