

President Masoud Pezeshkian Has Congratulated the Emir and the People of Qatar on the Occasion of the Country's National Day Which Falls on December 18 This Year

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Iran's Nuclear Technology Will Never Be Limited



TEHRAN - Mohammad Eslami, during a ceremony commemorating the martyrs of the Al-Aqsa Storm in Isfahan, stated that "the power of today's nations is based on science and technology." He expressed that science and technology are among the main factors contributing to power and sovereignty; a country that can pursue its development without dependency on others, especially the dominant system, will be able to maintain its independence and progress.

He emphasized that a country lacking modern science and technology will definitely suffer setbacks, adding that the proud armed forces of the country might be caught off guard if they are not equipped with advanced sciences and technologies.

The head of the Atomic Energy Organization reminded that "since the victory of the Islamic Revolution, our country has always faced sanctions." He clarified that these sanctions have been imposed due to the nation's noncompliance with the dominant system and its steadfastness on the principles of the revolution, including independence, freedom, and the Islamic Republic.

He further added that advanced sciences and technologies in the fields of nuclear energy, aerospace, information technology, nanotechnology, and biotechnology are power-generating and sovereignty-building; these are usually monopolized by the dominant system. Entering these fields for independent countries is often accompanied by conditions, but our country, whose people have paid a heavy price for independence, freedom, and the Islamic Republic, cannot be subservient to the dominant system and accept its conditions.

In another part of his speech, the Vice President remarked, "What position do international organizations that have repeatedly taken a stance against the Islamic Republic now have regarding these crimes? What role can they play? Can we place our hopes in the United Nations and the Security Council?" He continued that during a recent vote in the UN General Assembly, 167 countries voted in favor of the Palestinian people's right to establish an independent government, while only the United States and at most five other countries opposed it. Nevertheless, today, this small number holds a decisive role in international affairs, and the majority vote of the world's countries is effectively ignored.

Negotiations With Russia for Astara Railway Contract Continue



TEHRAN - Saeed Rasouli, the head of the Transportation Department at the Ministry of Roads and Urban Development, spoke to reporters during a visit to a transportation exhibition. He emphasized the necessity of adhering to and implementing a comprehensive transportation plan, which should be land-use oriented. Currently, the outline and framework of the plan are clear, and during this period, the goal is to maintain continuous and strong communication with stakeholders to execute this comprehensive plan. He noted that this is not just a government initiative but a plan for the transportation sector, primarily involving non-governmental players whose opinions must be considered. A group of academics and specialists in this transportation field is active, and their input is essential.



The One to Be Rooted Out Will Be Israel, Says Leader

TEHRAN - In a significant address, the Supreme Leader of Iran, Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, emphasized the role of women in Islam while addressing thousands of women and girls. He hailed Fatimah Zahra (peace be upon her) as one of the wonders of creation and reiterated fundamental principles of Islamic teachings regarding women. He highlighted that in Islam, men and women complement one another, and both are equal in their pursuit of a pious life, intellectual abilities, and contributions to various fields such as science, culture, art, social-political engagement, economic activities, and international affairs.

During the session, which was marked by enthusiasm and devotion, the supreme leader acknowledged the continued atrocities committed by the Israeli regime and the United States in the region, alongside the assistance of some collaborators. He stated, "The Israeli regime believes it can encircle and eradicate Hezbollah forces through Syria, but the one that will be rooted out is Israel itself."

Commenting the occasion for honoring the birth of Fatimah Zahra (peace be upon her), Khamenei also expressed gratitude for the insights shared by seven women in the gathering on topics such as safeguarding families in cyberspace, population growth, women's issues in the arts, and facilitating marriage. He urged relevant authorities to consider these valuable points seriously.

Ayatollah Khamenei elaborated on the unique attributes of Fatimah Zahra (peace be upon her), acknowledging her deep spiritual connection, her partnership in challenging circumstances with the Prophet Muhammad, her contributions to the struggles alongside her husband Imam Ali, her remarkable piety in worship, and her eloquent speeches. He declared that she represents the ultimate role model for Muslim women throughout her life stages.

Touching upon various global perspectives regarding women, Ayatollah Khamenei criticized capitalist entities and politicians for exploiting media to promote deceptive messages under the guise of philosophical or humanitarian ideologies. He lamented how, historically, these figures have concealed their corrupt motives, such as drawing women into factories under the pretext of freedom and independence. He cited the hidden agenda of past movements, like the call for the freedom of American slaves, as a means to transfer them from southern plantations to northern

factories, highlighting that today's feminist slogans often mask similar ulterior goals. He noted that it is vital to articulate the Islamic perspective on women to enhance public understanding. He declared the concept of partnership between men and women as foundational within Islamic teachings, based on numerous Quranic verses suggesting that they are complementary to each other, resulting in the family unit as a third entity—a divine creation that is cherished within Iranian culture.

The leader asserted that Islam sees no difference in spiritual and existential growth for men and women despite physical distinctions. He remarked that both possess infinite capabilities, allowing women to participate actively in diverse sectors, political, social, economic, and artistic alike.

He countered interpretations positioning differing family roles as indicators of superiority, stating both genders enjoy equal rights and that Islam views women as delicate flowers that need nurturing. Ayatollah Khamenei also stressed that restrictions on interactions between men and women are well-founded in Islam, addressing issues of hijab, modesty, and respect.

Highlighting the invaluable role of motherhood in Islamic thought, he criticized negative portrayals of motherhood propagated by capitalist agendas. The leader emphasized that the role of a mother in raising a child is fundamentally honored and treasured in Islam, often expressed through teachings encouraging respect and obedience to mothers.

