

Foreign Minister of Iran Abbas Araqchi and His Counterpart From United Arab Emirates Sheikh Abdullah Bin Zayed Al Nahyanin Dubai Met and Discussed Mutual Relations and the Latest Developments in the Region

IRAN NEWS

The Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Has Expressed Its All-Out Readiness to Defend Iran's Security and Counter the Enemy's Plots to Create Chaos and Sedition in the Country

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Rise in Transportation Costs to Turkey



TEHRAN - Mehrdad Saadat Dehghan, President of the Iran-Turkey Joint Chamber of Commerce, spoke to ILNA reporters regarding Turkey's recent decision to impose fuel taxes on Iranian commercial vehicles. He explained that over the past few days, Turkey issued a directive requiring Iranian trucks entering the country to pay higher fuel costs. This move is reportedly in response to a similar policy Iran applied to Turkish trucks.

Dehghan expressed concern over this development, stating that the policy change increases the cost of trade for Iranian merchants. Consequently, it raises transportation costs for exporters, leading to higher prices for goods sold to foreign buyers. This ultimately undermines Iran's competitiveness in the Turkish market.

He emphasized that the impact of this decision on Iran-Turkey trade will be immediate and direct.

Dehghan also mentioned that a joint commission meeting between Iran and Turkey was held in recent weeks. However, the discussions did not include any mention of preferential trade agreements. He noted that the Iran-Turkey Joint Chamber has proposed moving toward a free trade arrangement, as preferential trade has not yielded significant benefits for Iranian traders.

He stated that implementing free trade would require strong political will from both governments and the establishment of necessary infrastructures, particularly in financial and banking exchanges.

"The advantage of free trade lies in its transparency," Dehghan remarked. "Currently, the volume of goods imported from Turkey to Iran exceeds the officially recorded figures due to sanctions. In a free trade scenario, we would work with accurate data, which could significantly boost bilateral trade. Turkish stakeholders expect reciprocal growth in Iranian imports to Turkey as Iranian exports increase."

Hamas Says Israel Obstructing Truce Talks as Gaza Genocide Rages



GAZA (Dispatches) - A senior official of the Hamas resistance movement says Israel has been sabotaging the talks aimed at securing a ceasefire deal in the Gaza Strip by refusing to completely withdraw its occupation forces and end its genocidal war on the Palestinian territory.

In an interview with the Gaza-based Al-Aqsa TV, Osama Hamdan said Hamas has shown "maximum flexibility" regarding the issue of Israeli captives, provided that the Tel Aviv regime stops its Gaza onslaught and occupation and facilitates the reconstruction and relief projects.

However, he added, Israel continuously reneges on the agreements made during the ceasefire negotiations.

Hamdan also noted that the resistance group expects not only positive messages but also a tangible action from the US administration to promote a Gaza truce deal.

Hamas "has engaged with mediators, Turkey, and other parties to garner an international stance that would force the occupation (Israel) to implement a ceasefire," he said.

"The destruction and the terrible suffering of our people due to the cold and hunger raise questions about the existence of the international system."

The Hamas official further emphasized that Israel is attacking hospitals in an attempt to eliminate the Palestinian presence in the region.



Iran and Oman Advocate for an Inclusive Syrian Gov't

TEHRAN - In a significant diplomatic meeting, Iranian Foreign Minister Seyed Abbas Araqchi and his Omani counterpart, Sayyid Badr Albusaidi, in Tehran emphasized the need for regional stability and a comprehensive government in Syria. This discussion unfolded during a joint press conference held in Tehran, highlighting the deepening ties and mutual interests of the two nations.

Welcoming Albusaidi, Araqchi described the timing of the visit as opportune and reflective of the growing relationship between Iran and Oman in political, economic, and cultural domains. Both nations have maintained consistent regional consultations, underlining their commitment to fostering bilateral ties.

Araqchi revealed that trade between the two countries has tripled in recent years. He also announced that the next meeting of the Iran-Oman Joint Economic Commission is scheduled to take place in Muscat next month, signaling further collaboration in economic ventures.

Addressing regional conflicts, the Iranian minister expressed a shared stance with Oman on the urgent need to end violence in Gaza. He noted that both countries, along with many others in the region, support peace and the establishment of a comprehensive government in Syria. This vision includes ending the occupation of Syrian territories, particularly by Israel, and restoring the country's sovereignty and international role.

Sayyid Badr Albusaidi echoed similar sentiments, affirming Oman's dedication to non-interference in the internal affairs of nations. He emphasized the importance of Syria's territorial integrity and sovereignty, calling for its reintegration into the international community.

Albusaidi also brought a written message from Oman's Sultan Haitham bin Tariq to Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian, underscoring the importance of continued dialogue and partnership. He highlighted agreements between Oman and Iran to take new steps in boosting trade and

investment. Discussions also covered regional and international developments, including the situation in Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine. Albusaidi reaffirmed Oman's support for the Palestinian people's struggle for independence, freedom, and peace.

Responding to questions about Oman's intermediary role, Araqchi acknowledged the country's longstanding efforts to facilitate dialogue between Iran and other nations. However, he clarified that no messages regarding nuclear negotiations were exchanged during this visit. He praised Oman's previous contributions to nuclear talks, expressing gratitude for their willingness to mediate if necessary.

For now, communication on nuclear discussions continues through the Swiss embassy in Tehran, with Oman ready to assist if required.

The plight of Yemen also featured prominently in the talks. Araqchi condemned military attacks by Israel and the U.S. on Yemen's territory and infrastructure, reiterating Iran's commitment to preserving the country's territorial integrity. He expressed hope for a swift resumption of peace negotiations to prevent a full-scale civil war in Yemen.

Reflecting on trade developments, Araqchi highlighted that the bilateral trade volume between Iran and Oman reached \$2.5 billion last year. This significant growth is seen as a testament to the strengthening partnership between the two nations.

The discussions between Iran and Oman underscore their shared commitment to fostering stability and addressing regional challenges. Their aligned views on Syria, Gaza, and Yemen reflect a broader aspiration for peace and cooperation in the Middle East. As economic and diplomatic ties deepen, both nations continue to advocate for dialogue and unity in resolving complex regional issues.

