

The Islamic Revolution Guard Corps (IRGC) Says Its Naval Forces Have Seized an Eswatini-Flagged Vessel Carrying Hundreds of Thousands of Liters of Smuggled Fuel in the Persian Gulf.

IRAN NEWS

Iran Has Formally Issued Land Demarcation and Ownership Documents for the Islands of Abu Musa, as Well as the Greater and Lesser Tunbs in the Persian Gulf, Asserting Its Sovereignty Over the Territories

VOL. XXIX, No. 8427 TEHRAN Price 50,000 Rials

www.irannewsdaily.com

TUESDAY DECEMBER 02, 2025 AZAR 11, 1404

2

DOMESTIC



Iran's Future Depends on the Digital Economy

> SEE PAGE 2

3

INTERNATIONAL

World Arms Makers Post Record \$679b in Sales as Wars Drive Demand

> SEE PAGE 3



Australia's Designation of IRGC Serves U.S.-Israeli Interests



TEHRAN (Dispatches) - The General Staff of Iran's Armed Forces has strongly condemned Australia's "unwise decision" to label the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) as a "state sponsor of terrorism."

In a statement on Sunday, the Armed Forces said the unwise decision by the "dependent" Australian government against the IRGC is in line with the sinister goals of the arrogant system, led by the terrorist United States.

It added that the move aims to serve the terrorist Israeli regime's interests in the continuation of oppression and crimes and has no meaning other than "baseless and spiteful" claims under the pressure of the US and Israel.

According to the statement, the move demonstrates a lack of proper understanding of international and global realities.

The Army, however, emphasized that such moves will strengthen the will of the heroic Iranian nation to boost its defense prowess and will result in nothing but greater support of Iranians and the free nations across the world for the Armed Forces, especially the powerful and anti-terrorism IRGC.

The Australian government listed the IRGC as a "state sponsor of terrorism" on Thursday over baseless accusations that the elite force had orchestrated attacks against Australia's Jewish community.

Iranian Navy to Escort National Ships Worldwide



IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - The Iranian Navy now provides escort services for Iranian vessels across the globe, far beyond its traditional focus on waters near Iran, the Navy's commander announced.

Rear Admiral Shahram Irani made the remarks during the 24th session of the "Theory of War Studies in Memory of Martyr Lieutenant General Ali Sayad Shirazi" at the Shahid Sattari Air University. Speaking on the significance of Iran's three strategic islands, he noted that December 1 marks the National Day of the Three Islands, commemorating the bravery of the Navy personnel who defended them.

Highlighting the role of the Iranian Navy in safeguarding maritime economic interests, Rear Admiral Irani stated that escort missions are now conducted continuously and "in the heart of the sea with full operational strength." He emphasized that, while naval escorts in the past were mostly limited to Iranian territorial waters, today Iranian vessels are accompanied by Navy forces "in all corners of the world."

The commander also discussed both the "soft and hard power" of Iran's naval forces and the presence of Iranian naval groups in distant waters. According to Irani, two of Iran's naval flotillas are currently participating in exercises—one in the Far East and another off the coast of Africa. He recalled the positive reception of Iranian forces during a recent port visit to Brazil, where local officials reportedly remarked on the professionalism and conduct of Iranian sailors, praising their adherence to ethical standards even on foreign shores.

Muslims Urged to Set Disputes Aside, Unite and Trade

IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - President Masoud Pezeshkian has stressed the urgency of strengthening unity in the Islamic world during a meeting with Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan, asserting that Muslim nations must "facilitate conditions for each other and avoid complicating issues" amidst mounting pressure from shared adversaries.

In the Tehran meeting, held on Sunday evening, President Pezeshkian described the historical and fraternal relations between Iran and Turkey as deeply rooted and possessing vast potential for expansion.

The Iranian President emphasized the vital need for strategic convergence and stronger ties among Islamic countries.

He identified many current regional crises as the result of "plots and the fueling of differences by intervening actors," whose goal is to "impose their wrongful intentions and policies on the region, creating obstacles to the development and progress of Islamic countries."

"If Islamic countries move within the framework of a unified will, based on unity, convergence, and exchange of experiences, no power will be able to create problems for Muslim nations," he said.

Pezeshkian drew a comparison to the European experience, noting that despite a long history of conflicts and wars, European nations have managed to diminish borders, establish common financial and political structures, and integrate their commercial and communication arteries.

He argued that the Islamic world, which enjoys "much deeper cultural and civilizational commonalities," can undoubtedly follow the path of cohesive cooperation and collective development by putting aside internal disputes.

Pezeshkian said this must be achieved through the integration of trade, knowledge, and culture.

"We believe that from borders where trade, science, and culture pass, terrorism and weapons will never pass."

For his part, Fidan conveyed warm greetings from his country's president and delivered a special message emphasizing the necessity of expanding bilateral commercial, economic, and regional cooperation.

Fidan commended President Pezeshkian's sincerity and sincere concern for the Islamic world, stating: "We are completely aligned and in step with these views. We believe internal differences have led to the waste of valuable time in the Islamic world."

The minister stressed that the "spirit of the time has reached a point where joint and collective cooperation has become an inevitable necessity."

He urged that now is the time for Islamic nations, including Iran and Turkey, to enhance their cooperation through joint, equal, and coordinated action, thereby "removing the big stone of differences from the path of the Islamic Ummah."

Earlier in meeting with Fidan, Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi said Iran is one of the most reliable energy suppliers for Turkey and is ready to extend a gas contract and enhance bilateral cooperation in the electricity sector.

Araqchi made the remarks during a joint press conference with Fidan in Tehran,



emphasizing Tehran's determination to strengthen energy ties with Ankara.

Iran currently supplies Turkey with about 10 billion cubic meters of natural gas annually under a contract signed in 2001. The 25-year agreement is set to expire in mid-2026.

Turkey has requested increased supplies due to rising energy demand in both household consumption and the manufacturing sector.

Araqchi said that during talks with his Turkish counterpart, the two sides underscored the need to remove barriers to trade and investment between the two countries.

