

IRAN NEWS Felicitates Its Readers On the Occasion of New Year and Wish You a Happy and Prosperous New Year for 2025

# IRAN NEWS



VOL. XXIX, No. 8170 TEHRAN Price 50,000 Rials

www.irannewsdaily.com

WEDNESDAY JANUARY 01, 2025 DEY 12, 1403

## 2 DOMESTIC

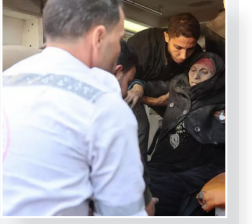


### \$80b Expected to Be Transacted in Commercial Currency Market

> SEE PAGE 2

## 3 INTERNATIONAL

### Health System in Northern Gaza Has Been Obliterated



> SEE PAGE 3

### Iran Dismisses Unfounded U.S., British Claims About Involvement in Mounting Red Sea Tensions



IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Iran's ambassador and permanent representative to the United Nations has categorically rejected the "unfounded and politically-motivated" allegations by the United States and Britain about Tehran's involvement in mounting tensions in the Red Sea region.

In identical letters addressed to the UN Secretary General António Guterres and the Security Council president on Monday local time, Amir Saeid Irvani reacted to the claims made by representatives of the US and the United Kingdom, and orchestrated by the representative of the Israeli regime, against the Islamic Republic of Iran during the open briefing of the UN Security Council on December 30.

He wrote that the unsubstantiated allegations made by the Israeli representative Danny Danon and supported by the regime's closest ally, the United States, are an obvious attempt to scapegoat Iran to justify their own illegal actions and malicious activities in the region.

"It is not Iran but the belligerent regime of Israel that has relentlessly pursued a policy of provocation and destabilizing activities, which poses a grave threat to peace and security in the region and beyond," Irvani pointed out.

The senior Iranian diplomat underlined that his country, as a responsible member of the United Nations, has always adhered to its obligations under international law and the United Nations Charter and has not been involved in any activity inconsistent with the relevant Security Council resolutions.

"Therefore, Iran categorically denies any violation of arms embargoes or any involvement in fueling the conflict in Yemen or elsewhere," he stated.

Iran's UN ambassador went on to describe it as both deeply troubling and highly ironic that the US and Britain, instead of upholding their responsibilities as permanent members of the Security Council to maintain international peace and security, persist in providing political cover and military support for Israel's reckless actions and violations while fabricating baseless accusations against Iran.

### Hezbollah Vows Massive Retaliation for Israeli Violations



BEIRUT (Dispatches) - Lebanon's Hezbollah resistance movement has reiterated that it is in full possession of its capabilities, warning that it will respond decisively to Israeli forces occupying Lebanon once the ceasefire concludes.

Mahmoud Qamati, deputy head of Hezbollah's political council, in an interview with the al-Manar network on Monday, said that the group's missile stockpiles and capabilities remain intact, noting that they continued missile strikes against Israel right up to the moment the ceasefire took effect.

Qamati explained that the current restraint exercised by the resistance is intended to support the Lebanese population and to honor the commitments made to mediators during ceasefire negotiations to allow for a resolution of outstanding issues.

"We have exercised patience regarding Israeli violations to ensure that citizens can return to their villages in the south, and now they demand that we respond to these violations," he stated.

He noted that the resistance's patience last for 60 days, and warned that the situation would change on the 61st day, noting that the Israeli forces would be viewed as occupiers and would be treated accordingly.

"The resistance is fully prepared, strong, and equipped," Qamati said, emphasizing their readiness to counter any provocations. He also reassured the local community of a zero-tolerance policy toward land occupation and settlement expansion.



### Majlis Speaker Labels Impeachment Talks as Political Stunt Amid Currency Crisis

IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Majlis Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf criticized recent discussions of impeachment as counterproductive and politically motivated, stating that such actions during the current economic turmoil would harm national interests.

Speaking at the Parliament's open session on Tuesday, Qalibaf reaffirmed lawmakers' commitment to the Supreme Leader's directive for constructive cooperation with the government. He emphasized that focusing on impeachment at this juncture is a "performative and political act" that does not address the country's challenges.

He detailed the Parliament's oversight measures to stabilize the economy, including frequent meetings with the Central Bank and economic commissions. He highlighted ongoing evaluations of monetary policies, inflationary impacts, and compliance with legal frameworks under the Seventh Development Plan.

He disclosed that the Supreme Economic Coordination Council, which includes leaders of the executive, legislative, and judicial branches, will deliberate on currency issues in its upcoming session.

"The recent surge in foreign exchange rates has severely impacted citizens' lives, underscoring the need for comprehensive solutions," Qalibaf said. He lamented the cyclical nature of sudden currency spikes in Iran, calling for long-term resolutions.

The Speaker pointed to legislative achievements, such as granting the Central Bank greater independence over monetary and exchange rate policies. He noted that under the Seventh Development Plan, the Central Bank is now the sole authority on currency policy, with all entities, including private sector players, bound by its regulations.

"There is no legal gap preventing the government and the Central Bank from managing the

currency market," he added.

Qalibaf argued that stabilizing the currency market is achievable with a robust policy package that increases foreign exchange supply, curbs speculative trading, and facilitates better use of available resources. He outlined potential measures, such as eliminating rent-seeking exchange rates, supporting exporters, and issuing currency bonds to stabilize the market.

He warned against unconstructive rhetoric and political disputes that further destabilize the market, urging that discussions remain within professional and executive frameworks.

The Speaker strongly opposed impeachment proceedings during the currency crisis, describing them as a "political spectacle" that would undermine economic stability. "Such actions might yield short-term political gains for Parliament but would inflict lasting harm on the economy and people's livelihoods," Qalibaf stated.

He urged lawmakers to focus on bold, informed decisions to manage the economy, particularly as adversaries seek to exploit vulnerabilities.