President Calls for University Collaboration in Addressing National Challenges

TEHRAN - President Masoud Pezeshkian has emphasized the critical role universities can play in addressing Iran's pressing challenges. Speaking to current and former members of the Islamic Association of University Professors, Pezeshkian reiterated the government's commitment to creating opportunities for academic institutions to actively contribute to solving national problems.

During the Saturday morning meeting, Pezeshkian stated, "Universities are one of the most trusted and reliable institutions for the government in tackling the country's challenges." He called on universities to leverage their expertise, identify relevant issues within their fields, and develop practical solutions. "If universities take an active role and provide actionable strategies, many of the country's issues can be resolved," he added.

The president criticized the country's outdated administrative framework, describing it as stagnant and inefficient. He noted that many managers remain passive, making systemic change a slow process. To address this, Pezeshkian proposed project-based collaborations with universities, where compensation would be performance-driven.

"While opinions abound on various matters, our critical shortfall lies in implementation," he said, urging a shift from theory to action. "We are ready to work with universities and focus on practical results."

Highlighting the challenges faced by border regions, Pezeshkian pointed out that despite abundant resources, these areas continue to struggle with poverty. Mismanagement has turned activities like cross-border trade and fuel transportation into threats rather than opportunities.

"Effective use of border capacities could significantly mitigate the impact of sanctions.



Universities can support the government by offering solutions and participating in execution," he noted.

Pezeshkian stressed the need to elevate universities to third and fourth-generation levels, focusing on quality over quantity. "In the past, misguided policies led to unchecked expansion of universities. Instead, we need to enhance their quality, aligning education with practical skills to address societal problems," he said. The government, he assured, is prepared to assist in this transformation.

Acknowledging the importance of broad-based decision-making, the president called for decentralizing management and empowering local authorities. "We have a wealth of capable individuals who are often overlooked. Providing them with opportunities and delegating authority to provinces is essential," he said.

Pezeshkian also emphasized merit-based leadership, prioritizing responsibility, performance, and accountability over political, religious, or ethnic considerations. "We need managers who are willing and able to help the government achieve its goals. Those who do not meet these criteria will be replaced."

The president addressed the nation's economic imbalances, citing mismatches between resources and expenditures, poor distribution management, and inefficient consumption. These issues, he said, have created significant challenges. "The government is working on plans to promote a culture of proper consumption and address these imbalances."

Pezeshkian highlighted the importance of synergy among the country's branches of power, crediting recent successes to cooperation between the executive, legislative, and judicial branches. "Without coordination and harmony, progress is impossible. We remain committed to maintaining this collaboration."

Russia Provides Credit Line for Importing Mining Equipment From Iran



TEHRAN - The Deputy for Planning and Empowerment at the Iranian Mines and Mining Industries Development and Renovation Organization (IMIDRO) announced that a Russian credit line will facilitate the import of drilling and mining machinery, addressing a critical need in Iran's mining sector.

Speaking during a virtual meeting with the CEO of the Industrial and Commercial Services Company on Monday, Somiyeh Kholousi highlighted the opportunity for Iranian companies to benefit from this arrangement. She noted the growing interest among major Eurasian companies in adopting the Iranian PERED method for steel production, urging maximum utilization of current opportunities to strengthen the mining and metallurgy value chain.

The PERED direct reduction process converts iron oxide pellets into sponge iron, which serves as a key input for high-quality steel production.

Kholousi emphasized the potential of Eurasian countries, especially those sharing borders with Iran, to collaborate on technical and engineering services in mining. She underlined the priority of neighboring countries in these partnerships and suggested that companies located in provinces near Eurasian member states have a strategic advantage in achieving this goal.

She also called on the Industrial and Commercial Services Company to prepare a detailed report outlining strategies to enhance collaboration with these nations and urged them to follow up on agreements with Russian counterparts regarding the PERED system.

Jamshid Molarahman, a member of IMIDRO's board of directors, highlighted the importance of leveraging Iran's observer status in the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) to boost mining exports and industrial cooperation. He stressed the need to update studies on expanding ties with EAEU members to tap into potential markets for Iranian mining products.

Flu Cases Surge: Ministry of Health Issues Urgent Advisory



TEHRAN - As flu season intensifies, Iran's Ministry of Health has reported a significant increase in cases of influenza with severe symptoms. Citizens are urged to take preventive measures to curb the spread of this highly contagious respiratory illness.

According to health officials, the influenza virus primarily spreads through coughs and sneezes, particularly in close proximity (under one meter). Non-compliance with health protocols, such as mask usage, has been identified as a major contributor to the virus's rapid transmission.

The Ministry of Health highlights that influenza, a viral illness prone to frequent genetic changes, can cause repeated infections with new symptoms. This makes annual vaccination, particularly in vulnerable groups like immunocompromised individuals, crucial. Fall is the ideal time to receive the flu shot to minimize risks throughout the year.

Dr. Qobad Moradi, acting head of the Communicable Diseases Management Center, revealed that laboratory data shows the seasonal H1N1 strain is currently dominant. Between December 11-21, influenza accounted for 21-23% of all respiratory infections nationwide. This gradual uptick has brought flu prevalence to over 20% of respiratory infections.

Dr. Moradi noted that this year's outbreak pattern aligns with pre-COVID-19 trends, although some provinces report higher influenza rates compared to other respiratory illnesses.

The Ministry strongly advises elderly individuals and those with underlying health conditions to avoid crowded spaces. Key recommendations include wearing masks, frequent handwashing, and resting at home if symptoms arise. Persistent symptoms like prolonged fever, bloody sputum, hoarseness, or shortness of breath warrant immediate medical attention.

Aside from influenza, rhinoviruses causing common colds are the second leading cause of respiratory infections. Increased winter indoor gatherings and environmental temperature shifts amplify virus transmission risks.

