

Iran Has Reported a Sharp Rise in Household and Commercial Demand for Natural Gas Amid a New Cold Spell That Has Pushed Temperatures Down to as Low as Minus 8 Degrees Celsius in Parts of the Country

# IRAN NEWS

Iran's Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council and Russia's Deputy Prime Minister for Transport Have Underscored the Need to Accelerate the Implementation of the Strategic North-South Corridor During High-Level Talks in Tehran

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### Iran Summons Cyprus Ambassador Over Meddlesome Remarks on Iranian islands



IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Iran has summoned the Cypriot ambassador to Tehran to express strong protest to the country's recent meddlesome remarks regarding Iran's territorial integrity, particularly about the three Iranian islands in the Persian Gulf.

Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs summoned the Cypriot ambassador to Tehran, Petros Nacouzis, on Tuesday after a joint statement issued by officials from Cyprus and the UAE included claims regarding Iran's Persian Gulf islands of Abu Musa, Greater Tunb, and Lesser Tunb.

Mohammad Alibek, Assistant Foreign Minister and Director General for the Persian Gulf at Iran's Foreign Ministry, handed over a formal written protest to Nacouzis, conveying the Iranian government's strong objections to the provocative statement.

Alibek reminded the Cypriot ambassador that the three islands in question are inseparable parts of Iranian territory, emphasizing the Islamic Republic's undisputed and long-standing sovereignty over these islands.

He stressed that Iran's historical and effective control over the islands is beyond question.

Alibek also reiterated Iran's firm stance in condemning any territorial claims against its sovereignty, stressing that such actions violate the fundamental principle of respecting national sovereignty and territorial integrity of states.

During the meeting, he further reminded the Cypriot envoy of Iran's longstanding policy of non-interference in the sovereign affairs and territorial integrity of other nations, including Cyprus.

### Iran-Russia Strategic Partnership Basis for Multilateral Order



IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi has described relations between Tehran and Moscow as a "strategic partnership" aimed at advancing a new, just, and genuinely multilateral world order.

In an op-ed published on Tuesday in Russia's Kommersant newspaper, coinciding with the first day of his visit to Moscow, Araqchi outlined the current level of political, economic, and humanitarian cooperation between Iran and Russia as well as the future trajectory of their relations.

He said that ties between Iran and the Russian Federation are deep-rooted, multi-layered, and founded on a shared understanding of profound transformations in the international system.

"These relations were formed not based on short-term considerations, but rather on historical and geopolitical ties and the enduring interests of both countries," he said, adding that over time and through complex regional and global developments, these relations have matured into a partnership marked by trust, foresight, and responsibility in the international system.

Araqchi said that Iran's neighborliness diplomacy is one of the main pillars of its foreign policy, as stressed by President Masoud Pezeshkian, which holds that regional security, stability, and sustainable development can only be achieved through cooperation among neighboring and regional states, free from external interference.



### Araqchi Advises Adversaries Not to Repeat Past Mistakes

IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi has said renewed threats of fresh military aggression against Iran amounted largely to psychological warfare, stressing that previous attempts to coerce the country through either force or sanctions had failed to yield their intended results.

In an exclusive interview with Al Jazeera, which was released in full length on Tuesday, the top diplomat said reports of possible new Israeli aggression were intended "to create fear and agitation inside the country."

He noted that such threats were not new, recalling decades of warnings from the United States and the Israeli regime that "all options are on the table," including the military attacks.

According to Araqchi, however, the Iranian public was accustomed to this approach. "For years, perhaps decades, the Americans and Israelis have issued such threats," he said, reiterating that such approach sought to "stir anxiety and fear in society."

He noted that the experience of the unprovoked and illegal Israeli-American war against the country in June demonstrated how the military action stopped short of achieving its stated objectives.

The official stressed that the 12-day atrocities amounted to "a failed experience," adding that repeating a failed course of action would inevitably produce the same outcome.

As a case in point concerning the failure of the war, he recalled that the attacks saw Tel Aviv and Washington deploy their most advanced aircraft and munitions against Iranian underground nuclear facilities without realizing their aims. "They brought their largest bombers, their most advanced fighter jets, and used their strongest bombs," he said, "yet no result was achieved."

Citing remarks by Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, Araqchi

said the Islamic Republic's nuclear technology was domestically developed and damage sustained from the aggression could, hence, be reproduced. "Iran's nuclear technology is not imported," he said, underlining that the technology was "the product of Iranian knowledge and Iranian scientists."

The official noted, meanwhile, that the Islamic Republic did not ignore the possibility of fresh war, asserting that the country was fully prepared to defend itself under any circumstances. "The possibility of war has always existed and certainly exists now as well," he said, adding that Iran's Armed Forces and people were "fully prepared" to defend the country.

Araqchi said Iran's security institutions constantly assessed potential scenarios and briefed the country's senior officials, ensuring preparedness for all situations. "We consider all possibilities," he said, noting that decisions were made based on continuous security evaluations.

Referring to the Israeli regime's Western-backed war of genocide against the Gaza Strip, he said Iran was dealing with adversaries "who recognize no limits in their crimes."

The official, nevertheless, underlined that Tehran did not pursue conflict and continued to prioritize diplomacy. "This does not mean that we seek war," Araqchi said, "We certainly seek to resolve issues through diplomacy."

Recent efforts at revival of diplomacy, Araqchi reminded, were undermined by decisions already taken by the United States and its European allies to return the UN Security Council's sanctions against Iran as well as their excessive demands.

The official still reiterated that rational actors had to refrain from repeating proven failures. "If there is any rationality," he said, "repeating a failed experience should not happen."

### Iran Needs a National Innovation Document

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Iran's First Vice President Mohammad Reza Aref has emphasized the need for a comprehensive national innovation document, stressing that the goal should not be merely drafting policy papers but ensuring their effective implementation. He also underlined the necessity of transforming universities into public scientific institutions with minimal government interference.

