

The U.S. Announced New Sanctions on Iranian and Non-Iranian Individuals and Entities That It Claims Have Been Linked to Iran's Military Programs to Design and Develop Legal Weapons

# IRAN NEWS

Foreign Ministers of Iran and Turkey Called for an End to the Israeli Regime's Acts of Aggression Against the People of Palestine to Ensure Sustainable Stability and Security in the Region

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### Iran Human Rights Council Condemns Canada's Anti-Iran Resolution



TEHRAN - The Human Rights Council of the Islamic Republic of Iran has issued a statement denouncing the passage of an anti-Iran resolution proposed by Canada at the United Nations General Assembly. The Council criticized the political maneuvering and hypocrisy of Western countries in using human rights as a tool to pressure independent nations.

In a report from the Iranian judiciary's international affairs department, the Council's statement expressed strong condemnation of the political, instrumental, and hypocritical handling of human rights by Western nations and their misuse of international human rights mechanisms to exert pressure on sovereign states.

The statement highlights that Canada, which has a troubling human rights record particularly regarding women's rights, indigenous populations, and migrants, along with other Western nations, has lost credibility for supporting the violent actions of the Israeli regime and has faced severe criticism from its own citizens. The anti-Iran resolution garnered minimal support, achieving backing from only 80 countries, while 112 countries voted against it, abstained, or were absent.

It notes the approval of the resolution coincides with ongoing atrocities committed against the people of Gaza, where the Israeli regime, backed by the proponents of the resolution, continues its assaults leading to significant loss of innocent lives including women and children. The Human Rights Council challenged these nations to explain their response to the reported killing of over 50,000 innocent individuals in Gaza, of whom more than 70% are women and children, asking what actions they have taken beyond providing political and military support to Israel.

The statement criticizes countries claiming to uphold human rights for their inaction against the reports of systematic violence against Palestinians, where statistics show that a child is reportedly killed every ten minutes in Gaza amid rampant violence against civilians, including targeted attacks on schools and hospitals.

The Human Rights Council posed questions regarding whether the brutal killings of innocents, including the horror of children being burned alive in front of their mothers, warrant a special human rights session or an investigation committee, yet such measures have not been taken by the Council.

### Iran Navy to Take Delivery of High-Tech Homegrown Vessels, Weapons



TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Iranian Navy Commander Rear Admiral Shahram Irani says that the navy will receive several new domestically designed and manufactured vessels and weapons, equipped with advanced and state-of-the-art technologies.

Irani made the remarks on Friday, highlighting that the homegrown military hardware will soon join Iran's naval fleet, and will "surprise" enemies.

"These new additions encompass various domains, including surface, aerial, manned, unmanned, and missile systems, of which the enemies are completely unaware of their capabilities. They are equipped with a new generation of highly valuable technologies and weapons with deterrent capabilities," Irani's Navy chief pointed out.

He noted that the missiles that are set to be unveiled feature "very new ranges."

Irani also said that unmanned aerial vehicles with operational ranges of more than 2,000 kilometers and underwater vehicles are among the modern homegrown military equipment.

Iranian Navy is awaiting the necessary preparations in order to unveil the domestically-developed equipment, he stated, emphasizing they will join Iranian naval units and enter service within the next few weeks.

Iran's Navy has in recent years achieved self-sufficiency in manufacturing surface and sub-surface vessels. It has also increased its presence in international waters to protect naval routes and provide security for merchant vessels and tankers.



### President Calls for New Bonds of Friendship Among D-8 Nations

TEHRAN - President Masoud Pezeshkian has called on the group of Developing Eight (D-8) countries to forge new bonds of friendship as the member nations gathered in Cairo for a summit.

"The importance of preserving friendships and forging new bonds through multilateral cooperation among Islamic countries, based on development and collective benefits, is now felt more than ever," he said in the Egyptian capital on Thursday.

"Moving toward multilateralism and establishing smart economic and trade networks among nations is a rightful course of action, reflecting the will of the majority of countries," Pezeshkian added.

The president announced Iran's interest in sharing its experiences and achievements, adding the country will support any initiative or proposal that fosters synergy in economic fields and paves the way for the involvement of young people in development-oriented programs.

Pezeshkian also said that Iran is ready to undertake joint actions within the framework of the D-8 to collectively support young entrepreneurs.

He cited establishing a D-8 Joint Bank of Ideas and Capital; creating shared science and technology hubs and parks; organizing scientific and technological tours and meetings; offering educational and research opportunities, scholarships, and exchange programs for professors and students; providing entrepreneurship facilities for young people and investing in small and medium-sized enterprises to address youth employment challenges among them. He also proposed "holding exhibitions showcasing knowledge-based achievements and products in collaboration with member states."

The Iranian president suggested that the D-8 Technology Transfer Network, with its secretariat located at Pardis Technology Park in Tehran, could be key in advancing joint youth-related initiatives.

Pezeshkian, however, expressed concern that member states still have a long way to go to reach the D-8's 2030 vision.

"The volume of trade among D-8 member countries is still far from the organization's 2030 vision. We hope that during Egypt's presidency of the organization, we will witness an acceleration in trade volume among the members. In this regard, barter trade can play a decisive role in increasing trade volume between the members," he said.

The Iranian president also announced that the next meeting of the "D-8 Permanent Committee on Communications and Information Technology" would soon be hosted by the Islamic Republic of Iran and that Tehran could begin working on this directive in collaboration with the member states.

"In my view, knowledge-based companies and new technologies, including artificial intelligence, have created suitable and innovative opportunities for the youth of Islamic countries to collaborate, enabling them to take significant steps toward the development and advancement of their nations and communities while preserving their indigenous and religious values," Pezeshkian said.

The Iranian president further highlighted the necessity of unity among Islamic nations, urging collective action to counter the aggressions of the Israeli regime. "Islamic countries must unite and stand against the aggression of the Zionist regime," he said. "It is our religious, legal, and humanitarian duty to take more immediate and practical measures to prevent further harm to our loved ones in crisis-hit areas."

The D-8 Organization for Economic Cooperation, also known as Developing-8, is an organization for developing cooperation among Bangladesh, Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, Malaysia, Nigeria, Pakistan, and Turkey.

Meanwhile on the sidelines of the event, Pezeshkian said the top priority for the countries of West Asia must be to stop the Israeli aggression in Gaza and attacks on Lebanon and Syria. "Today, we have gathered under circumstances where the West Asia region is experiencing a sensitive, complex, and unstable situation," he told a meeting on the situation in the Gaza Strip on the sidelines of the D-8 Developing summit in Cairo.