IRAN NEWS



Pezeshkian Offers Condolences Over Death of Former Indian PM Singh

TEHRAN (IRNA) - President Masoud Pezeshkian extended his condolences over the death of former Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh.

In a post on X, the president on Sunday offered his condolences to the people and government of India as well as the late prime minister's family.

Pezeshkian also said in his post that Mr. Singh was a prudent leader for India and a great supporter for its ties with Iran. Singh led India from 2004 to 2014, becoming one of the longest-serving prime ministers of the country.

He died on Thursday aged 92. A state funeral was held for him on Saturday.

Quaid-e-Azam Posters Put on Display Across Tehran in a Show of Solidarity



TEHRAN - For the first time in three decades, the administration of Iranian capital city - Tehran, put on display posters of Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah at prominent locations to show solidarity with Pakistan on the 148th birth anniversary of father of the nation.

This gesture was made in support of the commemorative events being organized by the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) Cultural Institute (ECI), based in Tehran.

The ECI, in collaboration with the Urdu Language Student Union of Iran and the Embassy of Pakistan in Tehran, arranged the week-long celebrations, a press release said.

Dr. Saad S. Khan, President of the ECI and a Pakistani historian-turned-diplomat, delivered remarks highlighting Quaid-e-Azam's visionary leadership. He emphasized Jinnah's pivotal role in uniting the Muslim community and guiding it toward freedom.

Dr. Khan also referenced Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei's praise for Quaid-e-Azam, underscoring his lasting legacy as a leader of faith and resolve.

The event was attended by several notable dignitaries, including Ismat Hassan Sial, Deputy Head of Mission of Pakistan in Tehran, Seydou Zataou Aly, Ambassador of Niger to Tehran, and the Deputy Head of the Tajikistan Mission.

Scholars such as Dr. Zahid Munir Amir, Head of the Pakistan Studies Chair at the University of Tehran, Dr. Ali Bayat, Dr. Ali Kavousi Nejad, Dr. Rashid Naqvi, and Mr. Hasan Naqvi also spoke at the occasion.

The ECI's celebrations included essay competitions in Urdu, Turkish, and Persian, patriotic song performances dedicated to Quaid-e-Azam, live sketching of the leader, and the launch of a documentary on the philosophy of Iqbal.

Iran's Absence from Japan Expo Sparks Debate in Private Sector



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Following the government's announcement to withdraw from participating in the Japan Expo, members of the Iran-Japan Chamber of Commerce convened a meeting to discuss the implications and explore the possibility of private-sector involvement in the event.

Economic experts criticized the decision, calling it a "self-imposed sanction" that could harm Iran's opportunity to showcase its capabilities on the global stage. Participants urged reconsideration of the withdrawal and emphasized the need for Iran to leverage such platforms for international engagement.

Ghadir Qiafeh, Vice President of the Iranian Chamber of Commerce, expressed dismay over the decision, calling it a step backward in development. "For the first time in nearly 200 years, Iran is not participating in an expo. These events document the history and future of nations. We must explore every avenue for participation," he said, stressing collective efforts to enable private-sector involvement in Japan Expo.

Hossein Selahvarzi, President of the Iran-Japan Chamber of Commerce, highlighted the benefits of the expo despite existing sanctions. He noted that the six-month-long event offers a platform for showcasing Iran's capabilities to a global audience. He affirmed the readiness of the Chamber to organize side events or other creative means to ensure Iran's representation.

"Despite sanctions, we've maintained trade ties through intermediaries and fostered strong cultural, technological, and educational collaborations. This decision jeopardizes our international connections," he added, underscoring the importance of preserving Iran's global presence.

The meeting revealed disagreements between Iran's Ministry of Industry, Mine, and Trade and the Ministry of Cultural Heritage over who should lead the

country's participation in the expo. This conflict resulted in the withdrawal decision, which Selahvarzi described as a move toward international isolation.

Maryam Jalali, Deputy for Handicrafts at the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, suggested finding creative solutions for participation, such as organizing cultural events or collaborating with Persian-speaking nations.

Participants argued that the private sector should step up if the government remains unwilling to engage. Sadina Abai, Chair of the ICT Commission at the Iranian Chamber of Commerce, suggested leveraging connections with Persian-speaking countries like Tajikistan to ensure representation.

Mohammad Lahouti, Chair of the Export Development Commission, acknowledged the difficulties in reversing the government's decision but stressed the importance of presenting Iran effectively if it does participate. "Quality matters more than mere attendance," he said.

Reza Padidar, Chair of the Commission on Standards and Sustainability, emphasized that exhibitions like the Japan Expo play a critical role in fostering national development. "With unity, the private sector can ensure Iran's participation, even under challenging circumstances," he stated.

Bahar Shakoori, Vice President of the Iran-Japan Chamber of Commerce, criticized the government's lack of consultation with the private sector before withdrawing. "The Expo is a platform for dialogue with the world and an opportunity to define our role in shaping the future. If the government won't act, the private sector stands ready to ensure meaningful participation."

As the Japan Expo approaches, stakeholders remain hopeful for a reconsideration or alternative strategies to secure Iran's place in this global event.

Iran-Eurasia Trade Tariffs Drop to Zero for 87% of Goods



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The Minister of Industry, Mining, and Trade has announced significant progress in Iran's trade relations with the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). Iranian exporters can now trade 87% of exchangeable goods with zero tariffs, signaling a major step forward in economic cooperation.

Speaking on the outcomes of his recent visit to Russia and participation in the EAEU summit, Minister Seyed Mohammad Atabak highlighted the strategic importance of Iran's observer membership in the union. During the St. Petersburg meeting of the Supreme Economic Council, the focus was on integrating Iran into the \$900 billion trade network facilitated by the EAEU, whose members include Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Armenia.

Atabak emphasized that observer membership allows Iran to participate in all EAEU sessions, sharing critical economic and trade data with member states. Discussions during the summit also included meetings with senior officials, such as the Deputy Prime Minister of Armenia.

The Iranian parliament recently approved the Iran-EAEU free trade agreement, which has also been ratified by all five EAEU member states. This agreement underscores the growing economic partnership between Iran and the region, paving the way for significant tariff

reductions on traded goods.