He recognized women's significant roles in political arenas, defending their homeland, and maintaining their cultural identity with modesty and dignity. Encouraging the community of women to resist adversarial soft warfare strategies aimed at undermining these values, Khamenei called for collective vigilance.

In concluding his remarks, he addressed regional issues, asserting the resilience against the adversities posed by the Israeli regime and the U.S. He remarked on the ongoing resistance by Gaza and Lebanon, stating, "The Israeli regime mistakenly believes it is preparing to encircle and eradicate Hezbollah via Syria, but it is Israel itself that will face eradication."

Ayatollah Khamenei reiterated Iran's commitment to supporting Palestinian fighters and Hezbollah, expressing hope that one day they would witness the downfall of the malevolent enemy.

Iran Embassy in Syria to Reopen Once Necessary Conditions Met

TEHRAN - The spokesman for the Iranian Foreign Ministry says the reopening of the country's embassy in the Syrian capital of Damascus is "high on the agenda," adding that the diplomatic mission will resume its activities once the "necessary conditions" are met.

"The reopening of the embassy in Damascus requires preparations, the most important of which is ensuring the security and safety of the embassy and its staff," Esmail Baqaei said at a weekly press briefing in the capital Tehran.

He did not provide a specific timeline, but added that Iran will work toward the objective "as soon as the necessary conditions are provided."

Baqaei said that the deployment of Iranian military advisers to Syria was fundamental and anchored in certain principles, while their departure was also a responsible move.

"We were neither seeking to conquer Syria nor to revive past empires. What was important in Syria was to help ensure public safety and security against terrorism."

"We were there for such a purpose and at the invitation of the [former] Syrian government. We were not in Syria to support a specific individual or group. It was important for us to help safeguard the territorial integrity of Syria until the last moment. We believe that prevalence of security in regional countries will guarantee security in West Asia," the Iranian diplomat stated.



He went on to denounce recent Israeli acts of aggression against Syria, stating that the Arab nation's territorial integrity has been undermined and portions of its territory have been occupied in blatant violation of UN Security Council resolutions.

Tiring to the ongoing genocidal war on Gaza, Baqaei noted that the United States and Germany are supplying 99% of the weapons exported to the Israeli-occupied territories, criticizing the two Western countries as complicit in Israel's atrocities in the besieged coastal sliver.

The Iranian diplomat also called for urgent action on the part of the global community in order to halt the genocide in Gaza, and to prosecute and punish the leaders of the occupying Israeli regime for committing heinous crimes.

He noted that the International Criminal Court (ICC) has issued prosecution and arrest orders for senior Israeli officials on charges of perpetrating war crimes and crimes against humanity.

The senior Iranian official stressed that the member states of the Hague-based court are obligated to implement the arrest warrants, ensure compliance with international humanitarian law and prohibit genocide.

Disrespect for Others' Rights Causing Social Divisions



TEHRAN - The President described justice as a fundamental principle of faith and stated that current social conflicts stem from a lack of respect for the rights of others. He emphasized that if society acts based on justice and fairness, no problems will arise.

In his remarks during the closing ceremony of the 15th International Farabi Festival at the Summit Hall, Masoud Pezeshkian highlighted that all disputes, injustices, and inequities in society occur because individuals are not satisfied with their own rights and overstep others' rights. "Our present conflicts arise from a failure to respect the rights of others," he said.

The President pointed out that religious principles teach us that the world has a creator and purpose, and we are here for a specific mission. He stressed the importance of instilling the belief that existence has been created by a power that has designed humanity's purpose. The Earth is made for humanity, which is meant to pursue knowledge and act with sincerity for the sake of God.

He referred to Maslow's hierarchy, explaining that as individuals ascend the pyramid, they detach from self-centeredness and the material world, ultimately reaching a state where their beliefs and way of life are aligned with humanity, justice, and fairness.

Pezeshkian asserted that addressing social issues is possible through choosing the right path and engaging sincerely with the public. He remarked that current social challenges—whether social, ethical, or behavioral—result from an inability to implement effective educational methods. "You cannot reform people just by issuing orders and prohibitions," he noted.

He stressed that societal dissatisfaction stems from the failure to uphold justice and the prevalence of oppression, warning that injustice towards people brings divine punishment.

U.S.-UK Aggression on Yemen Blatant Breach of Int'l Law



TEHRAN (Dispatches) - The spokesman for Iran's Foreign Ministry has condemned in the strongest terms a new act of aggression by the United States and Britain against several areas in northwestern Yemen.

In a statement, Esmail Baghaei said the U.S. and Britain continue to carry out joint military aggression against Yemen simultaneous with the two countries' unwavering support for the Israeli regime's genocidal war against the Palestinians in Gaza.

He added that such attacks are a blatant violation of international law and the United Nations Charter by two permanent members of the UN Security Council.

Baghaei praised "honorable" support and solidarity of the Yemeni people for the Palestinians in the face of the Israeli regime's occupation and massacre.

The Iranian spokesman called on the international community and global circles as well as Muslim countries to fulfill their legal and human duties to support the oppressed people of Yemen and oppose the US-UK military aggression and destabilizing moves in the West Asia region.

American and British warplanes early on Monday conducted a joint airstrike on targets in Yemen's province of Hajjah, amid the Arab country's ongoing maritime operations against vessels linked to Israel and its allies in the Red Sea.

According to reports, the aerial assaults struck the Buhais area in the Midi district of the province. They, however, did not provide any details regarding potential casualties or damage.

The US and British military aircraft also targeted a number of locations in the At Tuhayta district of the strategic western province of Hudaydah. Details on potential human or material losses from the strikes have yet to be disclosed.

