

Iran's Foreign Ministry Has Strongly Condemned Airstrikes Carried Out by the United States and the United Kingdom Targeting Infrastructure in Yemen's Sa'ada Province

IRAN NEWS

The Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesman Esmail Baqaei Has Condemned the Suicide Attack on a Bus Carrying Pakistani Army Personnel in Southwestern Pakistan

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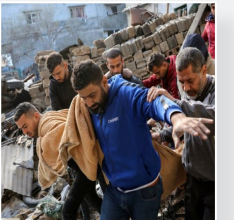


Emphasis on Achieving 10m Tons of Transit Through the North-South Corridor

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Gaza Truce Talks Resume in Qatar as Violence Shows No Let-Up



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Top Medical Association Urges Safe Release of Gaza Hospital's Director



TEHRAN (PressTV) - The Academy of Medical Sciences of the Islamic Republic of Iran has voiced deep concern over the detention of the Kamal Adwan Hospital director, Dr. Hussam Abu Safiya, in Gaza by the Israeli regime, calling for his "safe" release.

The president of the Academy, Alireza Marandi, made this demand in a letter to the Director General of the World Health Organization (WHO), Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, on Saturday. The letter was titled "Urgent Call for Action Regarding the Humanitarian Crisis in Gaza."

"We implore you to actively follow up on his (Abu Safiya) situation and work towards preventing further atrocities against healthcare professionals," Marandi wrote.

He said the recent destruction of Kamal Adwan Hospital, the last remaining refuge for countless vulnerable Palestinians in the north, exposed the "unprecedented level of barbarism."

On December 28, Israeli forces carried out airstrikes on Kamal Adwan Hospital, with the Gaza Health Ministry saying an estimated 50 people, including medical staff, were killed in the attacks and the rest were abducted by the occupation forces.

Dr. Abu Safiya was among those taken for questioning by the Israeli military over alleged links to the Palestinian resistance movement Hamas.

In his letter, Marandi called on the WHO chief to prevent atrocities against healthcare professionals such as those experienced by Adnan al-Bursh, who was raped and tortured to death.

Bursh, a Palestinian surgeon and professor of orthopedic medicine, lost his life in April as a result of torture at the Israeli-run Ofer prison in the occupied West Bank after more than four months of detention.

Marandi pointed to the dire humanitarian crisis currently unfolding in Gaza and the death of nearly 50,000 innocent civilians in "the ongoing Holocaust" in the besieged Strip and said the actual number of Palestinian casualties is believed to be much higher.

Iran Armed Forces Confront All Violations Against the Country's Soil



TEHRAN (PressTV) - The commander of the Iranian Army's Ground Forces asserts that the Islamic Republic's Armed Forces would confront whatever instance of violation against the country's soil.

Brigadier General Kioumars Heydari made the remarks on Saturday, attending the country's western border areas, where he paid a visit to the Forces' 41st Offensive Mobilized Brigade, including the brigade's 35th Special Forces Unit, which he inspected as a means of assessing the combat readiness and operational capabilities of the servicemen enlisted in the brigade.

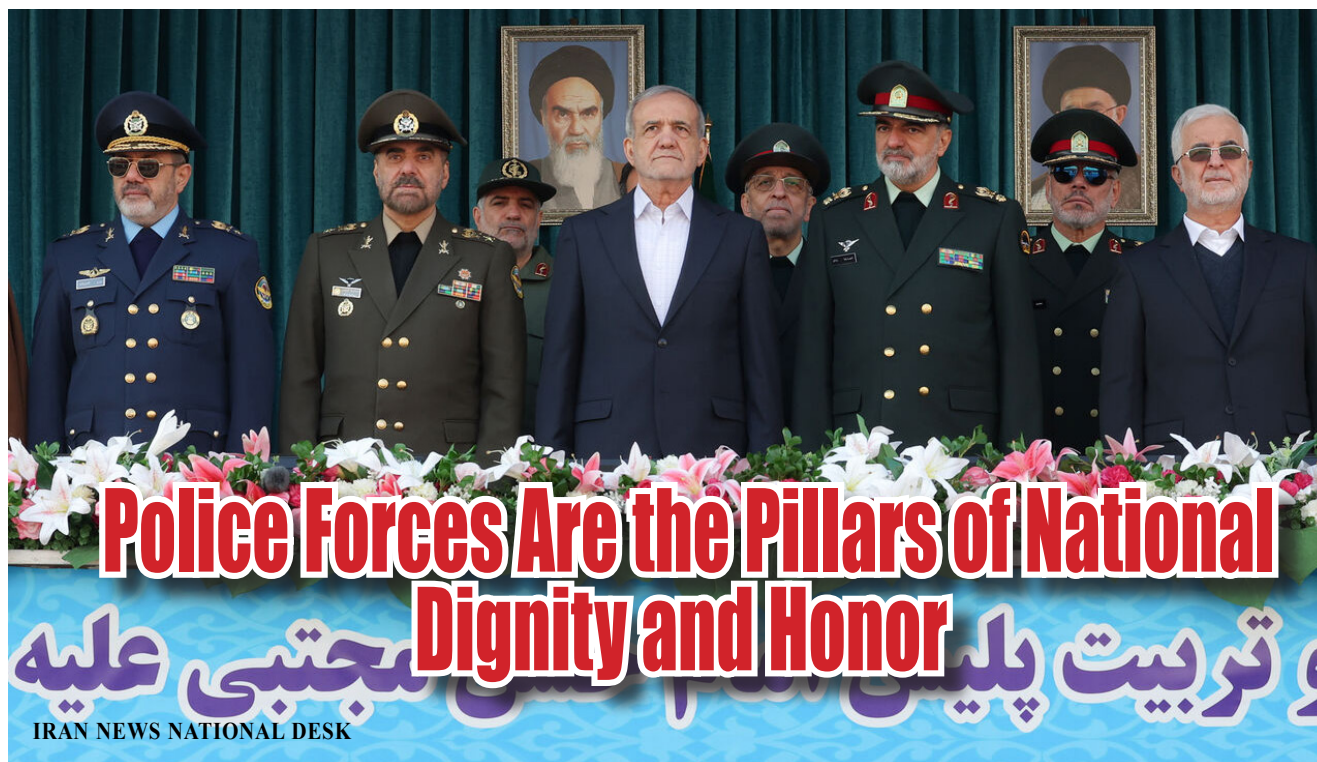
"Our country's Armed Forces, especially the Army's Ground Forces, prevent whatever type of encroachment against our Islamic nation's soil by relying on national will and integrity," he said.

Heydari underlined the utmost importance of military forces' adherence to the righteous religious leadership, describing loyalty to such leadership as the factor "leading to disarmament of enemy forces and the most powerful shield against them."

He also laid emphasis on the imperative nature of adherence to justice and meritocracy across the forces.