Atabak stressed the need to enhance private sector engagement in EAEU countries, noting a recent increase in exports to the region. However, he acknowledged that current trade volumes remain insufficient. With the new free trade agreement in place, opportunities for exponential growth in trade and economic exchanges have emerged.

"The Eurasian region presents an excellent market for Iranian goods," he said, adding that Iranian engineering and technical services could also expand their footprint in these countries.

The minister highlighted the role of the Trade Promotion Organization in collaborating with the private sector to establish marketplaces, trade fairs, and exhibitions. He announced that a major exhibition is planned for the coming months at the Tehran Exhibition Center, where EAEU member states, including Armenia and Uzbekistan, have expressed interest in participating.

Atabak also addressed the potential for Iranian engineering and technical companies to secure international projects. These firms, many with a strong domestic track record, could contribute significantly to neighboring markets. However, the primary challenge lies in securing guarantees for international tenders.

Minister Emphasizes Addressing Issues Faced by Iranian Students and Teachers in Turkey



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - The Minister of Education has urged Turkish authorities to resolve issues concerning Iranian students and teachers residing in Turkey during a meeting with the Turkish Ambassador to Iran.

Alireza Kazemi, the Minister of Education, held a friendly meeting with Hicabi Kirlangic, Turkey's Ambassador to Iran. The meeting, held at the Minister's office, highlighted the cultural and economic ties between Iran and Turkey.

Kazemi emphasized the significant cultural bonds between the two nations and addressed the presence of Iranian students in Turkey. He noted that appropriate educational services and facilities are being provided to Iranian students in Turkey, and similar support is extended to Turkish students residing in Iran.

The Minister stressed Iran's commitment to offering necessary facilities and support to Turkish students in Iran and addressing any challenges faced by Turkish teachers in the country through cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He expressed hope for reciprocal efforts in Turkey to resolve issues faced by Iranian students and teachers.

Kazemi also highlighted agreements signed between the two countries in this regard and affirmed the Ministry of Education's readiness to implement these agreements effectively.

He further pointed out challenges related to educational spaces for Iranian students in Turkey and called for their resolution, emphasizing that such efforts would enhance educational processes and strengthen unity between the two nations.

In response, Hicabi Kirlangic, Turkey's representative in Iran, acknowledged the longstanding historical ties between the two countries, which continue to thrive. He expressed his commitment to facilitating and simplifying interactions between the two nations.

Kirlangic also shared his satisfaction with the operation of a Turkish school in Iran and noted concerns related to Turkish teachers in Iran. The Minister of Education assured him of efforts to address these concerns in collaboration with the Iranian government and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Challenges in Launching Rudaki School in Tajikistan to Be Resolved



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Iran's Minister of Education, during a meeting with the Tajik ambassador, emphasized the need to establish a joint committee to resolve legal issues concerning the Rudaki School project in Tajikistan. The committee will include representatives from the Iranian Ministry of Education's Legal Affairs, Renovation Department, and International Center, alongside Tajik counterparts.

Alireza Kazemi, Iran's Minister of Education, met with Nizamuddin Zahidi, Tajikistan's Ambassador to Iran, on Sunday, December 31. During the meeting, Kazemi highlighted the strong ties between the two countries, noting their shared Persian language and cultural, historical, and traditional connections. "Iranians have great affection for Tajikistan," he added.

Kazemi expressed satisfaction with the presence of Tajik students in Iran and affirmed that educational services would continue to be provided to them. He also pledged to address any concerns or challenges related to their education.

Ambassador Zahidi, thanking Kazemi for the opportunity to discuss these matters despite his busy schedule, underscored the importance of education in societal success. "Nations with a strong education system thrive," he said.

He noted the deep cultural, historical, and religious connections between the two countries, emphasizing the belief that these shared values will continue to flourish. Zahidi also pointed out the significant agreements established during Tajikistan's independence era between the two countries' educational ministries.

The ambassador highlighted the unprecedented growth in collaboration between Iran and Tajikistan in recent years. He mentioned that Tajikistan's president attended the inauguration ceremony of Iran's new president, and a visit by Iran's president to Tajikistan is expected soon.

Addressing the challenges surrounding the jointly constructed Rudaki School, Zahidi identified issues related to ownership, curriculum content, and management. He urged swift resolution to facilitate the school's opening.

Iran's Trade Balance Hits \$7.7b Deficit



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

from Iran's Customs Administration, the country's trade balance has reached a significant deficit of \$7.7 billion during the first nine months of the current Iranian year. This comes as exports of raw and semi-processed goods continue to dominate the country's trade profile.

Iran's non-oil exports during this period amounted to 116.348 million tons, valued at \$43.14 billion. Meanwhile, imports, including gold bars, totaled 7.941 million tons, valued at \$50.89 billion. The gap between these figures highlights a stark decline in the trade balance compared to previous years.

China, Iraq, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Turkey, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India remain Iran's top trading partners for exports. These seven countries collectively accounted for 82.4% of the total weight and 82.85% of the total value of Iran's non-oil exports.

The primary exported goods continue to be raw and semi-processed items. Liquefied propane, methanol, and liquefied natural gas were the top export commodities, reflecting Iran's reliance on low-value-added products to drive trade.

On the import side, the UAE topped the list with \$15.3 billion worth of goods sent to Iran, followed by China (\$13 billion), Turkey (\$8.9 billion), Germany (\$1.8 billion), India (\$1.1 billion), Russia (\$1.1 billion), and Hong Kong (\$1 billion). Together, these countries contributed to 75% of the total import weight and 83% of its value.

The most significant imports during this period included raw gold (\$5.6 billion), livestock corn (\$2.1 billion), and smartphones (\$1.7 billion), underscoring a mix of essential goods and high-demand consumer products.

One noteworthy development is the substantial rise in the customs value of imported goods. The average value per ton of imports reached \$1,821, marking an 8.4% increase compared to the same period last year. Similarly, the average export value per ton rose by 3.74%, reaching \$371.