"As we approach the final days of the fourteenth month of the Israeli regime's war against Gaza, we are witnessing a series of atrocities that represent the epitome of all the tragedies and crimes in human history committed against the Palestinian people. Moreover, in recent months, the Zionist regime has been carrying out ruthless attacks in Lebanon and Syria," he said.

Pezeshkian stressed that acts of aggression by the occupying regime in the past year have not only deprived the Palestinian people of their rights, such as the right to independence, self-determination, security, welfare, and education, but today it has also taken away their right to life, food and water, shelter, knowledge of the fate of family members, and a life free from the sound of explosions, particularly for children and women.

"The severity of the crimes committed by the Zionist regime in the Gaza Strip and the dire humanitarian and human rights situation are such that they have deeply wounded the conscience of all honorable human beings and have drawn the condemnation of all countries and international organizations," he said.

The Iranian president also stressed that there must be no delay whatsoever in confronting such crimes and widespread acts of aggression, urging that actions in this regard must be prioritized through cooperation and coordination.

### World Has Embarrassingly Failed to Stop Israel Amid Incessant U.S. Support

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi has deplored the international community's abject failure to stop the Israeli regime's violations amid untrammelled support provided for Tel Aviv by the United States, its biggest ally.

The top diplomat made the remarks in Cairo, addressing the 21st Session of the Council of Ministers of D-8 (Developing-8) Organization for Economic Cooperation.

"The international community has embarrassingly failed to stop acts of aggression, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide by the Zionist regime," he said.

"This is largely attributed to the political, military, intelligence, and financial support by the US administration to Israel."

The foreign minister pointed to around 15 months of escalated deadly aggression by the regime against the Gaza Strip, where Tel Aviv has been waging a genocidal war, Lebanon, and Syria.

The war has so far claimed the lives of at least 45,097 Palestinians, mostly women and children.

Araqchi likewise noted that the meeting of the developing nations had come at the time when the Muslim world was still suffering from unprecedented cruelty on the part of the regime.

He hoped that the nations' Special Summit, which is scheduled to go underway on Thursday, gathering representatives from the Islamic Republic, Egypt, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia, Nigeria, Pakistan, and Turkey, would send a strong message to the world that the Israeli aggression and violations in Gaza, Lebanon, and Syria had to stop immediately.



The event, the official added, also had to convey the message that the regime and those of its allies that have been fueling its aggression, had to be held accountable, and a permanent ceasefire had to be established in Gaza to allow unhindered access to humanitarian assistance by the Gazans.

According to Araqchi, the summit was also expected to underline the imperative that the Palestinian cause and the right of Palestinians to self-determination had to be realized, any attempt for land annexation by the regime be prevented, and Israeli forces be immediately taken out of occupied territories in the coastal

sliver, Lebanon, and Syria.

"Last but not the least, that D8 countries are prepared to support Palestine and Lebanon to address economic and related challenges and problems resulting from the current situation," he stated.

Araqchi, meanwhile, hailed the countries for acting as one of the first groups of nations to condemn the launch of the war on Gaza, adding that the Thursday event "will be the latest testament of our brotherly countries to our continued joint commitment to fraternity, peace, dialogue, justice, and rule of law across the region and the world, as envisaged in the D8 Charter."

The top diplomat, meanwhile, hailed a declaration that was issued during the Wednesday meeting for presenting a promising landscape for enhanced cooperation among the countries.

He finally advised the nations to focus more on the ways and means to make their economies and peoples more resilient in the face of possible shocks in the future.

### Inflation Rate Reaches 37.3%



TEHRAN - The latest statistics from the Central Bank indicate that the annual inflation rate reached 37.3% in November, while producer inflation has declined to its lowest level in seven years.

The monthly inflation rate for November has been reported at 3%, an increase from the 2.5% recorded in October.

Additionally, the point-to-point inflation rate for consumers in November stands at 35.3%, with the annual rate recorded at 37.3%.

These figures suggest that the annual inflation rate for November is the lowest recorded in the past four years.

Based on the Central Bank's tables, the monthly producer inflation rate, recognized as a leading inflation indicator, was reported at 2.4% for November, indicating that producer inflation was lower than consumer inflation for the month.

Furthermore, the Central Bank's assessment shows that the point-to-point producer inflation for November was 25.5%.

Meanwhile, the average annual producer inflation rate for November this year is recorded at 27.6%, marking the lowest level since February 2019.

This trend indicates that the Central Bank's monetary policies have been effective in controlling liquidity and the growth of monetary base, thereby preventing factors that affect producer inflation from escalating.

### Tehran, Cairo Discuss Restoration of Ties as Iran Pushes for Muslim Unity



TEHRAN (Dispatches) - President Masoud Pezeshkian and his Egyptian counterpart Abdel Fattah el-Sisi have expressed their hope that the recent positive steps taken to restore ties between the two countries will continue until full bilateral relations are established.

The two presidents met on Thursday on the sidelines of the 11th summit of the leaders of the D-8 Organization for Economic Cooperation in the Egyptian capital, Cairo, where they reviewed the recent measures taken to restore the bilateral ties.

Pezeshkian emphasized the necessity of promoting economic cooperation, and the continued talks between Tehran and Cairo, which have not had political ties for more than four decades.

Mehdi Sanaei, a senior political aide to Pezeshkian, had noted earlier that "good dialogue" was held between the heads of the two countries last month, adding that "political talks and appropriate actions have started between the two countries."

"There is the necessary will for both countries to resume relations, and we hope that with the measures that have been taken and are being taken, we will go as far as to reopen embassies in the near future," said the advisor.

During the meeting, the two presidents also discussed regional developments, with Pezeshkian stressing the importance of sharing capabilities and enhancing cooperation among Muslim countries within the framework of regional and international treaty organizations such as the D-8 and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

He also noted that unity is "the most essential need" of today's Muslim world.

"All Islamic countries should strive to expand interaction and dialogue within the Islamic world according to their share, and overcome existing differences, as these differences provide a basis for foreign interventions," he stressed.

For his part, Sisi underscored that West Asia has faced serious threats, amid the recent developments in Gaza, Lebanon and Syria.

He described the latest Israeli aggression on Syria as unprecedented, expressing his country's support for the formation of an inclusive government in Syria.