Qalibaf reiterated Parliament's dedication to working with the government, recalling the Supreme Leader's directive for a cooperative approach. "The Leader has emphasized that the success of the President is the success of the entire system," he said, stressing Parliament's role in supporting the administration's efforts.

In closing, he commemorated the anniversary of the December 30th rallies, a historic day marking public unity in defense of national and religious values. He praised the Iranian people for thwarting adversarial plots with their resilience and insight.

This statement underscores the Speaker's emphasis on national unity and pragmatic governance as Iran navigates economic challenges and external pressures.

### Promotion of Peace and Security in Region, Muslim World Iran's Practical Approach



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - President Masoud Pezeshkian says the Islamic Republic's practical approach is based on the promotion of peace and security in the region and among all the countries in the Muslim world.

In a meeting with Oman's Foreign Minister Said Badr al-Busaidi in Tehran on Monday, Pezeshkian said Iran's foreign policy is on the basis of expanding relations with Muslim and neighboring countries.

It is not acceptable at all that the "criminal" Israeli regime exploits differences among the regional countries and Muslim nations to harm them, he added.

Pointing to deep-rooted relations between Tehran and Muscat in various fields and at different levels, Pezeshkian said, "Further continuation and expansion of constructive relations is of importance to the Islamic Republic of Iran."

He noted that Iran and Oman have agreed to hold a session of the joint economic committee in Muscat in the near future.

The two countries are taking positive measures to accelerate the implementation of previous agreements and sign new deals in the future, he explained.

The Omani foreign minister, for his part, said his country's ties with Iran are based on mutual confidence and goodwill, calling for further promotion of relations.

Busaidi added that enhanced ties with Iran based on mutual respect and confidence is an unchangeable rule for Oman.

Earlier on Monday, the top Omani diplomat met with Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi and attended a joint press conference.

### Gov't Spokesperson Highlights Social Capital as Key to Overcoming External Challenges



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The government spokesperson emphasized the crucial role of enhancing social capital in addressing external challenges, stating that despite current economic and social unrest, efforts must be made to deliver positive news to the public and improve the collective mood.

Speaking at the inaugural conference for public relations departments of executive agencies under the National Unity Government on Tuesday, Fatemeh Mohajerani outlined the evolving responsibilities of public relations offices in response to media's changing roles. The event was held at the Islamic Summit Conference Hall.

Mohajerani stressed that one of the hidden yet essential duties of public relations is fostering social capital. She stated, "Public relations offices must effectively communicate their organization's strengths while listening to and addressing criticisms to elevate the organization's standing."

She acknowledged the challenge of preserving social capital amidst criticisms of government inefficiency. "While we have achieved significant results, our inability to communicate these effectively has contributed to the perception of underperformance," she said.

Highlighting the difficulty of ensuring impactful communication in today's noisy media environment, Mohajerani remarked, "In a society overwhelmed with competing voices, showcasing the accomplishments of public institutions becomes increasingly challenging. Public relations are the face of an organization, yet like an individual whose inner qualities may not align with their outward appearance, organizations can face similar misrepresentation."

### Iran Ready to Host BRICS Business Tourism Events

TEHRAN - Iran's Cultural Attaché in

Russia announced the country's readiness to host BRICS business tourism events, highlighting its rich cultural and historical capacities.

Speaking to tourism industry representatives from 18 countries at the inaugural session of the International Congress on "Global Business Tourism Development," Masoud Ahmadvand emphasized Iran's potential to organize impactful business tourism activities for BRICS nations (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa).

Ahmadvand stated that cultural understanding plays a pivotal role in fostering business tourism between Iran and BRICS countries, as well as other nations in the Global South. He underlined how cultural exchange enhances trust, promotes commercial cooperation, and aids in sustainable tourism development through shared historical and cultural connections.

He added that by leveraging the cultural diversity of BRICS nations, there is potential for organizing successful trade and cultural events while strengthening local infrastructure. Additionally, he proposed creating a unified brand for business tourism among BRICS nations based on their shared cultural values.

Ahmadvand also advocated for strengthening cultural diplomacy through academic collaborations, student exchange programs, and joint artistic exhibitions. He suggested that multinational scientific and artistic events under the BRICS framework could further facilitate the exchange of ideas and technologies.

Referring to Iran's 27 UNESCO World Heritage Sites, Ahmadvand highlighted the country's history of hosting significant international events, showcasing its readiness to welcome future global initiatives.

The congress attracted over 750 experts and 129 international delegates from 18 countries,



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

including Iran, Azerbaijan, Brazil, China, Egypt, India, Russia, Saudi Arabia, and South Africa. The event emphasized sustainable development strategies for the business tourism sector, with key sessions led by officials such as Dmitry Vakhrukov, Russia's Deputy Minister of Economic Development, and Amarch Kumar Tiwari, Vice President of India's Convention Promotion Bureau.

Previously, the first BRICS Tourism Forum held in Moscow established a roadmap for tourism cooperation among member countries.

The Fuad Library in Beijing safeguards over 1,500 ancient Islamic texts, reflecting China's efforts in preserving Islamic cultural heritage. Since 2014, the Beijing Islamic Association has worked on cataloging, protecting, and studying these rare books with support from the city's Religious Affairs Bureau.

A dedicated team of young scholars, proficient in Arabic and Islamic sciences, compiled a comprehensive catalog of the collection, completing the "Index of Fuad Library's Book Collection" in 2016.

The library's holdings include a diverse range of manuscripts and printed works spanning various dynasties, such as the Yuan, Ming, and Qing. The collection features Qur'anic texts, commentaries, Hadith, Islamic law, educational materials, and historical studies in Arabic, Persian, and Chinese.

The catalog details essential information such as the book title, content, original and translated names, publication year, place of printing, publisher, and physical dimensions.