Iran's trade performance continues to reflect structural challenges, including its heavy reliance on raw and semi-raw goods for exports and its dependence on a limited set of countries for both imports and exports. The deficit underscores the need for diversification in trade partners and a shift toward higher-value-added exports to bolster economic resilience.

With non-oil exports failing to keep pace with rising imports, Iran's trade dynamics face increasing pressure, necessitating strategic policy changes to address the widening gap.

Russia Vows Response After State Media Blocked on Telegram in EU

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russia vowed to retaliate after the channels of its state media were apparently blocked on the popular Telegram social media platform in the EU. The channels of Ria Novosti news agency, Rossiya 1, Pervyi Kanal and NTV television, and Izvestia and Rossiyskaya Gazeta newspapers were not accessible in several countries, including France, Belgium, Poland, Greece, the Netherlands and Italy, according to media reports. Neither Telegram nor EU sources have yet commented on the disruption. Moscow called the move "an act of censorship".

"The systematic cleansing of all undesirable sources of information from the information space continues," foreign ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova, said. Slamming the "constant campaign of repression against Russian media in nearly all European Union countries", she said that "these attacks and similar ones against our media will not remain unanswered".



Azerbaijan's President Says Russia Unintentionally Shot Down Crashed Jetliner



BAKU (Dispatches) - Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev said Sunday that the Azerbaijani airliner that crashed last week was shot down by Russia, albeit unintentionally, and criticized Moscow for trying to "hush up" the issue for days. "We can say with complete clarity that the plane was shot down by Russia. (...) We are not saying that it was done intentionally, but it was done," he told Azerbaijani state television.

Aliyev said that the airliner, which crashed Wednesday in Kazakhstan, was hit by fire from the ground over Russia and "rendered uncontrollable by electronic warfare." Aliyev accused Russia of trying to "hush up" the issue for several days, saying he was "upset and surprised" by versions of events put forward by Russian officials.

"Unfortunately, for the first three days we heard nothing from Russia except delirious versions," he said.

The crash killed 38 of 67 people on board. The Kremlin said that air defense systems were firing near Grozny, the regional capital of the Russian republic of Chechnya, where the plane attempted to land, to deflect a Ukrainian drone strike. Aliyev said Azerbaijan made three demands to Russia in connection with the crash.

"First, the Russian side must apologize to Azerbaijan. Second, it must admit its guilt. Third, punish the guilty, bring them to criminal responsibility and pay compensation to the Azerbaijani state, the injured passengers and crew members," he said.

Aliyev noted that the first demand was "already fulfilled" when Russian President Vladimir Putin apologized to him on Saturday. Putin called the crash a "tragic incident" though stopped short of acknowledging Moscow's responsibility.

He said that an investigation into the crash was ongoing, and that "the final version (of events) will be known after the black boxes are opened."

Israeli Forces Order New Evacuation of Besieged Northern Gaza Town



CAIRO (Dispatches) - Israeli forces carrying out a weeks-long offensive in northern Gaza ordered any residents remaining in Beit Hanoun to leave the town on Sunday, citing Palestinian militant rocket fire from the area, residents said.

The instruction to leave has caused a new wave of displacement, although it was not immediately clear how many people were affected, the residents said.

Israel says its almost three-month-old campaign in northern Gaza is aimed at Hamas militants and preventing them from regrouping. Its instructions to civilians to evacuate are meant to keep them out of harm's way, the military says.

Palestinian and United Nations officials say no place is safe in Gaza and that evacuations worsen the humanitarian conditions of the population.

Much of the area around the northern towns of Beit Hanoun, Jabalia and Beit Lahiya has been cleared of people and razed, fuelling speculation Israel intends to keep the area as a closed buffer zone after the fighting in Gaza ends.

South Korea Orders Air Safety Probe After the Country's Worst Crash Kills 179



MUAN COUNTY (Dispatches) - South Korea's acting President Choi Sang-mok ordered an emergency safety inspection of the country's entire airline operation system as investigators worked to identify victims and find what caused the country's deadliest air disaster.

The crash killed 179 people when a Jeju Air jet belly-landed and skidded off the end of the runway, erupting in a fireball as it slammed into a wall at Muan International Airport. Two crew members were pulled out alive.

The top priority for now is identifying the victims, supporting their families and treating the two survivors, Choi told a disaster management meeting in Seoul.

"Even before the final results are out, we ask that officials transparently disclose the accident investigation process and promptly inform the bereaved families," he said.

"As soon as the accident recovery is conducted, the Transport Ministry is requested to conduct an emergency safety inspection of the entire aircraft operation system to prevent recurrence of aircraft accidents," he said.

Jeju Air flight 7C2216, arriving from the Thai capital Bangkok with 175 passengers and six crew on board, was trying to land shortly after 9 am (0000 GMT) at the airport in the south of the country.

Investigators are examining bird strikes and weather conditions as possible factors in the crash, fire officials have said. Experts say many questions remain, including why the twin-engine Boeing 737-800 appeared to be travelling so fast and why its landing gear did not appear to be down when it skidded down the runway and into a wall.

The crash killed mostly local residents who were returning from holidays in Thailand, while two Thai nationals also died.

On Monday morning, investigators were trying to identify some of the last remaining victims, as anguished families waited inside the Muan airport terminal.

Park Han-shin, who lost his brother in the crash, said he was told by authorities that his brother had been identified but

not been able to see his body.

Park called on other victims' families to unite in responding to the disaster and recovery efforts, citing a 2014 ferry sinking that killed more than 300 people. Prolonged efforts to identify the victims and cause of the sinking followed that disaster.

Emergency workers were sifting through wreckage that was nearly completely destroyed when the aircraft was engulfed in an explosion of flames and debris at the regional airport near the country's winding western coastline.

Transportation ministry officials said the jet's flight data recorder was recovered but appeared to have sustained some damage on the outside and it was not yet clear whether the data was sufficiently intact to be analyzed.

The Muan airport remains closed through Wednesday but the rest of the country's international and regional airports including the main Incheon International Airport were operating as scheduled.

