Iranian Foreign Minister Is Scheduled to Pay an Official Visit to Oman on Monday and the Netherlands Later Next Week to Attend the Annual Conference of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) in The Hague

IRAN NEWS

Shina Ansari, Vice President and Head of the Department of Environment, Says That International Negotiations Are in Progress to Secure Support for Firefighting Efforts in the Affected Areas of the Elit Region of Chalous, Iran

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2 DOMESTIC

Iranian Companies Propose Establishing Mineral Processing Hub for Afghanistan at Border Zone

> SEE PAGE 2

3 INTERNATIONAL

Ukraine Faces Difficult Choice as Trump Demands Acceptance of Peace Plan

> SEE PAGE 3

Iran Prioritizes Inflation Control and Budget Deficit Reduction

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Minister of Economic Affairs and Finance, Seyed Ali Madani-Zadeh, emphasized that the government is placing inflation control and the correction of structural budget imbalances at the top of its economic agenda amid persistent economic challenges. Speaking at the Annual Iran Capital Market Conference on Saturday, which was attended by the President and leading figures from the country's financial sector, Madani-Zadeh outlined the government's strategy for stabilizing the economy and supporting households.

"Today, the Iranian economy is grappling with high inflation, stagnation, and declining long-term growth," Madani-Zadeh said. "The government has therefore prioritized policies aimed at reducing the budget deficit, controlling liquidity pressures on the Central Bank, and protecting household livelihoods. These are the main pillars of our economic strategy in the coming months."

The minister described the three primary challenges facing the Iranian economy. "First, there is inflation, which is significant and affects all sectors. Second, the economy is experiencing a noticeable recession this year. And third, long-term growth has been declining for over a decade," he noted.

Madani-Zadeh highlighted that these challenges have both external and internal causes. On the international front, developments have contributed to structural imbalances, slower long-term economic growth, and inflation. While addressing these external factors largely involves Iran's foreign policy and international affairs teams, coordination with the government's economic team is ongoing.

Domestically, the minister criticized past interventions in markets, describing them as predominantly price-based or state-led. "Such interventions have led to severe reductions in capital and labor productivity, with the inevitable outcome being persistent inflation and continuous increases in the exchange rate," he explained. "Ultimately, this has resulted in an unfavorable combination of high inflation and declining long-term economic growth."

A key area of concern, Madani-Zadeh said, is energy. "Currently, energy imbalances, particularly in electricity and gas, are seriously hampering economic growth. Policies on energy pricing in previous years have reduced investment returns in this sector. Consequently, investors have little incentive to reinvest, leading to declining production and increasing consumption."

He added that energy prices have largely remained fixed in nominal terms, failing to adjust with inflation. "As a result, energy has effectively become cheaper over time, driving higher consumption in both households and industries and deepening structural imbalances," Madani-Zadeh noted.

He further stressed that these factors together have contributed not only to long-term slower growth but also to the emergence of recession and inflation in the current year.

Madani-Zadeh also referenced external shocks, including the ongoing regional instability and the ambiguous "neither war nor peace" situation that emerged in the latter half of the previous year. "This uncertainty has created operational challenges for many production units, reduced investment, and exacerbated recession," he said.

He emphasized that the current economic condition is characterized by a combination of high inflation and slowed short-term growth. "The inflation we are witnessing is the cumulative effect of these domestic and international factors and presents an accurate reflection of Iran's macroeconomic situation," he explained.

In response to these challenges, the minister stated that the government has designed a comprehensive set of programs across multiple sectors, all coordinated through the Economic Headquarters of the government. "Our immediate focus is controlling inflation, which has reached unprecedented levels," he said.

Madani-Zadeh stressed that the government's current priority is to support household livelihoods while simultaneously implementing medium-term strategies to address structural budget imbalances. He noted that the President has repeatedly emphasized the importance of this issue, holding numerous meetings at both governmental and parliamentary levels.

"The government aims to reduce budgetary imbalances, control deficits, and alleviate pressures on the Central Bank. Liquidity pressures and budget deficits are among the primary drivers of inflation," he added.

He concluded by affirming the administration's commitment to tackling structural economic challenges while maintaining social stability and supporting the most vulnerable segments of society. "Through these policies, we aim to create a more sustainable economic environment, curb inflation, and lay the groundwork for long-term growth," Madani-Zadeh said.

Iran Welcomes Dialogue With Lebanon

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi says the country welcomes any dialogue aimed at strengthening bilateral relations with Lebanon, while underlining that Tehran does not interfere in the country's internal affairs.

"My dear friend, Lebanese Foreign Minister Youssef Rajji, has invited me for negotiations in an interview with MTV Lebanon," Araqchi wrote in Arabic on his X account in response to his Lebanese counterpart's public invitation for talks.

Reaffirming Iran's position, Araqchi added, "We do not interfere in Lebanon's internal affairs, but we welcome any dialogue aimed at advancing bilateral relations between Iran and Lebanon."

He further underscored that there is no need for a third party to facilitate such discussions. "I invite my colleague Youssef to travel to Tehran, and if I am invited to travel to Beirut, I will gladly accept," he stated.

Iran has repeatedly reiterated that it respects Lebanon's sovereignty and does not interfere in the Arab country's domestic affairs.

Back in August, the Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council (SNSC), Ali Larijani, expressed the Islamic Republic's unwavering support for the government and people of Lebanon in various circumstances, dismissing allegations that Iran seeks to interfere in Lebanon's internal affairs.

Iran Takes Major Step in Developing Farzad B Gas Field Shared With Saudi Arabia

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

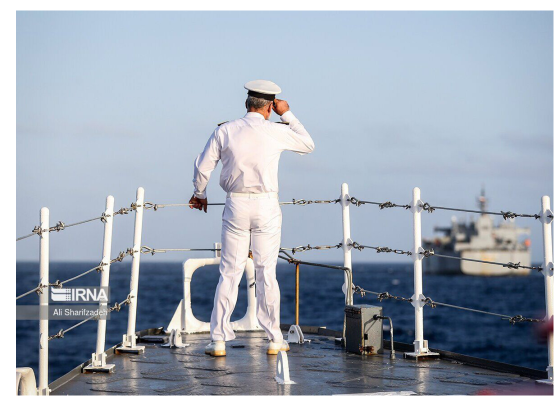
TEHRAN - Iran has completed a key stage in the development of the Farzad B offshore gas field in the Persian Gulf, a reservoir shared with Saudi Arabia. The latest achievement marks the first practical progress by Iran in tapping this field after more than two decades of stalled negotiations and delays.