# IRAN NEWS



## Iran Showcases Defense Achievements at Vietnam Defense Expo 2024

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iran is showcasing its defense achievements at the Vietnam International Defense Expo 2024, an international defense exhibition held in Hanoi from December 19 to 22.

The Vietnam Defense Expo 2024 brings together approximately 200 companies from 27 countries, including the Islamic Republic of Iran, Vietnam, China, Russia, Turkey, the UK, and the US, to showcase their military equipment.

The Iranian delegation, led by Brigadier General Seyyed Mehdi Farahi, Deputy Defense Minister for Industrial and Research Affairs, participated in the exhibition's opening ceremony on Thursday. The event was attended by Vietnamese Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh and other senior Vietnamese officials.

## D-8 Aims for \$500b Trade Volume by 2030



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Minister of Economic Affairs and Finance has announced that the Islamic Republic can transform the D-8 Organization for Economic Cooperation among Developing Countries by enhancing its activities. He stated that the trade target among member nations is to reach a commercial volume of \$500 billion by the end of 2030.

In a video released on Thursday, aboard a plane carrying him and the President on their way to Cairo, Abdolnasser Hemmati remarked that nearly 30 years have passed since the establishment of D-8, yet this opportunity has not been fully utilized for various reasons.

Hemmati was traveling with the President to participate in the 11th D-8 summit, where Masoud Pezeshkian is set to deliver a speech.

He emphasized that the goal of the Organization for Economic Cooperation among Developing Countries is to foster sustainable economic and social development among its members. He acknowledged that despite fluctuations, the trade volume between these countries, while not at an ideal level, is promising, with 7 to 8 percent of trade currently conducted in national currencies. This figure is expected to rise to 10 percent in the future. Additionally, he mentioned that the aim is to reach a trade volume of \$500 billion by the end of this decade (2030).

Hemmati reported that the current trade volume among D-8 member countries stands at \$125 billion. He noted that, in addition to Islamic countries such as Iran, Egypt, and Nigeria, nations from the Far East are also part of the organization, providing vast opportunities for collaboration. He added that the 14th government's policy is focused on increased cooperation with regional countries, with plans to maximize the use of this opportunity.

## Emphasis on Strengthening Trade Relations between Iran and Belarus



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The Head of Iran's Trade Development Organization emphasized the need to enhance commercial relations between Iran and Belarus during a meeting with the Belarusian Deputy Foreign Minister, underscoring the importance of establishing a joint commission.

Mohammad Ali Dehghan Dehnavi highlighted that trade development is a crucial factor in bolstering political ties and cultural exchanges between nations during his meeting with Sergey Lukashevich, the Deputy Foreign Minister of Belarus. He noted that several beneficial topics have been agreed upon in the draft of the joint committee between Iran and Belarus, suggesting that issues within the joint commission can be resolved amicably.

The Deputy Minister of Industry, Mine and Trade stressed the necessity of facilitating the travel of Iranian traders to Belarus, declaring that efforts are focused on increasing the presence of Iran's private sector in the Belarusian market.

Dehghan Dehnavi expressed hope that Iran and Belarus would reach a clear operational trade model, rather than getting stuck in bureaucratic protocols.

He further commented on the potential for a broader relationship between Iran and Belarus, emphasizing that adherence to production standards is essential and that Iran has strict regulations in this regard. He explained that Iran not only produces trucks and buses but also imports these vehicles, indicating an opportunity to utilize Belarusian production capacities, provided they do not harm domestic manufacturing.

During the meeting, Sergey Lukashevich pointed to the positive advancements in negotiations between Iran and Belarus, stating that the development of political relations without considering a boost in economic ties is unacceptable. He expressed anticipation for the establishment of the joint commission in December of this year.

Lukashevich deemed the trade volume between Iran and Belarus as promising and added that the trade relationship could be extended, potentially leading to new achievements in this area. He stressed that issues can be resolved, given there is mutual willingness to advance this endeavor.

The Belarusian Deputy Foreign Minister further emphasized the importance of developing commercial cooperation between the two countries, noting that joint production with Iran is on the agenda and discussions regarding the specifics can be initiated.



TEHRAN - The spokesman for the Trade Development Commission of Iran's Industry, Mine, and Trade House reported a trade volume of \$17.186 million between Tehran and Cairo over the past eight months, marking a 67% increase compared to the same period last year.

Seyed Rouhollah Latifi stated on Friday, coinciding with the Iranian President's visit to Egypt for the D-8 summit, that trade relations between the two countries have experienced many ups and downs, much like their political relations. However, with the strengthening of political ties and both nations joining BRICS, there has been a noticeable increase in direct trade between Iran and Egypt.

He elaborated that in the first eight months of this year, over 35,883 tons of goods worth \$17,186,348 were exchanged between the two nations, signifying a 65% rise in weight and a 67% rise in value compared to the same timeframe last year.

Latifi further highlighted that Iran's exports to Egypt accounted for 28,116 tons of goods valued at \$13,798,476, reflecting a 30% increase in weight and a 41% increase in value compared to the previous year.

According to him, Iran's imports from Egypt reached 7,767 tons of goods valued at \$3,387,872, demonstrating a significant 592% increase in value compared to the same period last year.

Regarding the nature of Iran's exports to Egypt, Latifi noted that steel and iron products accounted for 27,206 tons valued at \$13,271,737, representing 96.8% of the weight and 96.1% of the value of Iran's total exports to Egypt during this period. Following these, laboratory measurement kits, pistachios, car clutch components, various types of marble, travertine, sodium hydroxide, tomato paste, tractors, and agricultural machinery were also exported.

On the topic of Iran's imports from Egypt, he explained that during the first eight months of this year, over 7,580 tons of manganese ore worth \$1,463,605 were imported, constituting 97.5% of the weight and 43.2% of the value of Iran's total imports from Egypt.

Following manganese, Iran also imported 12.5 tons of circuit breakers valued at \$1,004,419, razors worth \$359,900, double-edged blades worth \$165,325, electronic components valued at \$155,610, potassium sulfate worth \$138,711, flow meters worth \$14,233, and glass components for lamps and lights valued at \$12,750 during this time.

Latifi added that Egypt's foreign trade in 2023 reached approximately \$115 billion, consisting of \$72.4 billion in imports and \$42.5 billion in exports. Of the total exports, \$28.5 billion was non-oil products, while \$14 billion comprised oil and electricity exports.

He noted that major Egyptian exports for 2023 included ready-made clothing (\$2.3 billion), urea fertilizer (\$2.1 billion), plastics (\$2 billion), and natural gas (\$1.95 billion).