"Based on this, one must comprehend the importance of commitment to performance of relevant duties and observance of integrity as a means of advancing various affairs in line with adherence to and preservation of these three strategic principles."

The commander, meanwhile, commended the country's border forces for their guarding the Islamic Republic's frontiers with complete awareness, dedication, and alertness, and hailed their "acting decisively in the face of whatever threat."



Police Forces Are the Pillars of National Dignity and Honor

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - In a speech delivered at the 47th graduation ceremony of the Police University, President Masoud Pezeshkian emphasized the crucial role of law enforcement in upholding national dignity, security, and justice. Speaking to the graduates, the President described police officers as the "fortresses" and "beacons" that protect and honor the country. His remarks came as part of a larger discourse on the philosophical and practical duties of governance.

Addressing the graduates and attendees at the Police University in Tehran, President Pezeshkian underscored that the purpose of government is to implement justice and uphold the rights of society. He referred to police officers as "the fortresses and bastions of our nation," adding that the continuation of life in society is impossible without the presence of law enforcement. He stressed that through their vigilance and commitment, police forces maintain justice and uphold the law, often under difficult circumstances and with the help of specialized tools and equipment.

The President further emphasized the monumental value of the police in maintaining public order, pointing out that without law enforcement, society would descend into chaos, injustice, and disorder. "Your presence is not only essential but is the ornament of society, ensuring its security and health," he said, acknowledging the relentless efforts of police officers. He expressed heartfelt gratitude for the tireless work of the police forces, as well as all military personnel, for their contributions to national security.

A major point in the President's speech was the tranquility and security that police provide in communities. "When you are present, the people feel safe, and this is a symbol of hope for a brighter future," he remarked. He praised the police as guarantors of the nation's movement toward justice, highlighting their role in ensuring that the country remains on the path laid out by the nation's leadership.

President Pezeshkian also focused on the importance of unity and adherence to the policies set by Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. He pointed out that the police forces symbolize national unity, which is necessary for achieving the lofty goals set by the Supreme Leader for the country. True unity, according to the President, can only be achieved under a singular leadership and through clear, coherent policies.

He further stated that national unity and adherence to the leadership's guidelines are vital to reaching the goals of the Islamic Republic. "Without such unity, achieving the ideals of the Islamic

system will not be possible," Pezeshkian said, calling on all segments of society, including the police, to work cohesively toward these objectives.

The President also referenced the words of Imam Ali (AS) on the duty of leaders to act justly and protect the rights of the people, reminding the police officers of their critical role in upholding justice and standing firm against those who seek to violate the rights of citizens. He lauded the police as the embodiment of truth and justice in society, emphasizing that the security and stability of the nation depend on their unwavering presence.

In closing, Pezeshkian reaffirmed the government's commitment to supporting law enforcement, ensuring that police officers have the necessary resources to perform their duties effectively and safely. "We are committed to providing everything necessary for your comfort, security, and training," he said, thanking the police for their dedication and hard work.

The President also congratulated the new graduates, emphasizing that their roles as protectors of justice and security would make a significant impact on the future of the nation. "With your presence, those who seek to harm our society will no longer have the courage to act," he added. General Ahmadreza Radan, the commander of the Islamic Republic of Iran Police, also delivered a speech at the ceremony, thanking the government and the public for their support. He highlighted the growing importance of modern technology in law enforcement, noting that the police are working to develop an intelligent and efficient policing system for the future.

General Radan addressed the new graduates, stating that they have sworn to serve the nation with sacrifice and dedication, ensuring peace and security for all. He also emphasized the importance of professionalism and public trust in law enforcement, noting that maintaining this trust is a key priority for the force.

The ceremony, attended by the families of martyrs and other distinguished guests, included an award presentation, where President Pezeshkian honored the families of martyrs who had served in the police force, as well as top-performing students from the Police University. He also presented insignia to the new graduates as a symbol of their commitment to service.

The event highlighted not only the importance of law enforcement in maintaining national security but also the deep sense of pride and responsibility that the police forces carry in their mission to protect the nation and its citizens.

Martyr Soleimani Transformed the School of Resistance Into the Axis of Resistance in Practice

TEHRAN - A ceremony commemorating the anniversary of the martyrdom of General Qasem Soleimani was held at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, with the presence of Seyed Abbas Araqchi, Iran's Minister of Foreign Affairs, and Rear Admiral Alireza Tangsiri, the Commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) Navy.



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

In his speech, Araqchi, Minister of Foreign Affairs, expressed his respect for General Soleimani, stating, "General Soleimani is described by the Supreme Leader as the 'epitome of the school of resistance.' He was the theorist of the resistance school of the Islamic Revolution. General Soleimani took this doctrine into practice, turning it into the axis of resistance and creating a movement in the region that is indestructible, as this axis is based on a noble cause—something that cannot be destroyed by a bullet. It is not reliant on a single person, meaning the martyrdom of a commander or leader cannot defeat it."

He emphasized that the core weapon of the resistance school is the blood of martyrs. "Enemies should not believe that if they inflict damage on the axis of resistance, they are victorious. In fact, it marks the beginning of their defeat. This is not the first time that the Hezbollah movement has lost its leader. After the martyrdom of Sayyid Abbas al-Musawi, Hezbollah became even stronger. The blood of martyr Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah will only make Hezbollah stronger. The key to victory lies in patience and perseverance," Araqchi added. The Foreign Minister also pointed out that diplomacy is part of the resistance doctrine.

"Alongside the field of battle, diplomacy works in coordination. The field and diplomacy complement each other, and inherently, there is no separation between the two."

He continued, "I have previously mentioned in the presence of media friends that there is a third component, which is the media. The field, diplomacy, and media together lead to victories. If any one falls behind, the achievements will not be fully realized. The field clears the path for diplomacy, and diplomacy turns the achievements of the field into national security, national interests, dignity, and pride."

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has always been present in the field, Araqchi affirmed, citing recent developments in the region. "What has occurred over the past few months, during this turbulent time in the region, and in relation to the Islamic Republic of Iran and the resistance movement, has been a renewed manifestation of the full coordination between the field and diplomacy. The field performed its role, and diplomacy fulfilled its duties. This is the nature of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs—to be present in the field."

Araqchi went on to highlight the Ministry's role in the field of transformation, recalling his recent trip to Beirut: "When I went to Beirut, Mr. Sheibani, our former ambassador to Beirut and Damascus, accompanied me. After my return, he remained in Beirut to continue the work, as our ambassador there had been injured. Similarly, whenever a commander fell as a martyr, another took their place. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has always been in the field, and we have offered many martyrs, whether in Yemen, Iraq, or Bosnia. We consider this part of our mission, and God willing, we will continue along this path."

Claims of Currency Reserve Decline Denied



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The Deputy Governor for Currency Affairs of the Central Bank stated that the central bank's foreign exchange and gold reserves are in a secure condition. He dismissed claims about a decline in foreign reserves and the inability to meet the country's import needs by the end of the year, asserting that both foreign reserves and domestic reserves in foreign currency and gold are fully reliable and usable.

