

Foreign Ministry Spokesman Strongly Condemned the Israeli Regime's Burning of Kamal Adwan Hospital in Gaza, Describing It as a "Heinous War crime" and "Crime Against Humanity"

IRAN NEWS

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Iran Dismisses Arab League Accusations, Says Wants Stability in Syria



TEHRAN - Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi has dismissed the Arab League's accusations against Iran, naming several reasons why Tehran seeks "stability" in Syria.

Araqchi made the remarks in a post in Arabic on his X account on Friday in response to the latest statement issued by the Arab League which accuses Iran of meddling in Syria's affairs.

"Like you, we also desire stability, calm, and the prevention of chaos and disturbances in Syria for very clear reasons," he wrote while addressing the Arab League members, before listing nine reasons.

He cited preserving Syria's territorial integrity, security of all ethnic and religious groups, and sanctity of shrines and holy sites as well as limiting the possession of illegal weapons as among Iran's reasons.

Rejecting "any form of foreign intervention under any pretext", preventing Syria from becoming a "haven for terrorism", and ensuring Syria does not pose a threat to neighbors and region were the three other reasons named by the Iranian minister.

He noted that stability is needed in Syria to "prevent further adventurism and dangerous expansionist policies by Israel" and "finally to form an inclusive government" in the country.

Meanwhile, he warned against attempts to incite strife and divert public attention toward "unrealistic threats". The objectives of those inciting strife are "to legitimize the continued occupation of parts of Syrian territory, especially by Israel and the United States, justify foreign intervention in Syria's internal affairs, deprive certain segments of the Syrian population of participating in determining their own destiny, and to achieve their desires by blaming external factors for the country's problems."

"Going through the current turbulent period in the region requires rationality, participation, cooperation, and avoiding the stirring of conflicts and temporary interests," Araqchi stressed.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran agrees with other countries in the region on a peaceful and secure transition towards the formation of an inclusive government with the participation of all currents, ethnic and religions in Syria and is ready to help achieve the aforementioned goals," he said.



Chinese, Iranian FMs Hold Talks in Beijing

IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

BEIJING - China has called on the international community to respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of countries in the Middle East, while hoping that parties concerned can play a constructive role in facilitating peace and stability in the region.

China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi made the remarks on Saturday during talks with Iranian Foreign Minister Seyyed Abbas Araqchi in Beijing. Araqchi landed in China on Friday for a two-day visit to discuss bilateral, regional and international issues of mutual concern.

Wang emphasized that the Middle East belongs to the people in the region and should not be reduced to an arena for major power rivalry or a victim of external geopolitical competition.

He called for an immediate ceasefire, alleviation of humanitarian crises, a commitment to political solutions and resumption of talks to transform the region from chaos to order.

China urged the international community to respect legitimate and reasonable concerns, and the rich historical and cultural traditions of nations in the Middle East, as well as honor the choices made independently by the people of the region, Wang said.

He warned against imposing external willingness on the people in the region, interfering in their affairs, or even resorting to sanctions, pressure, confrontation and force.

Wang also reaffirmed China's unwavering support for Middle East countries in their independent pursuit of development paths, resolving conflicts through dialogue and consultation, and efforts to safeguard sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity while resisting external interference.

On the Iran nuclear issue, China has always advocated on resolving the issue through political and diplomatic means and preserving the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, and encouraged all the relevant parties to play a constructive role in resuming dialogue and negotiations, Wang said.

He voiced firm opposition to sanctions and pressure as well as support for Iran in safeguarding its legitimate rights and interests.

Araqchi appreciated China's significant contributions to facilitating and preserving the JCPOA and expressed Iran's readiness to maintain close communication with China.

Earlier on Friday and upon arrival in Beijing, Araqchi said new circumstances surrounding the nuclear issue and sanctions removal talks in 2025 necessitate "more consultations" with China.

"The main goal of this visit is to [facilitate] consultations on bilateral, regional, and international issues," he said.

He added that Iran has maintained close consultations with China about all regional and international matters, noting that the two countries have always enjoyed good relations and should continue collaboration on various issues.

"We are currently facing a sensitive situation," the top Iranian diplomat emphasized, referring to different regional and global developments.

Araqchi said it is crucial for both Tehran and Beijing to engage in more talks to prepare for tackling regional and international challenges anticipated in 2025, particularly those involving the United Nations Security Council.

In an article published by China's official People's Daily newspaper on Friday, the Iranian foreign minister said his visit to China will open a "new chapter" in strategic cooperation between the two countries and herald a "golden" era for bilateral relations.

"The next golden 50 years of Iran-China relations will demonstrate that this visit marks the beginning of a new chapter of strategic cooperation between the two countries," he wrote.

China is Iran's largest trade partner. Both states are subject to different levels of illegal sanctions imposed by the US.

The two countries signed a landmark 25-year partnership agreement in March 2021 in an attempt to strengthen their long-standing economic and political alliance.

The negotiations to restore the 2015 nuclear agreement - officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) - began in April 2021, three years after the US unilaterally withdrew from the UNSC-endorsed agreement and began to target Iran's economy with tough economic sanctions. China is a signatory to the deal.

Iran to Showcase Defensive Strength Through Series of Military Drills



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Minister of Defense and Armed Forces Logistics announced that a series of military exercises will begin on Saturday, aiming to demonstrate the nation's defensive capabilities, which have not diminished, but rather strengthened, despite adversarial propaganda.

During a ceremony on Friday evening, marking the first anniversary of martyr General Seyyed Razi Mousavi, held at the shrine of Imamzadeh Saleh (AS) in Tajrish, Minister of Defense Brigadier General Amir Azizi Nasirzadeh delivered a keynote address.

General Nasirzadeh emphasized that resistance is not a material concept but an ideology rooted in history, particularly in the event of Karbala, where moral victory triumphed over physical power. He refuted claims that resistance has weakened, asserting that such narratives arise from a misunderstanding of its essence. He pointed to Gaza as an example, where resistance remains active and impactful.

"Resistance makes the impossible possible," he stated, attributing global awareness and resilience to this ideology. "Even with the martyrdom of its leaders, resistance flourishes and continues to challenge oppressors."