Turkey emerged as the largest destination for Egyptian exports in 2023, purchasing \$4.5 billion worth of goods, followed by Italy and Saudi Arabia.

Regarding the classification of goods imported to Egypt, Latifi stated that 36.3% were intermediate goods, 17.9% capital goods, 14.6% fuel, and 12.5% consumer goods, which are categorized as significant imports.

In terms of values, Egypt imported \$5.1 billion of fuel, \$4.8 billion of plastics, \$3.5 billion of wheat, and \$2.8 billion of pharmaceuticals in 2023, with China, Saudi Arabia, the United States, and Russia being the four major trading partners supplying goods to Egypt.

Despite the historical fluctuations in commercial relations over more than six decades, both under the previous regime and in the past four decades, Latifi emphasized that rebuilding these relations has been time-consuming for various reasons. However, he expressed optimism about the current intentions of both governments and viewed the recent eight-month trade growth between Iran and Egypt as a potential beginning for economic flourishing, especially with the Iranian President's visit to Egypt. He hopes that the current share of less than half a percent of Egypt's \$115 billion market can exceed \$1 billion through the removal of existing trade and political hurdles.

## Iran Has the Potential to Become the Region's Food Hub



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Despite numerous challenges, Iran possesses the capacity and opportunities to transform into the food production hub of the region, stated the former Deputy Minister of Agriculture.

Alireza Peyman-Pak made these remarks during the fourth session of the 11th Annual Resistant Economy Conference titled "Requirements for Transforming Iran into the Regional Food Hub." The session was held in collaboration with the Resistant Economy Think Tank and hosted by the Iran-Russia Joint Chamber of Commerce.

Peyman-Pak emphasized that Iran's geographical and geopolitical position, combined with its economic technical status, indicates a significant potential for becoming a food hub.

He pointed out that Central Asian countries like Kazakhstan have substantial capacities in grain production and other food products, while countries like Pakistan and those in the Persian Gulf have significant import capabilities for food products. This potential should be addressed in terms of both transit and food processing.

The former Deputy Minister noted that in recent years, a large portion of the food industry's capacity in Iran—such as flour and animal feed production—has remained underutilized. He asserted that these technical capacities could be utilized without the need for new investments.

According to him, there are three main capacities for Iran to become a food hub: first, the transit of various food products; second, the potential for re-export that has not been recognized in the country's laws and economic structure; and third, leveraging processing capacities and exporting products to regional countries.

Peyman-Pak stressed that utilizing these three capacities would enhance food security in Iran, as it could facilitate access to a vast array of goods during a crisis, thereby mitigating the impact of such situations.

Hadi Tizhoosh Tabaan, the head of the Iran-Russia Joint Chamber of Commerce, highlighted that maritime transit is a crucial focus for trade with Russia. He urged for better utilization of existing resources and proposed establishing a dedicated section within the Trade Development Organization solely for exports.

He noted the discrepancies between how export issues are handled in Iran compared to Turkey, where the Turkish ambassador quickly intervenes when a Turkish exporter faces problems at the border. In contrast, there is currently no individual responsible for addressing exporters' concerns in Iran.

Tizhoosh Tabaan criticized the market regulation measures in Iran that, instead of facilitating exports, create obstacles, asserting that market concerns are typically resolved through imports in other countries.

He emphasized the need for a dedicated manager to comprehensively oversee and troubleshoot export-related problems, suggesting that having such leadership could triple Iran's export volume in a short timeframe.

Vladislav Perplekin, representative of the Ministry of Agriculture of the Russian Federation in Iran, remarked on the significant role of the North-South Corridor in Russia-Iran relations, noting that food security is an essential element of this partnership.

He explained that in the contemporary world, no country can independently dictate its path toward food security and must collaborate with others. Russia is closely cooperating with BRICS and the Eurasian Economic Union to achieve its food security goals.

Perplekin mentioned a recent initiative from BRICS to establish a domestic exchange for agricultural products, emphasizing its importance and expressing hope for successful progress through collaboration among BRICS countries.

Farshad Avatefi Hovida, an expert from the AICAS Center for Strategic and International Analysis, stated that Iran seeks to shape new markets and enhance strategic relations through its role as a food hub.

He emphasized that Iran, currently a grain importer, can transition into a processor and exporter of final products. He also noted that if Iran becomes the regional food hub, the food security of neighboring countries would become increasingly tied to Iran, complicating efforts to impose sanctions on the country.

## Iranian Officials Seek Chinese Investors for Tehran's Water and Wastewater Projects



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - In a recent effort to attract private Chinese investors for water and wastewater projects in Tehran, Iran's ambassador to China expressed his commitment to facilitating investment opportunities.

According to a report from the Tehran Water and Wastewater Company, Ambassador Mohsen Bakhtiar stated during a meeting with the company's CEO that the current financial constraints facing water and wastewater projects necessitate looking for foreign investment through methodologies such as Build-Operate-Transfer (BOT).

Bakhtiar emphasized that the Iranian embassy in China aims to create the necessary conditions to attract investment for these vital infrastructure projects. He noted his satisfaction that, over the past 18 months, the Tehran Water and Wastewater Company has emerged as a pioneer among Iranian water companies in pursuing private investment with the support of the Iranian embassy in China.

CEO of the Tehran Water and Wastewater Company, Mohsen Ardakani, thanked the ambassador for facilitating this meeting and for his commitment to easing the process of foreign investment. He described the ambassador's involvement as a positive step towards diversifying funding sources for Tehran's water and wastewater initiatives.

Ardakani also highlighted that the environment for Chinese investors and contractors to operate in Iran is currently favorable. He pointed out that the ambassador's background in urban infrastructure at the Ministry of Energy presents a significant opportunity for maximizing investments in this sector.

Accompanied by Deputy Head of Operations and Development of Water, Hesam Khosravi, and CEO of Tehran's Wastewater Company, Abbasali Masrizadeh, Ardakani attended the AQUATECH CHINA international trade fair for industrial water, drinking water, and wastewater management held in Shanghai.

## Surge in Coffee Consumption by 40% Annually in Iran



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - An official from the Iran Coffee Association has addressed the effects of rising global coffee prices on local producers, revealing that the country imports approximately 50,000 tons of coffee annually while experiencing a 40% increase in consumption each year.

According to ISNA, cocoa and coffee prices have seen significant fluctuations in 2024, primarily due to severe droughts and rising temperatures, coupled with global reliance on a limited number of producing regions.