The milestone involves the successful "roll-up" installation of the jacket (steel platform foundation) for the Farzad B gas platform, a structure now ready for offshore loading and installation. According to the Pars Oil & Gas Company, the operation was completed on November 19 with full domestic engineering and construction capabilities.

Located on the maritime border between Iran and Saudi Arabia near the center of the Persian Gulf, the reservoir is known as Farzad B on the Iranian side and "Arabiyah" on the Saudi side. The field is estimated to hold about 23 trillion cubic feet of natural gas.

An initial agreement to explore and develop Farzad B was signed in 2000 with a consortium of three Indian state-owned companies. While exploration was completed, development never began due to protracted negotiations. Talks continued for 15 years until India withdrew in 2014, citing sanctions. Further delays occurred when Iran continued trying to renegotiate with India, despite the option to approach other international partners.

Iranian Flag Now Flies Strong Across the Oceans



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - The Deputy Commander of the Islamic Republic of Iran Navy said on Friday that the Iranian flag is now being raised with dignity and power across the world's oceans.

Speaking at a ceremony marking Book and Reading Week at the Navy's University of Science and Technology, Rear Admiral Faramarz Bameni emphasized the vital role of the Navy during the Iran-Iraq War and highlighted the importance of strengthening reading culture as a foundation for the scientific and operational capabilities of Iran's armed forces.

Bameni honored the memory of martyrs, prisoners of war, and naval veterans, saying that the early naval operations during the first months of the war, particularly from October to December, demonstrated unmatched bravery and sacrifice. "Today, it is our duty to continue the path of these martyrs with sincerity and a spirit of devotion," he added.

He noted that many naval combatants entered battles under extremely difficult conditions in the depths of the Persian Gulf, relying on their faith and devotion to the Prophet's household. He described the families of martyrs as the nation's greatest spiritual assets and emphasized respect for them as a national responsibility.

Highlighting the Navy's current capabilities, Bameni said: "Today, the flag of the Islamic Republic of Iran is being raised with honor and authority on the oceans and is sailing around the world. This achievement is the result of the sacrifice and devotion of those who fought during the Sacred Defense."

President Warns Against Turning Hijab Issue into Social Conflict

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - President Masoud Pezeshkian has urged officials and society to avoid using the issue of hijab and modesty as a tool for political dispute, stressing that real social reform requires wisdom, sincerity, and respect for human dignity.

Speaking during the closing session of the National Unity Government's visit to Qazvin Province, Pezeshkian emphasized that "no form of force or coercion can replace inner belief and understanding." He said matters of culture, particularly hijab, must be addressed through behavior grounded in respect rather than confrontation.

Pezeshkian devoted a significant part of his speech to Iran's development policies, warning that growth without understanding environmental limits threatens the country's future. He said development decisions must align with natural capacities, noting that Qazvin's groundwater levels drop nearly 1.5 meters each year and over 90% of its water comes from wells. This, he said, marks "the end of one phase of exploitation" and requires serious planning for the future.

He also recalled failed attempts to restore Lake Urmia, saying that years of investment led to little result because decisions were made without accurate scientific planning. "We celebrated projects that looked like achievements, but they brought us closer to disaster," he said.

Iran's president criticized the current state of academic research in the country, saying that 90–95% of studies remain unused despite large budgets. He argued that universities must move beyond theoretical work and shape solutions for national needs. "Management is only effective when scientific findings become practical decisions," he said.

Pezeshkian stressed that officials must treat citizens as rights-holders, not burdens on the system. He criticized bureaucratic behavior that disregards people's dignity, noting that in hospitals and government offices, dissatisfaction often arises not from outcomes but from disrespectful interaction. "A person may recover physically but leave disappointed because he felt ignored. Another may lose a loved one but remain grateful if he saw genuine effort," he said.

Turning to social issues, the president said that many cultural problems emerge from a failure to recognize the true status of women in society. He argued that when society respects women's intellectual and professional contributions, superficial forms of self-display lose significance. Iranian women, he noted, have repeatedly proven their competence in public life and show lower rates of administrative misconduct compared with men.

"A society that honors women reduces insecurity and exhibitionism because what empties a woman from within is not clothing, but neglect of her dignity and thinking," he said. Pezeshkian criticized a small minority that portrays Iranian women negatively, saying they overshadow millions of capable women who carry the nation's moral and social responsibilities.

The president accused some foreign media of exploiting internal debates to distort the image of Iranian women while ignoring violent actions in countries that claim to defend human rights. Those who support such double standards, he said, distance themselves "not only from their nation but from humanity."

Pezeshkian called for reviving mosque-based social services, arguing that community solidarity, not government structures, has historically protected Iran during crises. With more than 80,000 mosques in the country, he said local congregations could eliminate many social problems by supporting vulnerable families. "If each mosque helps just one family, we will achieve true social welfare," he said.

He highlighted how ordinary people, not state resources, defended the country during wartime, built schools, and responded to disasters such as floods and earthquakes. "The power of the people can rescue the economy just as it defended the country's borders," he said.

Addressing provincial leaders, Pezeshkian insisted that the ultimate goal of governance is citizens' satisfaction. He reminded officials that public trust is earned through humility and ethical conduct, not symbolic achievements. "God's satisfaction lies in people's satisfaction," he said, urging leaders to work transparently and remain close to local communities.

He concluded by expressing gratitude to the people and officials of Qazvin, asking for divine support to ensure that leaders remain worthy of serving the Iranian nation and "never stand ashamed before the people."