He added that the two sides agreed to hold the meetings of the High-Level Cooperation Council and the Joint Economic Commission to specifically address the issues.

Iran expressed its readiness to expand a new border crossing, Araqchi noted.

He said Iran calls for expert-level meetings to discuss the preferential trade agreement with Turkey.

Fidan, in turn, also underscored the need to boost cooperation between Turkey and Iran in trade, energy, and regional security.

"Trade and energy are top priorities, and we saw again today there is much more to be done," he said alongside Araqchi.

The Turkish foreign minister said the two sides had agreed to work to improve border security by installing more border gates and implementing logistics and transportation projects.

Araqchi further pointed to his detailed discussions with Fidan about regional issues, saying, "Both sides have many commonalities in the region, and naturally, there are also shared concerns."

He added that the issue of Palestine and the importance of Tehran-Ankara cooperation to end the massacre of the oppressed Palestinians in Gaza were on the agenda of the talks.

Repeated violations by Israel in Gaza and Israeli attacks in Lebanon and Syria show that this regime has bigger plans to destabilize the region, the minister said.

"Repeated violations of the ceasefire in Gaza and the recent attacks by the Zionist regime on Lebanon and Syria show that the regime is pursuing plans to destabilize the region," the top Iranian diplomat warned.

Araqchi said stability, security, and peace in Syria are directly linked with the country's territorial integrity and national sovereignty.

He added that Israel's occupation poses the most significant threat to Syria's security and stability, emphasizing that all regional countries are duty-bound to block the regime's acts of aggression and expansionist policies in Syria and Lebanon.

The Iranian foreign minister reiterated that Tehran's position is to maintain stability and security in the Caucasus through cooperation with regional countries and to avoid extra-regional intervention.

He described terrorism as an "unfortunate and common threat" to both countries and the region.

The Iranian foreign minister stressed the necessity of dismantling all terrorist groups to achieve a region free from terrorism.

Iran Says U.S. Is "Greatest Threat to International Peace

IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Foreign Ministry spokesperson, Esmail Baghaei, sharply criticized U.S. foreign policy and Israel's regional actions during his weekly press briefing, calling the United States "the greatest threat to international peace and security" and warning that Tehran will not allow "the fantasies of the Zionist regime" to materialize.

Baghaei opened the briefing by addressing regional developments, stating that the most pressing issue in West Asia remains "the threat posed by Israel's actions and its blatant violations of international law against Lebanon and Syria." Despite ceasefire arrangements in Lebanon and Gaza, he said violations are "intensifying," claiming that the ceasefire in Gaza has been broken nearly 600 times and that each violation has resulted in civilian casualties. He accused international institutions of failing to take effective measures to stop the violence.

Baghaei condemned Washington's recent policies, including its declaration restricting Venezuelan airspace, calling the move "unprecedented" and a violation of international law. He also cited U.S. threats against African states regarding participation in the G20, and what he described as American support for "the crimes of the Zionist regime," urging the UN Security Council to classify U.S. conduct as contrary to global peace.

He warned that such actions are becoming "a model for other actors," ultimately harming all states.

The spokesperson confirmed the visit of Saudi Arabia's deputy foreign minister to Tehran, describing it as part of the ongoing normalization process that began two years ago. Discussions covered bilateral ties and regional issues, including Palestine, Lebanon, and Syria. Both sides, he said, remain "determined to strengthen stability in West Asia."

Regarding Australia's recent designation of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC),



Baghaei said the move had "no legal or factual basis" and was influenced by "false information" from Israel. He claimed Australian officials themselves had previously confirmed that Iran was not linked to the allegations related to activities in Sydney.

Baghaei provided details on Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi's visit to France and discussions with EU foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas. He said talks focused on bilateral and international issues, including Iran's nuclear program, but emphasized that the meeting with Kallas was not directly tied to the French visit.

The spokesperson accused Israel of systematically violating the Lebanon ceasefire, referencing UN reports that record "around 10,000 violations." He said Israel uses ceasefires as "a pretext for further attacks," and criticized guarantors of the ceasefire for failing to act.

Baghaei condemned new U.S. actions against citizens of Iran and 19 other countries, calling the measures "racist" and politically motivated.

On Iran's nuclear activities, Baghaei said Iran is exercising its rights under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, and that talk of an impasse is misplaced. He said Western states must stop using coercion and instead recognize Iran's rights. European countries, he argued, have repeatedly undermined negotiations under U.S. pressure.

Responding to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's recent warnings about a new regional crisis, Baghaei said Israel has spent "eight decades manufacturing instability." He insisted Iran is prepared for any scenario and "will not allow the Zionist regime's fantasies to come true."

Baghaei also discussed Iran-Turkey coordination on counter-terrorism, Iranian-Afghan economic cooperation, and the case of Mahdich Esfandiari, an Iranian national detained in France. He said Iranian officials had visited Esfandiari and that she is in good condition, expressing hope for her swift return to Iran.

Federal Gov't Shutdown: A Failed Strategy

By: Hamid Reza Naghashian

Looking at the outcomes and consequences of this shutdown, it can be evaluated as a costly and low-yield strategy. Assessing whether Donald Trump succeeded in shutting down the federal government to advance his budget demands depends on what we consider the standard of success.

Although he was ultimately forced to sign a bill that did not meet his main demands, the crisis caused widespread disruption and imposed heavy costs on the American people and federal employees. Trump's main goal was to pressure the Democrats into approving a budget without extending the healthcare subsidies known as Obamacare.

But the direct outcome was the passage of a temporary budget bill (CR) that only provides the government with liquidity and funding needs until January 30, 2026—without fulfilling the Republicans' primary demand regarding healthcare subsidies. The media fiasco and the confusion of 1.5 million employees during the 43-day shutdown made it the longest government shutdown in U.S. history.

The impact on the public and the stoppage of various services—1.5 million federal employees without pay or on forced leave, disrupted air travel, and the suspension of food assistance for millions of Americans—had widespread consequences. The evaluation of the results and the disappointing outcomes amounted to nothing more than an unsuccessful partisan struggle.