Published by Minzu Publishing House, the 508-page catalog is a significant resource for researchers. Its authors include leading experts such as Ding Xin, Ma Ai Min, and others, highlighting China's dedication to preserving its Islamic heritage.

# IRAN NEWS



## President Extends New Year Greetings to Christian Nations

TEHRAN - President Masoud Pezeshkian has extended his congratulations to the leaders and people of Christian nations celebrating Christmas and the New Year. In his message on Monday, Pezeshkian emphasized the values embodied in the teachings of Jesus Christ, whom he described as the "prophet of light and mercy". He highlighted that the celebration of Jesus Christ's birth anniversary serves as a reminder of peace and ethics in human societies. The Iranian president expressed his wish for the world to witness the eradication of oppression, violence, war, and genocide in the New Year.

## Government Plans to Support Tourism Industry



TEHRAN - The Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts emphasized that the government, under the leadership of the President and with the support of other branches, including Parliament and the Judiciary, is determined to eliminate obstacles in the path of the tourism industry.

Speaking at a conference held at the Milad Tower in Tehran, Seyyed Reza Salehi Amiri addressed a gathering of tourism professionals, travel agency executives, and officials from both public and private sectors. He stated, "Tourism agencies, offices, and affiliated organizations are the driving force of this industry in Iran. The government is committed to supporting these entities, as tourism development cannot be achieved without them."

Salehi Amiri urged for a departure from the routine approach in tourism and stressed the need to identify and remove barriers hindering the growth of the industry.

He noted that the government is consistently discussing and addressing tourism-related issues through specialized consultations. "We must avoid despair and focus on attracting tourists with determination," he said.

One of the critical measures, according to Salehi Amiri, involves identifying target regions for attracting tourists from various countries. He explained that the initial focus has been on countries within the cultural sphere of Nowruz celebrations. Following this, capacities in other regions were explored, leading to negotiations and agreements with officials from different nations, which are ongoing.

The Minister highlighted recent developments, such as the resumption of flights from Saudi Arabia to Mashhad and Riyadh's request for increased flights. He also announced plans to facilitate the arrival of tourists from countries like Bahrain and Kuwait.

## Opportunity for 2.5-Fold Growth in Trade with the Eurasian Union



TEHRAN - The head of Iran's Trade Promotion Organization (TPO), Mohammad Ali Dehghan Dehnavi, announced that a preferential trade agreement between Iran and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) over the past five years has paved the way for a 2.5-fold increase in trade with member countries.

Dehghan Dehnavi emphasized the importance of preferential and free trade agreements during a meeting with members of the Entrepreneurs' Assembly on Monday. He stated that the agreement, signed five years ago, reduced tariffs on certain goods and created opportunities for significant growth in trade with the EAEU.

Dehnavi noted that this success has encouraged the pursuit of a free trade agreement with the union. Currently, the parliaments of the five EAEU member states have approved the agreement, and in Iran, it awaits final approval from the Guardian Council. He anticipates the agreement will come into effect early next year.

The TPO, responsible for trade negotiations, is also advancing similar preferential trade agreements with other nations, such as ongoing talks with Pakistan, he added.

Dehnavi outlined three primary goals for the TPO: regulatory reform and facilitation, development of free trade agreements, and promotion of export-oriented production. He stressed that export growth should not rely solely on surplus goods, as this approach would not lead to a substantial trade leap. Instead, Iran must identify and develop industries with strong growth potential to enhance trade opportunities.

He also highlighted the need for supportive laws and regulatory reform to facilitate exports.

Discussing exchange rate policy, Dehnavi said the government is mindful of inflation and public welfare in its efforts to align currency rates with economic realities. He advocated for a shift from preemptive supervision to retrospective oversight in policymaking, allowing economic actors to operate freely within legal boundaries while ensuring compliance through post-action monitoring.

## \$80b Expected to Be Transacted in Commercial Currency Market



TEHRAN - The Governor of the Central Bank of Iran announced that transitioning all official foreign exchange needs to the commercial currency market is feasible. He estimated that with the launch of the commercial forex system, nearly \$70 to \$80 billion in transactions could take place in this market annually.

Mohammad Reza Farzin made these remarks during a coordination meeting with petrochemical holdings at the Iran Currency and Gold Exchange Center on December 30. He commended the petrochemical industry for fulfilling its commitments by returning foreign currency earnings to the economy. Farzin noted that daily transactions in the exchange center could soon reach approximately 20 trillion rials, highlighting its significant influence on the country's financial industry.

Farzin emphasized the efficiency of the commercial forex system, enabling the Central Bank to ensure the country's forex needs are met in a market-based manner. Suppliers can use this system to secure funding for development and operational needs. The system's design eliminates rent-seeking opportunities for intermediaries and ensures a fair rate for both suppliers and demanders.

He added, "Our objective is to minimize unofficial market transactions and shift all legitimate commercial and service-related forex demands to this regulated market."

Farzin stated that the commercial forex market could become the benchmark for foreign exchange rates in Iran. Referring to the \$65 billion worth of transactions in the NIMA system last year, he suggested the new system would surpass these figures and serve as a reliable indicator for other markets.

"Rate signaling from the commercial forex market is crucial. Previously, NIMA rates influenced commodity markets but had little impact on asset markets. We aim to establish a more comprehensive signaling system," Farzin remarked.

The Central Bank Governor stressed the importance of economic stability

across various markets. "Uncertainty and instability harm economic actors. We must create conditions where rates are predictable, even amid political and security shocks," he said, urging collaboration from the private sector to achieve this goal.

Farzin announced plans to introduce a currency bond market to address funding challenges caused by international sanctions. "Currently, 92% of the country's financial burden is shouldered by the banking system. Diversifying financing methods is essential to sustain development," he noted.

Mohammad Aram, Deputy Governor for Forex Affairs, praised the petrochemical sector's cooperation in supplying currency via the commercial forex system. He expressed hope for increased currency offerings from this sector, particularly during the final days of the year.