In response to recent psychological warfare suggesting a decline in Iran's defensive capabilities, General Nasirzadeh announced the commencement of military drills starting Saturday. These exercises will demonstrate the growth and strength of Iran's defense forces.

He stressed the importance of preserving resistance across political, cultural, and economic domains, urging Iranian citizens to remain steadfast against external threats. "Our people are resilient, and no one can challenge us successfully," he added.

Paying tribute to General Mousavi and other martyrs, General Nasirzadeh highlighted their conscious and selfless sacrifice for divine causes. He rejected accusations of material motives for martyrdom, emphasizing their spiritual commitment and eternal legacy.

"Martyrs transcend worldly pleasures, offering their lives for divine principles. They illuminate the path like candles, sacrificing themselves for the greater good," he said, acknowledging the shared sacrifices of their families.

U.S. Aims to Plunder Muslims, Will Achieve Nothing in Syria



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's Armed Forces says the ouster of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad by foreign-backed militants is an American-Zionist plot, but the US will achieve nothing in the Arab country.

"Recent events in the region, not least the developments in Syria, indicate the continuation of the evil, insecurity, and depth of the hostility of the global arrogance, led by the great evil of the criminal America, against freedom-seeking nations," the General Staff of the Armed Forces said in a statement.

"There should be no doubt that what has happened in Syria is the product of a joint American and Zionist plot. It is obvious that the hegemonic system led by the US in the West Asian region is seeking to achieve its evil goals, including the plundering of resources and enslaving Muslims."

The General Staff of the Armed Forces also underlined the Islamic Republic's readiness for a crushing and firm response to any threats and acts of aggression against the country.

The statement said the global arrogance, led by the wicked America and with the help of the evil and child-killing Zionist regime, spared no effort over the years to confront the 1979 Islamic Revolution and its goals but faced successive and ignominious defeats.

Iran has voiced concern over rising insecurity and violence in Syria, marked by attacks on minority groups which have sparked widespread protests.

Stressing that global arrogance considers the Islamic Republic to be the greatest obstacle to its oppression and crime, the statement said, "Therefore, it is trying to use all international and regional capacities to overcome this obstacle."

"However, if it reviews its past days, it will understand that, as in the past, all their aspirations will be trampled on by the heroic nation of Islamic Iran, and by God's grace, they will not achieve anything in Syria either."

Sirens Blare in Israeli-Occupied Lands as Yemen Launches Fresh Missile Attack



SANAA (Dispatches) - A ballistic missile launched from Yemen has triggered sirens in dozens of towns and cities in the al-Quds area as well as the southern Negev.

Israel's Magen David Adom (MDA) emergency response service said one person suffering from shock, according to Channel 12 news.

The Israeli military claimed that its anti-air missile systems intercepted and shot down the projectile before it crossed into the skies over the occupied territories.

The latest Yemeni missile launch came hours after the US-British naval coalition launched a fresh airstrike on the Arab nation's capital of Sana'a on Friday night, targeting the 1st Armor Division in the city.

Yemen's al-Masirah television channel reported that the airstrike shook the whole city and ambulances were heard rushing to the targeted site.

Yemeni authorities have yet to disclose any information regarding possible casualties and losses.

Yemenis have declared their open support for Palestine's struggle against the Israeli occupation since the regime launched its devastating war on Gaza on October 7, 2023, after the territory's resistance movements carried out Operation Al-Aqsa Flood against the occupying entity.

Yemen's Ansarullah resistance movement has been also targeting ships linked to Israel, the United States, or the United Kingdom to force an end to the Tel Aviv regime's genocidal war on Gaza.

Urgent Measures Needed to Combat Fuel Smuggling in Iran

TEHRAN - President Masoud Pezeshkian has called for proactive measures to address the energy imbalance in Iran, urging officials to manage energy production and consumption efficiently in preparation for the upcoming summer and winter seasons.

During a high-level meeting involving cabinet members and provincial governors, the President highlighted forecasts indicating worsening energy imbalances in December. The meeting focused on strategies to stabilize energy and power distribution systems nationwide.

Pezeshkian, addressing the state of the national power grid, noted significant progress in stabilizing the system. "Predictions suggested a far worse situation than we currently face," he said, extending gratitude to those who have worked tirelessly to maintain stability.

He emphasized the importance of addressing the root causes of energy crises rather than assigning blame. He stressed the need for simultaneous, multifaceted approaches to manage energy imbalances. For instance, he proposed tailored educational packages to guide energy consumption across residential, commercial, and industrial sectors.

Acknowledging Iran's high average energy consumption, Pezeshkian underlined the potential for effective management through public education. He urged authorities to collect and share successful experiences to promote best practices.

The President also called for engineering-based approaches to optimize energy production, distribution, and consumption. "We need to regulate and enforce laws that support consumption management, incorporating incentives and penalties. This requires collaboration with private and non-governmental sectors," he said.

He further highlighted the necessity for precise monitoring systems to track energy production, distribution, and unauthorized usage. "Clear metrics should guide energy consumption to identify and address irregularities," he added.

He proposed forming a specialized task force to design and implement precise measures,



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utilizing media outlets, schools, mosques, and other platforms to engage the public effectively. He also emphasized strict control over the distribution network for oil derivatives, noting that significant leakage from the legal distribution system is unacceptable and must be addressed promptly.

"Continued inefficiency in managing fuel smuggling is unacceptable," he said, urging provincial governors and ministers to develop practical solutions to tackle the issue.

Pezeshkian stressed the importance of sustained efforts to manage energy imbalances, urging authorities to focus on future stability. He proposed

forming a central team under the Ministry of Interior to oversee energy management initiatives, including regulatory improvements, smart consumption practices, and public education.

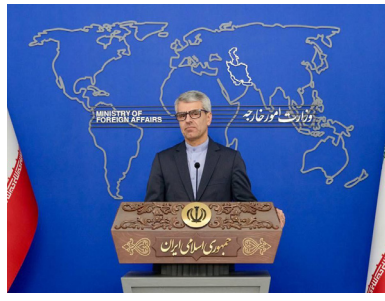
The President also prioritized the uninterrupted operation of industries, advocating for the allocation of saved fuel to industrial sectors to avoid disruptions. "We must ensure no power cuts for industries, even during peak seasons," he stated.

