

Minister of Health, Mohammad Reza Zafarqandi, Has Claimed That the Country Is the Number-One in the Middle East Region Concerning Its Research on Medical Ethics

IRAN NEWS

President Masoud Pezeshkian, in a Message, Has Extended His Congratulations to Nicolás Maduro on His Inauguration as President of Venezuela for a Third Term

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Iran Never Left Negotiation Table



IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi has asserted that Iran has never acted as the party to leave the negotiation table due to its confidence in the peaceful nature of its nuclear energy program.

"In the nuclear issue, we never left the negotiation table because we have been confident in the peaceful nature of our nuclear program," he said during a televised interview on Tuesday.

"We have no problem with negotiations whether in principle or basis, although, some of the other parties' excessive demands have caused some problems and adversities in negotiations," the top diplomat noted.

Araqchi also emphasized that the Islamic Republic's "main demand" is finding a way towards resumption of nuclear negotiations.

He also described as "positive" the country's recent talks with the European trio of the UK, France, and Germany, which are parties to Iran's 2015 nuclear deal.

The talks were attended by senior Iranian diplomats, Majid Takht-Ravanchi and Kazem Gharibabadi, as well as the representatives of the European states, European Union's foreign policy chief Enrique Mora, and other European experts.

"The talks with the Europeans have been essentially positive. We witnessed some seriousness in them, and their desire to reach a resolution based on negotiations."

He, however, laid emphasis on Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei's insistence on the country's not pinning hopes and relying exclusively on negotiations and instead trying to neutralize the illegal and unilateral sanctions that the United States and its European allies imposed on the country.

"We do not abandon this course, but are not attached to it either, and would try to neutralize the sanctions by relying on the country's domestic capabilities."

Iran Navy Takes Delivery of Zagros Destroyer



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - The Iranian naval defense industry has handed over the first "signals-intelligence" destroyer of its own indigenous production to the country's Navy.

The vessel, named Zagros, was delivered to the Navy on Wednesday during a ceremony attended by Navy Commander Rear Admiral Shahram Irani, other senior military and government officials, and scientists.

Irani described Zagros as the "waking eye of the Navy within the depth of the world's oceans," praising the achievement as "very valuable" for the Islamic Republic's Armed Forces, and noting that the ship had been outfitted with state-of-the-art electromagnetic, electronic, and cyber technology.

"In light of all the orders of prudence that we are issued through the [relevant] chain-of-command, we try incessantly for the result of our performance to serve as a source of pride for the Islamic Republic's establishment," the commander remarked.

He hoped that the Navy's advances would ensure the contentment of Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei as well as the country's commanders and those who had been martyred down the path of defending the nation.

Irani finally noted that all of the ship's equipment was of Iranian production, saying that the Navy had managed to meet the country's defensive demands on the back of its intelligence command as part of its efforts to ensure stable naval security across various bodies of water, including the Indian Ocean and Pacific Ocean, as well as other waterways.

The Islamic Republic's Armed Forces, including the Army and the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC), have been continuously enhancing their military hardware and combat readiness in line with Ayatollah Khamenei's directives.



Iran Open to Dialogue With Trump

IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - President Masoud Pezeshkian, in an interview with the American television network NBC, stressed that the Islamic Republic never hatched plans to assassinate anyone, including Donald Trump and will never do so.

Pezeshkian said in response to a question raised by Lester Holt in his NBC Nightly News program that one of the potential threats to diplomacy could be seen as what the US believes Iran had planned to assassinate Trump. Was there such a plan?

The Iranian president explained further: "All the assassinations and acts of terror that we see happening in the region, Europe and elsewhere, is there any trace of the involvement of Iranians in them or there were other foreign nationals? Have there been any links of those terror assassinations with Iran? Never! Iran has never been in pursuit of assassination and acts of terror."

"Never, by no means!", Pezeshkian said when the NBC anchor in Tehran repeated the question asking him whether Iran ever planned to kill Trump or will he promise that there's no such action taken in the future.

"We did not have any such intention from the beginning", the Iranian president underlined, adding that "What is being called a conspiracy against Trump is a plot by Israel and other countries to promote hostility toward Iran."

Iran has, time and again, rejected attempts with "malicious political motives" to implicate the country into assassination plots in the United States. That after the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the US Justice Department claimed that a Pakistani national is suspected of collaborating with Iran to plot and assassinate political figures, including Trump.

Holt asked Pezeshkian questions related to a number of other issues, including the ongoing multi-front war in West Asia amid an impending Gaza ceasefire deal, Iran's relationship and willingness to negotiate with the US, Iran's support for resistance groups, its nuclear program among others.

NBC will broadcast the full interview on January 15, Mohammad-Mehdi Tabatabai, deputy director of communication and information at the Presidential Office, wrote on his X account on Tuesday.

In wording carefully chosen to give just a hint of Pezeshkian's intended message, Tabatabai said that the Islamic Republic of Iran "seeks peace and de-escalation in the region and the world, condemns warmongering, encroachments, and genocide by the Zionist regime and is ready for equal and honorable negotiation."

That last part — that Iran is ready for negotiations on an equal footing — could be a significant message to the incoming Donald Trump administration.

In 2018, Trump withdrew the United States from a multilateral hard-fought deal with Iran known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) that had been meant to resolve a dispute over the Iranian nuclear program and had raised hopes of ushering in a new era of international engagement.

Trump's withdrawal and his subsequent move to re-impose sanctions under his so-called "maximum pressure" campaign not only put those hopes on ice but even failed Trump to pursue his goal, which was to force Tehran to renegotiate the agreement.

Iran refused to renegotiate the agreement that was hammered out after two years of intensive negotiations between Iran and several world powers, including the US. Iran held the US government and the European signatories accountable for failing the deal with their inaction and lack of adherence to their obligations under the JCPOA.

While President Pezeshkian's remarks on other issues during the interview with NBC is unclear, but as Tabatabai's hint in a rather encrypted way, a potential announcement that Iran is ready to negotiate with the Trump administration would be a significant development in itself.

Military Chief Stresses Self-Reliance in Defense Capabilities



TEHRAN - Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces, Major General Mohammad Bagheri, emphasized that dependence on major world powers leads only to humiliation and disgrace. He highlighted the necessity for Iran to enhance its military strength to match the stature of its great nation, with naval fleet expansion being a critical component.

During the commissioning ceremony of the Zagros intelligence-signaling vessel at the Islamic Republic of Iran Navy's Third Naval Region, General Bagheri celebrated this achievement as a significant milestone for the Iranian people. He reiterated that defensive strength is a cornerstone of Iran's national security and power.