Trump failed to achieve his core demand and could not secure the elimination of healthcare subsidies, and in the end, he was forced to sign a bill that he essentially had from the beginning. This outcome marked the failure of the core strategy of "shutdown as blackmail."

Republicans accused Democrats of "extortion," while Democrats and some polls blamed Republicans—and Trump personally—as the main culprits of the shutdown. This deepened partisan divides across the United States. And although Trump called the outcome a "great victory," reports indicated that the shutdown ultimately harmed Republicans in public opinion, as people viewed them as responsible and coercive.

Considering all aspects, it appears the government shutdown initiated by Trump was not a successful move. Although he managed to attract media attention, he failed to achieve his primary budget demand, imposed significant human and economic costs on the country, and weakened his party's standing in public opinion. This event, rather than being a display of power, revealed political deadlock and the challenges of governing in a polarized society.



Judiciary Chief Emphasizes Upholding Constitution and Protecting Citizens' Rights



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - At a session of Iran's Supreme Judicial Council, Chief Justice Gholam-Hossein Mohseni-Eje'i stressed the importance of safeguarding the principles of the Constitution, with particular focus on aligning laws with Islamic principles and protecting the rights of the people.

Speaking to reporters via the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB), Eje'i highlighted Article 4 of the Constitution, which mandates that all national laws and regulations must be based on Islamic criteria. He warned that over time, some may attempt, under the guise of modernity or intellectualism, to challenge these principles or claim that certain laws are outdated or ineffective.

He also referred to Chapter Three of the Constitution, covering Articles 19 to 42, which pertains to citizens' rights. "All state officials, and especially those of us in the judiciary, are responsible for upholding and safeguarding the rights of the people," Eje'i said. Citing Article 6, he emphasized that the administration of the country relies on public participation and elections, noting that Iran has held numerous elections since the revolution with high voter turnout compared to many other countries.

IRAN NEWS



Iran, Afghanistan Explore Ways to Boost Agricultural Trade

TEHRAN (IRNA) - The head of Iran's Plant Protection Organization announced that strategies to expand Afghanistan's agricultural exports to Iran and resolve existing trade barriers were reviewed during a bilateral meeting.

Maryam Jalili-Moghadam met with Mawlawi Shahabuddin Saqib, Acting Deputy Minister of Finance and Administration and Acting Minister of Industry and Trade of Afghanistan, along with representatives from Afghanistan's cotton sector. The discussions focused on increasing exports of Afghan agricultural products—particularly cotton—to Iran and addressing obstacles in the export process.

Government and private-sector delegates from both countries exchanged views on boosting cotton and other crop exports, easing customs and transportation procedures, improving quality standards, and establishing direct communication channels between producers and traders.

303 Domestic, Foreign Companies to Participate in Iran's Coatings and Resin Exhibition



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The Deputy for Exhibition Affairs at the Iran International Exhibitions Company announced that 243 domestic companies and 60 foreign companies will take part in the 25th International Exhibition of Paint, Resin, Industrial Coatings, Composites, and Electroplating.

Speaking at a briefing for the 25th edition of the exhibition, held at the Tehran Permanent International Fairground, Mohammad Javad Ghanbari said the event is one of the oldest exhibitions in the paint and resin industry and will be held this year from December 2 to 5.

He noted that despite economic fluctuations and sanctions, the exhibition platform has remained strong. "The presence of domestic and foreign companies is significant—around one quarter of all participants this year are international exhibitors," he said.

Ghanbari added that the exhibition space covers more than 19,000 square meters, marking a slight increase compared with last year.

He highlighted the active participation of domestic companies across various fields, including electroplating, composites, sealants, and other specialized sectors related to paints and resins. He emphasized that the exhibition plays an important role in creating economic and commercial opportunities.

According to Ghanbari, the event allows companies and manufacturers to directly discuss industry challenges with competitors, industrial leaders, government officials, and private-sector representatives such as chambers of commerce. He said that hosting such exhibitions at the Tehran International Fairground creates opportunities for ministers and parliamentary committee heads to hear industry concerns firsthand.

He also noted that 30 additional exhibitions in various sectors are scheduled to take place at the Tehran fairground before the end of the year.

Responding to a question about the potential privatization of the International Exhibitions Company, Ghanbari said the organization is a national asset with more than 50 years of experience. Nearly 70 exhibitions are planned for this year, about 30 of which have already taken place, with the remainder to be held according to the event calendar.

Iran a Reliable Partner for Maldives in Heritage, Culture, and Tourism



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - On the sidelines of the Second General Assembly of the Asian Cultural Heritage Alliance (ACHA) in Chongqing, a high-level meeting between Iranian and Maldivian ministers was held with a focus on opening a new chapter of cooperation in cultural heritage, tourism, and scientific exchanges. Both sides emphasized readiness to share expertise, expand cultural events, and collaborate on climate-change initiatives.

According to the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts, Seyyed Reza Salehi-Amiri met on Friday, November 27 (December 7, 2025), with Adam Naseer Ibrahim, the Maldivian Minister of Dhivehi Language, Culture, and Heritage.

The meeting highlighted shared historical ties and explored cooperation in tourism development, cultural exchanges, handicrafts, specialized training, and climate-change programs.

Salehi-Amiri underscored Iran's civilizational standing and extensive cultural-heritage capacity, noting: "Iran has identified more than one million historical sites, thousands of which are nationally registered. To date, 29 tangible and 26 intangible heritage elements have been inscribed on the UNESCO list, and we have prepared preliminary files for 58 more."

He stressed Iran's strategic priority of maritime tourism development, explaining that with seven coastal provinces, Iran has launched a national sea-based economic initiative. "This direction reflects our national policies, and we are ready to share our scientific, research, and managerial experience with the Maldives," he said.



Iran's Future Depends on the Digital Economy

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Iran's First Vice President Mohammad Reza Aref says investment and ICT production are central to the country's Seventh Development Plan, describing ICT as one of the safest, most profitable, and most strategically important fields for economic growth. He stated that the government is prepared to remove barriers, revise regulations, and support both major and small-scale projects to strengthen the industry.