Interior Minister Eskandar Momeni reported that over 100 high-consumption government facilities had experienced power and gas cuts in recent weeks. Measures such as reducing power usage in urban and intercity areas and curtailing energy consumption in airports and railway stations have also yielded significant savings.

Mohsen Paknejad, the Oil Minister, detailed efforts to stabilize fuel supplies, noting increased diesel reserves at power plants. He attributed the stability to strategies like controlled closures and inter-ministerial cooperation.

Additionally, Minister of Energy Abbas Ali-Abadi reported a 40% average efficiency rate across the country's power plants, while Minister of Industry Mohammad Elhtesham highlighted increased fuel allocations to industries following recent savings.

IRAN NEWS



Iran Expresses Condolences on Passing of Former Indian PM Singh

TEHRAN (Tasnim) – Spokesperson for the Iranian Foreign Ministry Esmail Baqaei offered his condolences to the people and government of India on the passing of former prime minister Manmohan Singh. The Iranian spokesman referred to the role of Singh in the economic development of India and in the expansion of ties between Tehran and New Delhi during his tenure. He also extended his sympathies to the family of the late Indian prime minister and prayed for divine mercy on him, the Foreign Ministry's website reported. Singh, the first person of India's minority Sikh faith to take office as prime minister, died in New Delhi on Thursday at age 92.

Asian Countries Aim to Establish Regional Aviation Regulations



TEHRAN - The head of Iran's Civil Aviation Organization announced efforts by Asian countries to establish unified aviation regulations for the region, aiming to end the dominance of the United States and Europe in this field.

Hossein Pourfarzaneh, speaking to IRNA, highlighted Iran's growing ties with BRICS and Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) member states. He noted that for years, global aviation followed U.S. regulations, which significantly benefited Boeing, the American aerospace giant.

Pourfarzaneh, who is also Iran's Deputy Minister of Roads and Urban Development, explained that Europe took a similar step two decades ago by introducing EU aviation regulations, which helped expand Airbus. This move allowed many European nations to collaborate in manufacturing components for the aircraft, fostering broader cooperation.

He emphasized that Asia, with its robust economy and key players such as China, India, Singapore, Malaysia, Russia, and Iran, is well-positioned to develop its own aviation framework.

"One of our goals is to lay the groundwork for establishing Asian aviation regulations," he said. "If successful, we could even create a joint aircraft manufacturing company similar to Boeing and Airbus."

Pourfarzaneh added that preliminary discussions with some Asian countries have been held, initial steps have been taken, and some agreements have already been drafted and signed. However, he stressed that the initiative requires further development and clarity regarding the roles and contributions of each participating nation. He also requested that this topic be discussed during BRICS and SCO meetings.

Iran has demonstrated strong capabilities in aircraft engine manufacturing, a fact acknowledged by both China and Russia. "We have been recognized as a significant player in this field," Pourfarzaneh noted.

Iran's Economic Leap Through Eurasian Collaboration: A Strategic Shift in Trade



TEHRAN - Iran's Deputy Minister of Industry, Mines, and Trade and Head of the Trade Promotion Organization, Mohammad Ali Dehqan Dehnavi, has underscored the immense potential for a significant trade surge through deeper collaboration with the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). Speaking on the sidelines of the EAEU summit in Saint Petersburg, he hailed the recent decision to grant Iran observer status in the union as a pivotal development for the nation's economic aspirations.

Addressing reporters on Friday, Dehqan Dehnavi highlighted the staggering trade volume among EAEU member states, which currently stands at approximately \$900 billion annually. He emphasized the disparity with Iran's external trade, estimated at \$100-110 billion, suggesting that securing even 5-10% of the EAEU's trade share could profoundly boost Iran's economic landscape.

Dehqan Dehnavi noted that EAEU member states' complementary economic structures align well with Iran's production and consumption patterns, presenting a fertile ground for mutually beneficial trade. He stated that observer status would enable Iran to access the union's processes and information, enhancing opportunities for active participation and collaboration.

The EAEU, established in 2014, includes Belarus, Kazakhstan, Russia, Kyrgyzstan, and Armenia as its core members, with Uzbekistan, Moldova, and Cuba previously holding observer status. With the recent inclusion of Iran, the bloc strengthens its position as a significant intergovernmental economic organization. Armenia holds the presidency of the union for 2024, with Belarus set to assume the role in 2025.

The formal granting of observer status to Iran was finalized during the summit, attended by Iran's Minister of Industry, Mines, and Trade, Seyed Mohammad Atabak, alongside the Iranian Ambassador to Moscow and Dehqan Dehnavi. The observer role imposes no binding commitments on Iran but provides access to the union's strategic discussions and operational frameworks. Moreover, the summit saw an affirmation of the EAEU-Iran Free Trade

Agreement (FTA), a pivotal accord signed a year ago in Saint Petersburg. Following its ratification by the member states and Iran's parliament, the agreement will take effect within two months. This FTA allows approximately 87% of Iranian exports to the EAEU countries to enjoy tariff-free access, reciprocated by similar benefits for EAEU exports to Iran.

Even before the FTA's enactment, the EAEU-Iran trade volume has witnessed a 12.8% growth in the first 10 months of 2024, according to the Eurasian Economic Commission's Executive Chairman. This growth underscores the robust potential for expanded trade ties between Iran and the union's 240-million-strong market.

Minister Atabak described the observer status and FTA as transformative opportunities for Iranian economic stakeholders. He praised the culmination of extensive efforts by Iranian leadership and experts, which thwarted attempts to isolate Iran economically. "By gaining observer status, Iran solidifies its presence in the EAEU's strategic decisions, opening doors for Iranian exporters and businesses to harness the vast potential of a tariff-free market," he said.

He further stressed that Iranian traders, with the FTA's implementation, could penetrate the EAEU market and leverage its streamlined customs regime to boost exports significantly.