General Bagheri noted Iran's strategic advantage due to its continuous maritime borders and valuable infrastructure, which, if fully utilized, could elevate the nation's regional and global standing. He cited the Supreme Leader's approval of maritime-focused development policies as the foundation for Iran's military and national progress.

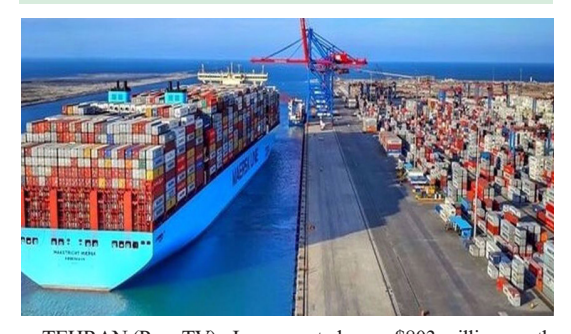
He pointed out the untapped potential of the Oman Sea and Makran coast, praising the Navy's decade-long efforts in activating these regions. Over the past four decades, operations in Konarak and Chabahar have expanded, with recent years seeing significant infrastructure and capability enhancements.

Highlighting future readiness, Bagheri described the domestically designed and constructed Zagros vessel as a prime example of strategic foresight. He underscored the vessel's importance for naval operations in the Oman Sea, the Indian Ocean, and global waters. Built entirely by Iranian engineers and defense industries, the Zagros enhances the nation's maritime intelligence capabilities.

Bagheri asserted that naval missions would fundamentally change with the Zagros's deployment, reinforcing that self-reliance is essential for pursuing national independence and sovereignty. He credited Iran's achievements to divine support, the sacrifices of martyrs, the Supreme Leader's leadership, and the dedication of military personnel and scientists.

He stressed the ongoing need to develop military strength, particularly naval forces, to safeguard Iran's security and prosperity. Addressing residents of Sistan and Baluchestan, Makran, Chabahar, and Konarak, he assured them of the military's commitment to ensuring peace and enabling progress.

Iran's Exports to Russia Up 14% y/y in 9 Months to Late December



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran exported some \$803 million worth of goods and commodities to Russia in April-December.

Iran's non-oil exports to Russia continued to rise this year thanks to an existing arrangement for preferential trade between Iran and a Russia-led economic bloc and amid growing political and economic cooperation between the two countries.

Figures by Iran's customs office (IRICA) released on Tuesday showed that Iran's exports to Russia had reached a total of 1.056 million metric tons (mt) worth \$803 million in the nine calendar months to December 20.

Exports represented an increase of 14% in value terms compared to the same period last year, IRICA data showed.

Iran had a trade deficit of nearly \$300 million with Russia in April-December as imports from the country reached 1.491 million mt worth \$1.099 billion, the figures showed.

Iran's main export item to Russia in the nine months to late December was bell pepper, according to an IRICA official who said shipments had increased by 175% in volume terms year on year.

Russia's main export item to Iran was raw gold as the country exported some 3,595 kilograms of the metal worth \$281 million to Iran over the period.

Russia and Iran have expanded their trade ties in recent years as the two countries seek to offset the impacts of Western sanctions on their economies.

Trade has also increased because of a preferential trade agreement signed between Iran and the Russia-led Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) in 2019.

Experts believe trade between Iran and Russia will increase significantly once the EAEU finalizes a long-anticipated free trade deal with Tehran in the coming months.

Significance of Pezeshkian's Visit to Tajikistan Highlighted

TEHRAN - The head of the Iran-Tajikistan Parliamentary Friendship Group, Fathollah Tavassoli, described President Masoud Pezeshkian's upcoming visit to Tajikistan as a significant step toward strengthening bilateral relations in economic, political, and cultural fields. He emphasized that the two Persian-speaking nations share common cultural ties, and this visit could further solidify their bond.

Tavassoli highlighted the President's upcoming visits to Tajikistan and Russia at the end of the week. He noted that Pezeshkian's visit marks a major development in relations between the two Persian-speaking countries, potentially boosting economic, political, and cultural cooperation.

Tavassoli stated that President Pezeshkian is scheduled to hold separate meetings with the President, Speaker of Parliament, and Prime Minister of Tajikistan. Several memorandums of understanding and agreements, particularly in economic sectors, are expected to be signed, enhancing bilateral cooperation.

Representing Kaboudarahang in Iran's Parliament, Tavassoli pointed out that Tajikistan, as a Persian-speaking nation with deep-rooted cultural ties, holds a strategic position for expanding regional relations.

He added that bilateral relations, especially economic ties, have grown in recent years, with trade volume tripling. Although the total figure is still modest, Tavassoli expressed hope that the President's visit would lead to further growth.

Highlighting past collaborations, Tavassoli mentioned the signing of 50 cooperation agreements in technical, engineering, knowledge-based sectors, and dam construction. He also noted the construction of a hospital in Dushanbe.

Regarding trade volume, Tavassoli reported that it increased from \$140 million in 2021 to \$240 million in 2022 and reached \$340 million in 2024, marking a threefold rise. He also mentioned ongoing efforts to reopen Iran's cultural advisory office in Tajikistan.

Reflecting on Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf's recent visit to



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

Tajikistan, Tavassoli highlighted the signing of agreements and productive discussions between Tehran and Dushanbe.

Tavassoli expressed optimism that the shared cultural heritage and geographical proximity would facilitate stronger bilateral relations.

He emphasized that many cultural symbols are shared between Iran and Tajikistan, and both nations' leaders and citizens are keen to deepen ties.

Tavassoli revealed that over 20 agreements across various sectors are expected to be signed during the President's visit to Tajikistan.

He also evaluated the upcoming visit to Russia as highly significant, considering Russia's role as a BRICS member and permanent UN Security Council member. Tavassoli stressed Russia and Tajikistan's strategic importance to Iran, making these visits critical.

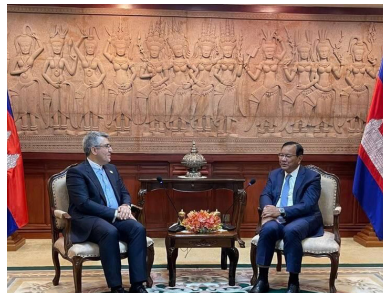
President Masoud Pezeshkian was embarking on a three-day trip to Tajikistan and Russia starting Wednesday.

Iran's Ambassador to Tajikistan, Alireza Haghhighian, underscored the strategic importance of the President's visit. He noted that Tajikistan, as a friendly, Persian-speaking nation with shared historical, cultural, and religious ties, holds a prominent place in Iran's foreign policy. He highlighted that selecting Tajikistan as the first official bilateral destination in Eurasia reflects its exceptional status in Iran's diplomacy.