Diplomacy Has Already Kicked the Bucket Thanks to West's Anti-Iranian Measures

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russia has sharply condemned the latest anti-Iran resolution adopted by the International Atomic Energy Agency's Board of Governors, saying Western countries have deliberately "killed diplomacy" with the Islamic Republic by pushing the resolution through.

Speaking on Saturday, Russia's permanent representative to international organizations in Vienna, Mikhail Ulyanov, said the resolution that was adopted a day earlier saw the West, featuring the US and its European allies of the UK, France, and Germany, ignore months of Iranian cooperation.

According to the envoy, the Western states' drive also sidestepped the extraordinary security conditions that has been created by the US-Israeli military attacks against Iran's nuclear facilities in June.

The resolution has faulted the level of the Islamic Republic's cooperation with the agency.

Tehran suspended the cooperation in the aftermath of the illegal and unprovoked war by the Israeli regime and the US between June 13 and 25 that had used an earlier such IAEA resolution as an excuse.

IRAN NEWS

Iran's Active Passenger Aircraft Fleet Reaches 209, Marking 18% Growth

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iran's passenger aviation fleet has expanded to 209 active aircraft, representing an 18% increase since the beginning of the 14th government administration, according to a senior aviation official.

Majid Akhlaghi, Deputy for Flight Standards at the Civil Aviation Organization (CAO), announced that the growth results from both the addition of newly acquired aircraft and improvements in domestic maintenance capabilities. "With the entry of new planes and enhanced repair capacity, the number of active aircraft has now reached 209," he said, adding that the figure is expected to rise to 220 by the end of the current Iranian year.

Six Nations Sign Landmark Rail Transit Agreement in Istanbul

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Representatives from six countries — Iran, China, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Turkey — have signed a multilateral agreement in Istanbul aimed at expanding rail freight transit across a strategic transport corridor linking East Asia to Europe. The deal is designed to boost the flow of container trains passing through Iran, elevating the country's role as a central gateway for Eurasian trade.

According to the Iranian Railways Public Relations Office, the agreement focuses on enhancing rail transit along the southern branch of a key international corridor. By signing this pact, the participating nations agreed to work together to strengthen rail logistics and streamline the movement of goods transported between China and European markets.

The agreement positions Iran as a "golden gateway" for transcontinental rail shipments, particularly for trains departing from China and destined for European countries. Iran's geographic location provides a shorter and more competitive pathway, serving as a crucial link between Central Asia and Turkey before reaching wider EU rail networks. Officials from the six signatory countries endorsed Iran's role, emphasizing the potential for major gains in transit volumes once the framework is fully implemented.

Under the terms of the agreement, member states committed to harmonizing tariffs, reducing customs-related costs, and accelerating train movement times. They also pledged to upgrade physical rail infrastructure and remove administrative barriers affecting the flow of cargo across borders. These measures are expected to make the corridor more commercially attractive to logistics companies and global exporters seeking alternative routes to Europe.

The announcement comes against the backdrop of a rapidly growing rail trade market between China and Europe. Last year alone, nearly 60 million tons of freight were transported via approximately 20,000 container trains across the Eurasian landmass. With the new agreement in place, a significant share of this traffic could shift to the southern corridor passing through Iran, potentially boosting Tehran's transit revenue and strengthening commercial ties with regional partners.

Iranian Companies Propose Establishing Mineral Processing Hub for Afghanistan at Border Zone

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - In a meeting with Afghanistan's Minister of Mines and Petroleum, the Vice President of Iran's Chamber of Commerce proposed the establishment of a joint mineral processing center at the border between the two countries, enabling Iranian companies to process Afghanistan's mineral resources.

During the discussions, Ghadir Ghiyafeh, Vice President of the Iranian Chamber of Commerce, highlighted Afghanistan's vast and rich mineral reserves, emphasizing the need for advanced exploration to fully develop the sector. He noted that after exploration, the key priority is mineral processing, which increases value-added before export.

Ghiyafeh announced Iran's readiness to form a joint mining committee between the private sectors of the two countries to expand cooperation. He pointed to the extensive experience of Iranian mining companies—particularly in the steel industry, where Iran possesses a complete production chain. He said Iran's mining technologies, equipment, and infrastructure are at a strong level and can be shared with Afghan partners.

Access to reliable electricity is a critical requirement for any processing operation, he said, emphasizing the need for joint energy projects. He added that Iran is prepared to cooperate in training Afghan human resources in mining-related fields.

Ghiyafeh identified several viable areas for cooperation, including exploration, joint investment, mineral processing, factory construction, investment model development, technical training, and the establishment of mining-related facilities inside Afghanistan.

He proposed creating a joint mineral processing center in a border region, noting that many high-value mineral deposits are located near the Iran–Afghanistan frontier. He said expert teams should travel to Afghanistan to assess and determine the scale of mineral reserves as the first essential step.

Ghiyafeh also suggested forming a joint mining committee to help Afghanistan draft a long-term, 10-year national mining strategy. Iranian companies, he said, can assist in developing foundational principles for Afghanistan's mining roadmap.

Responding to the proposals, Haj Mullah Hedayatullah Badri, Afghanistan's Minister of Mines and Petroleum, said expanding cooperation with Iran is a priority for the Islamic Government of Afghanistan. He noted that agreements were already reached in earlier meetings with Iran's Minister of Industry, Mine and Trade.

Badri stressed Afghanistan's preference that both extraction and processing take place within Afghan territory, with mining sites handed over to investors to carry out operations domestically.

Iran's Ambassador to Kabul, Alireza Bigdeli, acknowledged the challenges facing Afghanistan and Pakistan and said Iran is committed to supporting the Afghan people through difficult conditions. He emphasized that the presence of the Iranian delegation demonstrates the private sector's strong interest in participating in Afghanistan's market and helping address local needs.

Bigdeli added that reputable Iranian private-sector companies will enter Afghanistan through the cooperation framework of the Iranian Chamber of Commerce and can operate across various fields. He requested relevant information from Afghan authorities to help advance earlier agreements.

During the session, a representative from Mobarakeh Steel Company also presented details on the planned construction of a steel sheet production plant aimed at supplying the Afghan market.