Speaking at the National Conference on Investment Opportunities in the ICT Sector, Aref said the Seventh Plan is built around three key pillars: investment, production, and ICT. He emphasized that the plan's economic target—most notably achieving 8 percent annual growth—cannot be reached without substantial and well-directed investment.

Aref noted that while Iran has long focused on self-sufficiency in production, its economic strategy is now increasingly aimed at expanding into regional markets that share cultural and commercial ties with the country. Production, he added, is no longer confined to hardware, as scientific progress over the past two decades has broadened the focus to include software and emerging technologies.

He identified ICT as "the beating heart of the innovation economy," pointing to this year's national slogan, "Investment for Production," and stressing the growing importance of ICT across governance, education, commerce, industry, national security, and daily life. "There is no major sector today in which ICT does not play a decisive role," he said.

Aref also referenced Iran's ranking in the Global Innovation Index—70th overall and 46th in innovation outputs among 139 countries—but argued that inaccuracies in domestic data reporting weaken these measurements. He stated that Iran's digital infrastructure still falls short of both national and regional needs.

The First Vice President warned that Iran is lagging in the global race toward artificial intelligence. Countries that invested early in AI, he said, now dominate the field. To close the gap, the 14th administration has established a High Council for AI Development at the highest levels of government. Aref urged the creation of a transparent, predictable, and flexible investment environment, including specialized regulatory frameworks to facilitate both domestic and foreign investment in AI sectors.

He highlighted the crucial role of coordinated collaboration between universities and industry to speed the commercialization of technological breakthroughs. While

acknowledging the current gap between Iran's capabilities and its goals, Aref called this gap "an opportunity rather than a threat," describing AI as the most powerful driver of transformation within ICT.

AI, he explained, is expanding digital services and enabling new industries such as intelligent cloud systems, advanced data analytics, and smart automation. These technologies are also lowering innovation costs for startups and technology companies.

According to Aref, the government has already begun implementing major initiatives to support advanced technologies and AI, with the new High Council expected to accelerate progress. He expressed confidence that with its skilled workforce and growing investment base, Iran can become a leading AI player regionally and potentially internationally.

Aref also underlined the need to reinforce the nation's digital infrastructure—expanding high-speed networks, large-scale systems, and cloud services. He warned against adding new users to outdated or overloaded systems without increasing capacity. "Quality must be our top priority," he said, calling for serious investment and greater support for startups and technology firms.

He praised the capabilities of domestic companies that have already made significant contributions to the digital economy, emphasizing the need for ongoing and targeted support. The shift toward smart governance, he said, will strengthen transparency, speed service delivery, attract investment, and help resolve structural inefficiencies.

Aref called for ICT investment to be treated as a national and strategic priority, supported by regulatory reform and modernization of infrastructure. He pointed to applications such as smart electricity-grid management—using ICT and AI to reduce losses, predict consumption, and monitor production in real time—as critical tools for increasing energy efficiency.

Reaffirming ICT as one of Iran's most secure and profitable investment fields, Aref said the government is prepared to assist projects of all sizes by removing regulatory barriers and fostering innovation. "The future will not be built on underground resources," he said, "but on innovation, data, communication, and digital technology."

He concluded by urging collective action as the country moves toward a major digital transformation: "Iran stands at the threshold of a digital leap. The future of our economy is digital—and it begins today."

Iran Poised to Establish Its First Artificial Intelligence Operator

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Iran is on the verge of entering a new phase of data governance and smart service development, following the communications minister's announcement that the country is preparing to issue a license for an artificial intelligence (AI) operator—an initiative expected to transform Iran's processing and data-driven infrastructure through extensive private-sector participation.

Seyyed Sattar Hashemi, Minister of Communications and Information Technology, said at the National Conference on Investment Opportunities in ICT: "When we talk about the economy and digital transformation, it is no longer a choice but a strategic necessity."

He added that the scale of investment required for digital economy infrastructure, and the multiplier effect it can generate, makes it clear that this sector stands apart from others in terms of returns and investment significance.

Hashemi stated that countries around the world are pursuing strategic approaches to investment in the digital economy, and Iran is doing the same. "At the Ministry of Communications—and in the country as a whole—we are focused on investment across various layers of the digital economy, with particular emphasis on incentivizing private-sector-led initiatives."

Highlighting the legal framework outlined in the Seventh Development Plan, he noted that multiple provisions—especially in Chapter Thirteen—demonstrate the legislature's strong attention to digital economic infrastructure and investment. "This indicates that Iran has taken an appropriate direction in addressing these needs from a regulatory standpoint," he said.

Given the scale of investment required, the minister emphasized that it is neither feasible nor economically justified for the government alone to meet the country's needs. "With a clear strategy and strong reliance on the private sector, the Ministry of Communications is opening the way for private investors across different layers of the digital economy."



Hashemi reiterated the ministry's focus on developing key communications infrastructure, including fiber-optic networks, 5G deployment, and readiness for future investment in 6G technologies.

He said that two main tracks are being pursued in fiber-optic development: an FTTH project led by private operators, and a national migration from copper to fiber led by Telecom Iran with the participation of other operators. Describing this as a major and lasting achievement, he noted that it marks a historic shift taking place during the current administration after nearly a century.

"Bold, wise, and forward-looking action is required," Hashemi said, calling for the mobilization of all available capacities to seize the limited window of opportunity. "We hope, with collective effort, to take timely steps."

He noted that with the long-awaited auction of 5G spectrum now completed, operators have entered the phase of building and equipping 5G infrastructure. But he emphasized that the core of any high-capacity communication network is data. "These infrastructures exist fundamentally to enable the flow of data."

Addressing the emerging need for national data management, Hashemi underscored the importance of data governance and data-centric development. "To achieve this, we must prioritize expanding storage infrastructure, data centers, and processing power."