Aref made the remarks during a session of the General Assembly of the Iranian Academic Staff Trade Association, held at the Faculty of Engineering of the University of Tehran.

Referring to the recent 12-day war, Aref said that no one can now deny the central and decisive role of science, technology, universities, professors, and students in ensuring the country's progress and security. "This has created a very important opportunity for universities to take the lead, and they must now play their rightful role in shaping the country's future," he said.

He stressed that science, technology, and universities must also assume a leading role in national defense. "Whenever universities have stepped forward and responded to the country's needs, we have seen success. But whenever universities have failed to engage in a particular area, the country has faced difficulties," he added.

Aref pointed to Iran's 20-year Vision Document, which sets the goal of achieving first place in the region in science and technology, as evidence of the strategic importance of knowledge-based development. He noted that the country currently faces various imbalances, including in water, electricity, and gas supply, as well as social challenges, adding that universities can contribute to addressing all of these issues.

The First Vice President emphasized that universities can only solve national problems if they are first able to address their own internal challenges. He noted that Iran has experimented with different models of university governance over the past century and since the Islamic Revolution, but said traditional methods are no longer adequate. "We are living in the age of information, the Fourth Industrial Revolution, emerging technologies, and artificial intelligence. Can universities still be managed using the approaches of the 1980s and 1990s?" he asked.

Aref questioned how much of faculty members' scientific capacity had actually been utilized in previous decades. While acknowledging the notable achievements of Iranian



academics, he said the full potential of universities remains untapped. He argued that governance models appropriate for third- and fourth-generation universities require revision, even if earlier regulations were once considered progressive.

He proposed that universities should be transformed into public scientific institutions with minimal government intervention. "I raised this proposal with Sharif University of Technology and the University of Tehran, but no major development has occurred yet, although working groups involving faculty members have been formed," he said.

Aref called on the Academic Staff Trade Association to assist the government by presenting concrete plans to address the country's structural imbalances. He noted that the association's charter explicitly mandates both a professional and a strategic outlook, urging it to strengthen its strategic role and contribute practical solutions to national challenges.

Addressing members of the association, Aref said he expects the newly elected central council to prioritize its strategic responsibilities and support the government with actionable programs.

He emphasized that the government wants universities to play an active role in achieving the goals outlined in Iran's overarching policy documents through a rational and scientific approach. "We were supposed to become the leading country in the region under the 20-year Vision Document, but we are currently far from that target. Universities must take responsibility for closing this gap," he said, adding that ensuring a calm and secure environment for faculty members is a prerequisite for effective academic engagement.

Aref expressed gratitude to university professors for their patience and resilience, noting that they rarely raise concerns about their livelihoods. "Those who choose an academic career are not seeking wealth, but the dignity and status of professors should not justify neglect or indifference toward their living conditions," he said.

He stated that the government has placed the improvement of faculty members' livelihoods on its agenda, while acknowledging financial constraints. "For the first time, we have prepared a budget with only a 2 percent increase in current expenditures, while planning at least a 20 percent increase in salaries," he said, adding that within existing limitations, the government is committed to addressing the economic concerns of university staff.

### Israel Before Israel

By: Hamid Reza Naghashian

It may come as new information to many people to learn that in northern Iran—before the emergence of Zionism and the occupation of Palestinian land through what the author describes as British intrigue, deception, oppression, and genocide—there existed another "Israel."

The name of this region is Birobidzhan, and it is located in southeastern Russia as the first Jewish republic. Most people around the world are unaware of its existence, which, according to the author, is because the Zionist regime has sought to conceal this reality and has, in various ways, prevented media presence and coverage there.

This republic was the first Jewish country in the world. Before migration to Palestine, and prior to the rise of Zionism and the ideology of settling Jews in Palestine, Jews migrated to this republic. Jews were able to establish the first Jewish republic without seizing land from indigenous populations—a country whose entire population was Jewish.

What Israel and its Western supporters fear, the author argues, is the growth and promotion of the idea of Jews returning to this republic as their first homeland, and the possibility that the world might be persuaded of the feasibility of the safe return of Jews currently living in Palestine to the Republic of Birobidzhan, where they could live in peace and tranquility.

In that republic, Jewish culture prevails, and everyone speaks Yiddish, the European Jewish language. According to the author, Jews can live there without the presence of what he describes as anti-Jewish ideologies that are currently promoted by global Zionism.

Dr. Saleh Ali Al-Suhayqi authored a book—translated by Ali Rashidi—in which he traces the 2,000-year history of Jewish life. In the book, he writes that the area of the Jewish Autonomous Republic of Birobidzhan within the Russian Federation is approximately 41,277 square kilometers, roughly the size of a European country such as Switzerland, with a very low population density of 14 people per square mile. By contrast, population density in the Zionist regime is currently 945 people per square mile.

According to the author, this republic has the capacity to accommodate all Jews worldwide, including those who have occupied Palestinian land. Should this occur, he argues, it would be possible to put an end to the catastrophe of Palestinian Arab displacement across the world and facilitate their return to Palestine.

The author maintains that this idea contradicts the objectives of global Zionism and Western countries that benefit from the presence of the State of Israel in the Arab world and West Asia. He claims that Israel's existence and survival in the region are tied to Western interests, arguing that Israel supports those interests by engaging in proxy wars against parties that threaten Western objectives—chief among them, in his view, Arab actors.

What Arabs, according to the author, do not know is that this Jewish republic was established in 1928 with the support and encouragement of American Jews, including a delegation that reportedly included Albert Einstein, the Jewish physicist, and Goldberg, the well-known American writer.

In this way, the author asserts, global Zionism deceived the world. At the start of World War II, Zionist leaders claimed they urgently needed Palestinian land as a national homeland because Jews were scattered and lacked a national refuge. This claim was then used, he argues, as a pretext to displace Palestinians and seize their land.