Concluding his remarks, Atabak affirmed Iran's strategic shift toward greater economic integration with international markets. "Efforts to marginalize Iran from global trade are crumbling. The outcome of relentless diplomacy and strategic foresight has now positioned Iran as a key player in the EAEU framework," he stated.

As Iran prepares to engage actively with the EAEU, its businesses and policymakers anticipate unprecedented opportunities to enhance trade, diversify markets, and strengthen economic resilience. The observer status and FTA mark a turning point in Iran's trade strategy, paving the way for a broader economic leap into Eurasia's vibrant economic landscape.

Turkey's Role in Iran's Reduced Rainfall



TEHRAN - Amid a reported 45.8% decline in rainfall across Iran, the head of the Meteorological Organization has addressed claims regarding Turkey's impact on Iran's reduced precipitation.

Sahar Tajbakhsh Mosalman refuted allegations that Turkey's mountainous regions are responsible for Iran's lower rainfall levels. She explained that multiple factors contribute to rainfall, stating, "For precipitation to occur, certain conditions, such as the rising and condensation of air, must be met. Once air condenses, it results in snow or rain."

Tajbakhsh elaborated that meteorological systems and topographical features are key factors influencing precipitation patterns. She noted that the Anatolian mountain range, which spans parts of the Iran-Turkey border, affects rainfall distribution. Southern regions of the range receive more rain than eastern areas due to differences in altitude.

She provided an example, comparing the elevations of Lake Van in Turkey, Lake Urmia in Iran, and Lake Sevan in Armenia, emphasizing that higher altitudes typically experience greater rainfall. "On average, Iran's annual precipitation is about 200 to 250 millimeters, whereas Turkey receives 500 to 600 millimeters, largely due to its topography," she said.

Atmospheric systems generally move from west to east. When these systems encounter the Anatolian mountains, they ascend, condense, and release precipitation, primarily on the western slopes. This phenomenon has been consistent over time, making the Anatolian range a significant factor in regional precipitation patterns.

However, Tajbakhsh clarified that this does not mean Iran always experiences low rainfall. She pointed to historical data from 2003, showing that similar weather conditions have occurred in the past.

According to data from Iran's Meteorological Organization, rainfall across 30 provinces has decreased significantly in the current water year (starting late September). Rainfall is down 45.8% compared to the long-term average, dropping from 63.2 millimeters to 34.3 millimeters by December 26, 2024.

The province of Sistan and Baluchestan has experienced the sharpest decline, with a 93.5% reduction, followed by Hormozgan with an 84.4% decrease.

Iran Maintains 10th Place in Global Steel Production with 28m Tons



TEHRAN - Iranian steel producers manufactured 28 million tons of crude steel during the first 11 months of the current calendar year (January 1 to November 30, 2024). This represents a 0.5% increase compared to the same period in 2023.

According to a report by the Iranian Mines and Mining Industries Development and Renovation Organization (IMIDRO), the latest data from the World Steel Association indicates that Iran has retained its position as the world's 10th largest steel producer during this period.

In November 2024 alone, Iran produced 3.1 million tons of crude steel, a slight increase of 0.1% compared to November 2023.

The World Steel Association reported that global crude steel production in the first 11 months of 2024 exceeded 1.694 billion tons, marking a 1.4% decrease year-over-year. Production for November 2024 alone was 146.8 million tons, reflecting a modest 0.8% growth compared to the previous month.

The largest declines in production were observed in North America, which produced 97 million tons, and the combined regions of Russia, the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), and Ukraine, which produced approximately 80 million tons. Both regions experienced a 4.1% decrease in production.

In contrast, non-EU European countries produced about 40 million tons, achieving a 5.2% growth, while EU member states recorded a 2.2% increase with a total output of 119 million tons.

Among the world's top 10 steel producers, Turkey showed the highest growth, producing 33.9 million tons, an increase of 11.2%.

Meanwhile, China, the world's largest steel producer, recorded a 2.7% decline, producing 929 million tons in the first 11 months of 2024. India, ranked second, produced approximately 136 million tons, achieving a 5.9% growth.

Other key players include: Japan: 77.1 million tons (-3.6%); United States: 72.9 million tons (-2.2%); Russia: 64.9 million tons (-3.6%); South Korea: 58.3 million tons (-4.9%); Germany: 34.5 million tons (+5.3%); and Brazil: 32.5 million tons (+5.6%).

These countries occupy the top nine ranks in global steel production, with Iran maintaining its position as the 10th largest producer.

Removing Four Zeros From the National Currency Is Not Effective Under Current Conditions

TEHRAN - Tahmaseb Mazaheri, former Governor of Iran's Central Bank, emphasized that the removal of four zeros from the national currency will not be effective given the current high inflation rates. He suggested that, for meaningful impact, the government should consider removing at least six zeros instead. Mazaheri also stressed that addressing the broader challenges in the monetary and banking systems should take precedence over such measures.

Mazaheri explained that the removal of zeros, or monetary reform, typically occurs after a country experiences prolonged periods of high inflation, leading to a significant devaluation of its currency. This situation often necessitates adjustments to make the currency more practical for domestic and international transactions.

He warned that failing to issue higher-denomination banknotes could result in the current notes losing their value to the point of being worth less than the cost of printing. While he acknowledged that the removal of zeros can be a logical step for certain economies, he noted that during his tenure under President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's administration, a similar proposal to remove four zeros was deemed reasonable at the time but never implemented due to legal hurdles.

Mazaheri critiqued the renewed discussion of removing four zeros, arguing that under present circumstances, it would be insufficient. He proposed that a more substantial reform, such as removing six zeros, would be necessary to align the currency with economic realities. Furthermore, he suggested that the government might consider adopting a term for the national currency that resonates more with the public, as "rial" is rarely used in everyday conversations.



Highlighting deeper systemic problems, Mazaheri pointed to issues such as banking deficits, inflation, government debt, and structural imbalances within the monetary system. He urged the government and parliament to prioritize resolving these challenges before dedicating time and resources to currency reform, which he described as neither essential nor urgent at this stage.

Meanwhile Yahya Al-Eshagh, former Minister of Commerce, echoed some of Mazaheri's sentiments. He described the removal of zeros as a superficial change that does not impact inflation, public purchasing power, or liquidity levels. Al-Eshagh noted that monetary terms like "rial" and "toman" are largely symbolic, acting as markers in financial transactions.