IRAN NEWS



Iran Judiciary Plans to Sell Oil Tankers Involved in Smuggling

BANDAR ABBAS (IRNA) - The Chief Justice of Hormozgan province has announced an auction for the sale of two oil tankers named Saghah-2 and Ariana due to their involvement in fuel smuggling.

Mojtaba Ghahremani said on Tuesday that following a directive by Head of the Judiciary Gholamhossein Mohseni Ejei to speed up making decisions on seized assets in judicial cases and the implementation of Iran's anti-trafficking law, an extraordinary nationwide auction (No. 619) will be held to sell a significant portion of seized assets related to smuggling cases in the southern province.

The auction will be conducted by the Organization for Collection and Sale of State-owned Properties of Iran (OCSSPI) under the supervision of the General and Revolutionary Courts of Hormozgan province, Ghahremani noted.

Iran Among Top Five Nations with Largest Maritime Fleet



TEHRAN - The Managing Director of Iran's Ports and Maritime Organization, Ali Akbar Safaei, announced today that the Islamic Republic is ranked among the top five countries globally for possessing a substantial maritime fleet. His comments came during a press conference held at the 8th Transport and Logistics Exhibition in Tehran.

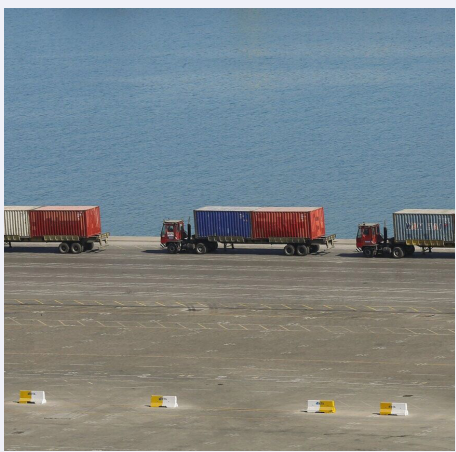
Safaei emphasized the significant growth of the maritime fleet in the Caspian Sea, stating that Iran's tonnage capacity now matches that of Russia. "We have made noteworthy progress in expanding our maritime capabilities, particularly in the Caspian region," he noted.

He also highlighted the government's commitment to a sea-oriented development policy initiated by Iran's Supreme Leader. According to Safaei, this policy is being actively pursued under the 14th government, with plans to implement a comprehensive maritime development scheme, focusing particularly on the Makran region.

The Deputy Minister of Roads and Urban Development remarked that final details of a consultancy service for the development plan were being settled, and a strategic council has been formed to oversee the project. "Studies have commenced, and we are updating our previous research to expedite the creation of a roadmap that aligns with our maritime development policies," Safaei added.

Turning to the performance of the country's maritime activities, Safaei reported that from the beginning of the year until December 15, approximately 172 million tons of cargo had been loaded and unloaded at Iranian ports, highlighting a 3% growth in non-oil goods. Furthermore, he relayed that around 9.4 million tons of goods have transited through Iranian ports during this period, reflecting a remarkable 37% increase compared to the same timeframe last year.

Transit of 12m Tons of Goods Through Land Borders by End of November



TEHRAN - The head of the Road Maintenance and Transportation Organization announced that over 12 million tons of goods were transited through the country's land borders in the first eight months of the current fiscal year, reflecting significant growth compared to a total of 14 million tons for the entire year of 2022.

In a press conference held on Tuesday during the 8th International Transport and Logistics Exhibition in Tehran, "Akbari" stated that during this period, approximately 21.9 million international passengers crossed through the country's land borders.

Akbari also addressed the upcoming increase in toll fees for several state-owned expressways, stating that toll rates had not been adjusted in the past five years. He added that the revenues generated were inadequate for the maintenance of the expressways. Efforts to update these tolls began two years ago and were finally approved by the Economic Council.

Currently, the toll fee of 1,200 toman for the Tehran-Qom expressway is applied uniformly to all users, regardless of their travel distance. Akbari highlighted the unfairness of this system as those traveling to Imam Khomeini Airport or all the way to Qom were paying the same toll. As a result, a new system of toll collection based on distance traveled has been instituted.

He announced that the new toll rates would be implemented starting February. Despite the optimistic outlook, Akbari noted that even with these new rates, the estimated 2 trillion toman generated would fall woefully short of the urgent need for 5 trillion toman in maintenance funds.

A plan will be developed to allocate the additional revenues specifically for the infrastructure and improvement of these expressways. Furthermore, discounts of up to 30 percent will be available for frequent users of these expressways.



Currency Suppression Undermines Competitive Edge of Knowledge-Based Companies

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Minister of Economic Affairs and Finance, Abdolnasser Hemmati, highlighted the detrimental effects of currency suppression on the competitive capabilities of knowledge-based companies in the country. Speaking on December 17, 2023, during a press conference held after the signing ceremony of a memorandum of understanding between the Ministry of Economic Affairs and the Vice Presidency for Science, Technology, and Knowledge-Based Economy, Hemmati emphasized the crucial need to support these innovative enterprises.

According to Hemmati, the primary objective of the memorandum is to bolster and enhance the capabilities of knowledge-based companies so that they can successfully navigate marketing and selling their products in global markets, potentially even engaging in cross-border production.

"This is a significant opportunity amid the current sanctions," he stated. "By enhancing the export of these products, we can import the necessary goods and components through barter, benefiting our economic landscape."

Hemmati noted that there has been considerable effort from the Vice Presidency in recent months to facilitate this initiative, expressing optimism about the potential for increasing the exports of domestic knowledge-based products. He stated that this agreement focuses on the micro-scale products of these companies and has the potential to expand to neighboring markets as well.

With neighboring countries boasting imports exceeding \$1 trillion, while Iran's exports to these nations hover around only \$27 billion, Hemmati underscored the vast potential for Iranian knowledge-based companies to significantly increase their export levels beyond current figures.