Within this framework, and based on mandates in high-level national plans, the government is moving to redevelop the national cloud platform with private-sector participation. Additionally, the Communications Regulatory Authority intends to issue licenses for AI operators, formally enabling private companies to operate AI services in the country. This initiative, he said, is rooted in the belief that progress in communications and data fields is impossible without the involvement of stakeholders and private industry.

Hashemi concluded by acknowledging existing challenges in the country's data landscape and stressed the need for stronger collaboration with the private sector to overcome them.

Iran's Handmade Carpet Exports Fall to Historic Lows



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Iran's handmade carpet exports have dropped to one of their lowest levels in history, with experts warning that even \$40 million in export revenue will likely not be achieved this year.

Morteza Haji-Aqamiri, a member of the Tehran Chamber of Commerce board, told ISNA that a combination of sanctions, domestic policies, and geopolitical disruptions has led to the loss of Iran's traditional markets.

He said Iran has lost its most important destination—the United States, which once accounted for about 45% of the global handmade carpet market. "Being cut off from such a major market naturally delivers a heavy blow to Iran's carpet exports," he added.

Domestic restrictions have also compounded the problem. Haji-Aqamiri pointed to the foreign-exchange repatriation requirement enforced since 2018, which significantly deterred exporters. Although the policy eased in recent years, its lingering effects remain.

He noted that hopes for a modest recovery were dashed this year by "the war and the post-war suspension period," which again disrupted markets and continues to affect trade flows.

Another major barrier, he said, is customs regulation. Under an addendum to Article 121 of the Customs Executive Bylaw, Iranian carpets stored abroad cannot be returned to the country for repair or restoration. "This drives down prices in our traditional markets and prevents us from entering new ones," he explained.

Tehran to Host 14th Meeting of UNESCO-Affiliated Regional Centre on Urban Water Management



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Minister of Energy, who serves as the Chair of the Governing Board of the Regional Centre on Urban Water Management (RCUWM) under UNESCO, is scheduled to address the 14th meeting of the Board, to be held in Tehran on Thursday, December 4.

According to the Ministry of Energy, the one-day meeting will focus on reviewing proposed projects and discussing ways to expand joint cooperation among member states. As the Centre's highest decision-making body, the Governing Board includes water ministers, their representatives or ambassadors from member countries, along with the representative of the UNESCO Director-General and delegates from several international organizations.

The RCUWM was established in 2002 under an agreement between Iran's Ministry of Energy and UNESCO. Its training, capacity-building, and research activities are aligned with UNESCO's Intergovernmental Hydrological Programme (IHP) priorities for 2022–2029, with the aim of advancing water management across the region.

Currently, 18 countries—including Azerbaijan, Germany, Armenia, Uzbekistan, Afghanistan, Iran, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkey, Sri Lanka, Syria, Switzerland, Iraq, Oman, Qatar, Lebanon, Egypt, and India—and 10 international organizations such as UNESCO, ECO, UNDP, WMO and FAO are members of the Governing Board. The Board convenes every two years to approve the Centre's annual, medium-term, and long-term programs.

During the 13th Governing Board meeting held in Tehran in February 2023, the Centre's six-year plan (2023–2029) was approved. The upcoming 14th meeting will present progress reports on these programs along with proposals to expand activities in areas such as flood management, drought management, climate change adaptation, and water and wastewater reuse across member countries.

Sri Lanka's Cyclone Death Toll climbs to 334

COLOMBO (Dispatches) - The death toll from floods and landslides triggered by Cyclone Ditwah rose sharply to 334 on Sunday, Sri Lanka's disaster agency said, with many more still missing. It is the worst natural disaster to hit the island in two decades, and officials said the extent of damage in the worst-affected central region was only just being revealed as relief workers cleared roads blocked by fallen trees and mudslides. The Disaster Management Centre (DMC) said the death toll had risen to 334, up from 212 earlier on Sunday, with nearly 400 missing and more than 1.3 million people across the island affected by the record rains.



Thousands March in Zagreb Against Far Right



ZAGREB (Dispatches) - Several thousand people rallied in Croatia's capital on Sunday in an anti-fascist march protesting against the rise of World War II revisionism and far-right views in the country.

In recent months, Croatia has been seeing right-wing nationalists increasingly trying to impose their agenda, with subsequent incidents targeting the ethnic Serb minority and the use in public of the country's World War II pro-Nazi regime salute.

In early November, masked men disrupted a Serb cultural event in Croatia's second-largest city of Split, replicating the Ustasha salute.

Relations with ethnic Serbs have remained fragile since Croatia's 1990s war with Belgrade-backed rebel Serbs who opposed its independence.

Hundreds of thousands gathered in Zagreb at a July concert of ultra-nationalist singer Marko Perkovic, known by his stage name Thompson.

One of Thompson's most popular songs starts with the Ustasha salute and his fans are often adorned with affiliated symbols.

In the days that followed the concert, two MPs made the salute from the parliamentary podium, while in October the assembly hosted a round table that downplayed the number of Croatia's WWII death camp victims.

"Fascists are no longer ashamed, nor do they hide," the organisers of Sunday's march said in a statement, calling for resistance to "violence, historical revisionism, and intimidation".

OPEC+ Holds Oil Output Steady, Agrees Capacity Mechanism



LONDON (Dispatches) - OPEC+ agreed to leave oil output levels unchanged for the first quarter of 2026 at its meetings on Sunday as the group slows down its push to regain market share amid fears of a looming supply glut.

The meeting of OPEC+, which pumps half of the world's oil, comes during a fresh U.S. effort to broker a peace deal between Russia and Ukraine, which could add to oil supply if sanctions on Russia are eased.

If the peace deal fails, Russia could see its supply curbed further by sanctions. OPEC+ groups the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and allies led by Russia.

Brent crude closed on Friday near \$63 a barrel, down 15% this year. "The message from the group was clear: stability outweighs ambition at a time when the market outlook is deteriorating rapidly," said Jorge Leon, a former OPEC official who now works as head of geopolitical analysis at Rystad Energy.