He highlighted the inefficiency caused by excessive zeros in calculations, suggesting that the adjustment could streamline economic communication. However, he cautioned that this reform should not be mistaken for a solution to deeper economic issues, emphasizing that the real value of a currency fluctuates with broader economic conditions and public trust.

Both experts agree that removing zeros from the national currency, while potentially beneficial in some respects, is not a priority given Iran's pressing economic challenges. They call for the government to focus on systemic reforms to stabilize the economy and address underlying issues before pursuing currency adjustments.

70% Self-Sufficiency Achieved in Iran's Chemical Industry



TEHRAN - The head of the Tehran Chemical Materials Union has announced that the capability of production and business units in Iran has led to 70% self-sufficiency in the chemical industry, enabling it to compete in global markets.

Behzad Maleki emphasized the critical role of the chemical industry in economic development and job creation. He noted that this sector provides essential raw materials for many downstream industries.

According to Maleki, over the past two years, the number of operational businesses in the chemical industry has grown by 50%. "Currently, there are 600 active businesses in this sector, and the potential exists to expand this number to 1,200," he added.

He further highlighted that approximately 40,000 individuals are directly employed in this industry, with countless others benefiting from related indirect employment opportunities.

However, Maleki pointed out that many chemical production units are struggling with financial constraints. "For instance, there is a factory that produces phosphate compounds. While it has the capacity to produce trisodium phosphate and other chemical compounds, its inability to secure adequate funding hinders further production expansion," he explained.

The union head stressed that insufficient investment in this field poses challenges for chemical manufacturers.

Maleki also underscored the importance of trade exhibitions for showcasing achievements and securing investment opportunities. He announced that the second edition of the International Iran Chemical Exhibition, focusing on chemical materials, downstream petrochemical industries, and related equipment, will be held from February 2, 2024, at the Tehran International Permanent Fairground. This event is organized by the Iran Cooperative Chamber in collaboration with the Tehran Chemical Materials Union.

Medvedev Accuses Norwegian Flagged Vessel of Anti-Russian Bias

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Dmitry Medvedev, deputy chairman of Russia's Security Council, today accused a Norwegian-flagged ship of refusing to rescue sailors from a sinking Russian cargo ship in the Mediterranean Sea in what he said was an unforgivable act. The Ursa Major cargo ship, part of the Russian Defence Ministry's military construction operations, ran into trouble on Monday and then sank between Spain and Algeria with 14 of its crew of 16 taking to a lifeboat.

Three explosions tore through the vessel breaching the hull in "an act of terrorism", the ship's owner, Oboronlogistika, told state news agency RIA on Wednesday.

Spain's Maritime Rescue Service said on Tuesday it had received a distress signal from the Ursa Major on Monday and that two vessels and a helicopter had been sent to the scene.



Airline Blames Physical and Technical Interference for Azerbaijani Plane Crash



MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russia's aviation chief said Friday that a Ukrainian drone attack was underway in the Russian region that an airliner was destined for before it diverted and crashed earlier this week.

Dmitry Yadrov, of Rosaviatsia, didn't comment on statements by an Azerbaijani lawmaker and some aviation experts who blamed Wednesday's Azerbaijan Airlines crash on Russian air defenses responding to a Ukrainian attack.

The plane was flying from Azerbaijan's capital of Baku to Grozny, the regional capital of the Russian republic of Chechnya, when it turned toward Kazakhstan and crashed while making an attempt to land there. The crash killed 38 people and left all 29 survivors injured.

Azerbaijan Airlines on Friday blamed the crash on unspecified "physical and technical interference" and announced the suspension of flights to several Russian airports. It didn't say where the interference came from or provide any further details.

Authorities in Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Russia have been tight-lipped about a possible cause pending an official probe. But a member of Azerbaijan's parliament, Rasim Musabekov, told the Azerbaijani news agency Turan on Thursday that the plane was fired on while in the skies over Grozny and urged Russia to offer an official apology.

Asked about Musabekov's statement, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov declined to comment, saying that it will be up to investigators to determine the cause of the crash.

"The air incident is being investigated, and we don't believe we have the right to make any assessments until the conclusions are made as a result of the investigation," Peskov said in a conference call with reporters.

Yadrov, the Russian aviation chief, said that as the plane was preparing to land in Grozny in deep fog, Ukrainian drones were targeting the city, prompting authorities to close the area to air traffic.



SANAA (Dispatches) - The top UN official for humanitarian aid in Yemen, who narrowly dodged an aerial bombing raid by Israel on Sanaa's airport, denied Friday that the facility had any military purpose.

Israel said that it was targeting "military infrastructure" in Thursday's raids and that targets around the country were used by Houthis to "smuggle Iranian weapons" and bring in senior Iranian officials.

UN humanitarian coordinator Julien Hameis said the airport "is a civilian location that is used by the United Nations."

"It's used by the International Committee of the Red Cross, it is used for civilian flights - that is its purpose," he told reporters by video link from Yemen.

"Parties to the conflict have an obligation to ensure that they are not striking civilian targets," he added. "The obligation is on them, not on us. We don't need to prove we're civilians."

Hameis described how he, World Health Organization chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, and 18 other UN staff, were caught up in the attack, which he said also took place as a packed airliner was touching down nearby.

One UN staffer was seriously wounded in the strikes, which destroyed the air traffic control facility, Hameis said. The rest of the team was bundled into armored vehicles for safety.

"There was one air strike approximately 300 metres (985 feet) to the south of us and another air strike approximately 300 meters to the north of us," he said.

"What was most frightening about that air strike wasn't the effect on us - it's that the air strikes took place... as a civilian airliner from Yemenia Air, carrying hundreds of Yemenis, was about to land," he said.

"In fact, that airliner from Yemenia Air was landing, taxiing in, when the air traffic control was destroyed."

Although the plane "was able to land safely... it could have been far, far worse."

The Israeli attack, he said came with "zero indication of any potential air strikes."