During a visit to the "Iran Made" exhibition, Hemmati observed a high potential for export within the country. He expressed concern regarding one of the significant issues facing companies at the exhibition, namely, the importation of similar foreign products by certain state entities, which undermines the products produced by local firms. He assured that efforts would be made to prevent such occurrences.

A key factor contributing to the challenges faced by local companies stems from currency suppression policies that make imported similar products

cheaper, thereby eroding the competitive ability of local firms. Hemmati expressed optimism that recent government decisions regarding a more flexible currency exchange system would mitigate this issue.

"We hope to see a halt in the import of goods that are already being produced by knowledge-based companies in Iran," he said, emphasizing that the government is committed to supporting local innovation and production.

Hemmati mentioned that the Iranian Foreign Investment Holding Company (IFIC) is actively assisting knowledge-based enterprises, and the ministry is committed to facilitating their operations effectively. He acknowledged queries regarding foreign investments made by IFIC, explaining that these investments are primarily state-to-state collaborations, such as the Iran and Egypt Development Bank, in which Iran holds a 40% stake.

Addressing speculation regarding the suspension of the Privatisation Organisation's meetings, Hemmati clarified that only the high council sessions had been temporarily paused; regular meetings would be reinstated in the coming week.

Furthermore, he provided updates on the ongoing formulation of the Production Finance Law, stating that related regulations, including its validation guidelines, are nearing completion. Some components of this legislation have already been implemented, such as the financing of production chains backed by available credit documents, which are currently operational.

Hemmati confirmed media reports about a temporary halt in the issuance of business licenses, attributing this situation to concerns raised by certain organizations regarding ambiguities in the process. Nonetheless, he assured that the procedures for reviewing and issuing business licenses would resume shortly as the necessary directives were issued three weeks ago.

In summary, the Minister's remarks underscore the Iranian government's recognition of the vital role of knowledge-based companies in driving economic progress, especially under the strain of sanctions and currency stability challenges. As the government aims to mitigate the negative impacts of currency suppression, there is a hopeful outlook for the growth and expansion of local innovations in international markets.

Challenges for Iranian Goods Entering Qatar: Exporting via the UAE



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Mustafa Salehi-Nejad, Secretary-General of the Iran-Qatar Joint Chamber of Commerce, discussed the outcomes of the 10th Iran-Qatar Joint Commission in an interview with ILNA. He explained that this event is fundamentally a governmental commission, with Iran's Minister of Energy participating alongside Qatar's Minister of Trade. This year's 10th edition was held in Doha, focusing on the development of economic cooperation. Private sector business leaders, responsible for economic activities, also attended, with 50 Iranian traders traveling to Qatar to hold a business conference with Qatari merchants.

He emphasized that the presence of the two countries' ministers was significant for Iranian traders, as the Iranian private sector has always requested the government to assist in creating a conducive trade environment. This year marked a departure from past gatherings, where government support for the private sector was minimal; this time, for the first time, a government representative accompanied the traders.

Salehi-Nejad pointed out the reality that Iran must accept in its trade sector: the country's interest in trading with Qatar is growing, while Qatari interest in trading with Iran is not as strong. Global investors are eager to trade with Qatar, which hosts attractive events aimed at

attracting investors, such as the World Cup and the Olympics. Consequently, Qatar presents a thriving economy, largely populated by foreign investors outnumbering the local population.

The Secretary-General of the Iran-Qatar Chamber of Commerce noted that Iranians face several challenges in trading with Qatar, the most significant being residency issues—so much so that even the Chairman of the Iran-Qatar Joint Chamber does not have residency in Qatar. Additional issues include logistics and shipping. This commission served as an opportunity to address these challenges.

He added that the current political climate in Iran has significantly affected relations with Qatar, worsening to the point where goods labeled as Iranian no longer have direct access to Qatar and must instead enter through the UAE. This route increases trade costs by up to three times. While there are no official legal barriers to trade between Iran and Qatar, the practical treatment of Iranian goods in Qatar does not stem from amicable relations, leading to delays at Qatari customs. This situation is rooted in political relations and negative news about Iran in the region. Previously focused on establishing a currency exchange to resolve financial transaction issues, the primary concern now is the direct entry of goods into Qatar.

Tehran Eyes Boosting Trade With Ashgabat

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK



TEHRAN - According to a report from the Ministry of Energy, Abbas Ali Abadi expressed his satisfaction at the economic conference for traders and merchants of the Islamic Republic of Iran and Turkmenistan, held in Ashgabat as part of the 16th specialized exhibition titled "Iran Agrofood." During the conference, he acknowledged the efforts of Berdymukhamedov, the President of Turkmenistan, in creating conditions conducive to the development of bilateral and multilateral cooperation.

He noted that the opening of the specialized exhibition highlighted the capabilities of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the fields of agriculture and food industries, providing an opportunity for the exchange of information and experiences, as well as mutual recognition of the capacities and resources of both countries.

Abadi added that today's economic conference would serve as a platform for companies from both nations to professionally discuss the expansion of cooperation and exchanges between their private sectors.

He reminded attendees that over 60 capable Iranian companies from various sectors, including agriculture, food industries, machinery and equipment, technical and engineering services, and knowledge-based industries, were present at the exhibition to facilitate negotiations more effectively.

The Minister of Energy emphasized that cooperation between the Islamic Republic of Iran and Turkmenistan in areas such as transportation, transit, and energy is on the rise, indicating that these collaborations benefit not only the two nations but also other countries in the region.

He further remarked that the implementation of agreements in the fields of gas, electricity, and transit could significantly increase the trade volume between the two countries through the exchange of goods and technical services.