In a report from the Iranian Currency and Gold Exchange Center, Mohammad Aram emphasized the increase in currency supply in the commercial currency market. He explained that price discovery in this market, which follows international standards, occurs based on supply and demand—supply by exporters and demand by importers.

Aram added that the matching process between supply and demand is done using a machine algorithm, with no human intervention, based on the highest buying price and the lowest selling price. Ultimately, the settlement and cash clearing in rials and foreign currency are carried out centrally.

The Deputy Governor for Currency Affairs stressed that all transactions within this system are recorded. He explained that if someone commits a violation at one bank, they will be banned from trading at any other bank, similar to how a bounced check affects banking processes. He also noted that good customers can secure credit lines through banks to ensure their foreign exchange resources.

Aram also highlighted advantages considered at the Iranian Exchange Center, such as facilitating currency transfers and providing financing and insurance for importers' and exporters' resources.

He mentioned that anyone looking to invest should do so through the capital market. However, there is also an option to guarantee the value of the funds allocated to importers and exporters.

The Deputy Governor for Currency Affairs further assured that the central bank's foreign exchange and gold reserves are in a secure condition. He dismissed claims regarding a reduction in foreign reserves and their inability to cover imports by the end of the year, confirming that the reserves—both foreign and domestic—are fully secure and accessible.

IRGC Deploying New Weaponry During Underway Ground Force Drills



TEHRAN (Dispatches) - The Ground Forces of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) deploy "new weaponry and equipment" during the forces' underway military maneuvers in the country's western areas.

Brigadier General Mohammad-Nazar Azimi, commander of the Ground Forces' Najaf Ashraf Headquarters, made the remarks on Saturday.

The drills also enlist the capabilities of local Basij volunteer forces, he said, adding, "I hope that these series of measures and maneuvers serve to contribute to the [country's] holy [Islamic] establishment's and the Iranian nation's esteem and strength."

The drills were taking place "in continuation of the country's efforts to enhance the capabilities of its Armed Forces and defend the Islamic Republic's holy establishment," the commander noted.

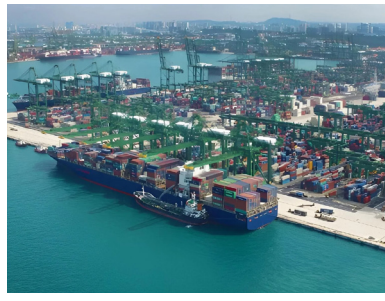
The maneuvers currently feature aligning the enlisted servicemen in designated columns and establishing their presence across the region, and would go on to comprise various other stages, the military official said.

"The region that has been chosen for implementation of the maneuvers is among our border regions. In the past too, namely during the country's Sacred Defense [against the invading army of Iraq's former dictator Saddam Hussein], as well as during various other junctures, when the Iranian nation's enemies were seeking to stir up insecurity, we witnessed implementation of some valuable measures by our servicemen in this region," Azimi noted.

The drills also host combat performance by a military unit enlisted by the IRGC's Special Ground Forces from the northern province of Gilan, he stated.

The Islamic Republic's Armed Forces, including the IRGC and the country's Army, have been continuously enhancing their military hardware and combat readiness in line with the directives that have been issued by Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei

IRAN NEWS



16.5m Tons of Goods Transited Through Iran in Nine Months

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - According to a report by the public relations department of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA), Farouq Asgari, Deputy Minister of Economy and Head of IRICA, announced that 16.5 million tons of goods were transited through Iran in the first nine months of the current year.

Asgari highlighted that the Shahid Rajaei, Parvizkhan, and Bashmaq customs offices were the primary hubs for transit operations, handling the highest volume of goods among origin customs offices during this period. He detailed that 4.4 million tons of goods were transited from Shahid Rajaei Special Economic Zone customs, 3.8 million tons from Parvizkhan customs, and 2.3 million tons from Bashmaq customs. In total, these three customs offices accounted for 10.5 million tons of the total foreign transit volume through Iran during this period.

Netherlands Emerges as Iran's Third-Largest Trade Partner in the EU



TEHRAN - Trade relations between Iran and the European Union (EU) have seen significant growth in 2024, with the Netherlands playing a pivotal role. According to data from Eurostat, Iran-EU trade volume reached €3.4 billion in the first nine months of 2024, marking a 96% increase compared to the same period in 2023.

During this period, Iran exported €600 million worth of goods to the EU, a 7.6% increase from the previous year. On the other hand, Iran imported €2.8 billion worth of goods from the EU, reflecting a slight 2% decrease compared to 2023.

Germany topped the list of Iran's trading partners with a total trade volume of €1.1 billion. It was followed by Italy (€570 million), the Netherlands (€470 million), Belgium (€270 million), and France (€210 million). Germany also led in exports to Iran, contributing €980 million, while the Netherlands stood out as the second-largest EU exporter to Iran, with exports valued at €430 million.

Iran recorded trade surpluses with select EU countries, including Luxembourg (€7.3 million), Croatia (€8.2 million), and Poland (€9.0 million). However, the country faced significant trade deficits with major partners such as Germany (€10.8 million), the Netherlands (€60.4 million), and Italy (€50.2 million).

Among EU countries, Malta experienced the highest increase in trade volume with Iran, registering a remarkable 169% growth. Estonia, Greece, Bulgaria, and Romania also saw significant increases. Conversely, Cyprus, Luxembourg, Latvia, and Ireland reported notable declines in trade with Iran.

Imports from Iran: Estonia, Greece, Croatia, Denmark, and Hungary recorded the highest growth rates, while Cyprus, Luxembourg, Ireland, and the Baltic states experienced declines.

Exports to Iran: Finland, Romania, Lithuania, Bulgaria, and Germany led the growth in exports, while Luxembourg, Croatia, Latvia, and Ireland saw reduced export volumes.

With €430 million in exports, the Netherlands has solidified its position as a key European supplier to Iran, second only to Germany. This reinforces its strategic role in Iran's trade network within the EU.

Emphasis on Achieving 10m Tons of Transit Through the North-South Corridor



TEHRAN - A joint video conference was held on Saturday between Farzaneh Sadegh, Iran's Minister of Roads and Urban Development, and Roman Starovoyt, Russia's Minister of Transport. The meeting aimed to discuss the memorandum of understanding for the construction of the Rasht-Astara railway and to enhance transport cooperation within the framework of the North-South Corridor.

At the beginning of the session, Iran's Minister of Roads and Urban Development extended New Year greetings to the Russian government and people, expressing hopes for a year of peace and deepened bilateral relations.

Highlighting the importance of the regular sessions involving representatives from both countries, Sadegh referred to the drafting of a joint cooperation memorandum and the preparation of the 2025 roadmap, which was presented to the Russian side during the meeting. She proposed signing both documents simultaneously on a specified date.

