

Mohammad Javad Zarif, Iran's Vice President for Strategic affairs, Left Tehran for Davos to Participate in the 2025 Annual Meeting of the World Economic Forum (WEF)

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Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei Led funeral Prayers for Two High-Profile Iranian Judges Who Were Assassinated in a Terrorist Attack in Tehran.

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Gov't Forced to Use Mazut, Addressing Imbalances With Public Support



TEHRAN – The President stated that this year, the government had initially planned not to burn mazut (heavy fuel oil) but was ultimately compelled to do so. He explained that if they had not used mazut, they would have had to cut off residential gas supplies due to the excessive demand, which was several times higher than the country's normal consumption.

In a speech at the National Clean Air Day conference, President Massoud Pezeshkian stated, "Our slogan is to implement the laws; yes, we have failed to enforce some of them, but we are not to blame. Some laws lack balance between resources and expenditures."

He emphasized that maintaining a balance between resources and consumption is fundamental to life, highlighting that development in the country has not adhered to this principle. "For example, the current state of Tehran's resources and consumption is unbalanced. The ground is subsidizing daily, yet we continue development under these conditions. With existing resources, it will not be possible to supply Tehran's water needs," he added.

The president urged that existing imbalances should not be perpetuated, citing past cases where funds allocated for environmental, health, and pharmaceutical sectors had to be redirected to pay for wheat procurement, yet shortages persisted. "I encountered similar challenges during my tenure as Minister of Health," he said.

Pezeshkian acknowledged the challenges in energy consumption, stating, "We were supposed to stop burning mazut, but we were forced to use it; otherwise, we would have had to cut off household gas supplies, as our consumption is several times higher than in other countries." He announced plans to generate 30,000 to 50,000 megawatts of solar power in the coming years to address the country's high energy consumption, which he noted is multiple times that of Europe. "It is estimated that we waste \$120 to \$150 billion on fuel consumption, which could be better managed to improve people's lives," he remarked.

Russia's VTB Bank to Upgrade Tehran Office to Branch



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Russia's second-largest lender, VTB, has announced it will upgrade its representative office in Tehran to a branch, becoming the first Russian bank to establish a branch in Iranian territory.

VTB said in a Sunday statement that the decision to upgrade the bank's office in Tehran to a branch had been adopted considering the prospect of growing economic and trade relations between Iran and Russia and to respond to demands by Russian businesses to receive banking services in Iran.

The statement said VTB hopes its branch in Tehran could start operating by the end of 2025 after receiving the approval of qualified financial authorities in the country.

The lender said Russia's central bank had already endorsed VTB's decision to launch a branch in Iran, adding that the branch will initially provide services to Iranian and Russian businesses with foreign activities while gradually offering other banking products and payment services related to Iran.

It said a priority of the branch will be to settle accounts in national currencies and to finance trade and export development schemes.

The bank said, however, that the structure of the branch and the number of its staff, which it said will include Russian and Iranian experts, will be decided by the trade needs of Iran and Russia and the laws and regulations governing the Iranian banking system.

The announcement comes just two days after Iran and Russia signed a strategic partnership treaty that outlines the roadmap for cooperation between the two countries for the next 20 years.



TEHRAN - The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has painted a cautiously optimistic picture for Iran's economy in 2025. According to the IMF's latest forecast, Iran's economy will experience a modest growth rate of 3.1%, accompanied by an inflation rate of 29.5%. Additionally, Iran's foreign exchange reserves are projected to stand at \$33.8 billion by that year.

The IMF estimates that Iran's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) will grow by \$29 billion, reaching a total of \$463 billion in 2025. While this growth rate is slightly below the regional average of 3.9% for the Middle East, Iran's economic performance will surpass that of several regional peers, including Algeria, Qatar, and Jordan.

In terms of sectoral growth, Iran's non-oil economy is expected to expand by 3.1%, while the oil sector will see a more modest growth rate of 2.3%.

As the second largest producer of oil and gas in the Middle East, Iran's oil output in 2025 is forecasted at 3.1 million barrels per day (bpd). The country's gas production is expected to reach the equivalent of 5.2 million bpd of oil, bringing its combined oil and gas production to a total of 8.3 million bpd. This places Iran behind only Saudi Arabia, which is projected to produce 12.2 million bpd in 2025.

Iran's oil exports are predicted to be 1.6 million bpd, with gas exports at an equivalent of 400,000 bpd.

The IMF has also highlighted a continued downward trend in Iran's inflation rate. In 2025, inflation is expected to reach 29.5%, marking the lowest level seen in the past four years. However, despite this reduction, Iran's inflation will still be more than three times the average rate forecasted for other oil-exporting countries in the Middle East.

This marks the highest inflation rate among Middle Eastern and North African nations for 2025. Iran's foreign trade in 2025 is projected to exceed \$240 billion. The IMF forecasts \$128 billion

in exports and \$115 billion in imports for the country. Interestingly, Qatar, a much smaller nation, is expected to have the same export value of \$128 billion in 2025. However, Qatar's imports are expected to be much lower than Iran's, at approximately \$82 billion.

The IMF expects Iran's current account balance to remain positive in 2025, with a surplus of \$13.9 billion. This figure would surpass that of many other countries in the region, including Algeria, Bahrain, Iraq, Kuwait, and even Saudi Arabia.

In contrast, Saudi Arabia's current account balance is expected to be negative, with a deficit of \$20.7 billion in 2025 — the lowest for the country in recent years.

Iran's foreign exchange reserves, despite the challenges posed by U.S. sanctions, have been on an upward trajectory in recent years. The IMF has forecast Iran's available foreign reserves to reach \$33.8 billion in 2025. This amount is greater than the total reserves of countries such as Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Oman, Jordan, and Tunisia.

One of the positive aspects of Iran's economic outlook is its relatively low external debt. The IMF predicts that Iran's external debt in 2025 will stand at just 1.8% of its projected GDP, the lowest among countries in the Middle East and North Africa. By comparison, Bahrain is expected to have an external debt equivalent to 202% of its GDP, the highest in the region. Saudi Arabia's external debt is projected to be 32.8% of its GDP, a substantial figure given the kingdom's \$1.1 trillion economy.

The IMF's 2025 forecast for Iran's economy presents a mixed but generally positive outlook. While growth remains modest, inflation is on the decline, and Iran's reserves and foreign trade are performing well. The country is set to maintain a significant role in the global oil market while managing relatively low levels of debt. Despite ongoing challenges, Iran's economy is showing resilience and is expected to make strides towards recovery in the coming years.

Iran's Response to Misuse of Trigger Mechanism Will Be Reciprocal

TEHRAN - The spokesperson for Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that if the trigger mechanism is misused to exert pressure on Iran, the response will be reciprocal, and there would be no justification for Iran to remain in certain agreements.

Ismail Baghaei, the spokesperson for Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, addressed reporters at his weekly press conference.