Iran Launches Contract Farming in Afghanistan

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The head of the Iran-Afghanistan Joint Chamber of Commerce announced the beginning of a new contract farming initiative between the two countries, aimed at expanding Iran's imports from Afghanistan and creating jobs and security within Afghan territory. According to Mahmoud Siyaadat, Afghanistan currently lacks sufficient industrial and mining capacity to export to Iran, but it holds strong potential in agriculture, livestock, and horticulture.

Siyaadat said that Iran intends to sign agreements for the supply of essential goods such as cotton, meat, animal feed, sesame, legumes, and other similar products through contract farming, in efforts to boost Afghan exports and improve regional stability.

Speaking with ILNA, Siyaadat explained that trade between the two countries sharply decreased after the Taliban assumed control of Kabul. Iran's exports to Afghanistan, formerly valued at over $3 billion annually, dropped significantly in the first year of the Taliban's return.

Siyaadat stated that current Afghan policy encourages domestic production to reduce widespread unemployment. As a result, Kabul has imposed high import tariffs on goods similar to those produced domestically. This shift has increased interest in industrial investment inside Afghanistan.

According to statistics provided by Afghanistan's Minister of Commerce and Industry, the number of industrial units in Herat has risen from 200 to 1,200 over the past four years. Consequently, Iran's exports have shifted from finished products to raw materials and intermediate goods, as well as industrial machinery, technology-transfer services, and engineering expertise.

The Chamber head emphasized that Afghanistan's industrial growth—particularly in Herat—has been aided by its proximity to Iran and easier access to Iranian technical services and know-how.

He added that improvements in security over the past three years have encouraged greater infrastructure and industrial activity throughout Afghanistan.

Siyaadat highlighted a major issue in bilateral trade: Iran exports around $3 billion in goods to Afghanistan, while its imports from the country amount to just $100 million. Afghan authorities have consistently criticized this imbalance and called on Iran to increase imports.

He reiterated that Afghanistan's agricultural and livestock output offers the strongest area for growth. Through contract farming and commodity agreements, Iran hopes not only to import more Afghan products but also support job creation and greater stability in the country.

Responding to whether Iranian goods are ever returned by Afghan buyers, Siyaadat confirmed that such cases do occur. He explained that as Afghanistan's industrial needs evolve, it sometimes demands more advanced products requiring specific certifications—which some Iranian exports have lacked.

He noted that a small number of products such as gas condensates, hydrocarbons, and steel items have also been rejected. In many cases, these goods were ordered directly by Afghan traders but did not comply with new Afghan government standards.

To sustain Iran's presence in Afghan markets, Siyaadat stressed the need for a shift in strategy. He argued that exporting only products is no longer sufficient; Iran must invest in Afghanistan, transfer technology, and even relocate parts of its production operations to the country.

Without these changes, he warned, Iranian goods—especially those in medium-scale industries—will face increasingly heavy tariffs and lose their competitive edge unless production is partially moved to Afghanistan under joint or Afghan investment, benefitting from protective tariffs.

Iran Records $32b in Exports Over Seven Months

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Iran's non-oil exports reached nearly $32 billion in the first seven months of this year, while imports rose to approximately $34.5 billion, according to a senior trade official.

Citing new data released by the Iran Trade Promotion Organization (TPO), Mohammad Sadegh Ghanadzadeh, acting deputy for trade services at the TPO, said that although non-oil exports continue to grow, simultaneous domestic and international efforts are required to expand the sector further.

Ghanadzadeh stated that improving export infrastructure, supplying refrigerated containers, reforming customs procedures, and resolving exporters' currency obligations are among the priorities currently being addressed.

He added that facilitating foreign currency repatriation and expanding export-related infrastructure are key programs being implemented.

The official also highlighted ongoing efforts to strengthen commercial relations with neighboring and regional countries. Several preferential trade agreements have been signed with countries in Eurasia and surrounding regions, and additional agreements with Oman, Kuwait, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates are under consideration. These moves aim to ease foreign trade and address internal challenges such as border trade restrictions and maritime trade regulations.

The average value of exported goods during this period stood at $348 per ton, reflecting a 4.92% decrease compared to the same period last year.

The main non-oil export products included: Natural gas $2.796 billion; Liquefied propane $2.099 billion; Petroleum bitumen $1.381 billion; Liquefied butane 1.358 billion; Methanol $1.337 billion; Non-alloy steel and iron billets $1.183 billion; and Urea 1.028 billion.

Iran Plans to Double Health Tourism to Two Million Visitors Annually

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Minister of Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts, and Tourism announced that the country aims to significantly expand its health tourism sector, targeting two million incoming medical tourists annually and €6 billion in revenue by the end of the Seventh National Development Plan.

Speaking to reporters on the sidelines of the weekly cabinet meeting in Tehran, Minister Seyed Reza Salehi Amiri stated that strengthening medical and health-related tourism has become a strategic priority for the government. According to the minister, Iran currently welcomes approximately 1.02 million health tourists per year, mainly from neighboring and regional countries. These visitors typically travel to Iran for medical treatment, plastic surgery, specialized care, or low-cost advanced healthcare services.

Salehi Amiri noted that to support the rapid growth planned for the sector, the ministry has developed a comprehensive national health tourism system, the product of collaboration between multiple government agencies. This system is expected to be unveiled in the near future. It has been designed in partnership with the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Labor, the Social Security Organization, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and other relevant authorities, aiming to streamline procedures, standardize services, and strengthen Iran's international competitiveness in the health tourism market.

The minister emphasized the need to overcome previous inefficiencies and scattered policies in the sector. He explained that several provinces have already begun reorganizing their medical tourism services, citing Khorasan and Khuzestan among the regions that have made notable progress. The reorganization includes improved coordination between hospitals, clinics, travel agencies, and insurance providers, as well as expanded infrastructure to host international patients.

Iran and UAE Discuss Expanding Aviation Cooperation at Dubai Airshow 2025

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - On the sidelines of the Dubai Airshow 2025, Hossein Pourfarzaneh, Iran's Deputy Minister of Roads and Urban Development and head of the Civil Aviation Organization of Iran (CAO), held high-level meetings with senior Emirati aviation officials during an official visit to the United Arab Emirates.