Farzin also highlighted a structural transformation in the NIMA system, marking the first time the market operates purely on supply and demand principles. This approach reduces risks and corruption while enabling optimal rate discovery.

Ahmad Mahdavi, Secretary-General of the Petrochemical Industry Employers Association, reported significant growth in exports and forex sales by petrochemical companies. He highlighted that \$7.144 billion had been sold through NIMA this year, a 7% increase compared to the same period last year.

Additionally, since the inception of the commercial forex market, petrochemical firms have sold \$516 million, demonstrating their readiness to participate actively in the new system.

Mahdavi concluded by highlighting 49 planned projects under the seventh development plan, which are expected to generate \$25 billion in exports annually and create an estimated \$40 billion in value for the sector.

This initiative aims to establish a regulated market that can bridge rate gaps, eliminate speculative activities, and meet the real forex needs of the economy.

## Iran Extends a Hand of Friendship to Kazakhstan for Collaboration in Health Sector

TEHRAN - The acting president of Babol University of Medical Sciences has expressed the university's full readiness to expand collaborations with Kazakhstan in the field of health during a meeting with Kazakhstan's Consul General in Iran.

Speaking at the university, Hossein Ghorbani met with "Erbol Akhmetov," Kazakhstan's Consul General in Iran. Ghorbani emphasized the extensive opportunities for collaboration between Babol University and Kazakhstan, highlighting medical tourism, student exchanges, and the promotion of health tourism as excellent avenues for partnership.

He added that specialized working groups involving experts will evaluate available capacities and conduct needs assessments in areas such as medical tourism and student education.

Ghorbani noted that Kazakhstan has shown interest in engaging with Babol due to the university's capabilities in health sciences, coupled with the region's tourist attractions.

The acting president highlighted the university's resources, including 400 faculty members and 4,508 students across 75 academic disciplines, and reiterated Babol's readiness to collaborate with Kazakhstan in all health-related areas.

Ghorbani mentioned that the university's hospitals, recognized for their expertise in kidney transplants, bone marrow transplants, cochlear implants, infertility treatment, genetics, dialysis, joint replacement, radio-oncology, dentistry, and more, are well-equipped to receive patients from other countries.

He stressed that academic collaboration should not be limited to

student admissions. Instead, it should encompass a wide range of scientific and educational partnerships, such as faculty exchanges, study opportunities for professors and students, participation in scientific conferences, and similar activities.

Ghorbani underlined the pivotal role of physicians and faculty members as key players in facilitating these academic and medical exchanges.

Erbol Akhmetov expressed his enthusiasm for visiting Babol University of Medical Sciences, describing the meeting as an excellent opportunity to establish a framework for joint collaborations through memorandums of understanding. He expressed optimism that the discussions would lead to practical developments across various domains.

Akhmetov emphasized the broader scope of relations, extending beyond medical, scientific, and technological areas to cultural, political, social, and trade-related collaborations. He reiterated Kazakhstan's commitment to pursuing comprehensive partnerships in health-related fields.

He highlighted the potential for collaborations, including faculty and student exchanges, short-term educational courses, joint research projects, medical equipment and supplies, and patient referrals.

Babol University of Medical Sciences, established in 1984, was the first medical university in northern Iran. Located in southern Babol, it spans a 40-hectare campus surrounded by Hyrcanian forests and fruit trees like oranges, apples, and pomegranates.



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK



## Wrong Legislation Drains Millions of Dollars Daily from Iran



TEHRAN - The Iranian Aviation and Travel Services Association has reported that flawed legislative policies by parliament have resulted in significant financial losses for the country. Hormatollah Rafieci, President of the association, highlighted how the imposition of taxes on aviation companies has allowed foreign airlines to exploit the loopholes, prompting daily capital outflows worth millions of dollars.

Rafieci explained that due to aviation being excluded from tax exemptions granted to rail, road, and maritime transportation, foreign airlines now sell Tehran-Paris tickets for exorbitant prices of 140 million tomans within Iran. Meanwhile, they advise travel agents to direct customers to their offices in Dubai or Turkey, where the same ticket costs 40 million tomans, payable in US dollars.

"This policy has led to foreign airlines strategically offering cheaper tickets on overseas platforms in Dubai and Istanbul, thereby draining millions of dollars from Iran daily. This contributes to inflation and the rising dollar exchange rate, which has now surpassed 80,000 tomans," Rafieci stated.

Rafieci criticized parliament's 2023 tax law, which exempted rail, road, and maritime transport but failed to include aviation. "Around the world, transportation is exempt from taxes, including in Iran. However, due to this oversight, flights originating from Iran are taxed, even on routes that traverse foreign airspace," he said.

This oversight has drastically inflated ticket prices. "A ticket that should cost 10 million tomans now costs 50 million. Meanwhile, travel agencies, which only earn a 4% commission, are being unfairly taxed on the full ticket price," Rafieci added.

Rafieci disclosed that despite meetings with the Minister of Economy and tax officials acknowledging the unfair burden on travel agencies, no corrective actions have been taken.

"Agencies act as intermediaries, earning a small commission, yet they are unfairly taxed on total sales. This injustice must be addressed," he emphasized.

Rafieci went on to strongly criticize the situation, calling for accountability at the highest levels. "The president, who has declared harsh consequences for corruption, should address this betrayal of public trust. Those responsible for this policy, which causes daily financial hemorrhaging, must face severe consequences," he said.

In a direct appeal to Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Ezzatollah Zarghami and Deputy Tourism Minister Mohammad-Ali Bandpey, Rafieci urged immediate action on two critical issues:

## TCCIMA Signs MoU to Boost Private Sector Trade with Russia



TEHRAN - A memorandum of understanding (MoU) aimed at enhancing collaboration and addressing the challenges faced by private sector businesses in expanding trade relations with Russia was signed between the Tehran Chamber of Commerce and the Iran-Russia Joint Chamber of Commerce.