Sadegh emphasized the necessity of developing transport cooperation within the North-South Corridor. She noted that, based on previous agreements, the goal of achieving a transit capacity of 10 million tons of cargo must be prioritized. Additionally, the existing infrastructure of the corridor, including rail, road, and sea routes, should be expanded to

activate a 20-million-ton capacity.

Sadegh also emphasized: Considering the prior agreements between Iran and Russia, achieving the goal of transiting 10 million tons of cargo along the North-South Corridor is essential. The 20-million-ton transit capacity along the current routes of this corridor must be activated through rail, road, and maritime infrastructure.

She highlighted the importance of activating the eastern branch of the North-South Corridor and the necessity of swiftly implementing executive actions. The minister also stressed the need for the swift activation of the eastern branch of the corridor, the establishment of a trilateral transport and customs committee among Iran, Russia, and Azerbaijan, and facilitating visa issuance for Iranian truck drivers. She highlighted the importance of increasing commercial shipping capacity and expanding passenger lines in the Caspian Sea.

Sadegh described the creation of a comprehensive transport roadmap between the two countries as a significant achievement currently being pursued by both ministries.

Roman Starovoyt, Russia's Minister of Transport, expressed his appreciation for the Iranian minister's efforts in organizing the productive meetings and agreed with all the proposals discussed during the session.

\$2b Credit Line for Africa



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - In a press briefing on Saturday, Ayvazlou, a member of the executive board of the National Development Fund (NDF), highlighted the Fund's foreign investment initiatives. He acknowledged gaps in regulations related to foreign investments, noting that mechanisms aligned with the organization's statutes have been devised to address these issues. The NDF has also engaged in various international projects.

He revealed that the NDF invested \$90 million in a petrochemical project in a target country, with the foreign partner contributing \$30 million. However, details about this investment and partnership remain confidential.

Ayvazlou announced the establishment of a \$2 billion credit line for Africa, in collaboration with the Central Bank and a partner bank. The operational framework for this initiative will be defined under the African task force.

Additionally, he noted a \$100 million investment in Côte d'Ivoire and the creation of a credit line for a power plant project in Venezuela.

The NDF is also setting up credit lines for technical and engineering projects in CIS countries, aiming to support Iranian exporters in these sectors.

Ayvazlou mentioned ongoing efforts to establish joint funds with Russia and China. The primary goal of these funds is to attract foreign investment into Iran.

Why Did the Saudi Company Exit Iran?



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Rashid Azizpour, Vice Chairman of the Food Industry Commission of the Iran Chamber of Commerce, spoke with ILNA regarding the reasons behind the Saudi conglomerate Savola's decision to leave Iran's food industry. According to the latest information released by the company on its website in recent days, Savola cited internal policy decisions as the reason for its departure. This move mirrors its prior exits from Morocco and Iraq in recent years. Savola had a significant share of Iran's vegetable oil market.

Azizpour addressed the potential impact of Savola's exit on the supply of food products, particularly vegetable oil. He stated, "I believe it's unlikely that Savola's departure will threaten the oil supply in our country. Although the Saudi-owned holding strengthened production, all employees of Behshahr Company are local, which makes it hopeful and predictable that this change will not significantly affect production and supply. Additionally, Iran's food industry is well-established."

When asked whether factors like energy shortages, including power and gas cuts, could have influenced the company's decision, Azizpour noted, "As I mentioned earlier, the company attributed its withdrawal to internal policies. However, challenges in Iran's industries, including the food sector, could drive not only foreign but also domestic investors to withdraw their capital. Securing raw materials and energy imbalances are persistent concerns faced by Iran's food industry."

He further explained that a specific challenge in Iran's vegetable oil sector stems from preferential currency allocations for raw material imports. This has led to export bans in recent years, despite the industry's significant export potential. Azizpour emphasized that temporary importation of crude oil could open avenues for exports, an idea the industry has repeatedly highlighted.

Regarding whether Savola sold its shares to another foreign company, Azizpour clarified, "Savola has not disclosed any information on this matter. Until the company provides details, everything remains uncertain, and no reliable information can be confirmed."

Turkish Fuel Tax Policy Strains Iran-Turkey Trade and Political Ties



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Tensions between Iran and Turkey have escalated following Turkey's enforcement of a new fuel tax policy targeting Iranian truck drivers. This move, implemented after repeated warnings to Iran, has caused significant disruptions at the border, with over 1,000 Iranian trucks stranded.

The issue stems from Iran's "Full Tank" law, which requires foreign vehicles to pay for a full tank of fuel at global prices, regardless of the amount already in their tanks. This policy, aimed at curbing fuel smuggling, has been a point of contention with Turkey, which has now responded by revoking fuel tax exemptions for Iranian drivers.

Reports indicate that Iranian truck drivers are being charged substantial sums, ranging from 40 to 90 million tomans (approximately \$800 to \$1,800), to leave Turkey. These high taxes and penalties have left many drivers without any profit from their cargo deliveries.

In an interview with ILNA, Omer Alipour, a representative from West Azerbaijan, explained the origins of the "Full Tank" policy. He stated that Iranian authorities introduced this measure to prevent Turkish trucks from exploiting Iran's subsidized fuel prices. Turkish vehicles, often equipped with additional fuel tanks capable of carrying over 1,000 liters, were taking advantage of Iran's cheaper fuel.

Alipour criticized Turkey's abrupt enforcement of the new tax without prior notice, a move he described as contrary to international norms. Typically, such changes are communicated one or two months in advance. He also accused Turkey of undermining Iran, both in trade and regional politics, referencing past disagreements over Syria.

"The new policy has left many Iranian truck drivers stranded in

harsh winter conditions in Turkey without adequate resources," Alipour added. Under the current rules, Iranian drivers earning 20 million tomans (\$400) per trip are now facing fuel tax penalties of up to 60 million tomans (\$1,200), effectively eliminating their earnings.

Alipour voiced strong criticism of Iran's "Full Tank" policy, implemented by the Ministry of Oil, and called for its revision. Previously, drivers were charged only for the actual fuel in their tanks, a more reasonable approach. Despite repeated appeals to the Ministry of Oil and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, no amendments have been made. While Iranian authorities have promised discussions with the president to resolve the matter, Alipour doubts that Turkey will accept any changes at this stage.

The ongoing dispute is having far-reaching consequences for Iran-Turkey relations, affecting trade and diplomacy. Alipour noted, "This policy severely damages trade between the two nations. Iranian drivers are not the only victims; there is a broader agenda at play, potentially involving pressures from Turkey's alliances with Israel and the United States."

He warned that such actions could backfire on Turkey, as Iran's fuel prices remain competitive even with the penalties. Alipour emphasized the importance of resolving these tensions, given Turkey's strategic role as Iran's gateway to Europe.