During the dissolution of the Soviet Union, this republic—like Chechnya—had the legal capacity to declare independence from the Russian Federation. However, the author claims that Zionism prevented such a declaration due to the sensitivity surrounding the emergence of a Jewish republic outside Palestine and the risk that awareness of this state among Jews worldwide would increase, potentially redirecting Jewish migration there instead of to Palestine. He adds that it is striking that Western governments, which encouraged Arabs and Muslims to wage jihad for Chechnya's independence from Russia, could have done the same to support Birobidzhan's independence and establish it as a Jewish state instead of Palestine.

The author notes that, despite this reality, Arabs rarely speak about it, and Arab citizens remain largely unaware of the issue—even though, in the 1980s, a delegation from Kuwait's Al-Arabi magazine conducted a comprehensive visit to the republic to examine conditions there.

He argues that this fact could be promoted today: that there exists a land to which Jews living in Palestine could return, enabling Palestinians to return to their own homeland.

"Why does this media censorship exist?" the author asks. "Why have Arabs and Muslims remained silent about this truth?"



# IRAN NEWS



## Iran-India Joint Chamber and Khorramshahr Chamber Sign Cooperation Agreement

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - The Iran-India Joint Chamber of Commerce and the Khorramshahr Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture have signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) aimed at expanding economic, trade, and industrial cooperation between the two sides.

According to Iran Chamber Online, the agreement is intended to open a new pathway for strengthening commercial relations between the private sectors of Iran and India, while also promoting the development of joint activities and partnerships.

## Iran Ranks Among Top 20 Countries Worldwide in Maritime Flag Fleet



### IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The head of the Ports and Maritime Organization of Iran (PMO) announced that Iran ranks 20th globally in terms of the number of vessels sailing under its national flag, among the 176 member states of the International Maritime Organization (IMO).

Saeed Rasouli, Managing Director of the Ports and Maritime Organization and Deputy Minister of Roads and Urban Development, made the remarks on Tuesday during a press conference held on the third day of the 9th International Exhibition of Transportation, Logistics, and Related Industries.

Rasouli stated that five countries bordering the Caspian Sea are actively engaged in maritime shipping, collectively operating around 500 vessels in the sea. "The Islamic Republic of Iran, with 104 vessels sailing under its national flag, ranks first among the Caspian littoral states in terms of fleet size," he said.

Highlighting the strategic importance of the Caspian Sea, Rasouli warned that the declining water level of the sea represents a serious threat. He noted that during the most recent meeting of the Caspian littoral states, all five member countries identified the falling water level as a major shared challenge.

"As a result, a joint decision was made to share all studies, data, and measures related to addressing the decline in the Caspian Sea's water level," he said.

Rasouli also announced that Iran's largest dredger operating in the Caspian Sea has recently arrived at the country's northern ports. In addition, he said new ports are being designed and developed in accordance with the changing conditions caused by the reduced water level.

Referring to a key maritime project, Rasouli spoke about roll-on/roll-off (Ro-Ro) vessels, noting that the project had previously been halted due to foreign exchange constraints. "We have now reactivated this project," he said, adding that a new operational model has been developed and that construction is expected to begin within the current year.

## Iran to Remain the Optimal Transit Route Even with Zangezur Corridor



### IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - A senior official at Iran's Ministry of Roads and Urban Development has stated that Iran will continue to be the safest, most economical, and most efficient transit route for regional cargo movement, even if the proposed Zangezur Corridor connecting Azerbaijan to Nakhchivan through Armenia becomes operational. He also announced that construction of the long-awaited Rasht-Astara railway line is expected to begin next year.

Speaking at a press conference on the sidelines of the Transportation Exhibition, Amin Torfa, Head of International Affairs at the Ministry of Roads and Urban Development, emphasized that Iran's transit corridors remain among the most secure and cost-effective routes in the region. He acknowledged, however, that the country faces growing challenges in the fields of transit and transportation, noting that these challenges have intensified in recent years.

Torfa explained that the ministry's overarching policy in the area of mobility focuses on ensuring affordable, smooth, and high-speed access. "These factors play a decisive role in transit operations and in the selection of transit routes," he said, adding that despite external pressures, Iran continues to hold a strategic advantage due to its geography and infrastructure.

Addressing concerns over the Zangezur Corridor and the possibility of Iran being bypassed, Torfa said that since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Iran has consistently served as a safe and inexpensive route for the transportation and transit of Azerbaijani goods to the Nakhchivan exclave. "Even assuming the construction of a direct route linking Nakhchivan to Azerbaijan through Armenia, Iran's route will still remain the best option," he stressed.

## Austria Urged to Facilitate Business Visas for Iranian Traders

### IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The Head of the Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA) has called on Austria to ease the issuance of business visas for Iranian traders, stressing that such a step would significantly contribute to the revival and expansion of bilateral economic relations between the two countries. The remarks were made during a meeting in Tehran with Austria's newly appointed ambassador to Iran.

Samad Hassanzadeh, President of the Iran Chamber of Commerce, met with Friedrich Stift, the Austrian Ambassador to Tehran, to discuss the current state of Iran-Austria relations and explore avenues for future cooperation. Hassanzadeh noted that trade exchanges between Iran and Austria have declined to minimal levels in recent years, largely as a result of international sanctions imposed on Iran. However, he expressed optimism that the presence of a new ambassador could help unlock fresh opportunities for expanding bilateral ties.

"Despite the limitations caused by sanctions, we hope that with the arrival of the new Austrian ambassador, the groundwork will be laid for broader and more effective cooperation between the two countries," Hassanzadeh said. He emphasized that Iran possesses substantial capacities across a wide range of sectors, including mining industries, agriculture, high-quality food production, medical equipment, pharmaceuticals, steel industries, and petrochemicals.

Highlighting Austria's technological strengths, particularly in water purification technologies, waste recycling, and environmental management, Hassanzadeh pointed to the strong potential for complementary cooperation. "There are valuable opportunities for joint projects between Iran and Austria, given Iran's industrial and natural capacities and Austria's advanced technologies," he stated.