According to the Tehran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines, and Agriculture (TCCIMA), the agreement was finalized during a joint meeting attended by Mehdi Sadeghi Niaraki, Vice President of the Tehran Chamber, and Hadi Tizhoosh Taban, President of the Iran-Russia Joint Chamber. The MoU was signed by Hessamoddin Hallaj, International Affairs Deputy of the Tehran Chamber, and Roshanali Yektaei Qarebai, Vice President of the Iran-Russia Joint Chamber.

Speaking at the event, Niaraki emphasized that eight countries have been identified as strategic target markets in the Tehran Chamber's 10th-term strategic plan, with Russia being a key priority. He added that six value chains have been defined to guide the chamber's activities.

Niaraki further highlighted the new phase of collaboration between the two chambers, focusing on synergy to facilitate private sector trade with Russia and create opportunities for trade and investment.

Hadi Tizhoosh Taban, President of the Iran-Russia Joint Chamber, noted that Russia imports goods worth \$290 billion annually, but Iran's share remains minimal. He called on Iran's private sector to work closely with trade organizations to identify barriers and develop actionable solutions to enhance trade with Russia.

## Trinidad and Tobago Declares State of Emergency on Expected Spike in Gang Violence

PORT OF SPAIN (Dispatches) - Trinidad and Tobago declared a state of emergency on Monday as the government braced for reprisal shootings after an attempt on a gang leader's life, officials said.

The dual-island Caribbean nation off the coast of Venezuela will use the emergency to launch an anti-gang crackdown, authorities said.



## Elon Musk Wants Weak Europe



BERLIN (Dispatches) - U.S. billionaire Elon Musk's support for Germany's far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) is a "logical and systematic" play for a weak Europe that will not be able to regulate as strongly, Vice Chancellor Robert Habeck said in his New Year's address.

The calls by Musk are not made out of ignorance, said Habeck, who is the chancellor candidate for the Greens party in German national elections due in February.

"It is logical and systematic. Musk is strengthening those who are weakening Europe. A weak Europe is in the interest of those for whom regulation is an inappropriate limitation of their power," added Habeck.

The German government on Monday accused Musk, who owns social media platform X and is CEO of Tesla and SpaceX, of trying to influence the upcoming election with a guest opinion piece for the Welt am Sonntag newspaper.

Musk, the world's richest person, spent more than \$250 million to help Trump get elected and has been tasked by Trump to prune the federal budget as a special adviser. Musk endorsed the AfD as Germany's last hope in the piece that prompted the commentary editor to resign in protest, praising the anti-establishment, anti-immigrant party's approach to regulation, taxes and market deregulation.

Meanwhile Scholz appealed to his fellow Germans to vote in snap elections in February as the country argues over immigration and the rise of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD), according to a New Year's speech seen in advance.

"I appeal to you today: Please go vote! By looking around in the world, you will know what a great accomplishment free and fair elections are," Scholz said in the address, which is set to air at 1910 GMT.

## South Korea Court Issues Arrest Warrant for Impeached President Yoon Suk Yeol



SEOUL (Dispatches) - A South Korean court has issued an arrest warrant for impeached, suspended President Yoon Suk Yeol, investigators said today, over his short-lived bid to impose martial law on the country.

Yoon briefly suspended civilian rule this month, plunging South Korea into its worst political crisis in decades.

He was stripped of his presidential duties by parliament over the action, but a constitutional court ruling is pending on whether to confirm the impeachment.

"The arrest warrant and search warrant for President Yoon Suk Yeol, requested by the Joint Investigation Headquarters, were issued this morning," the Joint Investigation Headquarters said in a statement.

The conservative leader faces criminal charges of insurrection, which could result in life imprisonment or even the death penalty.

Investigators probing Yoon over his declaration of martial law requested the warrant yesterday after the suspended president failed to report for questioning a third time.



## Health System in Northern Gaza Has Been Obliterated

ZURICH (Dispatches) - The International Committee of the Red Cross said Monday the health care system in northern Gaza had been "obliterated" by fighting in the Israel-Hamas war, with hospitals rendered "completely inoperable".

"Repeated hostilities in and around hospitals have obliterated the health care system in northern Gaza, putting civilians at an unacceptably grave risk of going without lifesaving care," the ICRC said in a statement.

It called for the respect and protection of medical facilities in line with international humanitarian law.

"This protection is a legal obligation and a moral imperative to preserve human life," it added, saying hospitals were a lifeline for those sick or wounded in conflict.

The Al-Awda Hospital, previously supported by the ICRC with supplies, was now absorbing more pressure as one of the few functioning medical facilities in northern Gaza, the Geneva-based organization said.

"The Kamal Adwan and Indonesian hospitals are now completely inoperable. For months, these medical facilities have struggled to provide care for patients as ongoing hostilities have damaged hospitals and endangered or harmed staff, patients, and civilians."

Israel launched a major raid on the Kamal Adwan Hospital on Friday and Saturday.

Israel's military said Sunday that its forces had killed approximately 20 Palestinian militants and apprehended "240 terrorists" in the raid, calling it one of its "largest operations" conducted in the territory.

It left northern Gaza's last major health facility out of service and emptied of patients, the World Health Organization said. Since October 6 this year, Israeli operations in Gaza have focused on the north, with officials saying their land and air offensive aims to prevent Hamas from regrouping.

"No patient can expect their medical needs to be fully met today," the ICRC said of the situation.

"The influx of patients, caregivers, and displaced civilians seeking shelter creates a situation that medical personnel cannot solve."

"The increasingly dangerous situation comes in addition to more than a year of insufficient provision of medical equipment and supplies, fuel, food, and specialised healthcare capacities."

The ICRC said it remained committed to supporting healthcare services wherever possible, including doing what it could to ensure the protection of medical responders and civilian access to health care, as well as facilitating movements of medical personnel and equipment.