As the crisis unfolds, Iranian officials are under increasing pressure to negotiate a solution that restores normalcy at the border and preserves critical trade routes. Alipour urged swift action to prevent further harm to both nations' economies and bilateral ties.

TCCIMA and Iran-Russia Joint Chamber Strengthen Cooperation



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - In a bid to enhance collaboration and address challenges in private sector trade between Iran and Russia, the Tehran Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Mine and Agriculture (TCCIMA) and the Iran-Russia Joint Chamber have signed a cooperation agreement.

According to Iran Online, citing the Iran-Russia Joint Chamber of Commerce's official website, the agreement was finalized during a joint meeting attended by Hadi Tizhoosh Taban, President of the Iran-Russia Joint Chamber of Commerce; Mehdi Sadeghi Niaraki, First Vice President of the Tehran Chamber; Roshanali Yektaie Gharabayi, Vice President of the Iran-Russia Joint Chamber; and Hesameddin Hallaj, Tehran Chamber's Deputy for International Affairs.

During the meeting, Mehdi Sadeghi Niaraki highlighted that Tehran Chamber has identified eight target countries, with Russia being a top priority due to its potential for expanding economic ties. He noted that the chamber has also defined six value chains to strengthen trade efforts.

The new cooperation between the Tehran Chamber and the Iran-Russia Joint Chamber aims to synergize efforts for streamlining private sector trade with Russia while creating opportunities for investment and business collaboration.

Hadi Tizhoosh Taban underscored the significant potential in Russia's \$290 billion annual import market, lamenting Iran's minimal share in this lucrative opportunity. He stressed the importance of identifying and overcoming key obstacles to bolster Iran's trade with Russia.

Tizhoosh Taban also highlighted the recent 21st Caspian Sea International Trade Cooperation Council meeting held in Astrakhan, noting the possibility of Tehran hosting next year's meeting in October.

Additionally, Hesameddin Hallaj announced plans for the Iran-Eurasian Economic Union Cooperation Summit, to be hosted by the Tehran Chamber in early March. This event will see the participation of 45 chamber leaders from the union's member countries, further strengthening regional ties.

Hallaj reiterated Tehran Chamber's readiness to host next year's Caspian Sea Cooperation Council meeting, emphasizing its commitment to fostering regional and international economic partnerships.

By leveraging this agreement, Iran aims to deepen its economic relationship with Russia, addressing key challenges and unlocking new trade opportunities for the private sector.

Syria Announces Resumption of Global Flights From Damascus Starting Tuesday

DAMASCUS (Dispatches) - Syria said the country's main airport in Damascus would resume international flights starting next week after such commercial trips were halted following last month's ouster of president Bashar al-Assad. "We announce we will start receiving international flights to and from Damascus International Airport from" Tuesday, state news agency SANA said, quoting Ashhad al-Salibi, who heads the General Authority of Civil Aviation and Air Transport. "We reassure Arab and international airlines that we have begun the phase of rehabilitating the Aleppo and Damascus airports with our partners' help, so that they can welcome flights from all over the world," he said. International aid planes and foreign diplomatic delegations have already been landing in Syria. Domestic flights have also resumed.



Fresh South Korea Protests Expected as President Arrest Deadline Nears



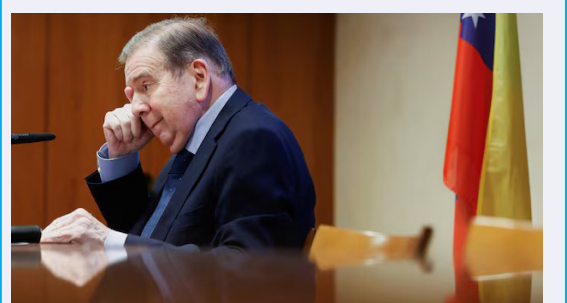
SEOUL (Dispatches) - Rival South Korean protesters were set to brave a snowstorm over suspended President Yoon Suk Yeol who was still resisting arrest less than 48 hours before the warrant expires. Yoon plunged the country into political chaos last month with a bungled martial law decree and has since holed up in the presidential residence, surrounded by hundreds of loyal security officers resisting arrest efforts. On Saturday, thousands descended on his residence and major roads in Seoul a day after a failed arrest attempt — with one camp demanding Yoon's arrest while the other calling for his impeachment to be declared invalid. They were set to mass again despite bitter snow conditions hammering the capital overnight. "Snow is nothing for me. They can bring all the snow and we'll still be here," said anti-Yoon protester Lee Jin-ah, 28, who had previously worked at a coffee shop. "I quit my job to come to protect our country and democracy," she said, adding that she had camped outside the residence overnight. "I live two hours away from here and going to the protests and going back home was too much." Park Young-chul, in his 70s, said the snowstorm wouldn't deter him from showing up to back Yoon this week said he was watching protests in support of his rule on a YouTube livestream, pledging to "fight" those trying to question his short-lived power grab. Yoon faces criminal charges of insurrection, one of a few crimes not subject to presidential immunity, meaning he could be sentenced to prison or, at worst, the death penalty. If the warrant is executed, Yoon would become the first sitting South Korean president to be arrested.



GAZA STRIP (Dispatches) - Israel confirmed today that negotiations for a Gaza ceasefire and hostage release deal had resumed in Qatar, as rescuers said more than 30 people had been killed in fresh bombardment of the territory. The civil defense agency said a dawn air strike on the home of the al-Ghoula family in Gaza City killed 11 people, seven of them children. AFP images from the neighborhood of Shujaiya showed residents combing through smoking rubble. Bodies including those of small children were lined up on the ground, shrouded in white sheets. As the violence raged, Israeli Defense Minister Israel Katz confirmed that indirect negotiations with Hamas had resumed in Qatar for the release of hostages seized in the October 2023 attacks. The minister told relatives of one of the hostages, woman soldier Liri Albag, that "efforts are under way to free the hostages, notably the Israeli delegation which left yesterday (Friday) for negotiations in Qatar", his office said. Katz said that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had given "detailed instructions for the continued negotiations". He was speaking after Hamas's armed wing, the Ezzedine al-Qassam Brigades, released a video of Albag in captivity in Gaza. In the undated, three-and-half-minute recording that AFP has not been able to verify, the 19-year-old conscript called in Hebrew for the Israeli government to secure her release. In response, her family issued an appeal to Netanyahu, saying: "It's time to take decisions as if it were your own children there." A total of 96 Israeli hostages remain in Gaza, including 34 the Israeli military says are dead. Campaign group the Hostages and Missing Families Forum said the latest video was "firm and incontestable proof of the urgency of bringing the hostages home". Hamas had said late on Friday that the negotiations were poised to resume. The militant group, whose Oct 7, 2023, attack on Israel triggered the Gaza war, said they would "focus on ensuring the agreement leads to a complete cessation of hostilities (and) the withdrawal of occupation forces". Mediators Qatar, Egypt and the United States have been engaged in months of effort that have failed to end nearly 15 months of war.