Abadi pointed out that participating companies in this specialized exhibition are known for their active roles, offering competitive goods and services in the international market. In this context, the Islamic Republic of Iran takes pride in sharing the experiences of Iranian companies with those from other countries, especially the friendly and neighboring country of Turkmenistan, to enhance bilateral cooperation and foster regional and international peace and friendship.

The Minister expressed hope that this conference would create an appropriate platform for the exchange of experiences between the businesses of the two friendly countries and lead to fruitful agreements and collaborations among economic actors.

He underscored that the expansion of cooperation between both public and private sectors, supported by the governments of the Islamic Republic of Iran and Turkmenistan, would undoubtedly enhance the cooperation between the two countries.

Maritime Tourism Line Among Caspian Sea Coastal Countries Expected to Be Launched Soon



TEHRAN - The Deputy for Maritime Affairs of the Ports and Maritime Organization announced the upcoming establishment of a maritime tourism line between coastal countries of the Caspian Sea. He stated that it is anticipated a Russian cruise ship will arrive in Iran within a maximum of three months.

According to the Ministry of Roads and Urban Development, "Ali Akbar Marzban" mentioned during the eighth Transport, Logistics, and Related Industries Exhibition that the Russian government proposed the launch of a maritime tourism line between Caspian coastal nations. According to the proposal from Russia, the passenger cruise ship will set sail from the port of Astrakhan, passing through the ports of Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Baku in Azerbaijan before arriving at the port of Anzali in Iran.

Marzban highlighted that the Islamic Republic of Iran has welcomed this proposal and is currently taking necessary steps to implement the initiative. He expressed hope that the international tourist line in the Caspian Sea will be established soon.

China, U.S. Can Achieve Great Things

BEIJING (Dispatches) - China's foreign minister said Tuesday that Beijing and Washington can achieve "many great things" if they work together, ahead of next month's inauguration of president-elect Donald Trump.

But top diplomat Wang Yi also warned against what he called the US' "crude interference" on the issue of Taiwan. The world's two largest economies have butted heads on a range of issues in recent years, from trade and technology to human rights and China's growing assertiveness towards the self-ruled island of Taiwan.

Wang said China's policy towards the United States "has not changed" during a Tuesday address in Beijing that reflected on the country's diplomatic work in the past year and its expectations for the future.



Canada Finance Minister Quits After Clash With Trudeau Over Trump Tariffs



OTTAWA (Dispatches) - Canadian Finance Minister Christy Freeland quit on Monday after clashing with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau on issues including how to handle possible U.S. tariffs, dealing an unexpected blow to an already unpopular government.

Freeland said she was quitting in the wake of a meeting last Friday with Trudeau, who asked her to take on a lesser post after the two had been arguing for weeks over spending.

Public Safety Minister Dominic LeBlanc - a member of Trudeau's inner circle - was quickly named finance minister of the minority Liberal government.

The resignation of Freeland, 56, who also served as deputy prime minister, is one of the biggest crises Trudeau has faced since taking power in November 2015. It also leaves him without a key ally when he is on track to lose the next election to the official opposition Conservatives.

A Liberal source said Trudeau wanted Freeland to serve as minister without portfolio dealing with Canada-U.S. relations in name only - in effect a major demotion.

Trudeau met the national Liberal caucus later on Monday - including Freeland - but legislators declined to say afterwards what had happened.

Labour Minister Steven MacKinnon said there had been a good and frank conversation but gave no details.

Trudeau later told a Liberal Party fundraiser in Ottawa that being prime minister was the privilege of his life.

"It's obviously been an eventful day. It has not been an easy day," he said.

The potential threat to his future was underlined when a top member of the opposition New Democrats, who have been helping keep the Liberals in power, said the party would vote to bring down Trudeau next year unless he quit.

Shooting at Wisconsin Christian School Kills Teacher and Teenage Pupil



NEW YORK (Dispatches) - A 15-year-old female student was identified by police as the assailant who opened fire Monday at a school in the US state of Wisconsin, where a fellow student and teacher were killed and the suspected shooter was found dead.

Shon Barnes, police chief in the state capital Madison, told a press briefing that three people had died and seven others were wounded at the Abundant Life Christian School, a private Christian school with about 400 students.

"The shooter has now been identified as (a) 15-year-old," Barnes told reporters, identifying the minor by name.

"She was a student at the school, and evidence suggests she died from a self-inflicted gunshot wound," he added.

Barnes said a second-grade student called emergency services to report the shooting shortly before 11:00 am local time (1700 GMT).

Of the six wounded victims who were hospitalized, two students remain in critical condition with life-threatening injuries, two people are in stable condition, and two have been discharged from hospital, the police chief said.

German Chancellor Scholz Loses No-Confidence Vote



BERLIN (Dispatches) - The German parliament accepted Chancellor Olaf Scholz's invitation to withdraw its confidence in him and his government on Monday, clearing the way for an early election on Feb. 23 necessitated by the collapse of his government.

Scholz's three-party coalition fell apart last month after the pro-market Free Democrats quit in a row over debt, leaving his Social Democrats (SPD) and the Greens without a parliamentary majority just as Germany faces a deepening economic crisis. Under rules designed to prevent the instability that facilitated the rise of fascism in the 1930s, President Frank-Walter Steinmeier can only dissolve parliament and call an election if the chancellor calls, and loses, a confidence vote.

The debate preceding the vote also opened serious campaigning for the election, with party leaders trading ill-tempered barbs. The chancellor and his conservative challenger Friedrich Merz, who surveys suggest is likely to replace him, charged each other with incompetence and lack of vision.