Meanwhile the head of the World Health Organization on Monday called for an end to attacks on hospitals in Gaza after Israel struck one and raided another in the past few days.

"Hospitals in Gaza have once again become battlegrounds and the health system is under severe threat," WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said in a post on X.

"We repeat: stop attacks on hospitals. People in Gaza need access to health care. Humanitarians need access to provide health aid. Ceasefire!" he added.

The Israeli military said Hamas militants were the targets of a strike on Gaza City's Al Wafa hospital on Sunday, which the Palestinian civil defence said killed seven people.

Israeli forces also detained more than 240 Palestinians including dozens of medical staff from Kamal Adwan hospital on Friday, among them its director Hussam Abu Safiya, according to health authorities in the enclave and Israel's military.

The Israeli military said the hospital was being used as a command centre for Hamas military operations and those arrested were suspected militants. It said Abu Safiya was taken for questioning as he was suspected of being a Hamas operative.

Tedros, who last week was caught up in an Israeli strike against Yemen's main airport that he said might have cost him his life, called for Abu Safiya's immediate release and said the Al-Ahli hospital had also faced attacks.

Tedros said the WHO and partners had delivered basic medical supplies, food and water to Gaza's Indonesian hospital and transferred 10 critical patients to Al Shifa hospital. Four patients were detained during the transfer, he said.

## Syria Eyes Strategic Ties With Ukraine, Kyiv Vows More Food Aid Shipments

DAMASCUS (Dispatches) - Syria hopes for strategic partnerships with Ukraine, its new foreign minister told his Ukrainian counterpart on Monday, as Kyiv moves to build ties with the new Islamist rulers in Damascus amid waning Russian influence.

Russia was a staunch ally of ousted President Bashar al-Assad and has given him political asylum. Moscow has said it is in contact with the new administration in Damascus, including over the fate of Russian military facilities in Syria.

"There will be strategic partnerships between us and Ukraine on the political, economic and social levels, and scientific partnerships," Syria's newly appointed foreign minister, Asaad Hassan al-Shibani, told Ukrainian counterpart Andrii Sybiha.

"Certainly the Syrian people and the Ukrainian people have the same experience and the same suffering that we endured over 14 years," he added, apparently drawing a parallel between Syria's brutal 2011-24 civil war and Russia's seizure of Ukrainian territory culminating in its full-scale 2022 invasion.

Sybiha, who also met Syria's new de facto ruler Ahmed al-Sharaa in Damascus on Monday, said Ukraine would send more food aid shipments to Syria after the expected arrival of 20 shipments of flour on Tuesday.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said he hoped providing help



to Syria would be beneficial to restoring stability in Ukraine, locked in a 34-month-old war with Russia.

"We can help restore stability in Syria after years of Russian interference and this will undoubtedly help us restore peace for ourselves," Zelenskyy said in his nightly video address.

"It will be the right step to renew our diplomatic relations with Syria and

our economic cooperation. I am very hopeful that post-Assad Syria will respect international law in a way that Assad could not and did not want to."

Zelenskyy announced last Friday the dispatch of Ukraine's first batch of food aid to Syria comprising 500 metric tons of wheat flour as part of Kyiv's humanitarian "Grain from Ukraine" initiative in cooperation with the United Nations World Food Program.

Ukraine, a global producer and exporter of grain and oilseeds, traditionally exports wheat and corn to countries in the Middle East, but not to Syria, which in the Assad era imported food from Russia.

Russian wheat supplies to Syria have been suspended because of uncertainty about the new government in Damascus and payment delays, Russian and Syrian sources told Reuters in early December.

The ousting of Assad by al-Sharaa's Islamist group, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, has thrown the future of Russia's military bases in Syria - the

Hmeimim airbase in Latakia and the Tartous naval facility - into question.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said the status of Russia's military bases would be the subject of negotiations with the new leadership in Damascus.

## Xi Pledges World Peace in New Year's Message to Putin

BEIJING (Dispatches) - Chinese President Xi Jinping vowed to promote "world peace" in a New Year's message to his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin, state media reported on Tuesday.

"No matter how the international situation changes, China will remain steadfast in further comprehensively deepening reform... and promoting world peace and development," Xi said, according to state broadcaster CCTV.

Since Putin's full-scale invasion of neighbouring Ukraine in February 2022, China has sought to present itself as a neutral party, unlike the United States and other Western nations.

But it remains a close political and economic partner of Russia, leading some NATO members to brand Beijing an "enabler" of the war, which Beijing has never condemned.

According to CCTV, Xi told Putin: "In the face of rapidly evolving changes not seen in a century and the turbulent international situation, China and Russia have consistently moved forward hand-in-hand along the correct path of non-alignment, non-confrontation and not targeting any third party."

The two presidents share a strong personal bond, with Xi calling his Russian counterpart his "best friend" and Putin cherishing his "reliable partner".

Their relationship has been a constant despite a decade of growing friction with Western countries, exemplified by Russia's war in Ukraine.

Xi noted to Putin that 2024 marked the 75th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Russia, according to CCTV, "representing a new important milestone in the relationship between the two countries".



"After three-quarters of a century of ups and downs, China-Russia relations have become increasingly mature and stable," Xi said, according to CCTV.

Meanwhile North Korean leader Kim Jong Un hailed Vladimir Putin as his "dearest friend" in a New Year's letter to the Russian leader praising close bilateral ties, state media said.

The two countries have deepened political, military and cultural ties since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, with Putin and Kim repeatedly professing their personal closeness.

They signed a landmark defense pact during Putin's visit to the isolated North in June. The pact obligates them to provide immediate military assistance if the other is invaded and came into effect this month.

Kim's latest message described Putin as his "dearest friend and comrade", the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) said.

The North's leader sent "warm greetings of best wishes to the fraternal Russian people and all the service personnel of the brave Russian army on behalf of himself, the Korean people and all the service personnel of the armed forces of the DPRK", it said, using an acronym of the North's formal name.