Baghaei highlighted significant events of the past week, including the Iranian President's visits to Tajikistan and Russia and the signing of a strategic partnership agreement between Iran and Russia. He also emphasized the ceasefire agreement in Gaza as an important regional development, calling it another example of resistance and victory against occupation and oppression.

Regarding the Gaza ceasefire, he remarked that regional and international communities have learned clear lessons from the event. He asserted that if victory is measured by casualties and destruction, it could be seen as a win for the Zionist regime. However, he argued that the regime's violations of international norms and laws have ultimately led to its disgrace.

He further criticized the support of the United States and Western countries for Israel's actions, stating that their backing enabled the continuation of these crimes. Despite this, he stressed that the resistance of the Palestinian people is independent and stems from their beliefs and identity.

Addressing claims about Iran-Europe talks and missile negotiations, Baghaei stated that Iran will never negotiate its defensive and military capabilities. He confirmed that Iran had made it clear during the previous administration that any misuse of the trigger mechanism to pressure Iran would be met with a reciprocal response.

Baghaei emphasized that Iran's official positions are conveyed through authorized spokespersons, and any personal opinions expressed by government officials should not be mistaken for the official stance.

Regarding reports of a ban on Iranian goods entering Syria, Baghaei expressed doubt over the validity of such claims and reiterated Iran's recommendation against travel to Syria for its citizens.



He also discussed the Iran-Russia strategic partnership treaty, highlighting that it is accessible to the media and builds upon previous agreements from 1940 and 2000, which form the basis of mutual relations.

On the performance of U.S. President Joe Biden, Baghaei stated that his administration's regional approach has been one of the worst in the past 60 years, particularly for its support of genocidal actions. He noted that the Gaza ceasefire came in the final days of Biden's tenure, marking a dark chapter in regional history.

Addressing the case of two Iranian citizens killed in France, he affirmed that pursuing Iranian citizens' rights is a primary responsibility of the Foreign Ministry. He urged French authorities to provide clear answers and ensure accountability.

On Iran's cooperation with Russia, he clarified that sanctions have never been an obstacle to expanding relations. Agreements are made based on mutual needs and existing capacities.

Regarding Iran's participation in the Davos Summit, Baghaei confirmed the invitation of Iranian officials, including former Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, to attend the event.

He also highlighted Iran's ongoing efforts to secure its water rights from Afghanistan, stating that cooperation in this area could strengthen bilateral ties.

Discussing Iran-Pakistan relations, Baghaei noted continued cooperation across various sectors, including defense, and emphasized ongoing diplomatic efforts to address mutual concerns.

Regarding Iran-Europe nuclear negotiations, he confirmed discussions on various issues but reaffirmed that formal negotiations pertain only to the nuclear deal (JCPOA).

Responding to potential threats against Iran's nuclear facilities, Baghaei stressed that Iran will firmly defend its national interests and territorial integrity against any hostile actions.

He concluded by reiterating Iran's commitment to upholding its interests in international relations, highlighting efforts to pursue diplomacy while firmly responding to any misuse of international mechanisms.

Iran Army Ground Force Launches Extensive Security, Counterterrorism Drills



TEHRAN (PressTV) - The Iranian Army's Ground Forces have launched extensive security, offensive and counterterrorism drills near the country's borders and beyond.

The forces began the exercises on Monday, enlisting a vast array of military hardware. The drills have featured successful nabbing of ringleaders and senior members of presumed terrorist outfits, and preemptive attack against terror groups' positions across the country's borders.

The first stage of the exercises saw the special units of the forces' rapid reaction division, especially the 65th Brigade of the Ground Forces' Special Airborne Forces, crossing the common border, staging deterrent offensive against the groups, and trying to take away and ensnare the terrorist elements.

The stage witnessed a specialized operation comprising gleaming of relevant information and completion of identification of the gatherings of overseas terrorists trying to endanger the country's security and territorial integrity, and sow insecurity along the borders.

After analyzing the data, the forces deployed various sorts of stealth and reconnaissance unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) against the terrorist positions, destroying the targets with Fajr (Dawn) missiles that can fly as far as 110 kilometers (68 miles), and Mohajer (Migrant) drones carrying Qa'em (Upright) bombs.

The operation was being supported with heavy airborne fire issued by the Army Aviation Units' helicopter gunships as well as strong firepower deployed by armored and artillery units.

The developments came after the Army's Combat Organization took delivery of as many as 1,000 advanced UAVs during a special ceremony.

Reflecting on the joining process, Defense Minister Brigadier General Aziz Nasirzadeh commended the superior stance of the capabilities of the country's Armed Forces, especially in the area of air defense and naval combat.

"The drones that joined the Combat Organization today created such capacity in the Islamic Republic's Army that has rendered it capable of bringing the skies under its command if necessary, and administer fatal blows to the enemy," he said.

Gaza War Marks Beginning of Zionists' Calamity



ISLAMABAD (Dispatches) - Chief of Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces Major General Mohammad Bagheri says the 15-month-long war in Gaza has marked the beginning of a calamity for the Zionist regime and the elevation of Islam as well as the Axis of Resistance.

Bagheri made the remark in a meeting with diplomats and other staff members at the Iranian embassy in Pakistan's capital Islamabad, a day after a ceasefire began in Gaza, which paused brutal Israeli attacks against the besieged Palestinian territory.

The top Iranian commander noted that the developments unfolding in the past 15 months were regarded as a turning point for West Asia, the Islamic world, and the Resistance Front.

Although painful human and material losses were caused, those developments pushed the Zionist regime to the edge of a precipice despite the fact that arrogant powers mobilized to assist the regime in its fight against the Axis of Resistance and Palestinian fighters, said Bagheri.

He also said that the Gaza ceasefire shows the collapse of the grandeur of the Israeli regime and global arrogance, as the regime was forced to accept the agreement.

The ceasefire was imposed on the Zionist regime, Bagheri said, adding that some US and European officials had admitted in their talks with regional leaders that the downfall of the regime was certain without their support.

Bagheri, said military and security relations between the Islamic Republic and Pakistan are on an upward trajectory and will be further strengthened as he arrives in Islamabad for an official visit.

"We have witnessed major events in the region over the past year, where Iran and Pakistan, as two Islamic nations, are located in the sensitive regions of West and South Asia," he noted.

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Iran Exports Farmed Caviar to 28 Countries

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Nasser Kermirad, the Director General of the Office for the Restoration and Protection of Aquatic Genetic Resources at Iran's Fisheries Organization, announced that in the first nine months of this year, over 5 tons of farmed caviar valued at \$3.2 million were exported from Iranian customs to 28 countries, representing a 112% increase compared to the total exports in the previous 12 months.

He also estimated that more than 50% of this figure may have been exported through travelers leaving the country. Kermirad pointed out that the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, and Belgium ranked first to third in imports of Iranian farmed caviar during the current nine-month period.