Scholz, who will head a caretaker government until a new one can be formed, defended his record as a crisis leader who had dealt with the economic and security emergency triggered by Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

If given a second term, he said, he would invest heavily in Germany's creaking infrastructure rather than making the spending cuts he said the conservatives wanted.

"Shortsightedness might save money in the short term, but the mortgage on our future is unaffordable," said Scholz, who served four years as finance minister under a previous coalition with the conservatives before becoming chancellor in 2021.

Merz told Scholz his spending plans would burden future generations and accused him of failing to deliver on promises of rearmament after the start of the Ukraine war.

"Taking on debt at the cost of the young generation, spending money - and you didn't say the word 'competitiveness' once,"

said Merz.

Neither mentioned the constitutional spending cap, a measure designed to ensure fiscal responsibility that many economists blame for the fraying state of Germany's infrastructure.

The conservatives have a comfortable, albeit narrowing lead of more than 10 points over the SPD in most polls. The far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) is slightly ahead of Scholz's party, while the Greens are in fourth place.

The mainstream parties have refused to govern with the AfD, but its presence complicates the parliamentary arithmetic, making unwieldy coalitions more likely.

Scholz has outlined a list of measures that could pass with opposition support before the election, including 11 billion euros (\$11 billion) in tax cuts and an increase in child benefits already agreed on by former coalition partners.

The conservatives have also hinted they could back measures to better protect the Constitutional Court from the machinations of a future populist or anti-democratic government and to extend a popular subsidised transport ticket.

Measures to ease unintended burdens on taxpayers could also pass if regional governments agree, but Merz rejected a Green proposal to cut energy prices, saying he wanted a totally new energy policy.

Robert Habeck, the Greens' chancellor candidate, said that was a worrying sign for German democracy, given the growing likelihood in a fractured political landscape that very different parties would again have to govern together.

"It's very unlikely the next government will have it easier," Habeck said.

AfD leader Alice Weidel called for all Syrian refugees in Germany to be sent back following the collapse of Bashar al-Assad's regime.

Russia Must Be Ready to Fight NATO in Europe in Next Decade

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russia's defense minister said that Moscow must be ready to fight the NATO military alliance in Europe in the next decade, as President Vladimir Putin said he believed the Ukraine war was turning in Moscow's favour.

Andrei Belousov, Putin's defence chief, cited a NATO summit in July, and military doctrines in the U.S. and other NATO members, as evidence that Moscow had to prepare for direct conflict with a more assertive NATO in the coming years.

"The activities of the Ministry of Defence are based on ... ensuring full readiness for any scenario in the medium term, including a possible military conflict with NATO in Europe in the next decade," Belousov told an audience including Putin at his ministry.

Belousov set out a raft of changes and reforms that he said were needed, "taking into account the nature of future military conflicts".

He cited U.S. plans to modernise its nuclear forces, the opening of a U.S. missile defence base in Poland, new NATO combat readiness plans, and plans announced at the NATO summit to deploy U.S. medium-range missiles in Germany in 2026.

He said the U.S. could soon have hypersonic missiles available that could reach Moscow in eight minutes.

Putin told the same gathering that the large numbers volunteering for service were turning the tide of the Ukraine war in Moscow's favour, as open-source maps suggest his army is advancing at the fastest pace since



2022.

"Russian troops have a firm grip on the strategic initiative along the entire line of contact. This year alone, 189 population centres have been liberated," he said.

He said roughly 430,000 Russians had signed army contracts this year, up from roughly 300,000 last year.

Belousov said Russia had pushed Ukrainian forces out of almost 4,500 sq km (1,737 sq miles) of territory this year, and was taking about 30 sq km (11.5 sq miles) a day.

Putin accused the West of pushing Russia to its "red lines" - situations it has publicly made clear it will not tolerate - and said Moscow had been forced to respond.

"They (Western leaders) are simply scaring their own population that we are going to attack someone there using the pretext of the mythical Russian threat," said Putin.

"The tactic is very simple: they push us to 'a red line', from which we cannot retreat, we start to respond and then they immediately scare their population."

He said Russia was watching U.S. development of short- and medium-range missiles with great concern and would lift its own voluntary restrictions on the stationing of such missiles if the U.S. decided to put them into service.

China Plans Record Budget Deficit of 4% of GDP in 2025

LONDON (Dispatches) - Chinese leaders agreed last week to raise the budget deficit to 4% of gross domestic product (GDP) next year, its highest on record, while maintaining an economic growth target of around 5%, two sources with knowledge of the matter said.

The new deficit plan compares with an initial target of 3% of GDP for 2024, and is in line with a "more proactive" fiscal policy outlined by leading officials after December's Politburo meeting and last week's Central Economic Work Conference (CEWC), where the targets were agreed but not officially announced.

The additional one percentage point of GDP in spending amounts to about 1.3 trillion yuan (\$179.4 billion). More stimulus will be funded through issuing off-budget special bonds, said the two sources, who requested anonymity as they were not authorised to speak to the media.

These targets are usually not announced officially until an annual parliament meeting in March. They could still change before the legislative session.

The State Council Information Office, which handles media queries on behalf of the government, and the finance ministry did not immediately respond to a Reuters request for comment.

The stronger fiscal impulse planned for next year forms part of China's preparations to counter the impact of an expected increase in U.S. tariffs on Chinese imports as Donald Trump returns to the White House in January.

The two sources said China will maintain an unchanged GDP growth target of around 5% in 2025.



A state media summary of the closed-door CEWC said it was "necessary to maintain steady economic growth", raise the fiscal deficit ratio and issue more government debt next year, but did not mention specific numbers.

Reuters reported last month that government advisers had recommended Beijing not to lower its growth target.