Kim also expressed "his willingness to design and push ahead with new projects" after their "meaningful journey in 2024".

In a possible reference to the war in Ukraine, Kim also hoped that 2025 would be the year "when the Russian army and people defeat neo-Nazism and achieve a great victory".



## Man United in Battle for Survival as Losing Run Goes On

MANCHESTER (Dispatches) - Manchester United boss Ruben Amorim said the English giants are in a battle for Premier League survival after Newcastle cruised to a 2-0 win at Old Trafford to inflict a fourth consecutive defeat on the hosts.

Just two months into his tenure, Amorim conceded this week that his job is on the line unless results begin to improve.

The Portuguese has won just two of his first eight league games to leave United languishing down in 14th, just seven points above the relegation zone.

"That is really clear, so we have to fight," said Amorim on United being dragged into a relegation battle. "It is a really difficult moment, one of the more difficult moments in the history of Manchester United and we have to address it with honesty."

Alexander Isak and Joelinton struck inside the first 19 minutes as a fifth consecutive win lifted the Magpies into fifth.

Amorim stood aghast at what he was witnessing in the first half as Newcastle cut through the home side at will.

"They are a better team and they started very strong," added Amorim.

"When we suffer a goal it is really hard to turn around because of all the losses we had before and we don't have the base of work behind to cope with the difficult moments."

Just over three minutes were on the clock when Isak was afforded space inside the six-yard box to head in Lewis Hall's cross and score for the sixth consecutive Premier League game.

United badly missed the presence of suspended captain Bruno Fernandes as the Newcastle midfield three of Sandro Tonali, Bruno Guimaraes and Joelinton played around the ageing duo of Casemiro and Christian Eriksen with ease.

Isak blew a huge chance to double the visitors' lead when he fluffed an attempted dink over Andre Onana and the Swedish striker also had a goal ruled out for offside.

However, it was just a matter of time before Newcastle added a second and it arrived when Joelinton burst in to meet Anthony Gordon's cross.

Amorim responded by replacing Joshua Zirkzee with Kobbie Mainoo after just 33 minutes - a move greeted with cheers by the frustrated Old Trafford crowd.

Tonali should have made it 3-0 when he hit the post at the end of a flowing Newcastle move through the heart of the United defence.

Meanwhile Enzo Maresca admitted Chelsea should not think about challenging for the Premier League title after lowly Ipswich beat the Blues 2-0 at Portman Road.

Maresca's side were rocked by Liam Delap's early penalty and a second-half goal from former Chelsea winger Omari Hutchinson.

Chelsea's second successive defeat after their Boxing Day loss against Fulham left them without a win in their last three matches.

The west Londoners had emerged as surprise title contenders after an eight-match winning run in all competitions.

But Maresca had insisted throughout that spell that Chelsea's inexperienced squad do not have what it takes to win the title in his first season after arriving from Leicester.

And the Italian's prediction looks spot on after a shock result in Suffolk that leaves Chelsea in fourth place, 10 points behind leaders Liverpool, who have a game in hand.

"We focus game by game. We are not focused on title race or those things," Maresca said.

## Former England Boss Gareth Southgate Knighted in New Year Honors



LONDON (Dispatches) - Former England manager Gareth Southgate has been knighted in the New Year Honours.

Southgate earned the award after a largely successful spell in charge of England from 2016 to 2024.

The 54-year-old led England to two consecutive European Championship finals, but came up short as they were beaten by Italy on penalties in 2021 and lost to Spain in this year's showpiece.

England also reached the 2018 World Cup semi-finals before losing to Croatia and were eliminated by France in the 2022 World Cup quarter-finals.

Southgate, who quit shortly after the Euro 2024 final in July, becomes the fourth former England manager to receive a knighthood, following in the footsteps of 1966 World Cup winning handler Alf Ramsey, Walter Winterbottom and Bobby Robson.

Former Chelsea and Bayern Munich boss Thomas Tuchel has been hired to succeed Southgate, who has hinted he may not return to management.

The German will officially start his job on Jan 1 as England begin their qualifying campaign for the 2026 World Cup.

Meanwhile, Gerald Davies, the former Wales and British and Irish Lions wing who subsequently served as president of the Welsh Rugby Union, has also been knighted for services to his sport and for voluntary and charitable service in Wales.

Davies played for Wales between 1966 and 1978 in their golden era and won three Grand Slams.

He toured with the Lions in 1968 and 1971 making five appearances.

The 1971 tour was both a personal and team highlight as it is the only time the Lions have beaten New Zealand in a series, and Davies scored all three of his Lions Test tries.

"I feel very emotional about it. I am surprised by it. Words are really quite inadequate to describe it," Davies said.

"It comes out of the blue. I was dumbstruck in many ways, but you don't achieve these things on your own."

Olympic gold medalist Keely Hodgkinson becomes a Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE).

The 22-year-old's triumph in Paris earlier this year made her just the third British woman to claim the Olympic 800 metres title after Ann Packer in 1964 and Kelly Holmes in 2004.

Katarina Johnson-Thompson, who won her first Olympic medal with heptathlon silver in Paris, and three-time medalist Dina Asher-Smith are also made MBEs.

## Australia Take Seven Wickets After Tea to Win Classic Melbourne Test

MELBOURNE (Dispatches) - Australia took seven wickets after tea on day five to win a classic fourth test against India by 184 runs and snatch a 2-1 series lead heading into the final match in Sydney.

India were coasting on the back of Yashasvi Jaiswal and Rishabh Pant's partnership through the entire middle session at the Melbourne Cricket Ground but lost 7-34 to be all out for 155 in front of a mammoth crowd of 74,362.

Australia captain Pat Cummins and fellow pacer Scott Boland finished with three wickets apiece, with spinner Nathan Lyon chipping in two on a dramatic final day which was tinged with controversy over the use of the Decision Review System (DRS).