Eight OPEC+ members have paused oil output hikes for the first quarter of 2026 after releasing some 2.9 million barrels per day into the market since April 2025, and Sunday's meeting reaffirmed that decision, OPEC said in a statement.

OPEC+ still has about 3.24 million bpd of output cuts in place, representing around 3% of global demand. The Sunday meetings did not alter those.

LONDON (Dispatches) - Sales by the world's top 100 arms makers hit a record \$679 billion last year, up 5.9% as wars in Ukraine and Gaza drove demand, researchers said on Monday, though production bottlenecks slowed deliveries. SIPRI said arms revenues have climbed 26% over the 2015-2024 period.

The figure was 5.9 percent higher than the year before, and, over the 2015-2024 period, revenues for the top 100 arms makers have risen 26 percent according to a report by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI).

"Last year global arms revenues reached the highest level ever recorded by SIPRI as producers capitalised on high demand," Lorenzo Scarazzato, researcher with the SIPRI Military Expenditure and Arms Production Programme, said in a statement.

Jade Guiberteau Ricard, a researcher for the same programme, explained to AFP that "it's mostly driven by Europe," although "all areas have increased except for Asia and Oceania".

Ricard said the increased demand in Europe was tied to the war in Ukraine and "the threat perception of Russia by European states".

According to SIPRI, demand from Ukraine as well as from countries militarily supporting it and which need to replenish stockpiles helped drive demand.

Ricard added that many European countries are also now looking to expand and modernise their own militaries, "which will present a new source of demand".

The United States is home to 39 of the world's top 100 arms makers, including the top three: Lockheed Martin, RTX (formerly Raytheon Technologies) and Northrop Grumman.

US arms makers saw their combined revenues rise 3.8 percent to reach \$334 billion in 2024, nearly half of the world's total.

At the same time, the authors of the report noted that budget overruns and delays plague several key US-led programmes, like the F-35 fighter jet and the Columbia-class submarine.

The 26 of the top 100 arms maker which are based in Europe saw aggregate revenues grow by 13 percent to \$151 billion. Czech company Czechoslovak Group saw revenue spike by 193 percent -- the sharpest increase of all the top 100 -- reaching \$3.6 billion.

The company benefited from the Czech Ammunition Initiative which provides artillery shells for Ukraine.

But European arms makers are also facing difficulties in responding to the increased demand, with SIPRI noting that sourcing



materials looks to become more challenging.

The authors noted that Airbus and France's Safran sourced half of their titanium from Russia before 2022 and have had to find new suppliers.

Chinese export restrictions on critical minerals have led companies -- such as France's Thales and Germany's Rheinmetall -- to warn of higher costs as they restructure supply chains.

Two Russian arms makers are also among the top 100, Rostec and United Shipbuilding Corporation, and they saw combined revenue rise by 23 percent to \$31.2 billion, despite a shortfall of components due to international sanctions, as domestic demand more than compensated for falling exports.

The report also noted that the Russian arms industry is struggling to find enough skilled labour "to support the projected rates of production needed to sustain Russia's war aims".

The Asia and Oceania region was the only region to see the overall revenues of the 23 companies based there go down -- their combined revenues dropped 1.2 percent to \$130 billion.

But the authors stressed that the picture across Asia was varied and the overall drop was the result of by a larger drop among Chinese arms makers.

"A host of corruption allegations in Chinese arms procurement led to major arms contracts being postponed or cancelled in 2024," Nan Tian, Director of SIPRI's Military Expenditure and Arms Production Programme, said in a statement.

Tian added that the drop deepened "uncertainty" around China's efforts to modernise its military.

In contrast, Japanese and South Korean weapons makers saw their revenues increase, also driven by European demand.

Meanwhile, nine of the top 100 arms companies were based in the Middle East, with combined revenues of \$31 billion.

The three Israeli arms companies in the ranking accounted for more than half of that, as their combined revenues grew by 16 percent to \$16.2 billion.

SIPRI researcher Zubaida Karim noted in a statement that "the growing backlash over Israel's actions in Gaza seems to have had little impact on interest in Israeli weapons".

U.S. Sees Progress After Talks in Florida With Ukraine

HALLANDALE BEACH (Dispatches) - U.S. and Ukrainian officials held what both sides called productive talks on Sunday about a Russia peace deal, with Secretary of State Marco Rubio expressing optimism about progress despite challenges to ending the more than 3-year-long war.

Rubio met with a Ukrainian delegation led by a new chief negotiator in Florida, his home state, for talks that he said were meant to create a pathway for Ukraine to remain sovereign and independent.

"We continue to be realistic about how difficult this is, but optimistic, particularly given the fact that as we've made progress, I think there is a shared vision here that this is not just about ending the war," Rubio told reporters after the talks concluded. "It is about securing Ukraine's future, a future that we hope will be more prosperous than it's ever been."

The discussions were a follow-up to a new set of negotiations that began with a fresh U.S. blueprint for peace. Critics said the plan initially favored Russia, which started the conflict with a 2022 invasion of Ukraine.

Special envoy Steve Witkoff and U.S. President Donald Trump's son-in-law, Jared Kushner, were also present representing the U.S. side. Witkoff leaves on Monday for Moscow, where he is expected to meet Russian counterparts for talks this week.

"There's more work to be done. This is delicate," Rubio said. "There are a lot of moving parts, and obviously there's another party involved here ... that will have to be a part of the equation, and that will continue later this week, when Mr. Witkoff travels to Moscow."

Trump has expressed frustration at not being able to end the war. He pledged as a presidential candidate to do so in one day and has said he was



surprised it has been so hard, given what he calls a strong relationship with Russian President Vladimir Putin, who has largely resisted concessions to stop the fighting.

Trump's team has pressured Ukraine to make significant concessions itself, including giving up territory to Russia.

The talks shifted on Sunday with a change in leadership from the Ukrainian side. A new chief negotiator, national security council secretary Rustem Umerov, led the discussions for Kyiv after the resignation on Friday of previous team leader Andriy Yermak, chief of staff to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, amid a corruption scandal at home.