Haghhighian added that bilateral cooperation is progressing well at bilateral, regional, and international levels. He expressed confidence that the President's visit would accelerate this positive trajectory.

In response to questions about the visit's objectives, Haghhighian explained that it is an official state visit at the invitation of Tajikistan's President Emomali Rahmon. He stated that both countries plan to sign key cooperation documents in cultural, scientific, economic, industrial, and other sectors.

IRAN NEWS



Cambodian FM Offers to Host Iranian Counterpart

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Cambodian Foreign Minister Prak Sokhonn has expressed a desire to visit Tehran and has also proposed hosting his Iranian counterpart Abbas Araghchi for a trip to Cambodia.

Ali Akbar Nazari, the Iranian ambassador to Vietnam and accredited to Cambodia, held talks with Sokhonn on Tuesday. Highlighting the friendly political relations and stressing the need to speed up political and economic cooperation, Nazari, on behalf of Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Iraqi, invited Sokhonn to visit Tehran to discuss collaboration opportunities.

Nazari voiced Iran's readiness to cooperate across all fields and share experiences, knowledge, and technology and also called for establishing a joint economic commission, signing cooperation agreements, and convening a meeting of the political advisory committee led by the deputy foreign ministers.

Consequences of Russia's Halt on Barley and Corn Exports for Iran



TEHRAN - Kaveh Zargaran, Chairman of the Iran Grain Association, discussed the impact of Russia's suspension of barley and corn exports on Iran in an interview with ILNA. He stated that the Russian Federation imposes monthly export tariffs on goods like wheat, corn, barley, and oil to control prices and manage exports. These tariffs can fluctuate, sometimes dropping to zero or rising up to \$100 per ton. Over two months ago, Russia announced that starting February 15, 2025, it would completely halt corn and barley exports until the end of June.

Russia is Iran's main supplier of feed barley, and under these circumstances, Zargaran emphasized that the Ministry of Agriculture should manage the supply of this essential commodity, either through strategic reserves or private sector imports. However, this has not been adequately addressed.

Zargaran added that Iran consumes around 5.5 to 6 million tons of feed barley annually, with about half sourced domestically. Demand peaks in winter when livestock cannot graze and require indoor feeding. Despite this predictable seasonal surge, the country has not secured the necessary supply, leading to domestic price hikes over the past two months. While the foreign exchange price of barley hasn't increased compared to corn, its market price has risen to 11,000 toman per kilogram.

He noted that Russia's export suspension this February is not a routine occurrence. As the head of the Grain Association, he had officially warned the Ministry of Agriculture about the concerning barley supply situation.

Regarding the halt in Russian corn exports, Zargaran explained that Brazil is Iran's main corn supplier. However, Brazil's export season is ending, and shipments will not resume until the next harvest in June and July. Traditionally, Iran sourced corn from Ukraine during this period, but geopolitical tensions have complicated these imports. Russia's export ban will further restrict corn imports.

Iran's Share in Maritime Research and Development is \$20b



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The Deputy Minister of Industry, Mine, and Trade and the Head of the Executive Board of the Organization for the Development and Renovation of Iranian Industries announced that global investment in maritime research, development, and industry amounts to \$1.7 trillion, with Iran's share at \$20 billion.

Farshad Moqimi stated at the National Maritime and Shipping Industries Conference at the Khaleji Fars University in Bushehr that development is impossible without research, and that access to markets for industrial equipment and parts in the maritime economy is a significant opportunity, with Bushehr province playing a leading role in this area.

He reminded attendees that the global scale of maritime industrial activities is valued at \$1.5 trillion, and according to plans, this amount is expected to rise to more than \$2.5 trillion by 2030.

Moqimi mentioned that Iran's current maritime industry activities are valued at \$500 million and emphasized that the country plans to increase its maritime industry investment to \$8 billion by 2030.

He noted that maritime economic projects, in accordance with the policies set by the Supreme Leader, are among the most important pillars of sustainable development for the country and have been given special attention in the seventh development plan.

The Deputy Minister of Industry, Mine, and Trade also pointed out that the President attends a weekly maritime economic session and added that seven provinces play a crucial role in the maritime economy, with Bushehr being one of the key provinces in this field.

The Head of the Organization for the Development and Renovation of Iranian Industries continued, stating that 15% of the country's coastline is located in Bushehr, which houses 25 of the 97 national maritime industrial production units.

Of these, 15 units are located in Bushehr Port, six in Tangestan, two in the city of Deir, and one in the city of Deylam.

Moqimi emphasized the importance of optimally utilizing the province's human resources and technological capabilities in shipbuilding and repair.

He concluded by stating that given Bushehr's significant potential in maritime economic activities, the establishment of a maritime industrial park should be a top priority.

Iran and Tajikistan Strengthen Economic and Cultural Ties

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - During the meeting of Iranian and Tajikistani economic leaders, the President of Iran's Chamber of Commerce, Samad Hassanzadeh, emphasized the extensive shared heritage between Iran and Tajikistan. He highlighted opportunities to expand bilateral cooperation in petrochemical industries, oil, gas, medical equipment, healthcare, and tourism sectors.

Hassanzadeh stated that beyond economic ventures, Iran and Tajikistan could collaborate on tourism initiatives, building on their mutual literary, scientific, and artistic connections. He noted the significant participation of Iranian business representatives in the forum as a sign of their strong interest in strengthening ties with Tajikistani counterparts.

Given Iran's capabilities in various economic fields, including engineering services, petrochemicals, energy, and tourism, Hassanzadeh expressed confidence in expanding bilateral partnerships. He also pointed out Iran's readiness to support Tajikistan's technological industries, industrial programs, refineries, and steel industries.

The Iranian government, led by President Pezeshkian, has lifted visa requirements for Tajikistani tourists and traders, facilitating easier travel between the two nations. Hassanzadeh emphasized that Iran's provincial chambers, joint chambers, specialized commissions, and research centers are prepared to offer services to Tajikistani entrepreneurs, fostering stronger economic relations.

Reza Salehi Amiri, Iran's Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts, referred to Tajikistan as Iran's historical bridge to the Caucasus and Eurasia, highlighting their deep-rooted cultural identity. He expressed hope that cultural and social connections would evolve into robust economic ties through the efforts of Iran's Chamber of Commerce.

Amiri stressed the importance of increasing tourist exchanges, aiming for 100,000 tourists annually between both countries. This goal was part of the agreements reached during the forum.

The event concluded with the signing of several Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) between Iranian and Tajikistani companies and provided opportunities for direct negotiations between economic actors from both nations.