"It was an amazing test match. I reckon that's one of the best to be part of," said Cummins, named Player of the Match after scoring 100 tail-end runs and taking six wickets.

"All week the crowd's been ridiculous, and the cricket's been just as good. Petty happy at the moment, happy to contribute."

The big day-five crowd brought the total attendance in Melbourne to 373,691, a record for a test match in Australia.

India were 112 for three when they resumed after tea with Jaiswal and Pant well set, looking to bat the tourists to safety, if not take a record 340 runs for victory.

However, after showing unusual restraint early on, Pant threw away his wicket with a hard pull at part-time spinner Travis Head to be caught for 30 by a sprinting Mitchell Marsh in the deep.



The wicket ended an 88-run partnership and turned the match. Boland had number six Ravindra Jadeja caught behind for two with a steepening delivery before Steve Smith lunged for a brilliant catch at slip to remove Nitish Kumar Reddy, who nicked Lyon to be out for one.

Controversy erupted when Jaiswal pulled at a short Cummins ball, prompting a big appeal for caught-behind, and the Australia skipper reviewed immediately when it was turned down.

Replays showed a clear deviation high off the bat but no evidence of a nick on the "Ultra Edge" technology. The TV umpire decided the deviation was enough, though, and overturned the decision.

Jaiswal, out for 84, remonstrated with the on-field umpires and sections of the crowd chanted, "Cheater! Cheater!"

Akash Deep was then dismissed for seven, again on review, caught

by Head off the bowling of Boland with a thin edge pinging off his pads. Australia referred the not-out decision and this time "Ultra Edge" showed a healthy nick.

That left tailenders Jasprit Bumrah and Mohammed Siraj to try to hold Australia out with some 40 minutes to stumps. Both fell for ducks, with Lyon sealing the win by trapping Siraj lbw.

"It's pretty disappointing," said India captain Rohit Sharma, who was dismissed for nine on Monday after managing three in the first innings.

"If you look at the overall test match, we had our opportunities, we had our chances. We just didn't take them."

India will rue their failure to clean up Australia's tail late on day four, with Lyon and Boland finishing with a 61-run partnership for the final wicket.

Bumrah bowled Lyon for 41 on the final morning to wrap up Australia's second innings for 234. He finished with 5-57 for the innings and nine wickets for the match.

Cummins had taken flak from some fans and pundits for not declaring on day four to give his bowlers a chance for quick wickets after tea.

But he silenced the critics by striking twice in the same over before lunch on Monday, dismissing Rohit and KL Rahul for a duck.

Rohit now has 31 runs at an average of 6.20 for his three matches, the worst-performing specialist batter in the series.

## LeBron Wants to Finish His Career With the Lakers

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - LeBron James on Monday said he hopes to finish his historic career off as a member of the Los Angeles Lakers, remarks the NBA's all-time leading scorer made on his 40th birthday.

"That's the plan. I would love for it to end here," James told reporters after practice in Los Angeles.

"I came here to plan the last stage of my career and to finish it off here, but I'm also not silly or too jaded to know the business of the game as well, to know the business of basketball."

"But my relationship with this organization speaks for itself."

Asked when he would know it was time to hang up his high tops, James said his exit would come before he felt he could no longer compete "at a high level."

"I could probably play this game at a high level for about another five to seven years if I wanted to, but I'm not going to do that," he said.

"King James" is a four-time NBA champion, four-time league



MVP, 20-time All-Star and the winner of three Olympic gold medals.

James joined the Lakers from the Cleveland Cavaliers in 2018 and led Los Angeles to a championship inside the biosecure COVID-19 "bubble" in 2020.

He surpassed Kareem Abdul-Jabbar to become the league's all-time leading scorer in February 2023 and this season teamed up with his son Bronny to become the first father-son duo to play on the same NBA team together.

The evergreen James has continued to shine in his 22nd NBA season, averaging 23.5 points, 7.9 rebounds, and nine assists while shooting 49.6% from the field for the 18-13 Lakers.

Tributes to the Akron, Ohio native on his birthday poured in from teammates past and present, competitors, coaches and more.

## Emotional Jesus Navas Bids Farewell to Football Career



SEVILLE (Dispatches) - Retiring Spanish football legend Jesus Navas tearfully bid farewell to his playing career yesterday with songs, chants and other tributes at a ceremony at Sevilla's packed Ramon Sanchez-Pizjuan stadium.

The 39-year-old winger — Sevilla and the Spanish national team's most-decorated player — will officially retire when his contract expires on December 31 due to a painful and chronic hip injury which has plagued him in recent seasons.

"I live to give joy to my Sevilla and the Spanish fans and if it hadn't been for my hip I would have continued, that's for sure. That's why it was very difficult for me to say that this is the end of the season," Navas told the crowd of around 45,000 fans who packed the stadium for the tribute, pausing at times to fight back tears.

"I have been suffering from hip difficulties for several years, but in the last few weeks the condition has worsened," he added as he stood below a huge placard that read "Navas legend".

Navas, who emerged from Sevilla's youth system, made 705 appearances for the club over 18 seasons, as well as a four-year spell at Manchester City — playing 183 games — between 2013 and 2017.

He was given a framed jersey with his name and the number 705 after being joined by his wife, two sons and parents on the stage as the crowd applauded and chanted his name.

Navas' 15 trophies include a record four with Spain — the 2010 World Cup, Euro 2012, the 2023 UEFA Nations League and Euro 2024 — and eight with Sevilla.

Spain and Manchester City midfielder Rodri hailed Navas at the ceremony as "a role model in every respect" while former Sevilla defender Sergio Ramos called him "the greatest legend the club has ever had".

Navas played the last La Liga game of his 21-year career on December 22, coming on as a substitute for Sevilla in their 4-2 defeat away to Real Madrid.