According to ILNA, Pourfarzaneh traveled to Dubai at the official invitation of the president of the UAE's General Civil Aviation Authority (GCAA). The meeting brought together top figures from the aviation sector of both countries.

During the talks, Sheikh Ahmed bin Saeed Al Maktoum, UAE's second executive deputy, president of the GCAA, and head of civil aviation, discussed ways to expand bilateral cooperation with the Iranian delegation.

Also present was Sheikh Hamad Obaidullah, Chief Commercial Officer of flydubai and a key figure in the UAE aviation industry, who actively participated in discussions regarding the expansion of flights and joint aviation projects.

Mohammed Al-Langawi, Director General of the Dubai Civil Aviation Authority (DCAA), also attended the meeting to explore enhanced regulatory, technical, and airport cooperation between Iran and Dubai.

The core agenda of the negotiations centered on broadening aviation ties between Iran and the UAE, including: Increasing bilateral flights; Expanding international air routes; Enhancing technical and operational cooperation; and assessing the feasibility of launching new air routes.

At the conclusion of the session, Pourfarzaneh formally invited Sheikh Ahmed bin Saeed Al Maktoum and senior Emirati aviation officials to visit Iran for continued discussions.

Central Vietnam Death Toll Rises to 55 From Flooding, Landslides

HANOI (Dispatches) - The death toll from torrential rain, flooding and landslides in central Vietnam has risen to 55, with 13 people reported missing, the country's disaster agency said.
Rainfall exceeded 1,900 mm in some parts of central Vietnam over the past week. The region is a major coffee production belt and home to popular beaches, but it is also prone to storms and floods.
Nearly half of the fatalities were in Dak Lak province, where 27 people have died, while 14 people have died in Khanh Hoa province. The government estimates the flooding has cost the economy around 8.98 trillion dong.
Over 235,000 houses were flooded and nearly 80,000 hectares of crops were damaged, Vietnam's disaster agency said.

IRAN NEWS

Gunmen in Nigeria Kidnap Over 200 Catholic School Students

MAIDUGURI (Dispatches) - Gunmen in Nigeria kidnapped at least 227 students and teachers at a Catholic school in the northwest yesterday, the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) said, the latest in a spate of school attacks this week that has forced the government to shut 47 colleges.
Friday's incident in Niger state was the largest mass kidnapping of school children since the March 2024 abduction of more than 200 students in northern Kaduna state.
Reverend Bulus Dauwa Yohanna, the CAN chairman in Niger said he had travelled to the school. He said some students managed to escape, but gave no details.
"From our record, 215 pupils and students including 12 teachers were abducted by the terrorists," Yohanna said in a statement.
Earlier, police and local government officials in Niger state confirmed the kidnapping from St. Mary's School, but they did not say how many. Nigeria's security situation has been under heightened scrutiny since US President Donald Trump threatened "fast" military action if the country fails to crack down on the killing of Christians.
In the first high-level meeting between the US and Nigeria since Trump's threat, Pentagon Chief Pete Hegseth wrote on X that he met Nigeria's national security advisor on Thursday to discuss the persecution of Christians.

France to Reduce Diplomatic Staff in Mali Amid Jihadist Fuel Blockade

PARIS (Dispatches) - France is pulling back diplomatic staff from Mali as the security situation in the country deteriorates under a jihadist-imposed fuel blockade. The move comes amid deepening concerns over the junta-led country's shift toward Russian military support, which has done little to improve the security situation, according to French officials.
"France continues to monitor the security situation in Mali closely," the ministry official said, asking not to be named.
"In light of the situation, and following the example of several of its partners, it has decided to adapt its diplomatic and consular arrangements," the official added, referring to the United States and UK which have already evacuated non-essential diplomatic personnel.
Mali, like its Sahel neighbours Burkina Faso and Niger, is led by a junta which seized power in a coup and has turned away from former colonial power France.
The juntas in all three countries have instead moved closer to Russia, which has sent in mercenaries to help them fight a jihadist insurgency.
In early November, France advised French nationals to temporarily leave Mali "as soon as possible", as a jihadist blockade upended daily life in the capital Bamako and other regions.
French officials and security experts said Russia's military presence in Mali did little to improve the security situation and help the ruling junta to contain the advance of the jihadists.
A spokesperson for the French foreign ministry said in early November that "the contested presence of Russia or similar forces in Mali does nothing to ensure the safety of Malians".

Ukraine Faces Difficult Choice as Trump Demands Acceptance of Peace Plan

KYIV (Dispatches) - President Volodymyr Zelenskiy warned that Ukraine risked losing its dignity and freedom — or Washington's backing — over a U.S. peace plan that endorses key Russian demands, a proposal Donald Trump said Kyiv should accept within a week.
The U.S. president told Fox News Radio he believed Thursday was an appropriate deadline for Kyiv to accept the plan, confirming what two sources told Reuters.
Trump later told reporters that time was short given the approaching winter and need to end the bloodshed and that Zelenskiy would have to approve the plan.
"He'll have to like it, and if he doesn't like it, then you know, they should just keep fighting, I guess," he said.
"At some point he's going to have to accept something he hasn't accepted," Trump said.
Recalling their fractious February meeting with Zelenskiy, Trump added: "You remember right in the Oval Office, not so long ago, I said, 'You don't have the cards.'"
Washington's 28-point plan calls on Ukraine to cede territory, accept limits on its military and renounce ambitions to join NATO. It also contains some proposals Moscow may object to and requires its forces to pull back from some areas they have captured, according to a draft seen by Reuters.
U.S. Vice President JD Vance said late on Friday that any plan to end Russia's war in Ukraine should preserve Ukrainian sovereignty and be acceptable to both countries but that it was a "fantasy" to think Ukraine could win if the U.S. were to give Kyiv more money or weapons or impose more sanctions on Moscow.
"There is a fantasy that if we just give more money, more weapons, or more sanctions, victory is at hand," Vance wrote on X.
Russia's President Vladimir Putin, who has refused to budge on Russia's key territorial and security demands, said on Friday the U.S. plan could be the basis of a final resolution of the nearly four-year-old conflict. He said Kyiv was against the plan but neither it nor its European allies understood the reality of Russian advances in Ukraine.
Zelenskiy, who has rejected the plan's terms in the past as capitulation, appealed to Ukrainians for unity and said he would never betray Ukraine.
"Now, Ukraine can face a very difficult choice — either losing dignity or risk losing a major partner," he said in a speech to the nation, adding: "I will fight 24/7 to ensure that at least two points in the plan are not overlooked – the dignity and freedom of Ukrainians."
Putin's investment envoy, Kirill Dmitriev, said on Friday the U.S. plan was aimed at preventing more Ukrainian deaths and loss of territory.