Coffee is cultivated in only a few tropical regions, with Brazil, Vietnam, Colombia, and Ethiopia being the main producers. The concentration of coffee production in key countries such as Brazil and Vietnam, which account for over half of the world's coffee, has rendered this industry highly susceptible to climate change impacts.

Ali Mahjooyan, speaking with ISNA, noted that the average global coffee price has surged by at least 80% this year, citing the climatic conditions in coffee-producing countries and high global demand as the driving factors behind this increase.

He warned that due to the rise in global coffee prices, some local producers in Iran with limited production capacity might struggle to continue their operations in the future, primarily because they are unable to sustain their working capital. He reiterated that the annual import of coffee stands at around 50,000 tons, with consumption levels rising by approximately 40% each year.

Mahjooyan identified Vietnam, Brazil, India, Indonesia, Colombia, and Uganda as the main sources of coffee imports to Iran.

He also pointed out issues concerning coffee imports, stating that import quotas are detrimental to producers. He explained that instead of being allocated directly to producers, these quotas are channeled through trade intermediaries, which is against the law and needs reform.

## Burkina Faso Frees Four French Spies After Moroccan Mediation

RABAT (Dispatches) - Four French nationals held in Burkina Faso for a year have been released following mediation from Morocco, France and Morocco said on Thursday, resolving a diplomatic row over their detention. The head of France's foreign intelligence agency, the DGSE, has previously said that they were spies. A spokesperson for the French military, which oversees the DGSE, and the DGSE did not respond to a request for comment. They had been held in Ouagadougou since December 2023. The French presidency said in statement that President Emmanuel Macron had on Wednesday thanked Morocco's King Mohammed for his mediation "which made possible the liberation of our four countrymen who had been held in Burkina Faso for a year".



## U.S. Claims Pakistan's Missile Program Is Emerging Threat



WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - A senior White House official on Thursday said nuclear-armed Pakistan is developing long-range ballistic missile capabilities that eventually could allow it to strike targets well beyond South Asia, making it an "emerging threat" to the United States.

Deputy National Security Adviser Jon Finer's surprise revelation underscored how far the once-close ties between Washington and Islamabad have deteriorated since the 2021 U.S. troop withdrawal from Afghanistan.

It also raised questions about whether Pakistan has shifted the objectives of nuclear weapons and ballistic missile programs long intended to counter those of India, with which it has fought three major wars since 1947.

Speaking to the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Finer said Pakistan has pursued "increasingly sophisticated missile technology, from long-range ballistic missile systems to equipment, that would enable the testing of significantly larger rocket motors."

If those trends continue, Finer said, "Pakistan will have the capability to strike targets well beyond South Asia, including in the United States."

The number of nuclear-armed states with missiles that can reach the U.S. homeland "is very small and they tend to be adversarial," he continued, naming Russia, North Korea and China.

"So, candidly, it's hard for us to see Pakistan's actions as anything other than an emerging threat to the United States," Finer said.

His speech came a day after Washington announced a new round of sanctions related to Pakistan's ballistic missile development program, including for the first time against the state-run defense agency that oversees the program.

The Pakistani embassy did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Islamabad casts its nuclear weapons and ballistic missile programs as deterrents against Indian aggression and intended to maintain regional stability.

Two senior administration officials, speaking on condition of anonymity, said that the U.S. concerns with Pakistan's missile program have been long-standing and stemmed from the sizes of the rocket engines being developed.

## HRW Accuses Israel of Acts of Genocide in Gaza

PARIS (Dispatches) - Israel on Thursday faced accusations of "acts of genocide" and exhibiting "signs of ethnic cleansing" in its military offensive in Gaza, charges Israeli authorities dismissed as "lies".

They are the latest in a series of accusations levelled against Israel -- and denied by the country -- during its 14-month war against Palestinian Hamas militants in the Gaza Strip.

In a report focused on water, New York-based Human Rights Watch detailed what it called deliberate efforts by Israeli authorities "of a systematic nature" to deprive Gazans of water, which had "likely caused thousands of deaths... and will likely continue to cause deaths".

The Gaza war was sparked by Hamas's October 7, 2023 attack on Israel that resulted in the deaths of 1,208 people, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally of Israeli official figures.

Since then, Israel's retaliatory offensive has killed at least 45,129 people in Gaza, a majority of them civilians, according to figures from the Hamas-run territory's health ministry that the United Nations considers reliable.

"Human Rights Watch is once more spreading its blood libels in order to promote its anti-Israel propaganda," the foreign ministry said.

"Since the beginning of the war, Israel has facilitated the continuous flow of water and humanitarian aid into Gaza, despite operating under constant attacks" from Hamas.

COGAT, the Israeli defence ministry body responsible for civil affairs in the Palestinian territories, denied using water as a "weapon" and said "three water lines from Israel are active" in Gaza.

The United States said it disagreed with HRW findings.

"When it comes to a determination of something like genocide, the legal standard is just incredibly high, and so the finding in this scenario we just disagree with," said State Department spokesman Vedant Patel.

In a separate report on Thursday, Doctors Without Borders (MSF) accused Israel of causing widespread devastation in Gaza and noted "signs of ethnic cleansing" in the north of the Palestinian territory.

Israel in early October began a major military operation in Gaza's north, which it said aimed to prevent Hamas from regrouping.

MSF Secretary General Christopher Lockyear said what the group's medical teams "have witnessed on the ground throughout this conflict is consistent with the descriptions provided by an increasing number of legal experts and organizations

concluding that genocide is taking place in Gaza".

"Signs of ethnic cleansing and the ongoing devastation -- including mass killings, severe physical and mental health injuries, forced displacement, and impossible conditions of life for Palestinians under siege and bombardment -- are undeniable," he said.

The foreign ministry slammed what it said was a "fabricated" MSF report.

"The report is entirely false and misleading. Israel does not target medical teams or individuals uninvolved in terrorist activities," it said.

The HRW report detailed what it said was the intentional damaging of water and sanitation infrastructure, as well as the blocking of fuel for generators.

The report concluded that in doing so, "Israeli authorities intentionally inflicted on the Palestinian population in Gaza 'conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part'."

This, it said, amounted to the war crime of "extermination" and to "acts of genocide".

Israel's foreign ministry said that, in addition to water pipelines, it has also ensured that "water pumping and desalination facilities... remain operational".

HRW stopped short of saying Israel was committing outright "genocide".

Under international law, proving genocide requires evidence of specific intent, which experts say is very difficult.