The head of the Iran Chamber of Commerce underscored Iran's strong interest in expanding collaboration with Austria in renewable energy and green projects, water resource management, soil technology, knowledge-based services, emerging technologies, artificial intelligence, greenhouse production, and modern agricultural products. He expressed hope that practical mechanisms could soon be put in place to realize these shared ambitions.

Referring to previous cooperation between Iran and Austria in the petrochemical sector, Hassanzadeh noted that Iran has now become a global exporter of high-quality petrochemical products. "Iran today has considerable capabilities in engineering services and the construction of refinery and petrochemical projects," he said, adding that sanctions, while restrictive, have also contributed to strengthening domestic production capacities and industrial self-reliance.

Hassanzadeh acknowledged that political constraints and sanctions have weakened



direct relations between the private sectors of the two countries. In this context, he stressed the importance of easing travel restrictions, calling on the Austrian ambassador to facilitate the issuance of business visas for Iranian traders. "We expect the Austrian Embassy to help remove obstacles to commercial travel so that closer ties between the private sectors can be re-established," he said.

He also emphasized the importance of exchanging trade and academic delegations and formally invited Austrian commercial and university delegations to visit Iran, describing such exchanges as essential for rebuilding trust and identifying concrete areas of cooperation.

In response, Austrian Ambassador Friedrich Stift expressed hope that Iran would emerge from its current sanctions-related challenges as soon as possible. He acknowledged that sanctions have significantly hindered the activities of Austrian companies interested in cooperating with Iran, particularly in the area of financial transactions and banking transfers.

According to the ambassador, the volume of trade between Iran and Austria stood at approximately €130 million last year—a figure he described as modest and not reflective of Iran's true economic potential as a major regional power. "This level of trade does not correspond to the capacities and historical relations between our two countries," Stift said.

He also highlighted the presence of around 60,000 Iranians and Iranian-descended citizens living in Austria, many of whom are active as physicians, architects, engineers, and even political figures. This, he noted, provides a strong social and professional foundation for expanding scientific, cultural, and commercial exchanges between the two nations.

Addressing recent diplomatic developments, Stift referred to the temporary closure of the Austrian Embassy in Tehran during the recent 12-day conflict. He confirmed that the embassy will resume accepting visa applications for both business and non-business travelers starting January 4. "We were deeply shocked by the attack on Iran and sincerely hope that such incidents will not be repeated," he said.

The meeting underscored a shared willingness on both sides to revitalize Iran-Austria relations, with a particular focus on sustainable development, renewable energy, and the facilitation of people-to-people and business-to-business exchanges as key drivers of future cooperation.

## Iran-Zimbabwe Relations Should Evolve into a Sustainable Economic Partnership

### IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The Ambassador of the Republic of Zimbabwe to Iran has emphasized the need to transform the longstanding relations between Iran and Zimbabwe into a sustainable and strategic economic partnership, saying that Iran's Zanjan Province could serve as one of the key starting points for expanding bilateral cooperation.

Zimbabwean Ambassador Bright Kupemba made the remarks on Tuesday during a meeting with economic and business stakeholders in Zanjan. He noted that relations between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Republic of Zimbabwe are deep-rooted and historically strong, dating back to Zimbabwe's independence, and have consistently been based on mutual trust and stability.

Kupemba stressed that ties between the two countries are not limited solely to economic interactions. "There has always been a very strong and strategic political relationship between the leaders of Iran and Zimbabwe," he said, adding that both sides share the belief that this political relationship should be effectively translated into broad, robust, and enduring economic cooperation.

Referring to formal mechanisms for bilateral engagement, the Zimbabwean ambassador described the Iran-Zimbabwe Joint Commission for Cooperation as one of the most important platforms for developing relations between the two countries. He noted that the commission convenes every two years and that its latest mid-term meeting was held in Tehran last week, during which future cooperation programs were reviewed and discussed.

Kupemba said the purpose of the Zimbabwean delegation's visit to Zanjan was to identify the province's economic capacities and investment potential. "Zanjan has considerable capabilities in agriculture, industry, and manufacturing, and it was precisely these strengths that attracted our attention to this province," he said.

Outlining Zimbabwe's own economic potential, the ambassador stated that the country, with a population of around 16 million and a strategically important geographic location, serves as a gateway to the markets of 16 African countries. He added that Zimbabwe is active in a range of sectors, including diversified agricultural production, tourism centered on Victoria Falls, and mining industries



involving gold, diamonds, lithium, and nickel. "These sectors offer numerous opportunities for joint investment with Iranian partners," he said.

Addressing the impact of sanctions on both countries, Kupemba explained that a significant portion of Iran-Zimbabwe trade is currently conducted through third countries. He said that Iran imports tobacco, gold, and precious stones from Zimbabwe, while exporting products such as bitumen, tractors, machinery, industrial fuels, plastics, carpets, and agricultural goods to Zimbabwe. These items, he noted, form the core of bilateral trade.

The ambassador highlighted Iran's pharmaceutical industry as a particularly important area for future cooperation. "Zimbabwe strongly welcomes investment by Iranian companies in pharmaceutical production, medical equipment manufacturing, and the transfer of technical know-how," he said.

Kupemba also pointed to investment opportunities in food industries, agricultural processing, footwear and leather production, information technology, e-commerce, transportation, construction, and industrial parks. He added that foreign investors in Zimbabwe benefit from tax exemptions of up to five years, and that company registration in the country can be completed within seven days.

Citing human capital as a major advantage, the ambassador said Zimbabwe has a highly educated workforce, with a literacy rate of approximately 98 percent. "Skilled labor is readily available to foreign investors, which significantly enhances the attractiveness of Zimbabwe as an investment destination," he said.

Concluding his remarks, Kupemba invited economic actors from Zanjan to visit Zimbabwe, stating that the province's strengths in agriculture, industry, and production could serve as an effective complement to Zimbabwe's economy. "Our presence in Zanjan marks the beginning of a continuous and long-term path of cooperation between Zanjan Province and the Republic of Zimbabwe," he said.