Iran's Non-Oil Exports to South Korea Surge 180%



TEHRAN - According to a joint report by the Iran-South Korea Chamber of Commerce, Iran's non-oil exports to South Korea surged 180% in 2024, reaching \$8.609 million, while South Korea's exports to Iran fell by 11% to \$142.631 million.

This significant change in trade dynamics indicates a shift in the structure of trade between the two countries. While Iran's non-oil exports to South Korea increased dramatically, South Korea's exports to Iran decreased due to various factors, including sanctions and banking restrictions, changes in target markets, and Iran's economic situation.

In 2023, Iran was a major importer from South Korea, but in 2024, the trade balance is shifting in favor of Iran, thanks to the significant increase in non-oil exports. This growth in exports is a result of Iran's efforts to reduce its dependence on oil and meet the demand for Iranian products in the South Korean market.

For Iran to maintain this trend, it must address the challenges of aligning with South Korea's standards and overcoming the obstacles posed by sanctions and banking restrictions. Iran needs to find solutions to facilitate trade and financial processes with South Korea.

The joint report highlights the efforts of both countries to strengthen their commercial ties and create new opportunities for cooperation.

Tourism Not a Priority: Call for Iranians Abroad to Visit Iran



TEHRAN - Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts, Salehi Amiri, emphasized that tourism is not a national priority, despite the rhetoric suggesting otherwise. He stated that Iran has fallen behind neighboring countries in the tourism sector and that there is no realistic prospect for closing this gap.

Speaking at a conference for governors across the country at the Ministry of Interior, Salehi Amiri declared that cultural heritage, handicrafts, and tourism have never been prioritized in Iran, especially in a nation where oil, mining, and petrochemicals dominate the economy. He pointed out that while these sectors are emphasized, they neglect tourism, resulting in Iran lagging behind its neighbors.

He highlighted that 90% of tourism potential lies within the provinces and expressed concern over the deterioration of cultural heritage sites. "We have 1 million cultural assets that are unique in the world. No country has as much cultural heritage as Iran, and the younger generation must be made aware of it," he stated.

He urged governors to dispel the false dichotomy between Iran and Islam, asserting that these two concepts have never been in conflict. He stressed the need for educational reforms to instill a sense of identity in students, encouraging a national pride in living in one of the most advanced civilizations.

Speaking on Iran's rich cultural and civilizational history, Salehi Amiri lamented the country's failure to properly introduce its heritage to its citizens and the world. He identified a pressing need to foster national identity as a crucial factor in curbing youth emigration.

Discussing tourism appeal, he noted that each province has its unique potential and that there is no one-size-fits-all solution. He stressed the importance of a unified five-year development plan for tourism, which is currently being drafted, and urged governors to prioritize its implementation.

The minister reported that Iran currently hosts around 1.2 million medical tourists, with a goal to increase this number to 2 million. He highlighted the

advanced healthcare facilities in Iran, where treatment costs are significantly lower compared to other countries, calling for maximization of this potential.

He announced plans to develop marine tourism and mentioned Iran's substantial pilgrimage capacity after Iraq. He called for active negotiations to attract tourists from neighboring countries, particularly those driving their own vehicles.

Stressing the need for a balanced distribution of tourists across provinces, he declared that achieving a target of 15 million visitors would require 1 million accommodations and necessary infrastructure enhancements. He encouraged governors to expedite the development of this infrastructure.

Addressing concerns about international perceptions of safety in Iran, he noted that Western media often portray Iran as unsafe, whereas the country is, in fact, one of the safer nations in the region. He stated, "85% of foreign tourists who visit Iran declare it a safe country," indicating a shift in perception.

He emphasized the economic benefits of attracting tourists from the Gulf region, Turkey, Iraq, the Caucasus, and Central Asia, and extended an invitation to Iranians living abroad to visit their homeland.

He pointed out the potential for private sector involvement in developing tourism infrastructure, emphasizing the need to complete 2,700 ongoing infrastructure projects in the country. He urged governors to support private investors and to facilitate their operations.

The minister reported that over 6.3 million foreign tourists visited Iran last year, with 5.7 million arrivals in the first nine months of this year—a 17% increase compared to the same period in 2022. He emphasized the goal of reaching 15 million tourists.

Lastly, he criticized the neglect of Iran's handicrafts sector, asserting that the country must focus on exporting these products. With handicrafts currently generating 224 million euros in exports, he highlighted the goal of increasing this figure, aiming for participation in the sector to grow from 500,000 to 1 million artisans by the end of the seventh development plan.

Cash Transactions Unbefitting for Iranian Traders



TEHRAN - During the meeting of the Iranian Chamber of Commerce's tenth term representative council, Head of the chamber Samad Hassanzadeh, the president of the chamber, addressed key issues facing the nation's economy, particularly regarding electricity supply and international trade.

Hassanzadeh reported that discussions with government officials, including the President, have been ongoing concerning electricity imbalances. He stated that future strategies to boost investments in electricity production have been proposed by the National Development Fund. The government aims to resolve electricity shortages before the upcoming summer, with the President emphasizing the urgency of this problem.

He shared that a team has been established to explore solar and wind energy opportunities and will present its findings by next Sunday. Additionally, there have been talks about the potential local production of solar panels, which could help meet energy needs.

Regarding a recent trip to Tajikistan alongside the President, Hassanzadeh noted that several economic activists from the Chamber accompanied the President. They engaged in multiple meetings with Tajik ministers, all expressing interest in collaborating, particularly in fields such as engineering, food, pharmaceuticals, and healthcare.

Hassanzadeh highlighted Tajikistan's favorable conditions for Iranian investment and exporting, mentioning the presence of five free trade zones that provide various tax exemptions, allowing Iranian traders to invest and export through these areas. He underscored Tajikistan's abundant water and gas resources, large limestone, and aluminum deposits as significant investment opportunities for Iranians.

On the delegation's recent trip to Turkey with the Minister of Agriculture, he referenced establishing a solid foundation for technology transfer between the two nations. He expressed his belief that Iranian farmers could benefit significantly from agricultural programs in both countries, given Turkey's strong agricultural export capabilities and Iran's skilled professionals. He mentioned that bilateral trade between Iran and Turkey reached \$12 billion and could potentially rise to \$30 billion.

Reflecting on the President's meeting with his Russian counterpart, Hassanzadeh hailed the signing of a comprehensive agreement between Iran and Russia as a positive development aimed at boosting the Iranian economy.

Insufficient Knowledge of Brazilian Market Poses Challenges for Iranian Traders



TEHRAN - The head of the Iran-Brazil Joint Chamber of Commerce has highlighted that the lack of adequate knowledge among Iranian traders regarding the Brazilian market is a significant barrier to trade between the two countries.