In December, Qatar expressed optimism that "momentum" was returning to the talks following the US election of Donald Trump, who takes office in 16 days. But Hamas and Israel then accused each other of setting new conditions and obstacles. As the clock ticks down to the handover of power in Washington, the outgoing administration of President Joe Biden notified Congress of an \$8 billion arms sale to Israel, a source familiar with the plan said. "The department has informally notified Congress of an \$8 billion proposed sale of munitions to support Israel's long-term security by resupplying stocks of critical munitions and air defence capabilities," the official said. The United States is Israel's largest military supplier. Civil defense spokesman Mahmud Bassal said the Ghoula home in Gaza City "was completely destroyed" by the dawn strike. "It was a two-storey building and several people are still under the rubble," he said, adding Israeli drones had "also fired on ambulance staff". Contacted by AFP, the Israeli army did not immediately comment. "A huge explosion woke us up. Everything was shaking," said neighbour Ahmed Mussa. "It was home to children, women. There wasn't anyone wanted or who posed a threat." Elsewhere, the civil defense agency said an Israeli strike killed five security officers tasked with accompanying aid convoys as they drove through the southern city of Khan Yunis. The Israeli army said the five had been "implicated in terrorist activities" and were not escorting aid trucks at the time of the strike. Rescuers said strikes elsewhere in Gaza killed 10 other people. AFP images showed Palestine Red Crescent paramedics in Gaza City moving the body of one of their colleagues, his green jacket laid over the blanket that covered his corpse. The health ministry in Hamas-run Gaza said a total of 136 people had been killed over the previous 48 hours. Today, the Israeli military said it intercepted a missile launched from Yemen in the latest of a series of attacks.

Venezuelan Opposition Leader Seeks Regional Support Ahead of Maduro Inauguration



CARACAS (Dispatches) - Venezuelan opposition candidate Edmundo Gonzalez Urrutia is expected to meet Argentine President Javier Milei on Saturday on a regional tour to drum up support ahead of President Nicolas Maduro's swearing-in for a third term. Venezuelan authorities have offered a reward of \$100,000 for information leading to the capture of Gonzalez Urrutia, who insists he beat Maduro at the polls in July and is recognised by the United States as Venezuela's "president-elect." The 75-year-old fled to Spain in September after being threatened with arrest by Maduro's government, but has pledged to return to his country to be sworn in as president on January 10, when Maduro is due to be inaugurated. Gonzalez Urrutia flew into Buenos Aires on Friday night from Madrid, former Caracas mayor Antonio Ledezma, who also lives in exile in Madrid and was in the Argentine capital as part of the delegation, told AFP. Strict security measures put in place for his arrival meant that a convoy of cars with tinted windows was all that could be seen of his delegation. Gonzalez Urrutia was due to be received by Milei, a self-described "anarcho-capitalist" who has called Nicolas Maduro a "criminal dictator," at the president's offices on Saturday morning. The opposition figure has called on Venezuelans in Buenos Aires to rally in the central Plaza de Mayo.

Austria's Chancellor to Step Down After Coalition Talks Collapse

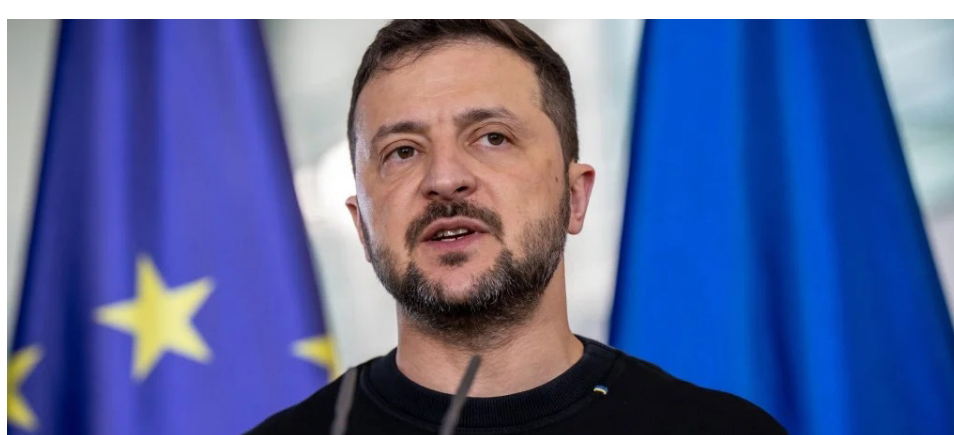
VIENNA (Dispatches) - Austria's conservative Chancellor Karl Nehammer said he would step down in the "coming days" after breaking off coalition talks with the Social Democrats over disagreements on key issues. The surprise move might lead to snap polls being called in the Alpine EU member country -- or the conservatives might negotiate with the far right that won national elections in September. Nehammer announced in a video message on X that he would step down "both as chancellor and party chairman of the People's Party (OeVP) in the coming days and enable an orderly transition". The development comes just one day after Austria's liberal party withdrew from three-party coalition talks to form a centrist government. The aim had been to sideline the far-right Freedom Party (FPOe) that won September elections with 29 percent but was unable to find partners to form a national government in the Alpine EU member state. Nehammer said on Saturday that he had wanted to be "the force of the political centre in order to build a bulwark against the radicals" who "only live by describing problems" rather than solving them. He "always stood for stability", he added -- even if that was "not sexy in politics". FPOe leader Herbert Kickl in a statement called the parties involved in the coalition talks "losers", saying that "instead of stability, we have chaos" after three "wasted months". The conservative People's Party came second with 26 percent, while the centre-left Social Democrats (SPOe) gained 21 percent in September. That led Nehammer to pursue talks with the SPOe and the liberal party NEOS, who got nine percent, to form a government to shut out the far right, but those three-way talks collapsed on Friday. The remaining two parties had vowed to continue their work, but after



just one day Nehammer announced on X that "agreement with the SPOe is not possible on key issues. "We are therefore ending negotiations with the SPOe," he added. Wealth and inheritance taxes, pensions as well as different views on how to reign in the country's ballooning budget deficit have been cited as the main sticking points in the coalition talks. SPOe leader Andreas Babler said those within the conservative party that "have always flirted" with the far right have "prevailed", warning of a "FPOe-OeVP government with a right-wing extremist chancellor". On Friday, President Alexander Van der Bellen had called on the OeVP and SPOe to form a government "without delay". Van der Bellen had initially tasked the conservatives with forming a stable government that respects the "foundations of our liberal democracy". In the past, he has voiced reservations about the FPOe's Kickl. If the OeVP decides to form a government with the FPOe, the president "must be prepared to swear in Kickl as chancellor", or if the two parties do not enter talks or find an agreement "there will be new elections", analyst Peter Filzmaier told AFP. The latest opinion polls currently put the FPOe at around 35 percent. The OeVP has been part of government in the Alpine country of nine million since 1987. It has governed several times with the FPOe as junior partners since 2000. While Nehammer in the past said he was open to talks with the FPOe, he has repeatedly ruled out working with Kickl. A three-party governing coalition would have been a first since 1949 in Austria, which faces a flagging economy. Nehammer had already warned that the coalition talks would be an uphill task.