Give it a whirl with one of our curated styles or imagine something from scratch.

## 20.6m Tons of Goods Transited Through Iran



### IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The Head of the Road Maintenance and Transportation Organization of Iran announced that 20.6 million tons of goods have been transited through the country from the start of the 14th administration until the end of the Iranian month of Aban (late October-late November).

Reza Akbari made the remarks on Tuesday during a press conference held on the third day of the 9th International Exhibition of Transportation, Logistics, and Related Industries at Tehran's Mosalla complex.

Akbari said that from Shahrivar of last year (late August-late September) through the end of Aban this year, covering 14 months of activity under the 14th administration, a total of 3,648 kilometers of rural roads were constructed across the country. In addition, 12,000 kilometers of existing rural roads were upgraded and asphalted during the same period.

The deputy minister of roads and urban development added that 29,076 kilometers of the country's main road network were also rehabilitated and resurfaced over these 14 months.

He further reported that 979 accident-prone road locations were identified and corrected during the period, noting that over the same timeframe, 813 million tons of cargo were transported nationwide and more than 187 million passengers were moved via road transport.

Referring to performance figures for the first eight months of the current year, Akbari said that corrective measures were initiated at 413 hazardous road points. He also cited the installation of road lighting along 125 kilometers of highways, the construction of 680 kilometers of road safety barriers, the transportation of 402 million tons of goods, and the transit of 11 million tons of cargo during this period.

## Final Signing of Rasht-Astara Railway Contract Expected Within a Month



### IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - A deputy minister of roads and urban development announced that an Iranian delegation will travel to Russia within less than a month for the final signing of the Rasht-Astara railway contract, after which executive operations on the project can officially begin.

Houshang Bazvand made the remarks on Wednesday during a press conference on the fourth day of the 9th International Exhibition of Transportation, Logistics, and Related Industries. He described the Rasht-Astara railway as one of the missing links in the Astara-Chabahar corridor.

Bazvand, who is also the Managing Director of the Construction and Development of Transportation Infrastructure Company of Iran, said the project had faced several challenges in the past, including the need to allocate resources for land acquisition along the route. He noted that a previous agreement between Iran and Russia had existed but had not completed its legal process until it was revived under the current 14th administration.

"At present, 106 kilometers of the route have been acquired, and this figure will reach 110 kilometers by the end of the month of Azar," Bazvand said, noting that only 20 kilometers of land had been acquired over the past 10 years prior to the current administration's efforts.

He added that approximately 35 kilometers of the route have already received formal approval. Bazvand explained that Russia had previously conditioned the start of construction on the full acquisition of the entire route, but has now withdrawn that requirement, allowing the project to move forward in stages.

## Trump Expands U.S. Travel Ban to Nearly 40 Nations

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) – U.S. President Donald Trump yesterday sharply expanded a travel ban by barring people from seven more countries including Syria, as well as Palestinian Authority passport holders, from entering the United States. The latest move brings to nearly 40 the number of countries whose citizens face restrictions in coming to the United States solely by virtue of nationality, with Trump also tightening rules for routine travel from Western nations. It comes as Trump, who has long made hostility to immigration a signature issue, orders mass deportations and takes an increasingly strident tone against non-white new Americans. The White House in a proclamation said it was banning foreigners who “intend to threaten” Americans.



## EU Scraps 2035 Ban on New Petrol and Diesel Cars to Boost Auto Industry



BRUSSELS (Dispatches) - The EU on Tuesday walked back a 2035 ban on new petrol and diesel cars seen as a milestone in the fight against climate change, as the bloc pivots to bolstering its crisis-hit auto sector.

Carmakers and their backers lobbied hard for Brussels to relax the ban over the past year – in the face of fierce competition from China and a slower-than-expected shift to electric vehicles (EVs).

The EU's industry chief, Stéphane Séjourné, insisted the bloc's green ambitions stood intact as he put forward a plan billed as a “lifeline” for Europe's auto industry. “The European Commission has chosen an approach that is both pragmatic and consistent with its climate objectives,” he said.

The combustion-engine ban was hailed as a major win in climate fight when adopted in 2023.

But carmakers and their backers have lobbied hard over the past year for Brussels to relax it, in the face of fierce competition from China and a slower-than-expected shift to EVs.

Weakening the ban is the most striking result yet of a pro-business push that has seen the EU pare back a slew of environmental laws this year – on the grounds they risk weighing on growth.

## U.S. Warns of Fees or Curbs on European Services Amid Dispute Over EU Tech Rules



WASHINGTON (Dispatches) – U.S. President Donald Trump's administration has warned that it could impose fees or restrictions on European service providers, escalating a transatlantic dispute over what Washington describes as discriminatory EU actions targeting U.S. companies.

The Office of the US Trade Representative (USTR), in a post on X, accused the European Union and some of its member states of “discriminatory and harassing lawsuits, taxes, fines and directives against US service providers”, while arguing that EU companies such as Accenture, DHL, Siemens, Spotify and others “operate freely” in the United States.

“If the EU and EU member states insist on continuing to restrict, limit, and deter the competitiveness of US service providers through discriminatory means, the United States will have no choice but to begin using every tool at its disposal to counter these unreasonable measures,” the USTR wrote.

It added that US law permits the assessment of fees or restrictions on foreign services “among other actions”, pointing to other EU service providers including Amadeus, Capgemini, Mistral, Publicis and SAP.

# Trump Orders Blockade of Sanctioned Oil Tankers' Bound for Venezuela

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - President Donald Trump announced Tuesday that the US will impose a blockade on all “sanctioned oil tankers” entering or leaving Venezuela, dramatically escalating his administration's campaign against President Nicolás Maduro. The move follows the recent seizure of an oil tanker off Venezuela's coast and a growing US military buildup in the region.