According to a report from the Iran-Brazil Joint Chamber of Commerce, Seyed Fakhraddin Amiriain made these remarks during a board meeting with the International Affairs Department of the Iran Chamber of Commerce. He noted that Brazil's market is largely untapped, presenting opportunities for Iranian companies and products, despite the presence of American, Chinese, and Indian firms.

Amerain emphasized the need for both the private and public sectors to adopt a new approach to trade with Brazil, especially in light of the favorable political and diplomatic relations and Brazil's upcoming presidency of the BRICS group in 2025.

He stated, "This change in approach must involve improving the domestic business environment and effectively utilizing available capacities to enhance the trade balance between the two countries."

The inclusion of Iran in the BRICS group provides a significant opportunity for Iranian traders this year, and economic actors are encouraged to take advantage of this to boost commercial relations with BRICS member countries, particularly Brazil.

Amerain affirmed that the Iran-Brazil Joint Chamber is prepared to play an effective role concerning BRICS policies by forming specialized working groups and committees to address relevant issues.

He also noted that the chamber is planning to send trade delegations in conjunction with the upcoming annual BRICS summit in Brazil, with more details to be shared in the coming weeks.

Seyed Hamed Asgari, Deputy of International Affairs at the Iran Chamber, stated that his department is working closely with the Joint Chamber to create strong opportunities for the private sector within the BRICS framework.

He added that the International Affairs Department intends to hold joint sessions with relevant officials to address BRICS-related topics and to tackle the challenges faced by Iranian traders in member countries, particularly Brazil. These challenges include legal issues, transportation, logistics, currency exchange, and more.

Tehran, Belgrade Explore Collaboration in Agricultural Research, Production, and Exports

TEHRAN - In a meeting attended by a Serbian delegation at the Karaj Chamber of Commerce, the potential for economic collaboration between Iran and Serbia in the fields of agricultural research, production, and exports was discussed. Effective dialogues were held in the form of B2B meetings, which are expected to enhance the economic and trade relations between the two countries.

Ahmad Gholami, Secretary-General of the Karaj Chamber, highlighted the significant industrial and agricultural capacities of Alborz Province, stating, "With a population of about 3 million, Alborz occupies less than half a percent of Iran's total area, yet it holds a superior position in the country due to its production and industrial capabilities." He noted that the Alborz Chamber is the youngest chamber of commerce in the country and is currently in its fourth term of operation.

Gholami pointed out that nearly 4,000 industrial units are located in Alborz, along with 160 national brands that make up a significant portion of active companies in the agricultural processing and food industries. Moreover, the presence of 12 state and privately-owned industrial parks contributes to the province's economic profile.

He also mentioned the Eshahard Industrial Park as one of the largest industrial parks in the Middle East, stating that Alborz has 68,000 hectares of cultivated agricultural and orchard land, and ranks prominently in the country with 480 knowledge-based companies.

The Secretary-General of the Karaj Chamber expressed that Iran and Serbia could be strong trade partners, mentioning that in addition to agriculture, there are significant capacities in the pharmaceutical industries in Alborz. He noted that a large portion of Iran's pharmaceutical exports, especially in biotechnology, is conducted from this province, which is also home to the Berek Pharmaceutical Special Economic Zone. Other manufacturing capacities of Alborz relevant for trade interactions with Serbia include food, cosmetics and hygiene products, construction, textiles, and automotive parts.

During the meeting, Siamak Kolbadi, head of the Iranian Trade Center in Serbia, discussed Serbia's economic advancements, stating, "Serbia has experienced substantial economic growth before, during,



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and after the COVID-19 pandemic. By 2025, it is projected to become the second fastest-growing country in the EU if it joins the union."

He further outlined large industrial projects undertaken in collaboration with Serbia in Iran, reiterating that the Serbian government is pursuing trade agreements with various countries, including those in the Eurasian region, and is currently negotiating with the Islamic Republic of Iran. He emphasized Serbia's role as one of the few countries that supported Iran during sanctions,

underscoring its high technical potential, which facilitates investment and the transfer of factory capabilities from around the world.

During the meeting, Seyed Reza Seyed Aghazadeh, Deputy for International Affairs at the Karaj Chamber, emphasized the effective dialogue that took place with the Serbian representatives, which occurred during the B2B sessions.

Aghazadeh noted that the friendly relations between Iran and Serbia, alongside cultural and economic connections, pave the way for further cooperation between the two parties.

He pointed out that Iran's capacity to export agricultural equipment and machinery to Serbia could significantly enhance collaboration in this area.

Following the discussions between the Serbian delegation and Alborz companies and unions active in agriculture and agricultural processing during the B2B meetings, new opportunities for economic and commercial cooperation arose. These interactions are expected to strengthen bilateral relations and capitalize on the potential of both sides, particularly in the fields of innovation and advanced technologies that could improve product quality and increase exports.

Additionally, these negotiations serve as a platform for exchanging experiences and technical knowledge between Iran and Serbia, contributing to sustainable development and economic growth in both countries.

After the meeting, the Serbian delegation visited the permanent exhibition of the production and industrial capabilities of the Karaj Chamber of Commerce.

Collaboration Agreement Signed Between Karaj Chamber, Trade Center in Makhachkala



TEHRAN - Karaj Chamber of Commerce and the Iran Trade Center in Makhachkala, Russia, have signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) aimed at facilitating trade for individuals and legal entities from Karaj in Russia.

According to a report from the public relations department of Karaj Chamber, the focus of this bilateral cooperation is to identify, invite, and introduce Iranian producers of goods and services. This will allow for exclusive contracts between individuals introduced by Karaj Chamber and the Iran Trade Center in Makhachkala, as well as participation in the center's permanent exhibition, thereby assisting in marketing, market creation, and branding for the interested parties.

Furthermore, if the marketing activities conducted by the Iran Trade Center for individuals introduced by Karaj Chamber result in contract agreements, the center will receive a percentage as a commission. Otherwise, there will be no charges for the companies.

Seyed Reza Seyed Aghazadeh, the international affairs deputy of Karaj Chamber, stated that companies introduced by Karaj Chamber will sign agreements with the Iran Trade Center in Makhachkala upon reaching a final consensus. He emphasized that this collaboration will aid companies in Alborz province in introducing their exported products to the Russian market.

He noted that the offices of the Iran Trade Centers, licensed by the Iran Trade Development Organization, are operational not only in Makhachkala but also in other regions in Russia, including Moscow. He described Makhachkala port in Dagestan as a gateway for Iranian goods into Russia, which can create new economic opportunities for exporters and traders from Alborz province.

High Approval Rating for Indonesia's Prabowo After First 100 Days

JAKARTA (Dispatches) - Nearly 81% of Indonesians approve of President Prabowo Subianto after 100 days in office, a poll showed on Monday, attributing the high rating to his early delivery on campaign promises.