"Ukraine's got some difficult little problems," Trump told reporters on Air Force One on Sunday, referring to the corruption scandal, which he said was "not helpful." He repeated his view that both Russia and Ukraine wanted to end the war and said there was a good chance a deal could be reached.

Umerov thanked the United States and its officials for their support. "U.S. is hearing us, U.S. is supporting us, U.S. is walking besides us," he said in English as the negotiations began.

After the meeting, he declared it productive. "We discussed all the important matters that are important for Ukraine, for Ukrainian people and U.S. was super supportive," Umerov said.

The Sunday talks took place near Miami at a private club, Shell Bay, developed by Witkoff's real estate business.

Zelenskyy had said he expected the results from previous meetings in Geneva would be "hammered out" on Sunday. In Geneva, Ukraine presented a counter-offer to proposals laid out by U.S. Secretary of the Army Dan Driscoll to leaders in Kyiv some two weeks ago.

Ukraine's leadership, facing a domestic political crisis fueled by a probe into major graft in the energy sector, is seeking to push back on Moscow-friendly terms as Russian forces grind forward along the front lines of the war.

Last week, Zelenskyy warned Ukrainians, who are weathering widespread blackouts from Russian air strikes on the energy system, that his country was at its most difficult moment yet but pledged not to make a bad deal.

"As a weatherman would say, there's the inherent difficulty in forecasting because the atmosphere is a chaotic system where small changes can lead to large outcomes," Kyiv's first deputy foreign minister Sergiy Kyslytsya, also part of the delegation, wrote on X from Miami on Sunday.

Trump Confirms Call With Maduro, Venezuela Slams U.S. Attack Preparations

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - U.S. President Donald Trump said Sunday he had recently spoken with Venezuelan leader Nicolás Maduro as tensions surged, while Caracas accused Washington of preparing an attack. The United States has tightened pressure with a military buildup in the Caribbean, branding a Maduro-run drug cartel a terrorist group, and warning Venezuelan airspace is "closed."

The United States is piling the pressure on Venezuela, with a major military buildup in the Caribbean, the designation of an alleged drug cartel run by Maduro as a terrorist group, and an ominous warning from Trump that Venezuelan airspace is "closed."

Washington says the aim of the military deployment launched in September is to curb drug trafficking in the region, but Caracas insists regime change is the ultimate goal.

"I wouldn't say it went well or badly. It was a phone call," Trump told reporters Sunday aboard Air Force One.

The New York Times reported Friday that Trump and Maduro had discussed a possible meeting, while The Wall Street Journal said Saturday that the



conversation also included conditions of amnesty if Maduro were to step down.

Republican Senator Markwayne Mullin said Sunday on CNN's "State of the Union" talk show that the United States has offered Maduro the chance to leave his country for Russia or elsewhere.

The United States accuses Maduro, the political heir to Venezuela's late leftist leader Hugo Chavez, of heading the "Cartel of the Suns" and has issued a \$50 million reward for his capture.

But Venezuela and countries that support it insist no such organisation even exists.

Several Venezuela experts say what Washington calls the Cartel of the Suns refers to the corruption of senior officials by criminal gangs.

The United States also does not recognise Maduro as the legitimate winner of last year's presidential election.

Though Trump has not publicly threatened to use force against Maduro, he said in recent days that efforts to halt Venezuelan drug trafficking "by land" would begin "very soon."



LONDON (Dispatches) - Mikel Merino rescued Arsenal as the Premier League leaders battled to a 1-1 draw against 10-man Chelsea in a heavyweight title clash, while Alexander Isak finally scored his first top-flight goal for troubled Liverpool in a 2-0 win at West Ham on Sunday.

Chelsea midfielder Moises Caicedo was sent off in the 38th minute at Stamford Bridge for a crude foul on Merino that caught the midfielder on his ankle.

Despite Caicedo's dismissal, Trevoh Chalobah headed Chelsea from Reece James' corner into the lead in the 48th minute.

But Merino's close-range header from Bukayo Saka's cross in the 59th minute ensured Arsenal emerged unscathed from a bruising encounter between the title rivals.

Arsenal are five points clear of second-placed Manchester City, who beat Newcastle on Saturday, and sit six points above third-placed Chelsea.

The Gunners remain the favourites to win their first Premier League crown since 2004, but Chelsea's combative display suggested they could emerge as the biggest threat to the Gunners' title aspirations.

Arsenal are unbeaten in 17 games in all competitions, winning 14 of those matches, while Chelsea have gone seven matches without losing in all competitions.

"I think we showed we are heading in the right direction. We were a much better team than them 11 v 11 but with 10 players, it is difficult but we dealt with it outstandingly," Chelsea boss Enzo Maresca said.

Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta added: "Two teams that play with a lot of intensity and aggression,

you could sense it in every tackle.

"We scored a brilliant goal. We had two or three big chances. It's been a massive week emotionally and physically."

Isak had failed to score in his five top-flight appearances since making a British record £125 million (\$165 million) move from Newcastle in September.

The Sweden forward banished that drought with only his second goal in 11 games in all competitions for the Reds, following his maiden strike in a League Cup win against second-tier Southampton.

Cody Gakpo bagged Liverpool's second goal in stoppage time to secure their first win in four games in all competitions.

"It's very important for us as a team that we went 1-0 up, but I think it was also important for him because I think it was his third or fourth chance of this game," said Liverpool manager Arne Slot. Joshua Zirkzee scored his first Premier League goal for nearly a year before Mason Mount grabbed the winner as Manchester United came from behind to beat Crystal Palace 2-1.

Ruben Amorim's side trailed to Jean-Philippe Mateta's first half penalty at Selhurst Park, but Zirkzee and Mount netted after the interval to secure United's first win in four games.

United recovered from their lacklustre start thanks to Zirkzee's first goal in the Premier League since he netted against Everton in December 2024.

"I could see that Palace were getting tired at the end of the first half and knew they would suffer if we scored," Amorim said.