Hameis said the airport is "absolutely vital" to continued humanitarian aid for Yemen. "If that airport is disabled, it will paralyze humanitarian operations."

The United Nations has labeled Yemen "the largest humanitarian crisis in the world," with 24.1 million people in need of humanitarian aid and protection.

Public institutions that provide healthcare, water, sanitation and education have collapsed in the wake of years of war.

The Houthis control large parts of Yemen after seizing Sanaa and ousting the internationally recognized government in September 2014.

Israel's strikes come as the group has stepped up its own long-range attacks on Israel in the wake of a ceasefire between Israel and another Iran-backed group, Lebanon's Hezbollah.

Israeli Forces Raid North Gaza Hospital



GAZA (Dispatches) - Israeli troops stormed one of the last hospitals operating in the northernmost part of Gaza on Friday, forcing many of the staff and patients out of the facility, the territory's health ministry said.

The Kamal Adwan Hospital has been hit multiple times over the past three months by Israeli troops waging an offensive against Hamas fighters in surrounding neighbourhoods, according to staff. The ministry said a strike on the hospital a day earlier killed five medical staff.

Israel's military said it was conducting operations against Hamas infrastructure and fighters in the area of the hospital, without providing details. It repeated claims that Hamas fighters were operating inside Kamal Adwan, though it provided no evidence.

Hospital officials have denied the accusations.

The Health Ministry said troops forced medical personnel and patients to assemble in the hospital yard and remove their clothes amid the winter temperatures. They were led out of the hospital, some to an unknown location, while some patients were sent to the nearby Indonesian hospital, which was knocked out of operation after an Israel raid earlier this week.

The ministry said troops set fires in several parts of Kamal Adwan, including the hospital's lab and surgery department. It said 25 patients and 60 health workers remained in the hospital out of 75 patients and 180 staff who had been there. The ministry's account could not be independently confirmed, and attempts to reach hospital staff were unsuccessful.

N. Korean Soldiers Captured by Ukrainian Army Die of Wounds

KYI (Dispatches) - Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said Friday that "several" wounded North Korean soldiers died after being captured by Ukrainian forces, as he accused Russia of throwing them into battle with "minimal protection".

Ukraine and its western allies say North Korea has sent thousands of soldiers to support Russia's army, in what is seen as a major escalation in the nearly three-year war following Moscow's 2022 invasion.

"Today there were reports about several soldiers from North Korea. Our soldiers managed to take them prisoner. But they were very seriously wounded and could not be resuscitated," Zelensky said in an evening address posted on social media.

South Korea's spy agency said earlier on Friday that a North Korean soldier who was captured while fighting in Russia's war against Ukraine had died of his wounds.

Zelensky did not specify how many North Koreans had died after being captured by Ukrainian troops.

Zelensky had earlier said that nearly 3,000 North Korean soldiers had been "killed or wounded" so far as they joined Russia's forces in combat in its western Kursk border region, where Ukraine mounted a shock incursion in August.

South Korea's intelligence service had previously put the number of killed or wounded North Koreans at 1,000, saying the high casualty rate could be down to an unfamiliar battlefield environment and their lack of capability to counter drone attacks.

The White House on Friday confirmed the South Korean estimates, saying that Pyongyang's troops



were being sent to their deaths in futile attacks by generals who see them as "expendable".

"We also have reports of North Korean soldiers taking their own lives rather than surrendering to Ukrainian forces, likely out of fear of reprisal against their families in North Korea in the event that they're captured," National Security Council spokesman John Kirby told reporters.

North Korea and Russia have strengthened their military ties since Moscow's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

A landmark defence pact between Pyongyang and Moscow signed in June came into force this month, with Russian President Vladimir Putin hailing it as a "breakthrough document".

North Korean state media said Friday that Putin sent a New Year's message to North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, saying: "The bilateral ties between our two countries have been elevated after our talks in June in Pyongyang."

Seoul's military believes that North Korea was seeking to modernise its conventional warfare capabilities through combat experience gained in the Russia-Ukraine war.

NATO chief Mark Rutte had also said that Moscow was providing support to Pyongyang's missile and nuclear programmes in exchange for the troops.

South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said Monday that Pyongyang is reportedly "preparing for the rotation or additional deployment of soldiers" and supplying "240mm rocket launchers and 170mm self-propelled artillery" to the Russian army.

Pyongyang's involvement in Russia's war against Ukraine had prompted warnings from Seoul.

South Korea's President Yoon Suk Yeol, currently suspended, said in November that Seoul was "not ruling out the possibility of providing weapons" to Kyiv, which would mark a major shift to a long-standing policy barring the sale of weapons to countries in active conflict.

German President Dissolves Parliament, Snap Elections Set for February 23

BERLIN (Dispatches) - President Frank-Walter Steinmeier dissolved Germany's lower house of parliament to pave the way for snap elections on February 23 following the collapse of Chancellor Olaf Scholz's three-way coalition.

"Especially in difficult times, like now, stability requires a government capable of acting, and reliable majorities in parliament," which was why early elections were the right way forward for Germany, Steinmeier said in Berlin.

After the elections, problem-solving must become the core business of politics again, added Steinmeier in a speech.

The president, whose post has been largely ceremonial in the post-war era, also called for the election campaign to be conducted fairly and transparently.

"External influence is a danger to democracy, whether it is covert, as was evidently the case recently in the Romanian elections, or open and blatant, as is currently being practiced particularly intensively on (social media) platform X," he said.



Scholz, a Social Democrat who will head a caretaker government until a new one can be formed, lost a confidence vote in parliament earlier this month after the departure of Finance Minister Christian Lindner's Free Democrats left his unwieldy governing coalition without a legislative majority.

The vote also kicked off election campaigning in earnest, with conservative challenger Friedrich Merz, who surveys suggest is likely to replace Scholz, asserting that the incumbent government had imposed excessive regulations and stifled growth.

The conservatives hold a comfortable lead of more than 10 points over the Social Democrats (SPD) in most polls. The far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) is slightly ahead of the SPD, while the Greens, a coalition partner, are in fourth place.