The Jan. 4-10 survey by the research unit of newspaper Kompas, showed 80.9% of the 1,000 respondents were satisfied because of his people-oriented leadership and that he had made a start on most of his campaign platforms.

Prabowo also had a good image as a president, 94.1% of respondents said.

Prabowo took office in October last year after winning a presidential election by a huge margin, with Gibran Rakabuming Raka, son of predecessor Joko Widodo, his running mate. Prabowo beat Widodo's score of 65.1% after his first 100 days.



South Korean Court Extends Detention of Impeached President Yoon Suk Yeol



SEOUL (Dispatches) - A South Korean court issued a warrant early Sunday allowing for the extended detention of the country's impeached President Yoon Suk Yeol, as investigators probe his failed martial law bid.

Tens of thousands of Yoon's backers had rallied outside the court on Saturday and scuffled with police as they chanted support for the suspended leader, who plunged South Korea into its worst political chaos in decades with his bid to suspend civilian rule.

The president's December 3 martial law declaration lasted just six hours, with lawmakers voting it down despite him ordering soldiers to storm parliament to stop them. He was impeached soon after.

Yoon was detained in a dawn raid Wednesday on insurrection charges after he refused investigators' summons and went to ground in his residence, using his presidential security detail to resist arrest.

South Korea's first sitting president to be detained, Yoon also declined to cooperate during the initial 48 hours detectives were allowed to hold him.

The disgraced leader, who attended court for the first time on Saturday over his case, will now remain in custody after investigators requested—and were granted—a new warrant to extend his detention.

The Seoul Western District Court's warrant allows investigators to keep him in custody for up to 20 days, including time already spent in detention since Wednesday.

After Saturday's hearing, Yoon's lawyer Yoon Kab-keun said the president "explained and answered faithfully regarding the facts, evidence, and legal issues".

Analysts had said it would have been unlikely for the court to free Yoon.

Crowds of Yoon's backers gathered outside the building, waving flags and holding "release the president" placards. Yonhap said police estimated up to 44,000 supporters had rushed to the area.

A total of 40 protesters were arrested for physically assaulting police officers, attacking a member of the media, or attempting to enter the court building, among other offences, a district police official in Seoul told AFP.

Israeli Hostages, Palestinian Detainees Freed on First Gaza Truce Exchange



GAZA (Dispatches) - Israel released 90 Palestinian prisoners after Hamas handed over three Israeli hostages, completing the first exchange under a long-awaited truce aimed at ending more than 15 months of war in Gaza.

The three hostages released yesterday, all women, were reunited with their families and taken to hospital in central Israel where a doctor said they were in stable condition.

Hours later in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, Palestinian prisoners released by Israel in exchange left Ofer prison on buses at around 1:00am (2300 GMT Sunday), with jubilant crowds celebrating their arrival in the nearby town of Beitunia.

As the ceasefire took effect on yesterday morning, thousands of displaced, war-weary Palestinians set off across the devastated Gaza Strip to return home.

In the northern area of Jabalia, hundreds streamed down a sandy path, heading to an apocalyptic landscape piled with rubble and destroyed buildings.

"We are finally in our home. There is no home left, just rubble, but it's our home," said Rana Mohsen, 43, back in Jabalia.

The initial 42-day truce was brokered by Qatari, US and Egyptian mediators.

It is meant to enable a surge of sorely needed humanitarian aid into Gaza, as more Israeli hostages are released in exchange for Palestinians in Israeli custody, Israeli forces leave some areas and the parties negotiate the terms of a permanent ceasefire.

The three Israeli ex-hostages, Emily Damari, Romi Gonen and Doron Steinbrecher, were taken back to Israel by security forces after Hamas fighters handed them over to the Red Cross in a bustling square in Gaza city, surrounded by a sea of people, including gunmen.

"After 471 days Emily is finally home," said her mother Mandy Damari, but "for too many other families the impossible wait continues".

Steinbrecher's family said in a statement that "our heroic Dodo, who survived 471 days in Hamas captivity, begins her rehabilitation journey today".

In central Tel Aviv, there was elation among the crowd who had waited for hours for the news of their release.

The Hostages and Missing Families Forum campaign group hailed their return as "a beacon of light", while Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said they had emerged "from darkness".

During this initial truce, 33 Israeli hostages, 31 of whom were taken by militants during Hamas's Oct 7, 2023 attack, are due to be returned from Gaza in exchange for around 1,900 Palestinians.

Of those, more than 230 Palestinian prisoners serving life sentences for deadly attacks against Israelis are slated for deportation, according to a list made public by the Israeli authorities. Two Hamas officials said the prisoners would be deported mainly to Qatar or Turkey.

The Israel Prison Service confirmed the release of 90 prisoners early Monday.

In Beitunia, near Ofer prison, AFP journalists saw crowds cheering and chanting as buses carrying the freed inmates arrived, with some climbing atop the lead bus and unfurling a Hamas flag.

The next hostage-prisoner swap would take place on Saturday, a senior Hamas official told AFP.

Minutes after the truce began, the United Nations said the first trucks carrying desperately needed humanitarian aid had entered the Palestinian territory.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres welcomed the truce, saying "it is imperative that this ceasefire removes the significant security and political obstacles to delivering aid".

The truce is intended to pave the way for a permanent end to the war, but a second phase has yet to be finalised.

It came into effect nearly three hours later than scheduled, and during the delay, Gaza rescuers said Israeli bombardment killed 19 people.

Thousands of Palestinians carrying tents, clothes and their personal belongings were seen going home yesterday, after the war that displaced the vast majority of Gazans, in many cases more than once.

Returning Jabalia resident Walid Abu Jiab said he found "massive, unprecedented destruction", with "nothing left" in Gaza's war-battered north, which has seen intense violence over the past months.

In Deir el-Balah, in central Gaza, displaced woman Umm Hasan al-Buzom, 70, said she would even "crawl my way back home" if needed.

At Least 80 Killed, Thousands Displaced in Colombian Guerrilla Violence



BOGOTA (Dispatches) - A fresh outbreak of guerrilla violence amid a faltering peace process in Colombia has left more than 80 people dead, including civilians, and displaced thousands in just four days, officials reported.

As residents fled for their lives, the army deployed some 5,000 troops to the cocaine-growing Catumbo region at the center of a fast-escalating territorial war.

The National Liberation Army (ELN) armed group, officials said, launched an assault in Catumbo last Thursday on a rival formation comprised of ex-members of the now-defunct FARC guerrilla force who kept fighting after it disarmed in 2017.

Civilians found themselves caught in the middle, and by Sunday, it was estimated that "more than 80 people have lost their lives," according to governor William Villamizar of the Norte de Santander department.

Terrified residents carrying backpacks and belongings on overlaiden motorcycles, boats, or crammed onto the backs of open trucks, fled the region over the weekend.

TikTok Restores Service in U.S.

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - TikTok restored service in the United States yesterday after briefly going dark, as a law banning the wildly popular app on national security grounds came into effect.