Trump's escalation comes after US forces last week seized an oil tanker off Venezuela's coast, an unusual move that followed a build-up of military forces in the region. In a social media post Tuesday night announcing the blockade, Trump alleged that Venezuela was using oil revenue to fund drug trafficking and other crimes. He vowed to continue the military build-up until the country turned over oil, land and other assets to the United States, though it was not clear why he believed the US had a claim to them.

“Venezuela is completely surrounded by the largest Armada ever assembled in the History of South America,” Trump said on his social media platform. “It will only get bigger, and the shock to them will be like nothing they have ever seen before – until such time as they return to the United States of America all of the Oil, Land, and other Assets that they previously stole from us.”

Pentagon officials referred all questions about the post to the White House.

Venezuela's government press office did not immediately respond to a request for comment. But before Trump's announcement Tuesday, Maduro praised Venezuela for having “proven to be a strong country” in the face of US pressure.

“Venezuela has 25 weeks denouncing, confronting and defeating a campaign of multidimensional aggression, ranging from psychological terrorism to the piracy of the corsairs who assaulted the oil tanker,” Maduro said on state television Tuesday.

He added, “We have taken the oath to defend our homeland, and that on this soil peace and shared happiness triumph”.

The military build-up has been accompanied by a series of strikes on boats in international waters in the Caribbean and eastern Pacific. The campaign, which has drawn bipartisan scrutiny from US lawmakers, has killed at least 95 people in 25 known strikes on vessels.

Trump has for weeks said the US will move its campaign beyond the water and begin strikes on land.

The Trump administration has defended the strikes as a success, saying they have prevented drugs from reaching American shores, while pushing back on concerns that the operations stretch the bounds of lawful warfare.

While administration officials have said the campaign is about stopping drugs headed to the US, Trump's chief of staff, Susie Wiles, appeared to confirm in a “Vanity Fair” interview published Tuesday that the effort is also intended to oust Maduro.

Wiles said Trump “wants to keep on blowing boats up until Maduro cries uncle”.

Tuesday night's announcement appeared to advance that same objective.

Venezuela, which holds the world's largest proven oil reserves and produces about 1 million barrels a day, has long relied on oil revenue as the backbone of its economy.



United States.”

It was not immediately clear how the US planned to enact what Trump called a “TOTAL AND COMPLETE BLOCKADE OF ALL SANCTIONED OIL TANKERS going into, and out of, Venezuela”.

The US Navy currently has 11 ships in the region, including an aircraft carrier and several amphibious assault ships. Those vessels carry a wide array of aircraft, including helicopters and V-22 Ospreys. The Navy has also been operating several P-8 Poseidon maritime patrol aircraft in the area.

Together, those assets give the US military significant capacity to monitor and interdict maritime traffic entering and leaving Venezuela.

In his post, Trump said the “Venezuelan Regime has been designated a FOREIGN TERRORIST ORGANISATION”, though it was unclear what designation he was referencing.

Historically, the foreign terrorist organisation label has been reserved for non-state actors that do not enjoy sovereign immunity under treaties or United Nations membership.

In November, the Trump administration designated the Cartel de los Soles as a foreign terrorist organisation. The term originally referred to Venezuelan military officers involved in drug trafficking, but it is not a cartel in the traditional sense.

Governments accused of financing or tolerating extremist violence are typically designated “state sponsors of terrorism”. Venezuela is not on that list.

In rare cases, the US has designated elements of foreign governments as foreign terrorist organisations. During Trump's first term, his administration did so with Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps, an arm of the Iranian government that had already been designated as part of a state sponsor of terrorism.

# Europe Launches Int'l Commission for Ukraine War Damages

THE HAGUE (Dispatches) - Europe launched an International Claims Commission for Ukraine on Tuesday in an effort to ensure Kyiv is compensated for hundreds of billions of dollars in damage from Russian attacks and alleged war crimes.

The gathering in The Hague of dozens of leaders including Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy coincided with a U.S.-orchestrated diplomatic push to end the war in Ukraine that was triggered by Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022.

“Every Russian war crime must have consequences for those who committed them,” Zelenskyy said, before 34 European leaders signed a convention to formally launch the commission at Tuesday's gathering in The Hague.

“That's exactly where the real path to peace begins,” he added. “It's not enough to force Russia into a deal. It's not enough to make it stop killing. We must make Russia accept that there are rules in the world.”

The establishment of the claims commission does not mean Ukrainians can expect swift reparations for damages.

Details on how any damages awarded by the commission, to be based in the Netherlands, would be paid still need to be worked out. Early discussions have touched on using Russian assets frozen by the EU, supplemented by member contributions.

“The goal is to have validated claims that will ultimately be paid by Russia. It will really have to be paid by Russia; this commission offers no guarantee for the damages,” Dutch



Foreign Minister David van Weel said.

The two-year-old Register of Damage, which will become part of the claims commission, has already received over 86,000 claims submitted by individuals, organisations and public bodies in Ukraine under a wide range of categories.

Russian officials were not immediately reachable to comment on the commission. The Kremlin denies accusations of war crimes by Russian forces in Ukraine. It has also described the EU's proposal to use immobilised Russian assets to finance Ukraine's defence and budget needs as illegal and threatened retaliation.

Plans to compensate victims of abuses in Ukraine, ranging from sexual violence and child deportations to the destruction of religious sites, could be complicated by the inclusion of an amnesty for wartime atrocities in any peace deal, earlier proposed by U.S. President Donald Trump's administration.

More than 50 states and the EU drafted the Council of Europe convention to establish the commission, which was to take force after ratification by at least 25 signatories, as long as sufficient funds had been secured to finance its operation.

The commission - the second part of an international compensation mechanism for Ukraine - will review, assess and decide on claims submitted to the Register of Damage for Ukraine, which was created by the Council of Europe in 2023, and determine compensation awards on a case-by-case basis.

# Alleged Bondi Gunman Charged With 15 Murders

SYDNEY (Dispatches) - A man who allegedly opened fire on a Jewish Hanukkah celebration on Sydney's famed Bondi Beach has been charged with 59 offences, including murder and terrorism, police said on Wednesday.