Zelenskiy Reports Heavy Russian, North Korean Troop Losses in Russia's Kursk

KYIV (Dispatches) - Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy said that Russian and North Korean forces suffered heavy losses in fighting in Russia's southern Kursk region. Ukrainian and Western assessments say that some 11,000 North Korean troops are deployed in the Kursk region, where Ukrainian forces occupy swathes of territory after staging a mass cross-border incursion in August. In his nightly video address, Zelenskiy quoted a report from top Ukrainian commander Oleksandr Syrskyi as saying that the battles had taken place near the village of Makhnovka, not far from the Ukrainian border. "In battles yesterday and today near just one village, Makhnovka, in Kursk region, the Russian army lost up to a battalion of North Korean infantry soldiers and Russian paratroops," Zelenskiy said. "This is significant." The president provided no specific details. A battalion can vary in size but is generally made up of several hundred troops. Reuters could not independently verify the president's account. Zelenskiy last week reported heavy North Korean losses in Kursk region,



saying their forces were not being protected by the Russian forces they are fighting alongside. He said North Koreans were taking extreme measures to avoid being taken prisoner and in some instances were being executed by their own forces. In his latest remarks, Zelenskiy also said "fierce battles" had raged along the entire 1,000-km (620-mile) front line, with the most difficult situation near the city of Pokrovsk. Russian forces, he said, "continue to expend vast numbers of their own personnel in assaults". A Ukrainian military spokesperson earlier said Pokrovsk remained the "hottest" frontline sector, with Russian troops launching fresh attacks near the town in an effort to bypass it from the south and cut off supply routes to Ukraine's troops. The city, home to a mine that is the sole supplier of coking coal to Ukraine's once-giant steel industry, had a pre-war population of some 60,000 people. Ukraine estimates that around 11,000 of them remain in the city.

Arsenal Stumble in Premier League Title Race as Manchester City Stroll



LONDON (Dispatches) - Arsenal blew a chance to make up significant ground on Premier League leaders Liverpool with a frustrating draw at Brighton as Manchester City pummelled West Ham 4-1.

In-form Newcastle inflicted another painful defeat on Ange Postecoglou's struggling Tottenham and Chelsea's recent woes continued with a 1-1 draw at Crystal Palace.

Mikel Arteta's Arsenal, Premier League runners-up over the past two seasons, travelled to the south coast hunting a fourth straight league win in the evening kick-off.

Seventeen-year-old Ethan Nwaneri, in for the injured Bukayo Saka, scored a first-half goal to put them on course for a vital three points.

But after being felled by an accidental headbutt from William Saliba, stand-in Seagulls captain Joao Pedro fired home from the spot in the 61st minute.

The 1-1 draw means the second-placed Gunners are five points behind Liverpool, having played two games more, with Arne Slot's in-form leaders hosting crisis-hit Manchester United today.

Arteta said his team had under-performed in the second half, failing to build momentum, adding that the penalty award was "bizarre".

"We are really disappointed with the decision that leads to the goal because I have never seen something like this in my life," the Spaniard told the BBC.

"He (Saliba) touches the ball as well."

Manchester City's win at home against West Ham means they have now won successive matches for the first time since October and Pep Guardiola will hope they are back on track after a horror run of one victory in 13 games in all competitions.

The defending champions took an early lead through a Vladimir Coufal own goal and two goals from Erling Haaland put City in total command.

Phil Foden made it 4-0 before Niclas Fullkrug grabbed a consolation for Julen Lopetegui's men, who suffered a 5-0 mauling by Liverpool last week.

Despite their shocking run, sixth-placed City are just two points behind Chelsea, in fourth, but Guardiola said his team were still not back in the groove.

"I'm very pleased for the result but you cannot ask me if the old City is back," he said. "If you saw the

game, we are not.

"You saw many times during the years what we have done with the opponents."

In the early kick-off, Newcastle came from behind to clinch a fifth straight Premier League win and heap more misery on injury-hit Spurs.

The home side went ahead in the fourth minute through Dominic Solanke.

Newcastle levelled two minutes later when Anthony Gordon arrowed an effort into the bottom corner, but Postecoglou stood in disbelief on the touchline looking at referee Andrew Madley after Joellinton intercepted Lucas Bergvall's pass with his hand in the build-up.

VAR deemed Joellinton's arm to be in a natural position and the contact to be accidental.

In-form Alexander Isak scored what turned out to be the winner towards the end of the first period.

The 2-1 victory, watched by new England manager Thomas Tuchel, leaves Newcastle in fifth spot, which may yet prove enough to secure a place in the Champions League next season.

But Spurs have slumped to 12th in the table after five defeats in seven matches.

Postecoglou said he was proud of his players but was the "angriest I think I have ever been in my career".

"I think it's clear," said the Australian. "Now whether people agree with me or not whether it wasn't handball or it was accidental, I'm just not interested in any of that discussion."

"I know what everyone wants me to say, but all I'll say is that on any other day, on a fair and even playing ground, we would have won that game. Simple as that."

Enzo Maresca's Chelsea were breathing down Liverpool's necks just two weeks ago but have taken just two points from four games over the festive period.

The prolific Cole Palmer gave the visitors a first-half lead, but they could not capitalise on their possession and Jean-Philippe Mateta levelled in the 82nd minute.

Aston Villa beat relegation-threatened Leicester 2-1 at home, with goals from Ross Barkley and Leon Bailey.

Brentford recorded their first league win on the road this season, smashing hapless Southampton 5-0, and Bournemouth beat Everton 1-0.

Sabalenka Returns to Brisbane Final With Win Over Andreeva



BRISBANE (Dispatches) - Aryna Sabalenka powered into the Brisbane International final with a 6-3 6-2 victory over teenager Mirra Andreeva, taking a step closer to a first trophy of the year before her Australian Open title defence begins later this month.

World number one Sabalenka saved five breakpoints to edge a tight opening set against her 17-year-old Russian opponent, who had stunned the then ailing Belarusian in the French Open quarter-finals seven months ago.

Fit and firing on all cylinders in her opening tournament of the new season, Sabalenka shifted gears in the second set for an early break and eased through to book a meeting with Russian Polina Kudermetova in Sunday's final.

"It's always the same tactic for me, to stay aggressive and put my opponents under pressure," said Sabalenka, runner-up at the tournament last year.

"I was glad I was able to do that against Mirra. It seemed like everything was working really well. She's an amazing player and I'm pretty sure she's going to be in the top 10 very soon. I'm happy to get this win."