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



Ronaldo Claims that Vinicius Deserved The Ballon d'Or

DUBAI (Dispatches) - At the recent Globe Soccer Awards gala, Cristiano Ronaldo reignited the controversy surrounding the 2024 Ballon d'Or by stating that Vinicius Junior deserved to receive the prestigious award. The Portuguese star's remarks have sparked widespread debate, especially since the accolade was awarded to Manchester City midfielder Rodrigo Hernandez, better known as Rodri.

"Vinicius deserved the Ballon d'Or," Cristiano declared during the ceremony, clearly expressing his stance on one of the most talked-about topics in football this year. The Real Madrid player was one of the main favorites after a standout season in which he scored 24 goals and provided 11 assists in 39 matches, securing the Champions League with a goal in the final and winning the La Liga title.

Meanwhile, Rodri, who received the award, attempted to ease the controversy during an interview with Cadena COPE. "I have immense respect for Vinicius and Real Madrid. There's no need to dwell on this," said the Spanish midfielder, emphasizing that every club and player has their own reasons for decisions like Real Madrid's boycott of the ceremony in Paris. Proud of his award, Rodri stressed that his intent was not to provoke disputes but to reflect his hard work on the pitch.

Vinicius himself also addressed the situation, posting a message on his X account (formerly Twitter) that many interpreted as a response to France Football, the organization behind the Ballon d'Or: "I'll do it 10 times if I have to. They're not ready." These words reveal the Brazilian's frustration, as he had been considered a favorite by his club, teammates, and sponsors in the weeks leading up to the gala.

Ronaldo just keeps proving he's the GOAT. At this year's Globe Soccer Awards in Dubai, the soccer legend picked up not one, but two major accolades, cementing his unstoppable legacy.

After shaking up the soccer world with his move to Saudi Arabia's Al-Nassr in early 2023, Ronaldo has been nothing short of a goal machine.

During the 2023-24 season, he racked up an insane 44 goals and 13 assists in just 45 matches across all competitions. Talk about consistency.

Ronaldo didn't just show up in Saudi Arabia; he owned it. With 35 goals, he snagged the Saudi Pro League golden boot, leaving stars like Aleksandar Mitrovic and Abderrazak Hamdallah in his dust.

At Friday night's Globe Soccer Awards—a glitzy affair packed with football's elite—the 39-year-old icon was crowned Best Middle Eastern Player.

Oh, and he also took home the Top Goalscorer of All Time award for the second year in a row.

Ronaldo also backed his old club Real Madrid and former rival Manchester City to return to the peak of their powers, as the two European giants approach the midpoint of what has been a difficult season for both.

Speaking to CNN Sport's Amanda Davies as part of the 15th edition of the Globe Soccer Awards in Dubai, Ronaldo was confident that the run that has seen City slip to seventh in the Premier League is just a temporary loss of form.

"Teams have moments. Difficult times, good times," he said. "It's a difficult time, but I'm sure, 100%, they will be back."

The five-time Ballon d'Or winner did seem to suggest, though, that certain players needed to focus more on their own game.

When asked what he would say if he were in the City locker room, Ronaldo replied: "Say less and show more. This is what I will say. I will push a few guys apart and say what I think. I don't need to say (it) in front of everybody."

"But I think the big teams, the big players, they are smart enough to understand what is the problem, where is the problem. I'm sure 100% they will be back. (City manager Pep) Guardiola is a very smart coach and he knows what the problem is coming from."

As for Los Blancos, Ronaldo did not agree with the assessment that his former team is having a bad season.

"I don't understand how they say this kind of thing," he said. "If you have to bet to win the Champions League again, I will bet on Real Madrid because you never know what's going to happen."

"And (Real Madrid's stadium, the Santiago) Bernabeu at that hour is different. All the teams, they're scared when they play there. This is a fact, history says that. Never consider Real Madrid dead because they're always back."

Bencic, Stricker Lead Switzerland Past France at United Cup



LONDON (Dispatches) - Belinda Bencic and Dominic Stricker defeated Elixane Lechemia and Edouard Roger-Vasselin 6-1, 7-6(4) in a deciding mixed doubles clash to lead Switzerland past France 2-1 in Group D action.

The Swiss side appeared in cruise control after losing just 12 points in the first set of the mixed doubles, but needed to work hard to ultimately prevail in 77 minutes.

"I saw her matches when she played with Roger, so it was not easy for me," Stricker said, referring to countryman Roger Federer. "But we just had a good talk before the match and then we came out hot and it's super great to win that match and that tie."

The winners will need to quickly recover for their next tie against Italy on Sunday evening at Ken Rosewall Arena. France will face Italy on Tuesday.

"So important [to earn the win] and it was a pleasure playing with Dominic," Bencic said. "It's so easy when he's on serve. I'm just chilling at the net, not touching the ball, so it's super cool to play with him and we had great energy on the court."

Ugo Humbert gave France a chance to contest a live mixed doubles when he levelled the tie with a 6-3, 7-5 victory against Stricker.

"It was the first match of the year, so it was not easy after the preseason. I worked well," Humbert said. "I felt much better at the end and I'm super happy about my win today."

Humbert closed his 2024 season with the best tournament of his career. The lefty made his first ATP Masters 1000 final at the Rolex Paris Masters.

Although the Frenchman did not play a perfect match against Stricker to begin the new season, falling behind by a break in the second set, he remained composed and battled through in straight sets.

"I tried to push myself," Humbert said. "At the end I had the break, my energy was going low, so I tried to push a little bit more and I played really great tennis at the end, so it was a nice victory for me."

In her first Hologic WTA Tour match since her maternity leave, 2021 Olympic gold medalist Belinda Bencic defeated Chloe Paquet 6-3, 6-1 to give Switzerland a 1-0 lead.

Former World No.4 Bencic, who gave birth to daughter Bella in April, needed 87 minutes to best 123rd-ranked Paquet on the hard courts of Ken Rosewall Arena. This was Bencic's first win at a tour-level event since her third-round victory at the 2023 US Open over 15 months ago.

Arsenal Climb to Second After Tight Win Over Ipswich

LONDON (Dispatches) - Arsenal moved up to second in the Premier League and within six points of Liverpool after a largely trouble-free, if slightly pedestrian, 1-0 win at home to struggling Ipswich Town on a chilly night in north London.