Meanwhile on Wednesday, Salehi Amiri met with Jum'a Khonzoda, Head of Tajikistan's State Tourism Committee. The meeting, attended by Hassanzadeh, President of Iran's Chamber of Commerce, and Iran's Ambassador to Tajikistan, focused on enhancing tourism cooperation. Salehi Amiri stressed that Iran's primary tourism target in the Eurasian and Caucasus regions should

be Tajikistan. He noted that the number of Iranian tourists traveling to Tajikistan and vice versa is around 8,500, reflecting underperformance in this area.

He highlighted the need for joint efforts to promote the tourism attractions of both countries. He suggested producing engaging films and broadcasting them in each other's countries, leveraging the influence of elites, celebrities, and public figures as a foundational step.

Salehi Amiri pointed to health tourism as a path to elevate bilateral relations. He stated that last year, 1.2 million people spent \$2 billion on Iran's health tourism services. The goal is to increase this figure to \$6 billion over five years, with an annual growth of 200,000 health tourists. He proposed offering discounted services for Tajik tourists due to cultural and linguistic similarities and encouraged hotel owners and doctors to provide special discounts for Tajik visitors.

He also emphasized holding tourism festivals in both countries, inviting Tajik officials to Iran's tourism festival on February 12, where ministers from six regional countries will attend. He noted this event as an opportunity for Tajikistan to better showcase its attractions.

Salehi Amiri underscored the importance of visa waivers to ease travel between the two countries. This policy has been finalized and communicated by the Iranian government and will be officially announced during President Pezeshkian's upcoming visit to Tajikistan.

He also highlighted the importance of improving hotel services, airlines, and tour operations, expressing Iran's readiness to increase flight numbers.

Jum'a Khonzoda welcomed these proposals, confirming Tajikistan's readiness to take significant steps to strengthen bilateral relations. He mentioned plans to promote Tajikistan's tourism capacities and encouraged Iranian companies to participate in Tajik exhibitions under better conditions while inviting Tajik companies to participate in Iranian exhibitions.

Referring to the tourism potential in southern Iran, Khonzoda stressed that experience exchange is vital for expanding relations. He proposed designing a mechanism for joint efforts to strengthen tourism ties.

Hassanzadeh reaffirmed Iran's interest in enhancing relations with Tajikistan, particularly in health tourism. He emphasized Iran's commitment to providing affordable medical services with a humanitarian and benevolent approach, along with accommodation services.

In conclusion, representatives from both sides were appointed to develop a mechanism to strengthen tourism relations between Iran and Tajikistan.

Iran Emphasizes the Need for Trade Development Plans in FTZs



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The head of Iran's Trade Promotion Organization (TPO) emphasized the necessity of drafting trade development plans for each of the country's free trade zones, stating that their potential advantages can only be realized through trade.

Mohammad Ali Dehghan Dehnavi made these remarks during a joint meeting between the Trade Promotion Organization and the Free Trade-Industrial Zones Organization, attended by Reza Masroor, Secretary of the Supreme Council of Free Zones. He pointed out that while concerns exist about free zones losing their economic advantages, their role as hubs for imports should not be viewed negatively.

Dehnavi explained that imports and exports are interlinked, noting that imports can lead to specialization and the development of infrastructure in free zones, transforming them into prime manufacturing centers.

Questioning why proper infrastructure and import planning shouldn't be pursued in free zones, Dehnavi stated, "When there is public demand for consumer goods, it is our duty to supply them to improve public welfare."

Highlighting the TPO's goal of driving transformation, he said each free zone holds unique potential that can be unlocked through trade. This requires clear, region-specific strategies.

He proposed drafting a dedicated trade development document for each free zone, allowing for measurable targets. The TPO is ready to collaborate with free zones in formulating and monitoring these plans.

Dehnavi stressed the importance of exports in resolving import-related challenges. "A positive trade balance will eliminate many economic concerns," he said.

Discussing the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) agreement, he noted that free zones could leverage zero tariffs on many goods to expand trade with neighboring countries. This could provide significant export opportunities while managing import-related risks.

Dehnavi suggested that free zones can turn import threats into

opportunities by hosting specialized exhibitions in EAEU member states and establishing sister-city relationships with neighboring regions.

Addressing inadequate infrastructure for cross-border trade, he called for the formation of specialized task forces to manage trade relations between free zones and neighboring countries, affirming the TPO's readiness to cooperate.

Reza Masroor underscored the need for a joint export development plan to support export-oriented investments and cooperation in revising government regulations on automobiles and passenger goods. He highlighted the need to ease restrictions on statistical registration of vehicles, passenger goods, and consumer and production items in free zones, in collaboration with the TPO.

Masroor also urged greater cooperation in responding to inquiries about representation status, after-sales services, brand registration, and the approval of technical service statistics. He requested assistance in reopening tariff codes for Group 4 commodities to encourage investment while protecting the legal framework and incentives of the zones.

Emphasizing support for export management companies (EMCs) in free trade zones and the creation of specialized export consortia targeting key markets, Masroor highlighted their vital role in sales and marketing.

Reaffirming the significant potential of free zones, he called on the TPO to align with announced policies to collectively contribute to Iran's progress.

Masroor announced efforts to activate commercial counselors in embassies, noting their critical role in promoting free zones and attracting foreign investment. He stated that the Secretariat is prepared to nominate and dispatch commercial advisors to neighboring countries.

He also stressed the need for a shared calendar of commercial events and exhibitions, with designated organizers, to boost joint activities. Masroor revealed plans to develop necessary infrastructure to support these events.

Iran's Airport Productivity Ranking Drops to 54th Globally Amid Industry Imbalance



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The head of Iran's Civil Aviation Organization (CAO), Mohammad Malekdar, revealed that Iran ranks 54th globally in terms of airport productivity, while the country stands 9th in the world for the number of airports. This disparity has contributed to the unbalanced growth and inefficiencies within the aviation industry.

In a press conference, Hussein Pourfarzaneh, head of the CAO, shared that Iran currently has airport assets worth approximately \$16 billion. In contrast, the value of Iran's fleet, comprising 180 active aircraft, is just \$1 billion.

Pourfarzaneh explained that past investments in the airport industry were often made based on personal preferences rather than economic analysis or necessity. Some of these investments, he noted, could have been better spent on expanding the national fleet, which could have enabled three times the current number of flights.

Pourfarzaneh emphasized that the aviation industry requires navigation, guidance, trained personnel, and functioning airports, all of which need robust support. He further noted that the CAO plays a critical role in regulating and overseeing these elements.

One of the key issues in Iran's aviation industry today is the aging fleet, which faces criticism both in terms of quantity and quality. The current fleet is not sufficient to meet the country's needs, Pourfarzaneh said, adding that past decision-making has led to a mismatch between airports and the national fleet.