The alleged father-and-son perpetrators opened fire on the celebration at Sydney's famed Bondi Beach on Sunday, killing 15 in an attack that shook the nation and intensified fears of rising anti-Semitism and violent extremism.

Funerals of the Jewish victims of the attack began on Wednesday, amid anger over how the gunmen - one of whom was briefly investigated for links to extremists - were allowed access to powerful firearms.

Sajid Akram, 50, was shot dead by police at the scene, while his 24-year-old son Naveed Akram emerged from a coma on Tuesday afternoon after also being shot by police.

New South Wales Police said on Wednesday that a man had been charged with 59 offences, including 15 counts of murder, 40 counts of wounding with attempt to murder, as well as a terror offence and other charges.

“Police will allege in court the man engaged in conduct that caused death, serious injury and endangered life to advance a religious cause and cause fear in the community,” it said in a statement.

“Early indications point to a terrorist attack inspired by ISIS, a listed



terrorist organization in Australia.”

A court filing on Wednesday named Naveed Akram, who remains in a Sydney hospital under heavy police guard, as the man charged.

He will appear via video link before a local court on Monday morning.

The father and son had travelled to the southern Philippines, a region long plagued by Islamist militancy, weeks before the shooting that Australian police said appeared to be inspired by Islamic State.

U.S. President Donald Trump told a Hanukkah event at the White House late on Tuesday that he was thinking of the victims of the “horrific and anti-Semitic terrorist attack”.

“We join in mourning all of those who were killed, and we're praying for the swift recovery of the wounded,” he said.

The leader of the Australian state of New South Wales said on Wednesday he will recall parliament next week to pass wide-ranging reforms of gun and protest laws, days after the country's deadliest mass shooting in three decades.

Chris Minns, the Premier of New South Wales state where the attack took place, told a news conference parliament would return on December 22 to hear “urgent” reforms, including capping the number of firearms allowed by a single person and making certain types of shotguns harder to access.



## Knicks Beat Spurs in NBA Cup Final to End 52-Year Trophy Drought

LAS VEGAS (Dispatches) - OG Anunoby scored 28 points as the New York Knicks ended their 52-year trophy drought with a 124-113 NBA Cup final victory over the San Antonio Spurs on Tuesday.

Forward Anunoby rattled in five three-pointers and point guard Jalen Brunson finished with 25 points as New York clinched their first silverware since the 1973 NBA Finals at the T-Mobile Arena in Las Vegas.

San Antonio went into the final brimming with confidence after upsetting top seeds and reigning NBA champions Oklahoma City in Saturday's semi-finals thanks to a superb display from French prodigy Victor Wembanyama.

But a dogged all-round performance from New York kept Wembanyama in check and thwarted San Antonio's hopes of crowning their cup campaign with victory.

The Knicks limited Wembanyama to 18 points while delivering a balanced offensive performance to pull clear in the fourth quarter after trailing by 11 points late in the third.

Seven Knicks players finished in double figures, with Anunoby and Brunson backed by Karl-Anthony Towns (16 points), Jordan Clarkson (15), Tyler Kolek (14) and 11 points apiece from Josh Hart and Mikal Bridges.

Mitchell Robertson provided a valuable defensive cameo from the bench, hauling in 15 rebounds with two blocks.

"OG Anunoby, Tyler Kolek, Jordan Clarkson, Mitchell Robertson -- they played their asses off tonight," said Brunson after being named the tournament's Most Valuable Player.

"Without them we don't win this," Brunson said. "We got down 10 or whatever it was and we found a

way to win.

"That's going to be our motto going forward: we're going to find a way."

San Antonio had looked to be motoring towards victory when Wembanyama knocked down a 27-foot three-pointer with just over two minutes left in the third period to put the Spurs up 92-81.

But Clarkson and Kolek drained three-pointers to trim the Spurs lead to five points and the Knicks then cut loose in the fourth quarter, outscoring their opponents 35-19 to seal the win.

Knicks head coach Mike Brown said winning the title augured well for hopes of mounting a championship run at the NBA Finals in his first season in charge.

"Any time you can participate in an event where you're the last one standing and you're able to hang up a banner, especially at iconic MSG (Madison Square Garden), you take that seriously," Brown said. "And all of our guys took it seriously."

San Antonio's scoring was led by Dylan Harper with 21 off the bench, while De'Aaron Fox was the pick of the starters with 16 points.

An emotional Wembanyama fought back tears at the post-game press conference, indicating he was mourning the loss of a loved one.

"Sorry, I just lost somebody today," he said, before taking one question and departing.

Spurs coach Mitch Johnson blamed collective shortcomings for the defeat rather than Wembanyama's performance.

## Chelsea Reach League Cup Semifinals With 3-1 Win at Cardiff

CARDIFF (Dispatches) - Enzo Maresca said he appreciated the backing of Chelsea's fans after they sang his name during the 3-1 win at Cardiff in the League Cup quarter-finals.

Chelsea moved into the semi-finals thanks to Alejandro Garnacho's double and a Pedro Neto strike after David Turnbull equalised for League One leaders Cardiff.

The Blues didn't have it all their own way in a hard-fought clash, but reaching a third semi-final in 18 months provided further evidence of Maresca's impact since he arrived from Leicester in 2024.

It was a well-timed victory after Maresca claimed following Saturday's 2-0 win over Everton that the previous 48 hours had been his worst at Stamford Bridge because he and his team lacked "support" from "many people".

The Italian's rant had fuelled speculation he was criticising the club's co-owners Todd Boehly and Behdad Eghbali and sporting directors Laurence Stewart and Paul Winstanley.

It has been suggested that Maresca was unhappy with the failure of Chelsea's hierarchy to publicly support him amid criticism of his rotation policy during the team's recent dip in form.



The win over Cardiff was only their second in six games in all competitions.