The video-sharing platform credited President-elect Donald Trump, who retakes power today, for making the reversal possible — though the outgoing administration of President Joe Biden had earlier said that it would not enforce any ban.

TikTok had shut down in the United States late Saturday as a deadline loomed for its Chinese owners ByteDance to sell its US subsidiary to non-Chinese buyers.

Earlier on Sunday, as millions of dismayed users found themselves barred from the app, Trump promised to issue an executive order delaying the ban to allow time to "make a deal."

He also called in a post on his Truth Social platform for the United States to take part ownership in TikTok.

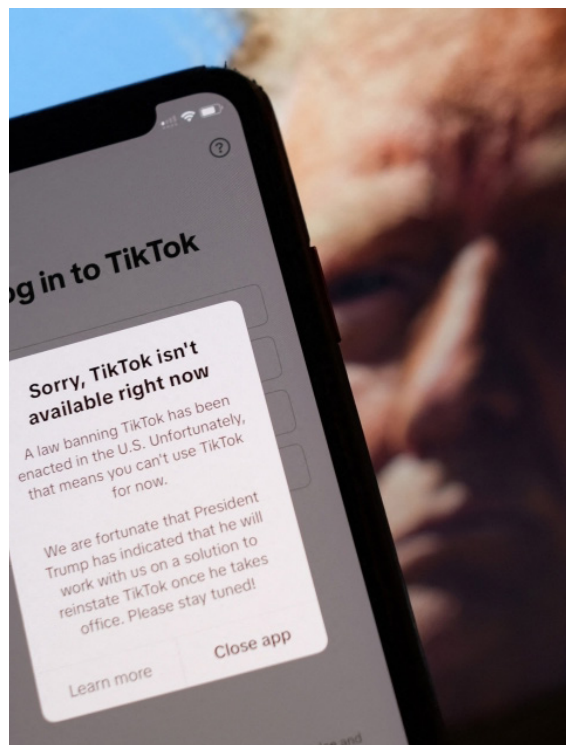
Trump said he "would like the United States to have a 50% ownership position in a joint venture," arguing that the app's value could surge to "hundreds of billions of dollars — maybe trillions."

"By doing this, we save TikTok, keep it in good hands," wrote Trump, who had previously backed a TikTok ban and during his first term in office made moves towards one.

In a statement posted on X following Trump's comments, TikTok said it "is in the process of restoring service."

"We thank President Trump for providing the necessary clarity and assurance to our service providers that they will face no penalties providing TikTok to over 170 million Americans."

TikTok, which was back online in the United States by yesterday afternoon, did not address Trump's call for part American ownership of the app.



Wedbush Securities analyst Dan Ives told AFP the episode "marked a big win for TikTok and a political win for Trump," likening the episode to "high-stakes poker between the US and China."

At a pre-election rally yesterday evening at a Washington sports arena, Trump hammered home his enthusiasm for saving the app, telling the crowd: "Frankly, we have no choice, we have to save it," while indicating that there were a "lot of jobs" involved.

"We don't want to give our business to China, we don't want to give our business to other people," Trump told his supporters.

The law allows for a 90-day delay of the ban if the White House can show progress toward a viable deal, but so far ByteDance has flatly refused any sale. The Biden administration said it would leave enforcement of the law to Trump.

From teenage dancers to grandmothers sharing cooking tips, TikTok has been embraced for its ability to transform ordinary users into global celebrities when a video goes viral.

But it is also rife with disinformation, and its Chinese ownership has long spurred national security fears, internationally as well as in the United States.

The blackout came after the US Supreme Court on Friday upheld the legislation banning it pending any sale.

Trump, who signed an executive order stepping up pressure on ByteDance to sell in 2020, has since credited the app with connecting him to younger voters. It is unclear what the incoming president can do to lift the ban unless ByteDance ultimately sells, however.

"Congress wrote this law to be virtually president-proof," warned Adam Kovacevich, chief executive of industry trade group Chamber of Progress.

Oxfam Report Finds Billionaires' Wealth Soared in 2024

LONDON (Dispatches) - Billionaires' wealth grew three times faster in 2024 than the year before, a top anti-poverty group reported on Monday as some of the world's political and financial elite prepared for an annual gathering in Davos, Switzerland.

Oxfam International, in its latest assessment of global inequality timed to the opening of the World Economic Forum meeting, also predicts at least five trillionaires will crop up over the next decade. A year ago, the group forecast that only one trillionaire would appear during that time.

Oxfam's research adds weight to a warning by outgoing President Joe Biden last week of a "dangerous concentration of power in the hands of very few ultra-wealthy people." The group's sharp-edged report, titled "Takers Not Makers," also says the number of people in poverty has barely budged since 1990.

The World Economic Forum expects to host some 3,000 attendees, including business executives, academics, government officials, and civic group leaders at its annual meeting in the Alpine village of Davos.

President-elect Donald Trump, who visited Davos twice during his first term and was set to take the oath of office on Monday, is expected to take part in the forum's event by video on Thursday. He has long championed wealth accumulation — including his own — and counts multibillionaire Elon Musk as a top adviser.

"What you're seeing at the moment is a billionaire president taking oaths



today, backed by the richest man. So this is pretty much the jewel in the crown of the global oligarchies," Amitabh Behar, executive director of Oxfam International, said in an interview, referring to Trump and Musk.

"It's not about one specific individual. It's the economic system that we have created where the billionaires are now pretty much being able to shape economic policies, social policies, which eventually gives them more and more profit," he added.

Like Biden's call for making billionaires "begin to pay their fair share" through the US tax code, Oxfam — a global advocacy group — called on governments to tax the richest to reduce inequality and extreme wealth, and to "dismantle the new aristocracy."

The group called for steps like the break-up of monopolies, capping CEO pay, and regulation of corporations to ensure they pay "living wages" to workers.

Many investors racked up strong gains in 2024, with strong performances for top tech companies and stock-market indexes like the S&P 500, as well as the price of gold and cryptocurrencies like Bitcoin.

Oxfam said billionaire wealth grew by \$2 trillion last year, or roughly \$5.7 billion a day, three-times faster than in 2023. The number of billionaires rose by 204 to 2,769, and the 10 richest men saw their wealth rise nearly \$100 million a day on average, it said.



Djokovic Marches Into Melbourne Quarters With Alcaraz

MELBOURNE (Dispatches) - Irrepressible 10-time champion Novak Djokovic set up a blockbuster Australian Open quarter-final with Carlos Alcaraz after downing Czech Jiri Lehecka. The 37-year-old Serb, who is gunning for a record 25th Grand Slam title, beat the 24th seed 6-3, 6-4, 7-6 (7/4) on Rod Laver Arena.

It sent him into the last eight at Melbourne Park for a 15th time, a record he now shares with Roger Federer and one ahead of Rafael Nadal and John Newcombe.