Several sources have told Reuters that the plan was the result of back-channel conversations between Dmitriev and Steve Witkoff, Trump's special envoy.
"Because of warmongers' propaganda, many people miss that Trump's Peace Plan is designed to save Ukraine from losing even more land and lives," Dmitriev wrote in English on the X social media platform.
Two sources told Reuters Washington had threatened to cut off intelligence sharing and weapons supplies to Ukraine if it does not accept the deal. A senior U.S. official later said it was not accurate to say the U.S. threatened to withhold intelligence.
In public, Zelenskiy, who spoke on Friday with the leaders of Britain, Germany and France as well as with Vance, has appeared careful not to reject the U.S. plan or offend the Americans.
"We value the efforts of the United States, President Trump, and his team aimed at ending this war," Zelenskiy said. "This must be a plan that ensures a real and dignified peace."
A poor deal for Ukraine could test the stability of its society after nearly four years of relentless warfare.
"Russia gets everything it wants and Ukraine gets not very much," said Tim Ash of Britain's Chatham House think tank. "If Zelenskiy accepts this, I anticipate huge political, social and economic instability in Ukraine."
The plan is expected to dominate discussions on the sidelines of the G20 summit in Johannesburg that European leaders are attending this weekend despite a boycott by Trump.
Three sources told Reuters that Ukraine was working on a counter-proposal to the 28-point plan with Britain, France and Germany. The Europeans have not been consulted on the U.S. plan and have expressed strong support for Kyiv.
"We all want this war to end, but how it ends matters. Russia has no legal right whatsoever to any concessions from the country it invaded," said the EU foreign policy chief, Kaja Kallas. "This is a very dangerous moment for all."
U.S. officials have said their plan was drafted after consultations with Rustem Umerov, secretary of Ukraine's National Security and Defense Council, a close Zelenskiy ally who served as defence minister until July.
Umerov "agreed to the majority of the plan, after making several modifications, and presented it to President Zelenskiy," a senior U.S. official said on Thursday.
However, Umerov denied agreeing to any of the plan's terms and said he had played only a technical role organising talks.
The plan would require Ukraine to withdraw from territory it still controls in eastern provinces that Russia claims to have annexed, while Russia would give up smaller amounts of land it holds in other regions.
Ukraine would be permanently barred from joining the NATO military alliance, and its armed forces would be capped at 600,000 troops. NATO would agree never to station troops there.
Sanctions against Russia would be gradually lifted, Moscow would be invited back into the G8 group of industrialised countries, and frozen Russian assets would be pooled in an investment fund, with Washington given some of the profits.
One of Ukraine's main demands, for enforceable guarantees equivalent to NATO's mutual defence clause to deter Russia from attacking again, is dealt with in a single line with no details: "Ukraine will receive robust security guarantees".

COP30 Climate Summit Deadlocked as EU Rejects Draft Deal

BELEM (Dispatches) - The outcome of Brazil's COP30 climate summit was left hanging in the balance, with the European Union refusing to accept a draft deal it said would fail to advance global efforts to curb greenhouse gas emissions driving climate change.
The two-week conference being held in the Amazon city of Belem had been scheduled to end Friday evening, but blew past that deadline as negotiations continued late into the night.
Brazil has cast the summit as a make-or-break moment for global climate cooperation, urging nations to bridge divides on issues including the future of fossil fuels and to send a message that concerted global action is the best way forward.
"This cannot be an agenda that divides us," COP30 President André Corrêa do Lago told delegates in a public plenary session before releasing them for further negotiations.
"We must reach an agreement between us."
Some emerging economies hit back at the EU's position, demanding the bloc commit more finance to help poorer nations cope with climate change.
"We can't just work with one pathway. If there is a pathway for fossil fuel, there has to be a pathway for climate finance as well," said a negotiator for a developing country, who was granted anonymity to discuss the closed-door negotiations.
The rifts over fossil fuels, cutting CO_2 emissions faster and finance highlighted the difficulty of reaching a consensus at the annual conference, a perennial test of global resolve to avert the worst impacts of global warming.
A draft text for a deal, released by Brazil before dawn on Friday, contained no reference to fossil fuels, dropping a range of options on the subject that had been included in an earlier version.
Scores of countries, including major oil and gas producer nations, had opposed

the options.
Earlier in the summit, some 80 governments had demanded COP30 deliver a plan to shift away from fossil fuels. But by Friday night, many of those nations had indicated in closed-door talks they would accept the deal without it, negotiators said.
Burning fossil fuels emits greenhouse gases that are by far the largest contributors to global warming.
The 27-member EU said the text was too weak.
"Under no circumstances are we going to accept this," EU Commissioner for Climate Wopke Hoekstra said in a statement on Friday.
The EU indicated it could "move beyond its comfort zone" on finance for developing nations - but only if the text's sections on action to cut planet-warming emissions were strengthened.
By Friday night, some European negotiators said the bloc was considering the option of walking away from the talks, rather than accepting the current deal.
A Brazilian negotiator told Reuters the fossil fuel language was unlikely to be reintroduced, and that the summit presidency was pressing for only small adjustments to the existing draft.
Other options being discussed by negotiators included a separate side deal on fossil fuels, which countries could voluntarily sign up to but which would not be agreed by consensus as COP deals need to be, negotiators said.
Three sources said the Arab Group negotiating bloc, whose 22 members include Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, told a closed-door meeting of negotiators that its energy industries were off limits in discussions.
Saudi Arabia delivered a statement from the Arab Group to negotiators, warning that targeting its industries would collapse the negotiations, the sources said.
Saudi Arabia did not reply to a request for comment addressed to the Saudi government communications office.
The draft deal also called for global efforts to triple the financing available to help nations adapt to climate change by 2030, from 2025 levels.
However, it did not specify whether this money would be provided directly by wealthy nations, or other sources including development banks or the private sector.
A deal text would need approval by consensus among the nearly 200 countries present in order to be adopted.
Corrêa do Lago said a show of multilateral unity was an important signal to send given this year's U.S. absence. President Donald Trump has called global warming a hoax.
"The world is watching," Corrêa do Lago said.