Meanwhile a South Korean passenger jet returned to the airport of departure following take-off Monday over a landing gear issue, a day after a similar malfunction caused a crash during landing, Yonhap news agency reported, as cited by Xinhua.

Jeju Air flight 7C101 departed from Gimpo International Airport in western Seoul for the southern resort island of Jeju at 6:37 am local time (2137 GMT Sunday).

A landing gear issue was found shortly after it took off. The Boeing 737-800 returned to the Gimpo airport at 7:25 am local time after informing the 161 passengers on board.

Earlier, a Boeing 737-800 passenger jet of the Jeju Air crashed while landing at Muan International Airport, around 290 km southwest of Seoul, on the previous day.

Because of the estimated landing gear failure, the airplane landed without wheels, skidded off runway and crashed into the outer wall of the runway, with its fuselage broken apart and catching fire.

New Georgian President Sworn In

TBILISI (Dispatches) - Mikheil Kavelashvili, a hardline critic of the West, was sworn in as president of Georgia on Sunday amid a political crisis after the government froze European Union application talks in a move that sparked major protests.

Outgoing President Salome Zourabichvili, a pro-EU opponent of the ruling party, said in a defiant speech to supporters outside the presidential palace that she was leaving the residence, but that Kavelashvili had no legitimacy as president, which is a mostly ceremonial position.

She said: "I will come out of here and be with you."

"I am taking legitimacy with me, I am taking the flag with me, I am taking your trust with me," she added, before walking out of the palace to mingle with her supporters.

Zourabichvili says that Kavelashvili was not duly picked, as the lawmakers who chose him were elected in an October parliamentary election that she says was marked by fraud. Georgia's opposition parties support her.

The Georgian Dream ruling party and the country's election commission say that the October election was free and fair. The ruling party says Kavelashvili is the duly elected president.

The presidential standoff is seen as a watershed moment in Georgia, a



mountainous country of 3.7 million that had until recently been regarded as among the most democratic and pro-Western of the former Soviet states.

Kavelashvili is a loyalist of Bidzina Ivanishvili, a reclusive billionaire ex-prime minister who is widely seen as Georgia's de facto leader.

On Friday, the U.S. imposed sanctions on Ivanishvili, saying he was spearheading Georgia's current anti-Western and pro-Russian turn.

Kavelashvili, a former professional soccer player who briefly played as a striker for Manchester City, has repeatedly accused Western intelligence

agencies of plotting to drive Georgia into war with neighbouring Russia.

"The Georgian people have always understood that peace is the main prerequisite for survival and development," he said after being sworn in on Sunday.

Protesters outside parliament held up red cards in a mocking reference to Kavelashvili's athletic career. Local media reported that six people were briefly detained amid scuffles with the police.

"Right now, this so-called government is telling us that they inaugurated the new president, but there is no new president for us, for Georgian people who are standing here day and night," protester Mariam Japaridze told Reuters.

"We have only one legitimate president, and this is Salome Zourabichvili," she said.

Georgian Dream got almost 54% of the vote in October's election, according to official results.

Local and international election monitors have said the vote was marked by violations that could have affected the results. Western countries have called for an investigation.

Zourabichvili is backed by the country's four main pro-EU opposition parties, which have boycotted parliament since the election. They say she will remain the legitimate president until fresh elections are held.

Former U.S. President Jimmy Carter Dies Aged 100

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - Jimmy Carter, the 100-year-old former U.S. president and Nobel peace laureate who rose from humble beginnings in rural Georgia to lead the nation from 1977 to 1981, has died, his nonprofit foundation said yesterday.

Carter had been in hospice care since mid-February 2023 at his home in Plains, Georgia — the same small town where he was born and once ran a peanut farm before becoming governor of the Peach State and running for the White House.

Carter died "peacefully" at his home in Plains, "surrounded by his family," the Carter Center said in a statement.

"My father was a hero, not only to me but to everyone who believes in peace, human rights and unselfish love," Chip Carter, the former president's son, said in the statement.

Carter was the oldest living ex-US leader and the nation's longest-lived president — an outcome that seemed unlikely back in 2015 when the Southern Democrat revealed he had brain cancer.

But the U.S. Navy veteran and fervent Christian repeatedly defied the odds to enjoy a long and fruitful post-presidency, after four years in the Oval Office often seen as disappointing.

During his single term, Carter placed a commitment on human rights and social justice, enjoying a strong first two years that included brokering a peace deal between Israel and Egypt dubbed the Camp David Accords.

But his administration hit numerous snags — the most serious being the taking of US hostages in Iran and the disastrous failed attempt to rescue the 52 captive Americans in 1980. He also came in for criticism for his handling of an oil crisis.

In November of that year, Republican challenger Ronald Reagan clobbered Carter at the polls, relegating the Democrat to just one term. Reagan, a former actor and governor



of California, swept into office on a wave of staunch conservatism.

As the years passed, a more nuanced image of Carter emerged — one that took into account his significant post-presidential activities and reassessed his achievements.

He founded the Carter Center in 1982 to pursue his vision of world diplomacy, and he was the recipient of the 2002 Nobel Peace Prize for his tireless efforts to promote social and economic justice.

He observed numerous elections around the world and emerged as a prominent international mediator, tackling global problems from North Korea to Bosnia.

Carter, known for his toothy smile, said basic Christian tenets such as justice and love served as the bedrock of his presidency. He taught Sunday school at Maranatha Baptist, his church in Plains, well into his 90s.

In recent years, he had received various hospital treatments, including when he revealed in August 2015 that he had brain cancer and was undergoing radiation.

Tributes poured in from White House leaders past, present and incoming. Bill Clinton said Carter "worked tirelessly for a better, fairer world," while Donald Trump said Americans owed the Democrat "a debt of gratitude."

George W. Bush said Carter's legacy would "inspire Americans for generations," while Barack Obama said the former leader "taught all of us what it means to live a life of grace, dignity, justice, and service."