HRW pointed to a statement by then-defence minister Yoav Gallant as suggestive of Israel's intent. In October 2023, he declared a "complete siege" on Gaza and said: "No electricity, no food, no water, no gas -- it's all closed."

Israel is facing a case brought by South Africa at the International Court of Justice last December, arguing the war in Gaza breached the 1948 UN Genocide Convention, an accusation Israel has strongly denied.

In November the International Criminal Court issued arrest warrants for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, for Gallant, and also for Mohammed Deif, military chief of Hamas.

Israel told the court it will appeal the warrants.

The HRW report, drawn up over nearly a year, is based on interviews with dozens of Gazans and health officials, as well as satellite imagery, photographs, videos and data analysis.

## At UN, Blinken Tells States Backing Sudan's Warring Parties



UNITED NATIONS (Dispatches) - U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Thursday had a blunt message for countries providing military support to Sudan's warring parties or profiting from the conflict: "Enough."

"Use your resources to ease Sudanese suffering, not deepen it. Use your influence to end the war, not perpetuate it. Don't just claim to be concerned about Sudan's future, prove it," he told the United Nations Security Council.

The war erupted in April 2023 amid a power struggle between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) ahead of a planned transition to civilian rule, triggering the world's largest displacement and hunger crisis.

The United Arab Emirates has denied giving military support to the RSF. Independent U.N. experts found the reports credible. The Sudanese army has acquired Iranian-made drones, sources have told Reuters. The army denied getting weapons from Iran.

Russia has provided diplomatic support to the Sudanese authorities, vetoing a Security Council resolution on Sudan last month that both disagreed with. Reuters also reported in October that a plane downed in Sudan's North Darfur had Russian crew members and was being used by Sudan's army to resupply troops.

Russia's U.N. Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia categorically rejected "insinuations about us allegedly playing with both sides of the conflict in an attempt to profit from the developments in Sudan."

## Putin Says Russia Is Ready to Compromise With Trump on Ukraine War

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russian President Vladimir Putin said on Thursday that he was ready to compromise over Ukraine in possible talks with U.S. President-elect Donald Trump on ending the war and had no conditions for starting talks with the Ukrainian authorities.

Trump, a self-styled master of brokering agreements and author of the 1987 book "Trump: The Art of the Deal", has vowed to swiftly end the conflict, but has not yet given any details on how he might achieve that.

Putin, fielding questions on state TV during his annual question and answer session with Russians, told a reporter for a U.S. news channel that he was ready to meet Trump, whom he said he had not spoken to for years.

Asked what he might be able to offer Trump, Putin dismissed an assertion that Russia was in a weak position, saying that Russia had got much stronger since he ordered troops into Ukraine in 2022.

"We have always said that we are ready for negotiations and compromises," Putin said, after saying that Russian forces, advancing across the entire front, were moving towards achieving their primary goals in Ukraine.

"Soon, those Ukrainians who want to fight will run out, in my opinion, soon there will be no one left who wants to fight. We are ready, but the other side needs to be ready for both negotiations and compromises."

Reuters reported last month that Putin was open to discussing a Ukraine ceasefire deal with Trump, but ruled out making any major territorial concessions and insisted Kyiv abandon its ambitions to join NATO.

Putin said on Thursday that Russia had no conditions to start talks with Ukraine and was ready to negotiate with anyone, including President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

But he said any deal could only be signed with Ukraine's legitimate authorities, which for now the Kremlin considered to be only the Ukrainian parliament.

Zelenskyy, whose term was due to expire earlier this year but has been



extended due to martial law, would need to be re-elected for Moscow to consider him a legitimate signatory to any deal to ensure it was legally watertight, said Putin.

Putin dismissed the idea of agreeing a temporary truce with Kyiv, saying only a long-lasting peace deal with Ukraine would suffice.

Any talks should take as their starting point a preliminary agreement reached between Russian and Ukrainian negotiators in the early weeks of the war at talks in Istanbul, which was never implemented, he added.

Some Ukrainian politicians regard that draft deal as akin to a capitulation which would have neutered Ukraine's military and political ambitions.

Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine has left tens of thousands of dead, displaced millions and triggered the biggest crisis in relations between Moscow and the West since the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis.

Russia, which casts the conflict as a defensive special military operation designed to stop dangerous NATO expansion to the east, controls around a fifth of Ukraine and has taken several thousand square kilometres of territory this

year.

Determined to incorporate four Ukrainian regions into Russia, Moscow's forces have taken village after village in the east and are now threatening strategically important cities such as Pokrovsk, a major road and rail hub.

Putin said the fighting was complex, so it was "difficult and pointless to guess what lies ahead... (but) we are moving, as you said, towards solving our primary tasks, which we outlined at the beginning of the special military operation."

Discussing the continued presence of Ukrainian forces in Russia's Kursk region, Putin said Kyiv's troops would be forced out, but declined to say exactly when that would happen.

The war has transformed the Russian economy and Putin said it was showing signs of overheating which was stoking worryingly high inflation. But he said growth was higher than many other economies such as Britain.

Asked if he'd do anything differently, he said he should have sent troops into Ukraine sooner than 2022 and that Russia should have been better prepared for the conflict.

Asked by a BBC reporter if he'd looked after Russia, something that Boris Yeltsin had asked him to do before handing over the presidency at the end of 1999, Putin said he had.

"We have moved back from the edge of the abyss," Putin said.

"I have done everything to ensure that Russia is an independent and sovereign power that is able to make decisions in its own interests."

Russia, Putin said, had made proposals to Syria's new rulers about Russia's military bases there and most people that Moscow had spoken to on the issue favoured them staying.

Russia would need to think about whether the bases should remain or not, he added, but rumours about the death of Russian influence in the Middle East were exaggerated.

## Trump-Backed Spending Deal Fails to Clear U.S. House, Shutdown Looms

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - A Republican spending bill backed by President-elect Donald Trump failed in the US House of Representatives on Thursday, leaving Congress with no clear plan to avert a fast-approaching government shutdown that could disrupt Christmas travel.

By a vote of 174-235, the House rejected the spending package, which was hastily assembled by Republican leaders after Trump and billionaire Elon Musk scuttled a prior bipartisan deal.

Government funding is due to expire at midnight on Friday. If lawmakers fail to extend that deadline, the US government will begin a partial shutdown that would interrupt funding for everything from border enforcement to national parks and cut off paychecks for more than 2 million federal workers. The US Transportation Security Administration warned that travelers during the busy holiday season could face long lines at airports.