The win also extended his own all-time mark to 61 for most quarter-final appearances at majors, three ahead of the Swiss great.

His reward is a showdown on Tuesday with third seed Alcaraz, who is already a four-time Slam winner aged 21 but has never gone beyond the Australian Open quarter-finals.

The Spaniard set up the clash after Briton Jack Draper retired during their last-16 match when losing 7-5, 6-1.

"Being in a quarter-final, I'm going to approach the match the same as I did in the previous matches against him, and let's see," said Alcaraz of Djokovic.

"When we are seeing him playing, he seems like he's young again, so... It's unbelievable. He's in a really good shape."

But the Spaniard added: "I'm just ready and I know what I have to do in quarter-finals."

Djokovic and Alcaraz have played each other seven times with the Serb leading 4-3, including victory in their last clash in the Paris Olympics final.

They have crossed paths at Grand Slams three times, twice in the Wimbledon decider with the Spaniard winning on both occasions.

But they have never played at Melbourne Park, where Djokovic has achieved his greatest success.

Lehecka won the lead-up Brisbane International event, where Djokovic lost in the quarter-finals, but he was never seriously in the reckoning on the big stage.

Djokovic quickly put pressure on his serve and achieved a break in the eighth game of set one when the Czech sent down a double fault.

Another break on Lehecka's opening serve set the tone for set two with Djokovic dominating from the baseline.

The young Czech changed tactics in a closer set three, pushing Djokovic to the net more while picking up his serving intensity.

It went to a tiebreak where the Serb produced some stunning shots to seal the win.

Against Draper, Alcaraz was well on top when the Briton pulled the pin on a sweltering afternoon because of "multiple areas really in pain".

The 15th seed Draper needed five sets to win his first three Melbourne matches, rallying from behind in all of them to stay in the tournament, and it finally caught up with him.

"It's not the way I wanted to win. But obviously I'm happy to play another quarter-final here in Australia," said Alcaraz.

"Physically, I'm feeling great. So coming into the second week of a Grand Slam it is important to feel well physically because right now the matches are even tougher."

Meanwhile Ukraine's Elina Svitolina recovered from a sub-par first 20 minutes to charge past Russian Veronika Kudrmetova 6-4 6-1 and reach the last eight of the Australian Open for the third time.

The 30-year-old was 4-1 down in the first set but upped her aggression to rattle off the next five games and put one foot in the quarter-finals at a Grand Slam for the 12th time.

Kudrmetova had a medical treatment at the end of the first set but could not stop the rot as Svitolina broke for 3-1 in the second stanza with a volley at the net.

The Ukrainian was by now charged with confidence and soon set up a tie against six-seeded Kazakh Elena Rybakina or American Madison Keys by sending another thunderous backhand winner down the Rod Laver Arena court.

Brignone Wins Cortina Super-G, Vonn Crashes Out



CORTINA D'AMPEZZO (Dispatches) - Italy's Federica Brignone won the super-G race at Cortina on Sunday, her first World Cup win at the Italian course extending her overall lead, while Lindsey Vonn gave the crowd a scare when crashing out on the third sector but emerged unharmed.

Vonn, four-times overall World Cup champion with 82 wins, retired in 2019 after suffering several injuries but the American announced her comeback in November.

The 40-year-old had her best finish since her return last weekend, coming fourth in a Super-G race in St Anton but at Cortina fellow competitors and fans held their breath when Vonn crashed after leaning into a bend.

The American was quickly back on her feet, but it was a disappointing end when she had looked set to post a decent time, going fourth fastest in the second sector, having finished 20th in Saturday's downhill event.

"I'm not so happy. I know my skiing is good and I can be fast," Vonn told Italian broadcaster Rai Sport.

"My ambitions were different for this weekend.

Brignone's 31st World Cup win never looked in doubt, with the Italian, the seventh skier out the gate, setting a time of one minute 21.64 seconds, and she celebrated wildly at the finish despite so many of her rivals having still to race.

"Today I really attacked, I felt fast, at one point I felt a bit long but I still had a good feeling and I was aware that I had done a good race," Brignone said.

"Let's hope this is the right time."

Man United Slumps at Home to Brighton

LONDON (Dispatches) - Manchester United slumped to a 3-1 defeat at home to Brighton as Old Trafford remembered the legendary Denis Law, while Tottenham's troubles also persisted as they lost 3-2 at Everton.

Manchester City roared back into form with a 6-0 thrashing of Ipswich, while Nottingham Forest's unlikely title challenge goes on after a 3-2 victory over Southampton took Nuno Espirito Santo's men level with second-placed Arsenal.

On an emotional day as United paid tribute to one of the club's greatest ever players in Law, Ruben Amorim conceded this version of the Red Devils is the "worst team maybe in the history of Manchester United."

A thrilling 2-2 draw at Liverpool and FA Cup victory over Arsenal earlier this month look like another false dawn for United fans.

After Amad Diallo's late hat-trick papered over the cracks in a 3-1 win over bottom-of-the-table Southampton in midweek, Brighton exposed the glaring holes in the foundations of Amorim's United project.

Yankuba Minteh, Kaoru Mitoma and Georginio Rutter struck for the Seagulls, who won for the third consecutive season at Old Trafford.

United remain 13th but enjoy a 10-point cushion over the bottom



three.

"We can't be comfortable in thinking that this is ok, because it is not," said United captain Bruno Fernandes.

"I'm not here to lose games and be in the position we are in at the moment."

Before kick-off, tributes were paid to Law, who is the third top scorer in United's history, with 237 goals in 404 appearances.

A piper played Scottish anthem "Flower of Scotland" as the teams walked out, with United legends Alex Ferguson, Brian Kidd, Paddy Crerand and Alex Stepney on the pitch as a eulogy was read out over

the tannoy.

Tottenham are now winless in six league games after Everton boosted their survival chances with the first victory of David Moyes' second spell in charge.

The goal-shy Toffees had failed to score in nine of their previous 11 league games but struck three times before the break.

Dominic Calvert Lewin's first goal since September opened the scoring before a brilliant individual run and finish from Iliman Ndiaye.

Archie Gray's own goal compounded Tottenham's misery.

Late goals from Dejan Kulusevski and Richarlison reduced Spurs' deficit but could not prevent a 12th defeat in 22 games.

"It is a challenging situation for sure, when you are losing players the amount we are at the moment," said under-fire Tottenham boss Ange Postecoglou, who was without 10 first-team regulars.

"It's up to me to get us out of it and I've got to be good enough to do that."

Everton pull four points clear of the bottom three and within four points of 15th-placed Tottenham.

Pakistan's Khan, Ahmed Help to Crush West Indies in First Test



ISLAMABAD (Dispatches) - Sajid Khan and Abrar Ahmed led the charge for Pakistan, bundling out West Indies for 123 to win the first test in Multan by 127 runs on the third day as spinners ruled the roost.