The 21-year-old Kudermetova earlier swept aside Ukraine's Anhelina Kalinina 6-4 6-3 to continue her stellar run from the qualifying competition.

Grigor Dimitrov's title defence in the men's event ended when the Bulgarian retired with injury while trailing 6-4 4-4 against Czech Jiri Lehecka on Pat Rafter Arena.

Reilly Opelka followed up his stunning victory over Novak Djokovic by beating Frenchman Giovanni Mpetshi Perricard 6-3 7-6(4) in a battle of big servers.

Lewandowski Double Helps Barcelona Beat Barbastro 4-0 in Copa del Rey



MADRID (Dispatches) - Barcelona kicked off their Copa del Rey campaign with a 4-0 win at fourth-tier Barbastro to progress into the last 16, with striker Robert Lewandowski scoring either side of the break.

Defender Eric Garcia put Barca in front with a bullet header in the 21st minute before Lewandowski nodded home from close range 10 minutes later.

The Poland striker added a third goal two minutes into the second half with a simple low finish from near the penalty spot and Pablo Torre made it 4-0 after capitalising on an error by Barbastro goalkeeper Arnau Fabrega.

"We had to start the year like this," coach Hansi Flick told a press conference. "We were very good in defence. We didn't give our rivals any chance."

The win saw Flick reach the 100th victory of his managerial career while Barcelona emergency signing Wojciech Szczesny made his debut in goal for the club.

Former Poland keeper Szczesny came out of retirement when he joined the LaLiga giants in October to replace the injured Marc-Andre Ter Stegen but had to wait to make his debut while his rival between the posts Inaki Pena maintained good form.

Barcelona took the lead when defender Ronald Araujo nodded on a long pass inside the box by Frenkie De Jong for Garcia to net into a bottom corner.

Araujo was making his season debut after suffering a hamstring injury in July during the Copa America.

"Ronald was injured but today we saw that he is fine," Flick said. "We have to be careful with him but he played well for 90 minutes. He is a leader, a captain. It's good to have him."

The hosts thwarted many of the visitors' attempts but Lewandowski, LaLiga's top scorer with 16 goals, doubled the lead after the ball deflected off a defender.

The 36-year-old added another goal after the break as Barcelona continued to dominate possession, with around 80% throughout the game.

Torre sealed the win in the 56th minute, calmly scoring after home keeper Fabrega failed to find one of his defenders with a low pass which ended up at the feet of the Barca midfielder instead.

Barcelona, who face Athletic Bilbao in a Spanish Super Cup semi-final on Wednesday, rested forward Raphinha, while midfielder Marc Casado and defender Alejandro Balde remained on the bench.

Aragonian club Barbastro sit 16th in Group Two of the Segunda Federacion. The two teams met at the same stage of the Copa del Rey last year when Barcelona won 3-2.

Pacers Run Away From Suns in Second Half

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Tyrese Haliburton scored 27 points to lead six Indiana scorers in double figures and the Pacers bookended the second half with big runs to send the visiting Phoenix Suns to a fourth consecutive loss and seventh in their last eight games, 126-108 in Indianapolis.

Indiana opened the second half with a 19-9 run that lasted a little more than four minutes and gave the Pacers a lead they held the rest of the way.

Phoenix stayed within striking distance behind Kevin Durant's 25 points and Devin Booker's 20, but the Suns could not cut the deficit to any fewer than six points after that.

Indiana pulled away with a 13-4 run over the game's final 4:08. Haliburton hit three of his five 3-pointers in the closing stretch.

The Pacers shot 15 of 40 overall from long distance, not dramatically better than Phoenix's 12 of 30. However, Indiana outscored the Suns by 10 points from inside the arc (31 of 56 to 26



of 48).

Myles Turner went 7 of 11 on inside 3-point land en route to 20 points. His rim-rattling dunk over Booker, set up on a back cut and assist from Andrew Nembhard in the third quarter, electrified the home crowd.

Meanwhile Joel Embiid totaled 28 points and 12 rebounds in three quarters as the Philadelphia 76ers overcame an extremely early 11-point deficit and rolled to a 123-94 victory over the short-handed Brooklyn Nets in New York.

Turner joined all four of Indiana's other starters hitting at least one 3-pointer, going 2 of 6.

Nembhard hit both of his attempts from deep and was 3-from-3 from the floor overall with nine points to go with seven assists. Benedict Mathurin added a double-double of 13 points and 10 rebounds, and Pascal Siakam finished with 15 points and nine rebounds.

The Pacers also got double-figure scoring performances off the bench from Obi Toppin with 12 points and Ben Sheppard with 10. Phoenix reserves Monte Morris and Grayson Allen scored 12 and 13 points, respectively, with Allen hitting three of his seven 3-pointers in his return from concussion protocols.

United States Set Up Final Against Poland in United Cup

SYDNEY (Dispatches) - Former champions the United States returned to the final of the United Cup mixed team tournament with a fortuitous victory over the Czech Republic and set up a title clash with Poland, who hammered Kazakhstan.

Tomas Machac looked set to draw the Czechs level at 1-1 in their semi-final and was serving for the contest against Taylor Fritz, but an apparent cramp took its toll and he lost three straight games before throwing in the towel at 7-6(4) 5-6.

The result gave the Americans an unassailable 2-0 lead that sent them through.

"It's great to be back (in the final). That was a crazy match, very physical and it's not the way that I guess I wanted to win," said Fritz.

"He said that he had been cramping for a couple of games. I didn't notice. He was moving pretty well. I guess he was playing through it. It's really humid in here... tough conditions."

Coco Gauff got the ball rolling for the 2023 champions with a 6-1 6-4 victory over the tricky Karolina Muchova in a rematch of the Beijing final in October that the American won.

"It's never easy against Karolina," said world number three Gauff, who recovered from a break deep in the second set to get past Muchova in Sydney.

"The whole match I was intense and focused and I think that made



the difference today."

Last year's runners-up Poland reached their second straight final at the \$10 million tournament after Hubert Hurkacz and Iga Swiatek won their singles matches in style.

World number two Swiatek settled the tie with a battling effort against the big-hitting Elena Rybakina, securing a 7-6(5) 6-4 victory for a 2-0 lead at the Ken Rosewall Arena.

"I think this was the first time I was able to win against Elena on a faster surface," said an exhausted Swiatek after the epic battle that lasted a little over two hours.

"It means a lot. I didn't start well, I felt like I was on the handbrake a bit. I knew I had to do something because this match could go both ways. I wanted to change the momentum and I'm happy I did that in the last possible chance."

"I told myself that I'm not going to miss anymore, and I'm happy because it's always tough against Elena."

Hurkacz earlier beat Alexander Shevchenko 6-3 6-2 in less than an hour to help his team put one foot into the final.

"The last match here gave me a little bit of confidence and I've been playing better with every single match," said Hurkacz, who downed Briton Billy Harris in the quarter-final after a couple of defeats in the group stage.