But Maresca, who led the Blues to Club World Cup and UEFA Conference League glory earlier this year, was serenaded by Chelsea's travelling supporters, who sang his name throughout the Cardiff match.

"I'm just happy, we're going to play another semi-final and I think it's what the fans deserve," Maresca said after making a point of marching across the pitch to acknowledge the fans at the final whistle.

"It was a great moment, I appreciate, always thankful. In some moments when you don't win games, they have been not happy, but it's normal. But overall, the fans have always been there.

Asked if he had spoken to any of the Chelsea hierarchy since last weekend, Maresca said: "No, as I said yesterday (Monday), the day after Everton, I started to prepare Cardiff. Focus on Cardiff."

"I didn't speak with anyone. I didn't speak, no it's OK. I always said that I've been happy since day one. So it's not that tonight I'm not happy. I'm happy."

## Dembele, Bonmati Win FIFA Player of the Year Awards

LONDON (Dispatches) - Paris St Germain and France forward Ousmane Dembele was named FIFA men's player of the year in Doha on Tuesday with Spain and Barcelona midfielder Aitana Bonmati winning the women's award for the third year in a row.

Dembele was instrumental in PSG's first Champions League triumph when they beat Inter Milan 5-0 in the final and scored 35 goals last season across all competitions, including 21 in Ligue 1 to finish as top scorer.

The 28-year-old, who won this year's Ballon d'Or in September, was part of the PSG team which also swept all before them on the domestic front last season and reached the final of the Club World Cup.

Bonmati, the Champions League player of the season, also won the women's Ballon d'Or for the third time in a row this year, and helped Barcelona win the domestic



treble along with reaching the Champions League final.

The 27-year-old also reached the Euro 2025 final with Spain, losing the decider to England on penalties, and Bonmati was named Player of the Tournament.

Sarina Wiegman won the best women's coach award for the fifth time after leading England to retain their European Championship title, and Luis Enrique won the men's coach award after taking Paris St Germain to their first Champions League win.

The best women's goalkeeper award went to England and Chelsea's Hannah Hampton who played a major role in the Lionesses' Euro 2025 win with her penalty shootout saves and also won the domestic treble with her club.

Italy's Gianluigi Donnarumma, who now plays for Manchester City, won the men's keeper award for his role in Paris St Germain's treble win.

## Shiffrin Extends Slalom Domination With Courchevel Win



COURCHEVEL (Dispatches) - Mikaela Shiffrin continued her ascendancy over the women's slalom in Courchevel on Tuesday night as she swept to a fifth straight victory in the discipline and 105th World Cup win.

At the finish after her record-extending World Cup win, Shiffrin said she was not sure why things were going so well.

"I'm just pushing. Not asking questions," she said, adding she wanted to "lock in this feeling".

Under floodlights, the American, who won the last race last season and has won every slalom this season, compiled a combined time of 1 minute 42.50 seconds, a colossal 1.55sec ahead of Camille Rast of Switzerland with German Emma Aicher narrowly third.

It was the 22-year-old German's third podium of the season and her second in three days after she showed her versatility by winning a downhill in St Moritz on Sunday.

Albanian Lara Colturi, who had been on the podium behind Shiffrin in every previous slalom this season, skied out on the first run, one of a series of high-profile casualties on a bumpy tricky course.

Croatian Zrinka Ljutic, the reigning slalom champion, and Austrian Katharina Liensberger did not finish the first run. Sara Hector and Lena Duerr were among half a dozen skiers who failed to complete the second.

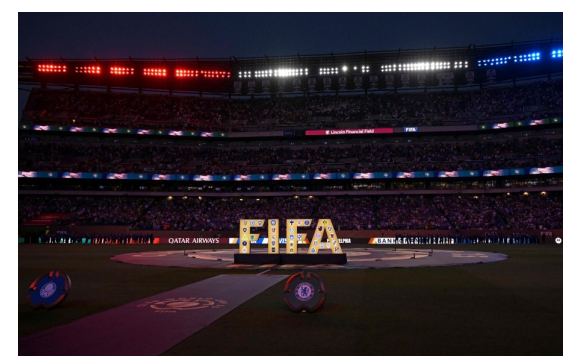
Shiffrin was 0.83sec faster than Rast in the first run, the sixth times in seven runs this season that the American has been fastest in a slalom run.

In the second run, Shiffrin was only fifth fastest but even without finding fluency was able to pad her lead on deteriorating snow after Rast, skiing second last, made mistakes.

"Sometimes you've got to take it and roll with it," said Shiffrin. "I was pushing like hell. It's a wonder I made it to the finish this time. Just fight!"

Shiffrin moved to a perfect 400 points in the slalom standings. Colturi remained second, 180 points behind.

## FIFA Unveils \$60 World Cup Tickets After Fan Backlash Over 2026 Pricing



PARIS (Dispatches) - World Cup organizers unveiled a new cut-price ticket category yesterday after a backlash by fans over pricing for the 2026 tournament in the United States, Canada and Mexico.

Football's global governing body FIFA said in a statement that it had created a limited number of "Supporter Entry Tier" fixed at \$60 for all 104 matches, including the final.

It said the plan was "designed to further support travelling fans following their national teams across the tournament".

FIFA said that the \$60 tickets would be reserved for fans of qualified teams and would make up 10 per cent of each national federation's allotment.

Fan group Football Supporters Europe (FSE), which last week called prices "extortionate" and "astronomical", responded by saying the FIFA was offering too little.

"While we welcome FIFA's seeming recognition of the damage its original plans were to cause, the revisions do not go far enough," FSE said in a statement yesterday.

Last week, FSE said ticket prices were almost five times higher than in 2022 in Qatar, describing FIFA's pricing for 2026 as a "monumental betrayal of the tradition of the World Cup".

"If a supporter were to follow their team from the first match to the final it would cost them a minimum of \$6,900," it said at the time, adding that World Cup organizers had promised tickets priced from \$21 in a bid document released in 2018.