Europe Increasingly Vulnerable to Shocks

FRANKFURT (Dispatches) - European Central Bank chief Christine Lagarde warned the region was increasingly "vulnerable" to shocks like US tariffs and is lagging behind in areas that will drive growth such as AI.
The continent must urgently speed up its integration and overhaul a model of export-led growth that has faltered amid mounting geopolitical turmoil, she said in a speech to a banking conference.
"Europe has become more vulnerable," the head of the central bank for the 20-nation eurozone said in Frankfurt, pointing to the region's "dependency on third countries for our security and the supply of critical raw materials".
"Global shocks have intensified, with rising US tariffs, Russia's invasion of Ukraine and stiffening competition from China," she added.
Europe's domestic market meanwhile had "stood still," particularly in areas set to underpin future growth like the digital sector and artificial intelligence, Lagarde said.
The continent had long relied on exports of goods ranging from cars to

factory equipment and pharmaceuticals to support its economies.
But this model was no longer working, said Lagarde, saying the European Union needed to strengthen its domestic economy as "a source of resilience in an uncertain world".
Faced with weak demand for key exports, structural problems and more recently the US tariff blitz, Europe's growth has been muted in recent years, lagging far behind the United States and China.
Lagarde outlined reforms to boost the region, ranging from better integrating the financial sector to lowering trade barriers and simplifying EU decision making processes.
She warned that more years of "lost growth, lost productivity, would not just be disappointing for future generations, it would be irresponsible on our part".
If radical reforms are enacted, "we can actually make sure that Europe is strong and is not the victim of decisions being made outside of this region," Lagarde said.

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Gillespie's Game-Winner Rescues Win for Suns Over T-Wolves

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Collin Gillespie had a season-high 20 points including the game-winner with 6.4 seconds remaining and the host Phoenix Suns overcame an eight-point deficit in the final 1:09 to beat the Minnesota Timberwolves 114-113 in an NBA Cup game.

Dillon Brooks had 22 points and four threes and Mark Williams had 19 points and eight rebounds for the Suns, who improved to 2-0 in Group A in Cup play and have won nine of 11.

Anthony Edwards had 41 points and five 3-pointers and Julius Randle had 20 points for the Minnesota Timberwolves, who had overcome an 18-point deficit and seemed in control before falling apart in the final moments.

Minnesota committed three turnovers, two leading directly to Suns points, and Edwards missed two free throws in the final 50 seconds.

Jordan Goodwin made a 3-pointer and a layup after consecutive turnovers when the Suns closed it 113-112, and Edward missed two free throws with 12.7 seconds left, setting up Gillespie's game-winner.

The Wolves led 113-105 on Donte DiVicenzo's two free throws with 1:09 left.

Rudy Gobert had 12 points and 12 rebounds and Jaden McDaniels had 13 points for the Timberwolves, who dropped to 2-1 in Group A in Cup play and with one Cup game remaining at Oklahoma City.

Edwards has 37, 30 and 41 points in three Cup games this season.

Devin Booker had a season-low 16 points on 4 of 18 shooting before fouling out. He had 10 assists and nine turnovers.

The Suns have Cup games remaining against Sacramento and Oklahoma City.

Edwards had 19 points and three threes in the third quarter, when the Timberwolves outscored the Suns 33-19 to turn a 62-49 halftime deficit into an 82-81 lead.

DiVincenzo's 3-pointer, his first basket off the game, gave Minnesota a 92-84 lead, and Gobert's three-point play made it 95-86 with just under eight minutes remaining.

Edwards' was fouled attempting a 3-pointer and made all three free throws for a 107-104 lead with 2:21 left after the Sun overcame a six-point deficit to tie it, and the Wolves extended their lead to eight.

The Suns committed a season-high 27 turnovers that the Timberwolves turned into 29 points, but the Wolves' turnovers down the stretch made the difference.

Meanwhile Brandon Ingram and RJ Barrett scored 24 points each as the Toronto Raptors dominated the visiting Washington Wizards 140-110 for their sixth straight win.

The Raptors improved to 3-0 in the NBA Cup group stage and clinched a spot in the knockout rounds. The victory and a Friday loss by the Indiana Pacers to the Cleveland Cavaliers wrapped up first place in the East Group A, making Toronto the first team to advance this season.

The Wizards, who are 0-2 in the NBA Cup, have lost 13 straight overall. The franchise record is a 16-game losing streak, done four times.

Battling Cobolli Sends Holders Italy Into Davis Cup Final

BOLOGNA (Dispatches) - Hosts Italy closed in on a third successive Davis Cup title as Flavio Cobolli saved seven match points to beat Belgium's Zizou Bergs in a thriller and seal a 2-0 semi-final victory.

The 23-year-old Cobolli, roared on by frenzied home support inside the SuperTennis Arena, clawed his way to a 6-3 6-7(5) 7-6(15) victory with the third-set tiebreak one of the best ever seen in the competition's rich history.

Both players produced some spellbinding tennis in a series of punishing rallies in the 32-point breaker with the aggressive ball striking of Bergs looking as though it would send the tie to the deciding doubles.

But Cobolli, who also failed to convert his first six match points, would not be denied and eventually fired down an unreturnable serve to spark wild celebrations in the stands.

"In the five years I've been captain, I've never seen anything like it," said Italy captain Filippo Volandri. "This match was incredible; in the end, it was 5 per cent tactics and 95 per cent heart."