"America and the world lost an extraordinary leader, statesman and humanitarian," current President Joe Biden and his wife Jill said in a statement.

"For anyone in search of what it means to live a life of purpose and meaning — the good life — study Jimmy Carter, a man of principle, faith, and humility."

In April 2021, the Bidens met with the Carters at their home in Plains.

Liverpool Destroy West Ham to Go Eight Points Clear



LONDON (Dispatches) - Rampant Liverpool smashed West Ham 5-0 to stretch their lead at the top of the Premier League to eight points as Manchester City returned to winning ways at troubled Leicester. Nottingham Forest climbed to second in the table with a fifth straight win at Everton while Ange Postecoglou's Tottenham conceded late to draw 2-2 against Vitor Pereira's rejuvenated Wolves.

Arne Slot's Liverpool look unstoppable in their quest for a record-equalling 20th English top-flight title, recording their 23rd win in 27 matches in all competitions this season.

Luis Diaz opened the scoring against Julen Lopetegui's hapless team on the half-hour, before Mohamed Salah set up Cody Gakpo for the second with some audacious footwork.

The Egypt international then scored his 20th goal of the season shortly before half-time to put the visitors in total control.

Trent Alexander-Arnold made it 4-0 with a deflected shot from distance in the 54th minute and Diogo Jota completed the rout, courtesy of another Salah assist following a surging run.

"I enjoyed it a lot because it doesn't happen many times that I could just sit back and enjoy," said Slot, flying in his first season in the Anfield hotseat after replacing Jurgen Klopp.

Liverpool's striking success has come against the background of mounting speculation over the futures of Salah, Alexander-Arnold and captain Virgil van Dijk.

All three can discuss a move to a foreign club on a free transfer from January 1 but remain focused on winning a second Premier League title together.

"The only thing on my mind is I want Liverpool to win the league and I want to be part of that," Salah told Sky Sports.

"I will do my best for the team to win the trophy. There are a few other teams catching up with us and we need to stay focused and humble."

Earlier, defending champions City travelled to relegation-threatened Leicester drained of confidence after just one win in all competitions since late October.

Their frailties over the past two months, which resulted in nine defeats in their previous 13 games, were on display again.

But Savinho's first-half goal and an Erling Haaland header after the break made it 2-0.

City's bid for a fifth straight title looks to be over as they are 14 points behind leaders Liverpool, who have a game in hand.

But the result lifts them to fifth in the table and within striking distance of fourth-placed Chelsea.

"It is not enjoyable right now, it is just relief. We have done incredible things for many years," said City boss Pep Guardiola.

"Our mood is in a better position. It was tight in the second half, they were much better.

"We don't have energy to sustain 90 minutes. Hopefully the new year can help us bounce back."

Nuno Espirito Santo's Forest beat Everton 2-0 at Goodison Park, leapfrogging Chelsea and Arsenal.

Chris Wood chipped over Jordan Pickford for the opening goal in the 15th minute after being set up by Anthony Elanga.

Wood turned provider for Forest's second, which came just after the hour mark when Morgan Gibbs-White produced some neat footwork before firing home.

Injury-hit Spurs were on track to end a torrid December on a high after first-half goals by Rodrigo Bentancur and Brennan Johnson cancelled out Hwang Hee-chan's brilliant opener for Wolves.

Tottenham captain Son Heung-min also squandered a 43rd-minute penalty, but it did not appear to be too costly until substitute Jorgen Strand Larsen smashed home in the 87th minute.

Djokovic Calls for Fair Play in Sinner, Swiatek Doping Cases



BRISBANE (Dispatches) - Novak Djokovic called for more transparency around doping suspensions in tennis, saying high-ranked players appeared to be treated differently to others.

The 24-time Grand Slam champion agreed with Australian Nick Kyrgios, who yesterday said integrity in the sport was "awful".

They were speaking in the wake of doping violations by world number ones Italian Jannik Sinner and Poland's Iga Swiatek during 2024.

The 37-year-old Djokovic, who will play doubles with Kyrgios at the Brisbane International this week, said there needed to be far greater transparency from the sport's governing bodies around doping violations.

And he said that it appeared that top players such as Sinner and Swiatek were being treated differently from those further down the rankings.

"I think Nick has some fair points when it comes to transparency and inconsistency with protocols and case-to-case comparables," the Serbian said.

"We have some players who have been waiting for over a year for their case to be resolved, so the issue is the inconsistency and the transparency."

While Djokovic said he believed Sinner when he said he tested positive to the steroid clostebol due to contamination from his physiotherapist, he asserted that the players had been "kept in the dark" throughout the whole process.

"I've been really frustrated, as have most of the other players, that we've been kept in the dark for five months," Djokovic said.

Timberwolves Escape Wild Finish to Defeat Spurs

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Donnte DiVincenzo scored a season-high 26 points as the Minnesota Timberwolves outlasted Victor Wembanyama and the San Antonio Spurs 112-110 in a wild Western Conference clash in Minneapolis.

The game was tied heading to the fourth quarter after the Spurs rallied from a 16-point deficit early in the third period.

Minnesota went ahead 110-105 after a pair of free throws by Rudy Gobert with 2:13 remaining. The Spurs responded with a jumper from Devin Vassell with 1:50 left, and Gobert split two free throws with 58 seconds to play.

Wembanyama brought San Antonio to within two points on a jarring, left-handed dunk with 45.2 seconds left. Minnesota's Anthony Edwards then missed a short floater with 27 seconds remaining and, after a foul called on Gobert, Wembanyama made just one of two free throws.

DiVincenzo returned the favor, missing the first of two free throws with 12.8 seconds to play, keeping the game within two points. After a time out, San Antonio's Jeremy Sochan missed a desperation 3-pointer with 2.2 seconds left, allowing Minnesota to escape with the victory.

Gobert added 17 points and 15 rebounds as the Timberwolves won their third straight game. Julius Randle had 16 points, Edwards scored 14 on 6 of 20 shooting from the floor, Jaden McDaniels hit for 12 and Naz Reid scored 11 for Minnesota.