Iran ranks 91st globally in flight quality indices, surpassing countries such as Syria and Yemen in terms of flight safety oversight. Despite the progress, Pourfarzaneh stressed the need for a more balanced airport development plan that includes modernizing the fleet and ensuring airports are updated to reflect the growing needs of the country.

Iran Sees 25% Increase in Overseas Farming Expansion



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Aqareza Fotouhi, the director of Iran's Overseas Farming Project at the Ministry of Agriculture Jihad, announced a significant increase in overseas farming led by the private production sector. He stated that approved statistics show Iran's overseas farming area has reached approximately 300,000 hectares—a 25% growth compared to the first half of this year. The Iranian private sector has expanded grain and oilseed cultivation in economically and logistically suitable countries such as Kazakhstan, Brazil, Mongolia, Russia, Belarus, Pakistan, and Georgia. Recently, Venezuela has also been added to this list.

Fotouhi emphasized that food security remains a top priority for the Ministry of Agriculture Jihad. While improving domestic production through agricultural optimization and efficient use of water and soil is a focus, the country still imports around 30 million tons of essential goods annually. According to Iran's Seventh Development Plan, the country aims to expand overseas farming to 2 million hectares by the program's end, producing 10 million tons of agricultural products annually from these operations.

He also highlighted another advantage of strengthening overseas farming: increasing virtual water imports. Currently, Iran imports approximately 100 billion cubic meters of virtual water each year.

Fotouhi noted that developed countries like the United States, China, India, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Japan use overseas farming to enhance their food security.

The Ministry of Agriculture Jihad is committed to supporting private sector investment in this farming model. To encourage participation, the ministry has implemented guaranteed purchase agreements through the Government Trading Corporation and the Livestock Affairs Support Company. Fotouhi believes these guaranteed purchases will strongly motivate private investors. The ministry is also working to improve transparency in processes to stimulate demand for overseas farming and has launched a one-stop service window for applicants interested in cross-border agriculture.

German Cabinet Plans to Shoot Down Illegal Drones

BERLIN (Dispatches) - Germany's cabinet is set to approve plans authorising the armed forces to shoot down illegal drones following repeated reports of illegal flights over critical infrastructure, a draft amendment seen by Reuters showed. Germany has been on high alert for hybrid attacks from Russia since the full-scale invasion of Ukraine. In one of the latest cases, police said on Monday they were investigating suspected Russian espionage after drones were sighted over military installations in Bavaria. Under the planned amendment to the Aviation Security Act, local authorities will be able to ask the military to take action if they deem it necessary. In this case, the armed forces will be allowed to use force against illegal drones in the event of an imminent, particularly serious accident, the draft said.



Los Angeles Braces for Strong Winds as Deadly Wildfires Continue to Rage



LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - Los Angeles firefighters braced for high winds overnight into Tuesday, gusts that could fuel two monstrous wildfires that have already leveled entire neighborhoods, killed at least two dozen people, and burned an area the size of Washington, D.C.

Dry, dangerous Santa Ana wind gusts reached 30 to 50 mph (48 to 80 kph) later on Monday, but the red flag warning was not due to start until 10 p.m. PST (0600 GMT) with the peak winds that could hit 75 mph (120 kph) starting around 4 a.m. Tuesday (1200 GMT), said David Roth, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service's Weather Prediction Center.

More than 8,500 firefighters attacked the fires from the air and on the ground, preventing the conflagrations at either end of Los Angeles from spreading overnight.

"This setup is about as bad as it gets," and Los Angeles City Fire Chief Kristin Crowley told Angelinos, "We are not in the clear."

Officials said the state was pre-positioning firefighting crews in vulnerable areas, not just in Los Angeles but also in other Southern California counties that were also under elevated fire danger.

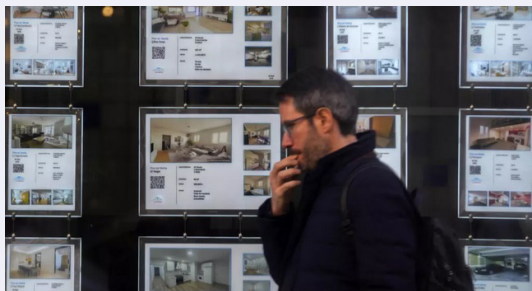
The two main wildfires erupted last week, fueled by hurricane-force winds bringing dry air from the inland deserts.

At least 24 people have died in the fires since then, the Los Angeles County Medical Examiner reported.

The wildfires have destroyed or damaged more than 12,000 structures, turning entire neighborhoods into smoldering ash and piles of rubble, leaving an apocalyptic landscape.

As of Monday, more than 92,000 people in Los Angeles County were under evacuation orders - down from a previous high of more than 150,000 - while another 89,000 faced evacuation warnings.

Spain Mulls 100% Tax on Homes Bought by Non-EU Residents



MADRID (Dispatches) - Spain is planning a raft of measures to address its brewing housing crisis, including an up to 100% tax on properties bought by people who are neither citizens nor residents of the European Union.

Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez announced the plan this week to tackle housing affordability and high rents in the Southern European nation. He said that the overall goal was to provide "more housing, better regulation and greater aid."

"The West faces a decisive challenge: To not become a society divided into two classes, the rich landlords and the poor tenants," Sánchez said as he announced the plan.

However, it remains unclear if the plan put forth by Sánchez's minority coalition will pass in parliament. Here's a look at what's happening:

Like most rich countries, Spain is in the throes of a growing housing affordability problem. Skyrocketing rents are particularly acute in cities like Barcelona and Madrid, where incomes have failed to keep up, especially for young people. Housing prices are also steadily rising, especially in cities and coastal areas.

Rental prices have also been driven up by short-term contracts mainly offered for tourists. Spain sees more tourists than almost any country in the world, having received more than 88.5 million visitors in 2024. Tourism is one of the country's key economic drivers.

Qatar Says Gaza Truce Talks in Final Stages



DOHA (Dispatches) - Key mediator Qatar said negotiations for a Gaza truce and hostage release deal were in their "final stages" yesterday, expressing hope an agreement could be reached "very soon."

Qatar, Egypt and the United States have intensified efforts to broker a ceasefire to enable the release of hostages taken during Hamas's October 7, 2023 attack on Israel.

Late on Tuesday, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu went into a meeting with top security officials to discuss the deal, his office said.

"The ball is now in Hamas's court," US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said earlier. "If Hamas accepts, the deal is ready to be concluded and implemented."

US President Joe Biden and his Egyptian counterpart Abdel Fattah el-Sisi said in a phone call yesterday that both sides needed to show "flexibility" to get a deal over the line, according to a statement from Sisi's office.

Biden had said the day before that an agreement was "on the brink" of being finalised, just ahead of the inauguration of his successor, Donald Trump.