Earlier, Matteo Berrettini powered past Raphael Collignon 6-3 6-4 to put Italy in front. It was Berrettini's eighth successive match win in the competition after he won all six he played last year, including doubles, as Italy retained the title by beating the Netherlands in the final.

Italy will try to complete the three-peat in Sunday's final against either Germany or Spain who face off.

Should they prevail, they would become the first nation to win three successive titles since the Challenge Round was abolished after the 1971 event.

Cobolli, who was a regular in the 2023 title-winning side, is playing as Italy's number one in the absence of world number two Jannik Sinner and Lorenzo Musetti and has risen to the challenge in magnificent fashion.

Formula One 2026 Rules Will Resolve Cost Cap Engine Loophole

LAS VEGAS (Dispatches) - Formula One's governing body says next year's rules revamp will fix a loophole that has allowed teams to exceed a driver's engine allocation without the new power unit being included in cost cap calculations.

Four-times world champion Max Verstappen started in the pitlane and finished on the podium in Brazil this month after Red Bull replaced the Honda engine in his car with a brand new one.

Rivals McLaren subsequently asked the International Automobile Federation (FIA) whether the engine would be part of Red Bull's cost cap spending, something of a grey area at present.

McLaren's Lando Norris and Oscar Piastri are one-two in the drivers standings with three rounds remaining but Verstappen remains a threat in third place and 49 points off the lead.

"If the engine was changed for performance reasons, it should go in the cost cap," McLaren principal Andrea Stella said at the time.

Engine changes for reliability reasons fall outside the cap, however.

Nikolas Tombazis, the FIA's single-seater director, acknowledged the governing body was currently reluctant to argue with a team or power unit manufacturer over what might be a reliability issue.

"We don't feel we have the expertise to argue with them whether it's really a reliability or strategic change," he told reporters after opening practice at the Las Vegas Grand Prix.

"This has been a weakness in the current regulations -- the combination of financial plus technical and sporting -- and it's been an area where we've adopted this approach where we accept these changes without getting into discussion about the impact on the cost cap."

Tombazis said a cost cap for power unit manufacturers from next year would solve the problem because such a strategic change would cost them roughly $1 million -- the price tag on an engine -- each time.

Premier League Clubs Vote in Favor of Squad Cost Ratio Rules

LONDON (Dispatches) - Premier League clubs have agreed a new set of financial regulations to replace the divisive Profit and Sustainability Rules (PSR) with a new Squad Cost Ratio system.

A statement yesterday said Premier League shareholders had voted in favor of the new rules that will come into force for the start of the 2026-27 season.

"Following extensive consultation, clubs agreed to bring in Squad Cost Ratio (SCR) and Sustainability and Systematic Resilience (SSR) proposals," the statement said.

It added that there had been insufficient support for a proposal on Top to Bottom Anchoring (TBA) -- a hard cap on clubs' football-related spending set at five times the money earned the previous season by the bottom-placed club in central payments passed on by the Premier League.

Squad Cost Ratio rules will regulate clubs' spending to 85 per cent of their football revenue and net profit/loss on player sales, although clubs will have a multi-year allowance of 30 per cent that they can use to spend in excess of the 85 per cent.

The extra allowance will incur a levy and once it is exhausted clubs will need to comply with 85 per cent or face sanctions.

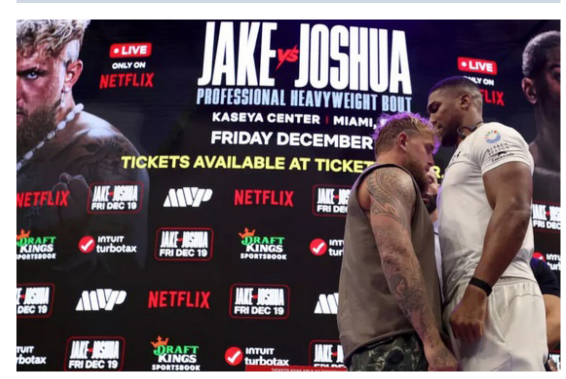
"The new SCR rules are intended to promote opportunity for all clubs to aspire to greater success and brings the League's financial system close to UEFA's existing SCR rules," the statement said.

UEFA's financial regulations cap a club's spending on player wages, transfers and agents' fees at 70 per cent of their revenue.

Premier League clubs playing in European competitions will still need to meet UEFA's 70 per cent ceiling or face the threat of punishment by the European soccer governing body.

The Premier League said the new rules will allow for transparent in-season monitoring with a club's SCR assessed once a year in March, following the January transfer window.

Paul Backs His Delusional Optimism to Upset Joshua



MIAMI (Dispatches) - Youtuber-turned-boxer Jake Paul is backing "delusional optimism" to carry him to an upset over British former world heavyweight champion Anthony Joshua when the two men clash in a made-for-streaming event in Miami next month.

Paul, 28, who defeated a 58-year-old Mike Tyson in a heavily criticised fight screened on Netflix in 2024, will take on a vastly younger opponent when he faces the 36-year-old Joshua in an eight-round heavyweight bout on December 19 in Florida.

The fight, which will reportedly see both men divide a massive $184 million purse, has once again raised safety concerns across boxing, with the 6ft 1in Paul going up against the hard-hitting 6ft 6in Joshua, the 2012 Olympic champion and two-time unified heavyweight champion.

Former world champion David Haye warned earlier this week the fight could be Paul's "last day on earth". The British Boxing Board of Control meanwhile has said it would not have sanctioned the fight on safety grounds.

Paul, whose limited ring record includes 12 wins and one defeat, with seven knockouts, will be at a sizeable, height, weight and reach disadvantage against Joshua, who has 25 knockouts amongst his 28 career wins, with only four defeats.

However the trash-talking American was adamant on Friday that he has the tools to stop Joshua as the two men faced off in a promotional event for next month's Netflix special.

Asked by a moderator if he had "lost his mind" by opting to take on Joshua, Paul replied: "I like to challenge myself against the best. We're going to go to war and the best man will win.