Verstappen Wins Qatar GP to Set Up Final Race Title Showdown

DOHA (Dispatches) - Max Verstappen won the Qatar Grand Prix on Sunday to set up a final race title showdown with McLaren duo Lando Norris and Oscar Piastri.

The Red Bull driver kept the wheels on his quest for a fifth successive crown after pole-sitter Piastri finished second and standings leader Norris came only fourth.

Verstappen's remarkable late season surge has lifted him past Piastri and into second in the championship.

The Dutchman now goes into the season-closer next weekend only 12 points behind Norris with Piastri 16 points behind his teammate.

Verstappen has fond memories of the last time the title went down to the wire when he beat Lewis Hamilton on the last lap of the last race in Abu Dhabi in 2021.

This was a race McLaren should have won, with



Piastri heading the grid and Norris alongside him on the front row, only to be overtaken by Verstappen at the start.

Red Bull pitted Verstappen under a safety car, unlike McLaren who kept their two drivers out on the track. "Clearly we did not get it right tonight," conceded Piastri.

"I drove as fast as I could but it wasn't to be. In hindsight it is pretty obvious what we should have done, but we'll discuss that as a team. (It's) a little bit tough to swallow at the moment," the Australian added.

Verstappen said: "An incredible race for us, we made the right call to box under that safety car. A strong race for us on a weekend that was tough."

Carlos Sainz of Williams completed the podium under floodlights at the Lusail International Circuit in the Doha desert.

Shiffrin Bags 104th World Cup Win With Copper Mountain Slalom Victory



COPPER MOUNTAIN (Dispatches) - American star Mikaela Shiffrin maintained her unbeaten start to the slalom season on Sunday with a dominant victory at the alpine skiing World Cup meeting in Copper Mountain, Colorado.

In front of a home crowd, the 30-year-old American cruised to victory with a combined time of 1min 48.75sec, finishing a comfortable 1.57sec ahead of Germany's Lena Durr in second. Albanian teenager Lara Colturi finished in third place, 1.85sec behind Shiffrin.

Shiffrin's win -- the 104th World Cup circuit victory of her career and her 67th slalom win -- followed similarly dominant slalom victories by the two-time Olympic gold medallist in Finland and Austria earlier this season.

She tops the discipline standings and also heads the overall standings, 90 points clear of Colturi.

Shiffrin's form comes as she builds towards next year's Winter Olympics in Cortina in Italy, where she is desperate to atone for her disastrous 2022 games in Beijing, where she came away empty-handed.

Despite her latest slalom victory though, Shiffrin admitted she had found Sunday's race -- just a few kilometers from her home -- a challenge.

"This is super special," Shiffrin said. "Today was stressful. I didn't expect to have so many nerves but it's special to race at home, and this crowd is incredible.

"I could hear them from the start... that energy helps, because this is a hard course. It's long and it's tiring."

Shiffrin meanwhile admitted that the altitude of Copper Mountain -- which is one of the highest race venues on the circuit with an elevation of nearly 10,000 feet -- had posed an additional challenge.

"I mean, I live here and I never get used to it," she said afterwards. "Particularly travelling from overseas. You don't even have a week to get used to it or anything."

France's Caitlin McFarlane posted the fastest time in the second run, just ahead of Shiffrin, to achieve her best career result with a 12th place finish, 3.44 seconds behind.

Real Madrid Drop Points at Girona in Third Straight Liga Draw



GIRONA (Dispatches) - Real Madrid were held to a third consecutive La Liga draw in a 1-1 tie at Girona on Sunday, allowing Barcelona to retain pole position.

Azzedine Ounahi fired the hosts into a surprise lead before half-time, with Kylian Mbappe earning Madrid a point from the penalty spot.

After Barcelona beat Alaves on Saturday to move top of the table, Madrid needed a victory at Girona to reclaim top spot but now sit second, a point behind the champions.

The draw increases the pressure on Madrid coach Xabi Alonso, after recent rumours suggesting his future is insecure in the Madrid dugout.

"We are up there, it's all very even, it's a long season and we have to continue," Alonso told reporters.

"I liked the reaction from the players. It was not enough to turn it around but we were close, and we have to continue with the unity we have, being self-critical enough, and wanting to win away from home, with this phase of the calendar where we have so many matches (away)."

Madrid travel to face Athletic Bilbao on Wednesday for a fourth consecutive league match on the road, a game moved because of the club's participation in the Spanish Super Cup in January.

"The table will be hard-fought, there will be lots of movement. We're playing for three points but it would be a good moment to win, in Bilbao," added Alonso.

Young Dazzles as Panthers Upset Rams, Bills Down Steelers

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - Bryce Young threw three touchdowns as the Carolina Panthers upset the in-form Los Angeles Rams 31-28 on Sunday as the NFL playoff race tightened.

Panthers quarterback Young -- coming off a poor performance in a dismal defeat to the San Francisco 49ers last Monday -- tossed two daring second-half touchdowns on fourth down to give Carolina a precious win in what promises to be a hectic final sprint for postseason places.

The Rams -- who boasted the best record in the National Football Conference heading into Sunday's duel in Charlotte -- were left ruing mistakes at key moments.

Quarterback Matthew Stafford gave up a first quarter interception that Panthers defender Mike Jackson returned for a touchdown before a costly fourth quarter fumble effectively sealed the Rams' defeat.

The win leaves the Rams at 9-3 at the top of the NFC



West while the Panthers improved to 7-6 to stay hard on the heels of the Tampa Bay Buccaneers in the NFC South. The Bucs remain top of the division after a 20-17 win over the Arizona Cardinals.

The Rams looked poised to extend their six-game winning streak early in the fourth quarter when Stafford led a superb 89-yard touchdown drive to help give the visitors a 28-24 lead.

That scoring drive included an astonishing one-handed catch from Rams receiver Puka Nacua that set up a close-range rushing touchdown for Kyren Williams on the next play.

However, Young responded to that challenge with a gutsy 43-yard touchdown completion on fourth down to find Tetairoa McMillan which gave the home side what turned out to be a decisive 31-28 lead after Stafford's late fumble.