Qatar foreign ministry spokesman Majed al-Ansari yesterday said the negotiations were in their "final stages". "Certainly we are hopeful that this would lead very soon to an agreement," Ansari said, while adding that "until there is an announcement... we shouldn't be over-excited".

Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Saar, meanwhile, said during a visit to Rome that there was a "true willingness from our side to reach an agreement".

Hamas's October 7 attack, the deadliest in Israel's history, resulted in the deaths of 1,210 people, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally of official Israeli figures.

On that day, militants also took 251 people hostage, 94 of whom are still being held in Gaza, including 34 the Israeli military says are dead.

Israel's retaliatory campaign in Gaza has killed 46,645 people, a majority of them civilians, according to the health ministry

in the Hamas-run territory, whose figures the UN considers reliable.

Relatives of Israeli hostages and war-battered Palestinians in Gaza waited anxiously for the deal to be finalized.

"Time is of the essence," said Gil Dickmann, cousin of former hostage Carmel Gat, whose body was recovered from a Gaza tunnel in September.

"Hostages who are alive will end up dead. Hostages who are dead might be lost," Dickmann told AFP at a rally in Jerusalem. "We have to act now."

Umm Ibrahim Abu Sultan said from Khan Yunis in southern Gaza that she had "lost everything" in the war. "I am anxiously awaiting the truce. I will cry for days on end," said the mother of five.

Israeli media and sources close to the talks said the first phase of a deal would see 33 Israeli hostages freed, while two Palestinian sources close to Hamas told AFP that Israel would release about 1,000 Palestinian prisoners in exchange.

Israeli media also reported yesterday that under the proposed deal, Israel would be allowed to maintain a buffer zone inside Gaza during the implementation of the first phase.

Hamas said it hoped for a "clear and comprehensive agreement", adding it had informed other Palestinian factions of the "progress made".

Successive rounds of negotiations last year failed to end the deadliest war in Gaza's history.

On Tuesday, a far-right member of Netanyahu's government, National Security Minister Itamar Ben Gvir, said he opposed what he described as a "disastrous deal".

The day before, Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, also a far-right cabinet member, had warned he too would oppose any agreement to stop the war.

Saar, however, said yesterday he believed "that if we will achieve this hostage deal we will have a majority in this government that will support the agreement".

NATO to Deploy Ships, Aircraft in Baltic Sea After Cable Breaches

HELSINKI (Dispatches) - NATO countries will deploy frigates, patrol aircraft and naval drones in the Baltic Sea to help protect critical infrastructure and reserve the right to take action against ships suspected of posing a security threat, alliance members said on Tuesday.

The military and political alliance is taking the action, dubbed "Baltic Sentry", following a string of incidents in which power cables, telecom links and gas pipelines have been damaged in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

Finnish police last month seized a tanker carrying Russian oil and said they suspected the vessel had damaged the Finnish-Estonian Estlink 2 power line and four telecoms cables by dragging its anchor across the seabed.

Finland's president Alexander Stubb said the damage on Dec. 25 was "definitely" linked to Russia.

"They're linked certainly in the sense that the vessel was part of the Russian shadow fleet. And we know that the cargo of it was very Russian. The link is definitely there," Stubb told Reuters, adding, however, that it was too early to draw further conclusions on the attribution.

While the region is on high alert for fear of sabotage, the Polish army denied on Tuesday a local media report that said a Russian "shadow fleet"



vessel was seen circling near the Baltic Pipe gas pipeline, stating that this "did not happen".

Finland's actions against the Eagle S tanker showed that vessels causing harm can be apprehended by law enforcement, NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte told a press conference following an eight-nation meeting in

Heilsinki on Tuesday.

"Potential threats to our infrastructure will have consequences, including possible boarding, impounding and arrest," Rutte said.

NATO members are looking at targeting Russia's shadow fleet in the area with sanctions as part of efforts to protect undersea critical installations, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said following the meeting.

"We will continue to take action against the Russian shadow fleet, including with sanctions that have already been introduced and others that may follow, including against specific ships and shipping companies that also pose a threat to the environment," Scholz told reporters.

Some 2,000 ships are crossing the Baltic Sea every day, making it difficult to monitor it all, Latvian President Edgars Rinkevics said.

"Let's face it, we can't ensure 100% protection, but if we are sending a bold signal then I think that such incidents are going to decrease or even to stop," Rinkevics told reporters.

Finland's President Alexander Stubb said further legal studies must be conducted to assess which measures can be taken against suspected rogue ships while preserving freedom of navigation rules.

South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol Arrested Over Failed Martial Law Bid

SEOUL (Dispatches) - South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol was arrested on Wednesday over his failed martial law bid, after hundreds of anti-graft investigators and police raided his residence to end a weeks-long standoff.

Yoon, who was impeached and charged with insurrection over his short-lived effort to impose martial law last month, is the first sitting president in the nation's history to be arrested.

A former prosecutor who led the conservative People Power Party to election victory in 2022, Yoon could face the death penalty or life in jail if he is found guilty of insurrection.

He had sought to evade arrest for weeks by remaining in his residential compound, protected by members of the Presidential Security Service (PSS) who had remained loyal to him.

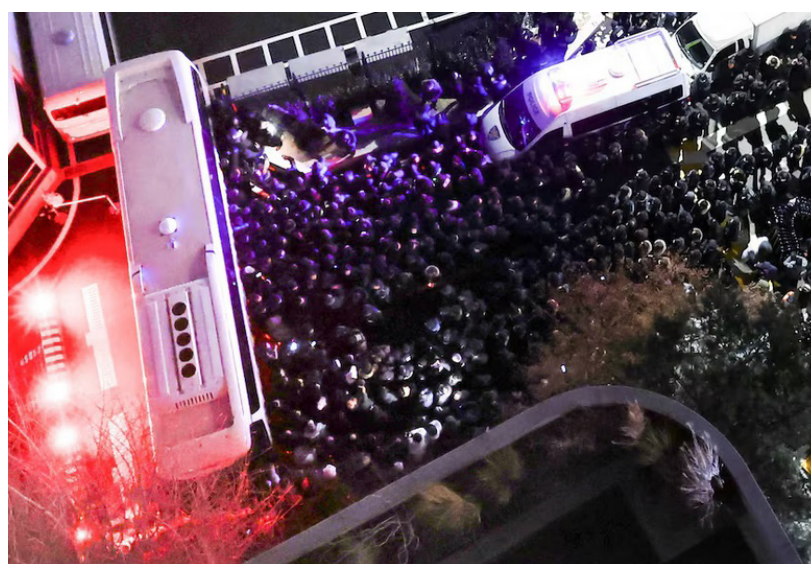
Yoon's guards had installed barbed wire and barricades at the residence, turning it into what the opposition called a "fortress".