The bill largely resembled the earlier version that Musk and Trump had blasted as a wasteful giveaway to Democrats. It would have extended government funding into March, when Trump will be in the White House and Republicans will control both chambers of Congress, and provided \$100 billion in disaster relief and suspended the debt. Republicans dropped other elements that had been included in the original package, such as a pay raise for lawmakers and new rules for pharmacy benefit managers.

At Trump's urging, the new version also would have suspended limits on the national



debt for two years -- a maneuver that would make it easier to pass the dramatic tax cuts he has promised and set the stage for the federal government's \$36 trillion in debt to continue to climb.

Ahead of the vote, Democrats and Republicans warned that the other party would be at fault if Congress allowed the government to shut down.

Republican House Speaker Mike Johnson told reporters that the package would avoid disruption, tie up loose ends and make it easier for lawmakers to cut spending by hundreds of billions of dollars when Trump takes office next year.

"Government is too big, it does too many things, and it does few things well," he said.

Democrats blasted the bill as a cover for a budget-busting tax cut that would largely benefit wealthy backers such as Musk, the world's richest person, while saddling the country with trillions of dollars in additional debt.

"How dare you lecture America about fiscal responsibility, ever?" House Democratic Leader Hakeem Jeffries said during floor debate.

Some Republicans likewise objected that it would clear the way for more debt while failing to reduce spending. "I am absolutely sickened by the party that campaigns on fiscal responsibility," Republican Representative Chip Roy said.

Even if the bill had passed the House, it would have faced long odds in the Senate, which is currently controlled by Democrats. The White House said Democratic President Joe Biden did not support it.



## Guiu Hat-Trick Powers Chelsea to 5-1 Rout of Shamrock Rovers

PARIS (Dispatches) - Teenage striker Marc Guiu scored a hat-trick as Chelsea thrashed Shamrock Rovers 5-1 for their sixth straight Europa Conference League win, advancing to the last 16 with maximum points. The 18-year-old Guiu took over as the competition's leading scorer with six goals, two of which came in the win away to Astana last week. The young Spaniard headed Chelsea in front after a defensive mix-up but a deflected effort from Markus Poom — the son of former Derby, Sunderland and Arsenal goalkeeper Mart — brought the Irish visitors level. Guiu took advantage of another mistake at the back to restore Chelsea's lead at Stamford Bridge, with Kiernan Dewsbury-Hall adding another before Guiu completed his treble by heading home in first-half stoppage time. Marc Cucurella fired in a fifth for the Blues around the hour as Chelsea finished the league phase with 26 goals scored — eight more than any other club — and again underlined their status as the title favourites. "A lot of people will say we are big favourites and honestly, we probably are, but in football it is not easy to keep winning," Dewsbury-Hall told TNT Sports. "Six wins out of six is pretty good. "This tournament is relieving a lot of pressure for some of the people who play in the Premier league and

it's a chance for young academy lads to make their debuts. "It is a good vibe at the moment." Chelsea coach Enzo Maresca admitted Guiu was frustrated by his limited opportunities, having not played a single minute in the Premier League since a substitute appearance in the opening game of the season. "Marc is a bit unhappy as Nicolas (Jackson) and Christopher (Nkunku) are doing well," said Maresca. "When you're a nine and another nine is doing well it is a matter of being questioned. It is important that they work hard day-by-day and then they get a chance." Shamrock, who began the night on course for the top 16 as one of only three remaining unbeaten teams, will instead head into the draw for Friday's knockout phase play-offs among the seeded sides. Joining Chelsea in qualifying directly for the last 16 were Vitoria Guimaraes and Fiorentina after a 1-1 draw between the sides in Portugal. Vitoria were the only other team not to lose in the league phase. Rapid Vienna, Djurgarden, Lugano, Legia Warsaw and Cercle Brugge will also go through to the last 16. Hearts missed out on a play-off spot after a 2-2 draw at home to Romania's Petrocub, who came dead last among the 36 clubs in the competition. Northern Ireland's Larne had already been eliminated but picked up their first points with a 1-0 win over Gent, while Welsh outfit The New Saints lost 3-2 away to Slovenia's Celje as their European run also ended.

## Pacers Prevail as Suns' Devin Booker Leaves With Groin Injury

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Pascal Siakam recorded 25 points and a season-best 18 rebounds to lead the Indiana Pacers to a 120-111 victory over the host Phoenix Suns on Thursday night. Myles Turner and Andrew Nembhard added 19 points apiece for Indiana, which has matched its season best with a three-game winning streak. Benedict Mathurin scored 16 points, Tyrese Haliburton registered 13 points and 12 assists and Obi Toppin added 13 points and eight rebounds off the bench. Kevin Durant scored a season-best 37 points, matched his season high of 10 rebounds and also dished six assists for the Suns, who had a two-game winning streak snapped. Suns star Devin Booker exited due to groin tightness with 5:18 left in the third quarter, and he didn't return. Booker had 17 points and six assists in 25 minutes. He made 5 of 10 field-goal attempts. Bradley Beal added 16 points and Jusuf Nurkic had 12 points and 10 rebounds for Phoenix, which made 48.8 percent of its shot attempts but was 9 of 30 (30 percent) from behind the arc. T.J. McConnell scored 11 points off the bench for Indiana, which shot 43.8 percent from the field, including 16 of 41 (39 percent) from



3-point range. The Pacers held a mammoth 29-10 edge in points off turnovers. Mathurin scored four points during a 6-0 run as Indiana grabbed a 105-86 lead with 9:53 remaining in the game. Phoenix responded with a 11-2 burst to move within 10 with 6:21 to go before Siakam and Mathurin answered with baskets to give the Pacers a 111-97 lead with 5:25 left. Siakam's 3-pointer made it 116-99 with 4:03 remaining. The Suns made another charge with 10 straight points to creep

within seven on Durant's layup with 48.9 seconds to play. Nembhard hit two free throws with 37.3 seconds left to end the drought, and Indiana closed it out. Turner drained a 3-pointer to cap an 8-0 burst early in the third quarter as Indiana took a 68-61 lead. Phoenix trailed 80-75 after Durant's basket with 6:18 remaining in the period before the Pacers put up nine straight points and 13 of 15 for a 93-77 advantage. Indiana led 97-83 entering the final stanza. Toppin scored 13 first-half points as the Pacers led 60-59 at the break. Booker had 16 in the half for the Suns. Meanwhile Norman Powell scored 29 points, and the visiting Los Angeles Clippers raced past the injury-depleted Dallas Mavericks 118-95. Los Angeles, playing the first of two straight games in Dallas, broke a stalemate that lasted much of the first half with a 22-6 run late in the third quarter.