A first-half goal from Kai Havertz, who pounced on a smart pull-back from Leandro Trossard, proved the winner although the hosts should have scored more as the Gunners' performance failed to provide many pre-New Year fireworks.

Lacking the creativity of the injured Bukayo Saka, it took 19 minutes before Arsenal mustered their first shot although four minutes after that Havertz netted his sixth of the season in all competitions by tapping in Trossard's whipped cross.

Ipswich had a spell of pressure after 10 minutes of the second half but it proved fleeting and Arsenal should have comfortably put the game to bed after that.

Defender Gabriel Magalhaes missed a golden opportunity to extend his run of scoring from corners when he headed just wide when completely unmarked. Captain Martin Odegaard then blazed over after he danced from midfield into the visitors box.

The win lifted Arsenal to 36 points behind Liverpool, who have 42



and a game in hand, and meant the Gunners leapfrogged both London rivals Chelsea, who have 35 points, and one of the season's surprise packages Nottingham Forest, fourth on 34.

Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta told reporters he was "very happy with the victory, with the clean sheet and with large parts of the game. We should have scored more but it is the consistency, the team conceded nothing again."

"Considering all the circumstances we had this season, the amount

of times we had to play with 10 men, all the injuries that we had, it's good to be in the position that we are but it's not where we want to be. We want to be first."

The Gunners next visit Brentford on New Year's Day and Brighton & Hove Albion on Jan. 4 before playing two domestic cup games and hosting local rivals Tottenham Hotspur on Jan. 15.

Yesterday's match started slowly as Arsenal kept the ball effortlessly early on, although it was mostly in non-threatening areas until Trossard burst to the byline after 23 minutes and fired the ball across for Havertz to prod in.

Arsenal forward Gabriel Jesus thought he had added to his recent run of goals later in the half when he poked the ball through the Ipswich keeper Arijanet Muric's legs from an unfathomably tight angle but it was ruled out for offside.

The home side created a handful of good chances in the final 20 minutes too with Odegaard, Havertz and Trossard all getting shots in but if Arsenal are to keep up their challenge on Liverpool they will need to demonstrate more clinical finishing.

Golf's World No. 1 Scheffler Sidelines Himself With Freak Christmas Dinner Mishap



MIAMI (Dispatches) - World number one Scottie Scheffler will miss the PGA Tour's season opening event in Hawaii after injuring his hand while making Christmas dinner, the player's manager said.

The injury rules Scheffler out of The Sentry which starts on January 2 but he hopes he will be able to feature in The American Express in La Quinta, California on January 16.

"On Christmas Day while preparing dinner, Scottie sustained a puncture wound to the palm of his right hand from a broken glass," Scheffler's manager, Blake Smith, said in a statement yesterday.

"Small glass fragments remained in the palm which required surgery. He has been told that he should be back to 100 per cent in three to four weeks. Unfortunately, he will have to withdraw from The Sentry. His next scheduled tournament is The American Express," he added.

Scheffler has just enjoyed one of the most successful seasons in PGA Tour history winning seven tournaments on the tour — the first player to reach that tally since Tiger Woods in 2007.

Last month he was voted the PGA Tour Player of the Year for the third consecutive year.

Scheffler won his second Masters green jacket, Paris Olympic gold, the PGA Tour's season-ending Tour Championship and FedEx Cup playoffs and The Players Championship this year.

He ended last season with victory at the unofficial Hero World Challenge Invitational which gave him nine wins in all competitions in the year.

Jackson Jr., Grizzlies Deal Hapless Pelicans 9th Straight Loss

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Jaren Jackson Jr. scored 33 points and Ja Morant had 25 before injuring his right shoulder and the visiting Memphis Grizzlies defeated the New Orleans Pelicans 132-124 on Friday night.

Morant went to the locker room for good with 4:13 remaining in the third quarter after colliding with Pelicans center Daniel Theis. Desmond Bane scored 18 points, Zach Edey had 14 and nine rebounds, Scotty Pippen Jr. added 13 points and Jaylen Wells 10 for the Grizzlies, who won for the eighth time in 10 games.

Trey Murphy III scored a season-high 35 points, CJ McCollum added 32, and Dejounte Murray 15 for the Pelicans, who lost their ninth straight game and their 18th in their last 19. Theis had 11 points, 11 rebounds and six assists.

The Pelicans got within 11 points three times early in the third quarter before a 6-0 run gave the Grizzlies an 86-69 lead.

Murphy answered with a 3-pointer, but Edey and Jackson made two free throws each and Jackson added a three-point play to expand the lead to 93-72.

New Orleans made a 16-3 run to get within eight, but Memphis scored the final eight points of the period to take a 104-88 lead into the fourth.

The closest the Pelicans got after that was six points in the final seconds.

The Grizzlies scored the first six points of the game on their way to a 12-4 lead in less than three minutes. Murphy scored five points



to help the Pelicans get within four before Jay Huff scored five during an 8-0 run that gave Memphis a 29-17 lead.

New Orleans scored the final six points to trim the lead to 32-25 at the end of the first quarter.

McCollum converted a three-point play to start the second-quarter scoring before Morant made consecutive 3-pointers and Jackson followed with back-to-back treys to expand the lead to 48-32.

McCollum answered with a 3-pointer, Murphy added three 3-pointers and Theis converted a three-point play to pull New Orleans within 59-56.

Bane made consecutive 3-pointers and Pippen added a 3-pointer as the Grizzlies finished with a 15-5 run that gave them a 74-61 halftime lead.

Victor Wembanyama scored 11 of his 19 points in the third quarter as the San Antonio Spurs recovered from a difficult opening quarter and earned a 96-87 victory over the Brooklyn Nets on Friday in New York.

Two days after totaling 42 points and 18 rebounds in San Antonio's 117-114 loss to the New York Knicks, Wembanyama shot 7-of-14 from the field despite starting 1-of-5. The second-year center added seven rebounds, six blocks and four assists.

Julian Champagnie put up 10 of his 18 points in the second quarter to help get the Spurs back in the game after they shot 4-for-25 and were held to 11 points in the opening 12 minutes.