A first attempt on January 3 failed after a tense hours-long standoff between the guards and anti-graft investigators working with police.

Yoon vowed shortly after that to "fight to the end".

But before dawn on Wednesday, hundreds of police officers and investigators from the Corruption Investigation Office again surrounded the residence, some scaling perimeter walls and hiking up back trails to reach the main building.

After another few hours of a standoff, authorities announced Yoon had been arrested



and the impeached leader released a pre-recorded video message.

"I decided to respond to the Corruption Investigation Office," Yoon said in the message, adding that he did not accept the legality of the investigation but was complying "to prevent any unfortunate bloodshed."

Yoon left his residence in a convoy and was taken to the offices of the Corruption Investigation Office.

AFP reporters earlier witnessed brief scuffles at the gate of the residence, where Yoon's die-hard supporters had been camped out to protect him, as authorities first moved on the compound.

Lawmakers from the People Power Party also rushed to the area in an apparent bid to defend him, AFP reporters saw.

His supporters were heard chanting "illegal warrant!" while waving glow sticks and South Korean and American flags. Some laid on the ground outside the residential compound's main gate.

Police and CIO officers began forcibly removing them from the entrance to the residence while around 30 lawmakers from Yoon's ruling People Power Party also blocked investigators, Yonhap News TV reported.

Due to the tense situation, police decided not to carry firearms but only to wear bulletproof vests for the new attempt Wednesday, in case they were met by armed guards, local media reported.

Medvedev Advances; Fonseca Dazzles on Debut at Australian Open

MELBOURNE (Dispatches) - Three-times Australian Open finalist Daniil Medvedev allowed his frustrations to boil over in a Melbourne Park meltdown before advancing to the second round while Taylor Fritz made a strong start in his bid to end a 22-year Grand Slam drought for American men.

The third day of action concluded with Brazilian teenager Joao Fonseca more than living up to the hype around him as the qualifier crushed Russian ninth seed Andrey Rublev in a stunning Grand Slam main draw debut.

Danish 13th seed Holger Rune was pushed all the way to five sets and Emma Navarro also had a tough time in one of three all-American ties, the women's eighth seed surviving a major scare to beat Peyton Stearns 7-6(5) 6-7(5) 7-5.

It was plain sailing for former Wimbledon champion Elena Rybakina as she blitzed Australian wildcard Emerson Jones 6-1 6-1 with new coach Goran Ivanisevic watching on impressed.

In a French thriller on Court Three, experience got the better of potential as Gael Monfils edged Giovanni Mpetshi Perricard 7-6(7) 6-3 6-7(6) 7-6(5) 6-4, while there were also wins for 2021 U.S. Open champion Emma Raducanu, ninth seed Daria Kasatkina and former men's world number six Matteo Berrettini.

Home hope Alex de Minaur also moved through as he beat Dutchman Botic van de Zandschulp.

Russian Medvedev, runner-up last year, smashed his racket and a net camera after dropping serve in the third set but rallied for a 6-2 4-6 3-6 6-1 6-2 win against Thai wildcard Kasidit Samrej.

The frustrated fifth seed's behaviour earned him a code violation for racket abuse as play was held up before the fourth set as staff swept up debris from the court but he cut a happy figure after the match.

"At the end of last year, this match I probably would have lost," said Medvedev. "Now it's a new year and new energy ... So I'm happy to win this match."

Fourth seed Fritz stayed cool throughout his match against compatriot Jenson Brooksby, the U.S. Open

finalist easing to a 6-2 6-0 6-3 win that showed why he is now considered best placed to end America's 22-year wait for a major men's prize.

The 27-year-old played an integral part in the United States winning the United Cup to begin the new season and continued his fine form with a 106-minute drubbing of Brooksby.

Brooksby, returning from two years on the sidelines after having operations on both wrists and serving a 13-month doping suspension, fought until the bitter end but was no match for Fritz, who sealed the victory with his 34th winner.

Those who stayed last on Margaret Court Arena will not forget it in a hurry as the 18-year-old Fonseca dazzled under the lights in a 7-6(1) 6-3 7-6(5) defeat of Rublev.

His win meant he is only the second teenager since 1973 to beat a top-10 ATP player on his Grand Slam debut.

Crushing 51 winners, Fonseca looked completely at home on the big stage as he set up a second-round clash against Italy's Lorenzo Sonego.

Navarro was on the back foot for almost the entirety of her three hour, 20-minute clash on Rod Laver Arena with world number 46 Stearns before rallying from a break down to win the final four games of the third set and claim victory.

Berrettini came from a set down to beat Britain's Cameron Norrie 6-7(4) 6-4 6-1 6-3 and claim his first win at Melbourne Park since his run to the semi-finals in 2022.

His reward is a second-round tie against 13th seeded Dane Rune, who was tested over five sets by China's Zhang Zhizhen before running out a 4-6 6-3 6-4 3-6 6-4 winner.

Raducanu reached the second round for the fourth year in a row but her 7-6(4) 7-6(2) win over 26th seeded Russian Ekaterina Alexandrova was not all smooth sailing.

Liverpool Held by Forest; City Stumble at Brentford

LONDON (Dispatches) - Liverpool's charge towards the Premier League title was halted by stubborn Nottingham Forest in a 1-1 draw between the top two as Manchester City's resurgence came undone in a 2-2 draw at Brentford.

Chris Wood fired Forest in front early on at a raucous City Ground, but Liverpool dominated almost the entire 97 minutes and got back on level terms thanks to substitute Diogo Jota's goal with his first touch.

Only a brilliant goalkeeping performance from Matz Sels denied the leaders victory, but the point maintained a six-point cushion over Forest for Arne Slot's men, who also have a game in hand.

Forest had won their last seven games in all competitions to raise the possibility of matching Leicester's incredible title win of 2015/16.

The in-form Wood had the home fans believing after just eight minutes when he slotted in Anthony Elanga's pass.

Liverpool enjoyed over 70 percent possession and had 23 shots on goal but only posed a serious threat in front of goal after the break.

Jota had only been on the field a matter of seconds when he nodded in Kostas Tsimikas' corner.

Sels then made incredible saves to deny Jota, Mohamed Salah and Cody Gakpo a winner, while Salah also had a goalbound effort



cleared off the line.

"I could not have asked for more," said Slot. "Second half was outstanding."

"There are not many teams that can create so many chances against an opponent so defensively strong. Unfortunately we couldn't get a second."

Liverpool's second consecutive league draw opens the door for Arsenal to cut the gap at the top to four points when they host Tottenham in the north London derby.