The world's second-largest economy has stuttered this year due to a severe property crisis, high local government debt and weak consumer demand. Exports, one of the few bright spots, could soon face U.S. tariffs in excess of 60% if Trump delivers on his campaign pledges.

The U.S. President-elect's threats have rattled China's industrial complex, which sells goods worth more than \$400 billion annually to the United States. Many manufacturers have been shifting production abroad to escape tariffs.

Exporters say the levies will further shrink profits, hurting jobs, investment and economic growth in the process. They would also exacerbate China's industrial overcapacity and deflationary pressures, analysts said.

The summaries of the CEWC and the Politburo meetings also flagged that China's central bank would switch to an "appropriately loose" monetary policy stance, raising expectations of more interest rate cuts and liquidity injections.

The previous "prudent" stance that the central bank had held for the past 14 years coincided with overall debt - including that of the government, households and companies - jumping more than five times. The economy expanded roughly three times over the same period.



Tyrese Maxey Puts up 40 as Sixers Top Hornets

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Tyrese Maxey pumped in 40 points and Paul George racked up 33 points as both sank six 3-pointers, leading the injury-ravaged Philadelphia 76ers past the host Charlotte Hornets 121-108.

The outcome dampened the excitement around the return to action of Charlotte point guard LaMelo Ball, who racked up 15 points and 11 assists while coming back from a calf injury that had kept him out since Nov. 27.

The 76ers made 16 of 38 attempts from 3-point range in their first game after losing both center Joel Embiid (sinus fracture) and rookie guard Jared McCain (torn meniscus in knee) to injury on Friday.

The Hornets lost for the 10th time in 11 outings despite Miles Bridges' 24 points.

Bulls 122, Raptors 121: Nikola Vucevic scored 24 points and visiting Chicago, which saw a 16-point lead shrink to one, held on to defeat Toronto. The Raptors cut into the final deficit with a last-second 3-pointer.

Coby White added 19 points for the Bulls, who have won two straight. Josh Giddey had 11 points, nine rebounds and eight assists before leaving with an ankle injury in the third quarter.

RJ Barrett scored 32 points and Grady Dick had 27 for the Raptors, who have lost five straight. Toronto's Jakob Poeltl left in the fourth quarter with a groin injury.

Pistons 125, Heat 124 (OT): Malik Beasley had a season-high 28 points, Cade Cunningham supplied a triple-double and host Detroit topped Miami in overtime.

Cunningham had 20 points, 18 assists and 11 rebounds for Detroit, which squandered a 19-point, fourth-quarter lead. Ausar Thompson contributed 19 points and Tim Hardaway Jr. tossed in 16, hitting three consecutive 3-pointers in overtime to wipe out an eight-point Heat lead.

Jimmy Butler produced 35 points, 19 rebounds and 10 assists for the Heat, who had their four-game winning streak end. Tyler Herro scored 23 points.

Cavaliers 130, Nets 101: Evan Mobley scored 19 of his 21 points in the second half, Caris LeVert scored all 19 of his points in the first half and Cleveland seized control early and cruised to a rout of Brooklyn in New York.

Cleveland led by as many as 37, improved to 23-4 for the best start in team history and is 8-4 since winning its first 15 games.

Cameron Johnson led the Nets with 22 points and Day'Ron Sharpe added 15. Brooklyn committed a season-worst 22 turnovers, which resulted in 34 Cleveland points.

Nigeria's Lookman Named African Footballer of the Year



ARRAKECH (Dispatches) - Nigeria forward Ademola Lookman was named African Footballer of Year by the Confederation of African Football at its awards ceremony on Monday after a stellar campaign for club and country.

The 27-year-old scored a hat-trick as his Italian club Atalanta won the Europa League final against Bayer Leverkusen in Dublin in May and earlier in the year helped Nigeria reach the Africa Cup of Nations final in the Ivory Coast.

He netted three times at the AFCON tournament.

London-born Lookman, who has played in the English Premier League for Everton, Fulham and Leicester City, scored 17 goals for Atalanta last season and already has 11 in this campaign. He moved to the Serie A club in 2022.

"This award is a blessing, to be recognised as best player in Africa is something incredible," he said.

"Four years ago my career felt down but now I'm here as the best player in Africa. Don't let your failures stop your dreams."

Lookman was named ahead of Morocco's Achraf Hakimi, Senou Guirassy of Guinea, Simon Adingra from the Ivory Coast and South Africa goalkeeper Ronwen Williams.

The award is voted for by a panel that includes national team coaches and captains, but no details of the voting tallies were immediately provided.

Lookman is the seventh Nigerian to take the award and succeeds last year's winner Victor Osimhen.

Nwankwo Kanu (twice), Emmanuel Amunike, Victor Ikpeba and Rashidi Yekini are the other previous Nigerian winners.

Inzaghi Hails Inter for Turning Tough Start Into 6-0 Thrashing of Lazio



MILAN (Dispatches) - Inter Milan coach Simone Inzaghi has praised his players for standing up to hosts Lazio in a challenging opening half hour before turning the performance into one of club's most dominant in Serie A.

Lazio showed greater determination at the start but the defending champions grew into the game and stormed to a 6-0 win, scoring quick-fire goals either side of halftime in a superb display that silenced the Stadio Olimpico.

"In the first 25 minutes we were good at keeping our distance with a Lazio team that played well technically," Inzaghi told a press conference.

"We then too grew a lot technically, we managed to score two goals and the third at the start of the second half, closing out a game against a team of absolute value penalised by absences and injuries. We had some players out too but I'm happy."

Lazio were without suspended forward Valentin Castellanos as well as injured defender Alessio Romagnoli and midfielder Matias Vecino, while Inter were missing defenders Francesco Acerbi and Benjamin Pavard.