## Spurs Survive Man Utd Comeback to Reach League Cup Semis

LONDON (Dispatches) - Tottenham survived two calamitous errors from stand-in goalkeeper Fraser Forster to beat Manchester United 4-3 and set up a League Cup semi-final against Liverpool, staying on track for their first trophy since 2008. The home side were cruising at 3-0 in the 54th minute of a captivating tie in London after two goals from Dominic Solanke and one from Dejan Kulusevski. But Forster's mistakes allowed substitutes Joshua Zirkzee and Amad Diallo to pull the score back to 3-2 with 20 minutes to go. It was one-way traffic after that, with United totally on top, but Spurs scored a fourth as Son Heung-min found the net from a corner and they held on despite a late Jonny Evans goal. Tottenham will face Premier League leaders Liverpool in the two-legged semi-finals, with Arsenal taking on Newcastle. Spurs boss Ange Postecoglou said his injury-hit team inflicted pain on themselves but gave a passionate defence of his gung-ho approach. "It should have been a lot more comfortable there, but having said that, I still can't get away from the fact that this group of players have done an unbelievable job at the moment to get us through this," he said. The Australian added: "I know people will say, 'Well, don't take any risks and all that sort of stuff', but we wouldn't be scoring four goals and five goals. "It's the hardest thing in the game to do, score goals, and we're doing it with bare bones." Tottenham, 10th in the Premier League, have not won silverware for 16 years, when they lifted the League Cup under Juande Ramos. But they are now just one stage away from a Wembley final in



March, with Postecoglou still on track to deliver on his bold statement that he always wins a trophy in his second season at a club. New United boss Ruben Amorim is back down to earth with a bump after his side's dramatic 2-1 Premier League win at Manchester City on Sunday. Amorim made five changes from the team that beat City while Spurs had six academy players on their bench. Marcus Rashford was left out of United's squad for the second consecutive game but Alejandro Garnacho, also absent on Sunday, was on the bench and came on as a second-half substitute. Meanwhile holders Liverpool booked their berth in the League Cup semi-finals with a 2-1 victory over Southampton at a wet and windy St Mary's Stadium, thanks to goals from Darwin Nunez and Harvey Elliott. Gabriel Jesus bagged a second-half hat-trick as Arsenal came from behind to beat Crystal Palace 3-2, and Sandro Tonali scored twice to lead Newcastle to a 3-1 win over Brentford. Nunez, who had been goaded by Saints fans earlier in the game for a wild miss, got on the scoresheet in the 24th minute, pouncing after a mis-kick by centre back Jan Bednarek and a slip by keeper Alex McCarthy. Nunez put his finger to his lips in a gesture to the crowd after finishing past McCarthy. Elliott doubled the Reds' lead eight minutes later when he unleashed a low, hard shot from Cody Gakpo's pass. Cameron Archer pulled one back for the home side in the 59th minute with a curling shot from just inside the box.

## New Zealander Lawson Replaces Perez at Red Bull



PARIS (Dispatches) - New Zealander Liam Lawson will race for Red Bull alongside world champion Max Verstappen next season after the decision to drop Sergio Perez, the Formula One team confirmed. Lawson, 22, who joined the Red Bull Junior Programme five years ago, steps in after just 11 grand prix over two seasons for the team. The announcement comes a day after Perez said he had agreed a termination deal following a disappointing season by the Mexican. He spent four seasons with the team. "To be announced as an Oracle Red Bull Racing Driver is a lifelong dream for me, this is something I've wanted and worked towards since I was eight years old," Lawson said. "I am super excited to work alongside Max and learn from a world champion, I have no doubt I will learn from his expertise. I can't wait to get going!" Lawson, who has earned three top-10 finishes so far in his fledgling F1 career, steps up from Red Bull's sister team RB. "I'm delighted to announce that Liam Lawson will join the Team in 2025," said Red Bull team principal Christian Horner. "Liam's performances over the course of his two stints with Racing Bulls (RB) have demonstrated that he's not only capable of delivering strong results but that he's also a real racer, not afraid to mix it with the best and come out on top." Lawson made his debut in F1 at the 2023 Dutch Grand Prix in place of the injured Daniel Ricciardo.

## Fury Gets Serious Ahead of Usyk Rematch



RIYADH (Dispatches) - Tyson Fury insisted that there would be no joking around ahead of his rematch with Oleksandr Usyk, as both heavyweights were subdued in a bizarre press conference on Thursday. Usyk beat Fury on a split-decision in Saudi Arabia in May to become a four-belt undisputed heavyweight champion, and the pair will meet once again at the same Kingdom Arena venue on Saturday in Riyadh with the WBC, WBO and WBA titles on the line. In a news conference before the bout, both fighters gave curt opening statements before engaging in a tense and drawn out faceoff that went on for over 11 minutes. They were eventually separated by their entourages after a heated exchange. Fury, garrulous even by the standards of a sport that thrives on trash-talking, was unusually quiet in the press conference and said he was fully focused on revenge. "I'm going to dish out a whole lot of pain," a bearded Fury said. "I've got nothing to say, apart from there is going to be a lot of hurt and pain in this fight, you watch. That's all I got to say. Talking's been done. The first fight I talked, I joked — all my career — this time, I am serious. "I am going to do some serious damage. Watch me go to work. Can't wait for Saturday night. Thank you everybody involved. God bless." Fury's silence was the latest of a string of strange decisions in recent days, with the boxer not throwing a single punch during a public workout on Wednesday and reportedly banning his father from his corner for the bout. Usyk, for his part, was typically business-like. "Now we have just a performance with lights and cameras. Everything will take place on Saturday..." the Ukrainian said. "Don't be afraid. I will not leave you alone. See you on Saturday." Promoter Bob Arum said he had confidence in Fury's ability to win the rematch, pointing to the Briton's dominant victory over former WBC champion Deontay Wilder in the second bout of their trilogy. "I'm not only Tyson Fury's co-promoter but I'm a Tyson Fury fan," Arum said. "For anyone who watched the second Fury-Wilder fight, remember the first was a draw, Tyson knew what he had to do and he won that second fight in a one-sided way. "I'm looking forward to him fighting in that way and being successful on Saturday. That being said, he's fighting a tough, tough, skilled Ukrainian."