Wembanyama rang up 34 points to lead all scorers. Harrison



Barnes added 24 for San Antonio, Vassell hit for 22 points, Keldon Johnson tallied 13 and Chris Paul had 14 assists and four steals.

The start of the game was delayed for an hour because of issues with the court surface. Once things got started, the Spurs owned the first quarter, sprinting to a 12-point lead before settling for a 33-25 advantage after one period.

The Timberwolves forged a 13-0 run to open the second period and took a 38-33 lead when Josh Minott poured in a 3-pointer with 8:34 left before halftime. Minnesota expanded its advantage to 10 points on Edwards' driving layup with 3:37 left, and carried a 57-45 advantage to the break behind DiVincenzo's 15 points.

Barnes led the Spurs with 15 points while Wembanyama had 10 in half.

Meanwhile Tyler Herro recorded game highs of 27 points and nine assists before being ejected during a hostile final minute as the Miami Heat rallied from a 12-point second-half deficit to beat the host Houston Rockets 104-100.

Herro was one of five players tossed in the final 47.4 seconds after Nikola Jovic's 3-pointer gave Miami a 98-94 lead.

Houston's Fred VanVleet was ejected first for arguing a five-second call on the Rockets' ensuing inbounds play. Twelve seconds later, Herro and Rockets forward Amen Thompson ignited a skirmish that led to both being disqualified along with Heat guard Terry Rozier and Houston guard Jalen Green. Rockets head coach Ime Udoka and assistant Ben Sullivan were also kicked out.

Jovic tacked on two free throws after the chaos to help Miami close out the win. He finished with 18 points, seven rebounds and six assists off the bench.

Haywood Highsmith tallied 15 points and eight rebounds for the Heat, who played a fifth consecutive game without Jimmy Butler. Bam Adebayo paired 12 points with 10 boards.

Dillon Brooks scored a team-high 22 points for Houston after missing the last three games with right ankle soreness. Alperen Sengun added 18 points and 18 rebounds, while Green scored 19 points before his ejection.

Jaiswal's Half-Century Guides India to Safety in Fourth Test



MELBOURNE (Dispatches)- Opener Yashvi Jaiswal scored a solid half-century in an unbroken partnership with Rishabh Pant as India pushed to safety at 112 for three at tea on day five of the fourth test against Australia.

With the five-test series level at 1-1, India were 228 runs short of their victory target at the Melbourne Cricket Ground but well placed to stave off defeat in the last session and look to regroup for the final match in Sydney in the New Year.

Jaiswal was 63 not out, with Pant on 28 in front of a huge day five crowd of more than 60,000.

India resumed on 33 for three after lunch and were lucky not to be four wickets down soon into the session when pacesman Mitchell Starc rapped Jaiswal on the pads when he was on 31.

Australia reviewed the not-out decision for lbw but the technology deemed it "umpire's call" even with more than half the ball projected to crash into leg stump.

In the morning session, Australia captain Pat Cummins struck twice in an over and left-armed Starc dismissed Virat Kohli cheaply to leave India reeling before Jaiswal and Pant's galvanising 79-run partnership after lunch.

After Australia were bowled out for 234 early on, Cummins ended a watchful 25-run partnership between Jaiswal and captain Rohit Sharma by dismissing Rohit for nine when the out-of-form opener edged straight to Mitchell Marsh at slip.

Five balls later, Cummins had his second victim when KL Rahul edged to Usman Khawaja in the slips to be out for a duck, delighting home fans.

Number four Kohli marched out to a mixture of boos and cheers from the rival supporters, four days on from his mid-pitch shoulder bump with Australia's 19-year-old debutant Sam Konstas.

He was out for five trying to drive Starc, nicking to Khawaja in the slips.

Jasprit Bumrah had earlier bowled Nathan Lyon for 41 to wrap up Australia's second innings as India's pace maestro finished with 5-57 and a total of nine wickets for the match.

Bumrah has now racked up five wickets or better in 13 innings in tests and has 30 wickets for the series at an average of 12.83.

His pace comrade Mohammed Siraj finished with 3-70 in a strong comeback after going wicketless for 122 in the first innings.

Zverev Shines as Germany Begins United Cup Title Defense



PERTH (Dispatches) - Alexander Zverev eased past Thiago Monteiro 6-4 6-4 as Germany beat Brazil for a winning start to their United Cup defence while the Czech Republic got the better of Norway in a hard-fought match.

Zverev had a lengthy spell on the sidelines after damaging his ankle ligaments at the 2022 French Open but returned to his career-high ranking of number two following his Paris Masters triumph last month.

The 27-year-old continued his good form in the mixed team tournament that kicks off the new season as he used his heavy shots from the baseline to grab a break in the first game and took the opening set on serve with a huge ace.

Zverev stepped up a gear at the start of the next set with a stunning backhand winner en route to another break and he closed out the match comfortably to give Germany an unassailable 2-0 lead ahead of the mixed doubles match.

"I'm very happy to be back, very happy to be playing for team Germany," said Zverev. "Perth is one of my favourite cities in Australia, I really enjoy my time here.

"I didn't play that much tennis in the off season, I was actually in

the gym... so the work has paid off I guess."

Laura Siegemund had earlier earned Germany their first point in the Group E encounter with a 6-3 1-6 6-4 victory over Beatriz Haddad Maia at the RAC Arena.

Meanwhile, former French Open runner-up Karolina Muchova got her campaign up and running with a 6-2 6-2 win over Malene Helgo in Sydney but Norway levelled the Group B clash thanks to Casper Ruud's battling effort.

Ruud needed a couple of medical timeouts for a left thigh problem before seeing off Thomas Machac 7-6(6) 5-7 6-4 but the world number six was unable to return for the mixed doubles decider that followed.

United Cup debutant Muchova and Machac then shrugged off the quick turnaround from their singles matches to ease past Ulrikke Eikeri and Viktor Durasovic 6-4 6-4 at the Ken Rosewall Arena.

United States, the inaugural champions of the tournament in 2023, play Canada in Perth while Italy were in action against Switzerland in Sydney.