Any suggestion City could get themselves back in the title race was ended in a late collapse in west London as Brentford struck twice in the final 10 minutes for a deserved point.

Phil Foden's double had City on course for a fourth consecutive win after a run of just one victory in 13 games.

However, the English champions' defending was not convincing all night and they were punished as Yoane Wissa and Christian Norgaard netted for the Bees.

Foden's return to the form that saw him crowned Premier League player of the year last season was the one positive for City.

But Pep Guardiola will reflect on a missed opportunity to make up ground on the top four as City remain down in sixth,

12 points off the top.

Foden produced a brilliant deft touch from Kevin De Bruyne's inviting delivery and then smashed in a rebound for his fourth goal in five league games.

Brentford wasted a host of chances before conceding but finally got some reward for their attacking endeavour when Wissa slotted in from Mads Roerslev's cross to become the club's all-time leading goalscorer in the Premier League.

Juve's Run of Draws Continues With 1-1 Stalemate at Atalanta



BERGAMO (Dispatches) - Juventus were held yet again as they drew 1-1 at Atalanta in Serie A with Pierre Kalulu's early second-half goal cancelled out by a late equalizer from Mateo Retegui.

The result brings Juve's total number of league draws to 13 from 20 matches so far, keeping them in fifth place with 34 points. Atalanta, also on a three-match run of draws, remain third with 43, four points behind leaders Napoli.

Kalulu scored nine minutes after the interval, finishing Weston McKennie's pass into the box by sliding the ball past onrushing goalkeeper Marco Carnesecchi at the near post.

However, Atalanta built momentum and substitute Retegui, returning from injury, levelled with a diving header from Raoul Bellanova's assist in the 78th minute.

Despite the draw both sides posted some positive records, with Atalanta remaining unbeaten in 15 Serie A games for the second time in their history.

Juve manager Thiago Motta, who watched from the stands after receiving a red card in Saturday's derby against Torino, is also the second Juve manager to remain unbeaten in his first 20 Serie A matches following in the footsteps of Antonio Conte.

Atalanta had more possession in the first half but it was a mostly dull affair as both sides probed without taking chances.

Juve's best opportunity came just before the break when former Atalanta player Teun Koopmeiners stretched to get on the end of a cross but Carnesecchi was able to clear the danger.

Juve came out aggressively after the break and nearly took the lead when Kalulu's header from a corner struck the post and rolled along the line before Carnesecchi cleared.

The ball then fell to Juve's Khephren Thuram, whose blocked attempt sparked a counter-attack for Atalanta, ending with Mario Pasalic sending a shot wide from the edge of the box.

Following Kalulu's goal the intensity remained high, with Atalanta midfielder Ederson's low shot minutes later forcing Michele Di Gregorio into a diving save.

Leverkusen Edge Mainz 1-0 for Seventh League Win in a Row



LEVERKUSEN (Dispatches) - Bayer Leverkusen battled past Mainz 05 with a 1-0 home victory courtesy of a superb Alex Grimaldo free kick to stretch their winning run to seven straight matches in the Bundesliga and close in on leaders Bayern Munich.

Last year's domestic double winners are second on 38 points, one behind Bayern, who host lowly Hoffenheim.

Eintracht Frankfurt are a further five points behind in third place following their 4-1 home victory over Freiburg.

Mainz suffered an early setback at Leverkusen when Germany forward Jonathan Burkardt had to be taken off injured in the third minute after making his comeback last weekend.

Leverkusen, who visit Atletico Madrid in the Champions League next week, gradually gained more possession and carved out several chances through Florian Wirtz and Jeremie Frimpong but Mainz held on in a goalless first half.

That, however, did not last long after the restart with Grimaldo curling his free kick over the wall and past the reach of Mainz keeper Robin Zentner in the 48th minute.

Wirtz had other good chances to add another goal as did Frimpong, who saw his shot blocked by Zentner in the 81st.

The Mainz keeper also denied Nathan Tella from point-blank range two minutes later to keep the visitors in the game.

Mainz then tried to put some late pressure on but had coach Bo Henriksen sent off after two bookings in stoppage time.

"We are very satisfied as we were ready for a tough game against an opponent who has a lot of intensity and is in a good moment," Leverkusen coach Xabi Alonso told a press conference.

Mainz, who are fifth with 28 points, had won six of their previous seven league games going into the game.

"We were patient. We played intelligently. We wanted a stable game and not a crazy game," Alonso said.

"We did not have too many chances but we had control. We had the chances to score a second goal but we did not manage it."

Young Racks Up 43 Points in Hawks' Win Over Suns

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Trae Young scored a season-high 43 points and the Atlanta Hawks finished strong to beat the visiting Phoenix Suns 122-117.

Young made 13 of 31 field goals, giving him 3,556 baskets for his career and pushing him past Al Horford for 10th most in franchise history. He was 6-for-12 on 3-pointers and 11-of-14 on free throws to go along with five assists.

Atlanta also got 22 points and a career-high 21 rebounds from Onyeka Okongwu and 19 points from fellow reserve Garrison Mathews, who made five 3-pointers.

Phoenix was led by Devin Booker's 35 points and Kevin Durant's 31 points, nine rebounds and six assists.

Atlanta salvaged a split of the season series after losing 123-115 on Thursday. The Suns had their three-game win streak snapped and have lost 11 straight games in Atlanta.

Grayson Allen gave the Suns their first lead of the game with a 3-pointer with 5.5 seconds left in the first quarter, but the Hawks countered with a 3 from Bogdan Bogdanovic with 1.5 seconds remaining and led 33-31.

Atlanta pushed its advantage to as many as 12 points in the second quarter and led 64-56 at halftime.

Durant heated up with 14 points in the third quarter to help Phoenix



surge ahead 84-75 until the Hawks rallied to carry an 89-87 edge into the fourth.

The Suns trailed by eight points but tied it at 101-101 on Booker's basket with 6:40 left. Atlanta then engineered a 13-3 run and took a 10-point lead on Mathews' fifth 3-pointer.

Young tallied 13 points in the fourth quarter to help secure the win.

The Suns lost Bradley Beal for substantial minutes due to a leg injury sustained with 5:53 left in the third quarter. Beal went to the locker room for treatment and returned for the fourth quarter. He finished with 11 points in 28 minutes off the bench.

The Hawks took another injury hit when De'Andre Hunter, the team's No. 3 scorer (19.4 points per game) was scratched after injuring his left foot during pregame warmups.

Atlanta was already missing second-leading scorer Jalen Johnson (19.8 points), who missed his fourth straight game with shoulder soreness.

The Hawks begin a three-game road trip on Wednesday in Chicago. The Suns play the second leg of their five-game road trip on Thursday at Detroit.