It was the shortest completed men's test match in Pakistan with 40 wickets falling in 1064 balls.

Spinners took 16 wickets on Sunday as Jomel Warrican's seven-wicket haul restricted Pakistan's second innings to 157, setting a target of 251 for West Indies, who failed to get a partnership going on the turn-heavy track.

"It's hard out there. Batting was hard," Pakistan captain Shan Masood said.

"In the second innings, we folded cheaply. There are improvements to be made. When you win, you can go on a happy ride and be happy. But we can't do that."

Pakistan, who had a 93-run lead after the first innings, started from an overnight score of 109-3, but Warrican struck early, dismissing Saud Shakeel and Mohammad Rizwan in his successive overs.

Warrican's destructive spell continued with Kamran Ghulam (27) getting caught behind soon after and, with Salman Agha (14) becoming Gudakesh Motie's solitary wicket of the innings, the hosts collapsed, having lost seven wickets in 48 runs.

"We'll take a look at how Warrican bowled. As spinners we should take a look at that. He was bringing the batters forward," West Indies captain Kraigg Braithwaite said.

Braithwaite (12) was the first to fall when the visitors began the chase as he tried to hit Khan for a six but ended up finding Khuram Shahzad at deep mid-wicket.

Keacy Carty (6) tried to sweep Khan, but the ball nicked his glove and was caught by wicketkeeper Rizwan. Khan bamboozled Kavem Hodge (0) and Mikyle Louis (13) soon after, bowling them out with sharp turns as West Indies fell to 37-4.

Alick Athanaze (55) put up a fight, scoring quick runs to put the pressure back on the bowlers. But Ahmed kept knocking batters down at the other end, as Tevin Imlach (14) and Kevin Sinclair (10) fell before they could fully settle down.

Athanaze was finally trapped leg before wicket by Khan, and a defiant Warrican was the last to fall as he was bowled out for a duck trying to reverse sweep Ahmed.

"The wicket had a lot of turn and bounce... it was our strategy to throttle the runs. If we could do that, wickets would come automatically," said Khan.

He took nine wickets in the test, including five in the second innings in a player-of-the-match performance.

Pakistan have now won three home tests in a row, having beaten England twice to win their three-match series 2-1 in October.

Bucks Make Quick Work of Short-Handed 76ers

LONDON (Dispatches) - Giannis Antetokounmpo scored 34 points and grabbed 15 boards to lead the host Milwaukee Bucks to a 123-109 win over the short-handed Philadelphia 76ers on Sunday evening.

It marked the fourth win in a row for Milwaukee. Damian Lillard added 25 points thanks to a 16-point fourth quarter, while Khris Middleton chipped in 13 points to go along with eight assists off the bench.

Tyrese Maxey had 37 points on 14-of-28 shooting to lead Philadelphia, which was without Joel Embiid (left knee injury management) and Paul George (groin), among others. Four other Sixers scored in double figures, including Kelly Oubre Jr., who finished with 19 points. The 76ers have dropped six straight games.

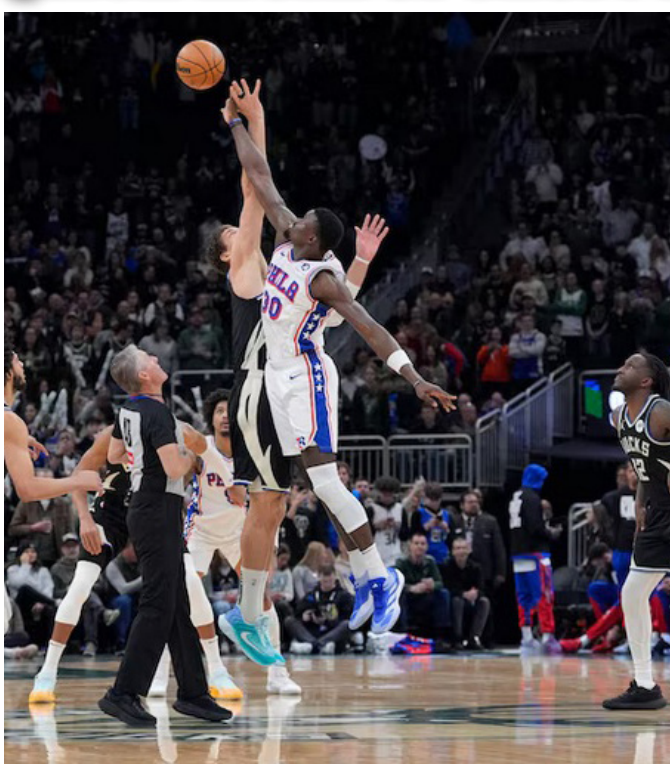
Milwaukee led 30-21 after the first quarter thanks in large part to 12 points from Antetokounmpo. However, Philadelphia responded.

A 10-0 76ers run to start the second quarter gave the visitors the lead. It took the Bucks over four minutes to make a field-goal attempt in the quarter, but they got back on track late in the frame to take a 59-50 lead into halftime.

Milwaukee was just 5-for-18 from deep before the break but shot 46.9 percent from the floor compared to 40.9 percent for Philadelphia.

After a poor start to the third quarter and a 6-2 spurt from Philadelphia that brought the 76ers' deficit down to just five, 61-56, Milwaukee would slowly pick it back up offensively and go into the fourth up 90-81.

The Bucks found their stroke from deep to start the fourth, with Lillard and Brook Lopez combining for three 3-pointers in the first



three minutes of the final quarter to put Milwaukee up 101-90 with 8:57 to go.

Lillard ended up with three triples in his big fourth quarter, which allowed him to reach the 22,000-point plateau for his career. The Bucks led by as many as 16 in the final 12 minutes of action.

Meanwhile Shai Gilgeous-Alexander collected 27 points and 10 assists to lead the Oklahoma City Thunder to a 127-101 win over the visiting Brooklyn Nets on Sunday.

The Thunder have won 20 of their past 23 games overall and 12 straight in Oklahoma City.

While Gilgeous-Alexander returned after missing Friday's loss to the Dallas Mavericks, the Thunder were without Jalen Williams for the first time this season. Williams missed the game with a right hip strain.

Gilgeous-Alexander didn't show any ill effects from the wrist sprain that kept him out on Friday, hanging off the rim for several seconds after a first-quarter dunk.

The Nets missed their first eight shots, failing to convert a field-goal attempt until the 7:29 mark of the first quarter.

While Brooklyn struggled offensively early, Oklahoma City got off to a hot start, primarily from the perimeter.

Oklahoma City hit nine 3-pointers (on 13 attempts) in the first quarter, getting a 4-for-5 showing from beyond the arc from Isaiah Joe in the first 12 minutes of action.

Brooklyn was just 2 of 14 from beyond the arc in the first quarter, and the Thunder led by as many as 27 points in the period.