"We were playing against a team that won 16 out of (their previous) 22 games (in all competitions), and when they lost they didn't deserve it," Inzaghi added.

"We needed a game of great pace and determination, and we did it because the Italian championship always puts so many pitfalls in front of you."

Six different players were on the scoresheet in an away Serie A fixture for the first time in Inter's history as Hakan Calhanoglu, Federico Dimarco, Nicolò Barella, Denzel Dumfries, Carlos Augusto and Marcus Thuram all found the net.

Three of them -- Dumfries, Dimarco and Calhanoglu -- ended the game with a goal and an assist.

"Going into individual performances after a display like that is not easy," Inzaghi said.

"(Stefan) De Vrij... has extraordinary consistency, Lautaro (Martinez) had a great game, for me it is as if he had scored a goal. He was very happy in the dressing room, he must continue to work like this and he will get satisfaction."

Inter increased the pressure at the top of the table as they sit third on 34 points, three points off Atalanta and a point behind Napoli with a game in hand on the top two. Fourth-placed Fiorentina and Lazio in fifth are three points behind them.

"We must continue like this, it is a very balanced championship with many teams that are on a positive streak," Inzaghi added.

Bournemouth's Unal Rescues Point With Superb Strike Against West Ham

BOURNEMOUTH (Dispatches) - Bournemouth's Enes Unal equalised with a stunning free-kick as the hosts earned a 1-1 draw after West Ham United's Lucas Paqueta scored a late penalty for what looked the winner in a Premier League clash of missed opportunities.

Bournemouth substitute Tyler Adams handled Aaron Wan-Bissaka's cross in the area and Paqueta stepped up in the 87th minute to convert from the spot to give his side the lead.

But within three minutes the home side were level as Turkish forward Unal rifled in a 30-metre free-kick that left goalkeeper Lukasz Fabianski, who had been excellent, with no chance.

Bournemouth move up to sixth in the standings with 25 points, while West Ham stay 14th with 19 also from 16 games.

Bournemouth had 29 attempts at goal, their record for a Premier League game, and West Ham a respectable 16. The total of 45 was



the most of any Premier League game this season, though between them the two teams managed only 12 on target.

"We will take the positives with some big games coming up over the festive period," Bournemouth midfielder Ryan Christie said. "We are getting into good positions and (29 shots) is a good stat to have in the Premier League. On another night we might have had two or three goals."

West Ham's Polish keeper Fabianski will be 40 years old in April but showed he has lost none of his reflexes with stunning stops from Dango Ouattara and Evanilson in either half.

Bournemouth opened up the West Ham defence early with a sign of things to come but Antoine Semenyo's scuffed shot at goal hit the outside of the post when he should have scored.

West Ham went close minutes later when Jarrod Bowen curled his effort from the edge of the box onto the crossbar.

Ouattara should have scored in the closing minutes of the first half after he was picked out at the back post but was denied by a sprawling stop from Fabianski, who then made another fine save from Evanilson's near-post header at a corner.

At the other end, Mohammed Kudus looked destined to get his shot away from 10 metres before a superb tackle from Illya Zabarnyi blocked his goal-bound attempt.

Kyrgios to Team Up With Djokovic for Brisbane International Doubles

LONDON (Dispatches) - Record 24-times Grand Slam champion Novak Djokovic will team up with former Wimbledon finalist Nick Kyrgios to play doubles at the Brisbane International, the Australian said.

The pair, who have developed a friendship after once being at loggerheads when Kyrgios labelled Djokovic "boneheaded" and a "tool", will use the Dec. 29-Jan. 5 ATP 250 event as a warm-up for next month's Australian Open.

Djokovic and Kyrgios have faced each other three times on the ATP Tour, with the Australian winning the first two encounters in 2017 before losing in four sets in the 2022 Wimbledon final.

In a post on Instagram on Monday, Kyrgios shared a picture of their meeting at Wimbledon, writing: "Doubles at Brisbane. See y'all there".

Organisers of the Brisbane International did not immediately respond to an emailed request for comment.

Kyrgios, who is also scheduled to play in the Dec. 19-22 World Tennis League exhibition event in Abu Dhabi, has played just one singles tour match in the last two years due to knee, foot and wrist injuries.

He is set to make his competitive singles return in Brisbane and will play at the Australian Open with a protected ranking of 21st, where he will also be reunited with Thanasi Kokkinakis in the men's



doubles. Kyrgios and Kokkinakis, dubbed the "Special Ks" as juniors, claimed their only major title in 2022 at Melbourne Park.

The 2025 Australian Open will run from Jan. 12-26.

Hady Habib blazed a trail by taking Lebanon to the Olympic tennis tournament for the first time earlier this year and he is hoping another breakthrough at the Australian Open in January will bring comfort to his war-torn country.

The Texas-born 26-year-old enjoyed a special moment when, as a lucky loser, he went down 6-3 6-1 to major winner Carlos Alcaraz in the first round of the Olympic men's singles at Roland Garros in July.

The experience fired his ambitions to get back to the biggest stages in the tennis world and he took a step towards that goal when he won a Challenger title in Chile earlier this month to clinch a spot in Australian Open qualifying.

"I just felt so much joy," he told The National newspaper.

"I'd had a couple of hard weeks before that. This was a goal of mine and to be able to achieve it in this last tournament and being the first Lebanese to win a Challenger, just so much joy."

The world number 216 is determined to make the most of his hard-earned opportunity and has changed plans to go home to Lebanon for Christmas and will instead train in South America with his Argentine coach.

Habib moved back to Lebanon with his family at the age of six and is extremely proud to represent the nation, particularly since the war in Gaza spilled over into conflict in the southern part of the country this year.