

Iran and the Republic of Azerbaijan Agreed to Enhance Coordination to Accelerate and Increase Cross-Border Traffic at the Astara Border Crossing, With a Focus on Facilitating the Passage of Trucks Carrying Perishable Goods

IRAN NEWS

In a Message to Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, the Emir of Qatar, President Masoud Pezeshkian Extended His Congratulations to the Brotherly Government and People of Qatar on their National Day.

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FM Says U.S. Is Not Ready for a Fair Agreement



IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Iran's Foreign Minister Seyed Abbas Araqchi said the United States lacks readiness for a fair and balanced agreement, citing what he described as Washington's excessive demands and the West's rejection of Iran's proposals.

In an interview with Russia's RT network during a visit to Moscow, Araqchi addressed the prospects of continued negotiations with the United States, saying any progress depends on whether Washington understands the difference between negotiation and imposing dictates. "We are ready for a fair and balanced agreement achieved through negotiation, but we are not prepared to accept dictates," he said.

Araqchi noted that he had previously been in contact with U.S. presidential envoy Steve Witkoff regarding Iran's nuclear program, and that five rounds of talks had taken place, with a sixth scheduled for June 15. However, he said the talks collapsed after what he described as an unprovoked and illegal Israeli attack on Iran two days before the planned meeting, followed by U.S. involvement.

He called the timing of the attacks during ongoing negotiations "very strange" and described it as a bitter experience, recalling a previous one when the U.S. withdrew from the 2015 nuclear agreement, known as the JCPOA, without justification. According to Araqchi, the decision stemmed solely from a change in U.S. administration.

Iran's Forex Supply for Imports Drops \$2b Amid "Snapback" Concerns



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - According to the latest data from the Central Bank of Iran (CBI), the country's foreign currency supply for imports has declined by over \$2 billion compared to the same period last year, raising concerns about the economic impact of international developments.

The CBI reported that from the beginning of the Iranian year 1404 (March 20, 2025) until December 15, 2025, approximately \$42.6 billion in foreign currency was allocated for various import needs, including essential goods, pharmaceuticals, commercial products, and services. This is lower than the \$44 billion allocated during a similar period in 1403, despite the 2025 timeframe being 32 days longer.

Analysts suggest that the reduction may be linked to the implementation of the "snapback" mechanism against Iran, which has directly affected the foreign exchange market, commodity prices, and overall trade flows.

At the Iran Exchange Center on December 20, the U.S. dollar traded at 108,734 rials, the euro at 127,438 rials, and the UAE dirham at 29,607 rials, reflecting ongoing currency pressure.

In 1403, the CBI allocated \$9.4 billion for essential goods and pharmaceuticals, \$23.9 billion for commercial and trade goods, \$945 million for services, and \$9.6 billion for imports against exports.

Impeachment to Be Placed on the Agenda If Reforms Are Not Made

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Majlis Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf saying that the Majlis is seriously pursuing livelihood issues and the rise in foreign exchange rates, said that if the government fails to carry out the necessary reforms, lawmakers will be compelled to initiate the impeachment process.

Qalibaf said during today's open session of Parliament on Sunday: "At the outset, I extend my congratulations to the honorable people of Iran on the arrival of Yalda Night and its coincidence with the advent of the blessed month of Rajab and the religious celebrations of this month. We thank Almighty God that in recent days, the land of our beloved Iran has been blessed with widespread snowfall and rainfall, giving new life to the country's thirsty soil."

He added: "However, what is more important to address today are the concerns and anxieties of the people regarding the runaway rise in prices of essential goods, especially the increase in the prices of foreign currency and gold, which are considered either part of the reasons for, or pretexts behind, these price hikes. Therefore, the Majlis will pursue this issue seriously."

The Speaker noted that during the week when representatives were in their constituencies following up on regional issues, he, as Speaker, along with the heads of the Economic Commission and the Planning and Budget Commission and several other lawmakers, held numerous meetings with ministers and members of the Cabinet to review price hikes and the rise in exchange rates. He added that this week's supervisory session, scheduled for Tuesday, will be held with the participation of the ministers of Economic Affairs and Finance, Agriculture Jihad, and Industry, as well as the heads of the Plan and Budget Organization and the Central Bank, focusing on preventing a decline in people's purchasing power, implementing the goods voucher law, and managing the foreign exchange market.

Qalibaf said: "It is evident that if these measures do not yield results, in order to reach solutions in the shortest time and with the least tension, the priority would be for the government to repair its Cabinet. And if the necessary reforms are not carried out by the government, representatives will be forced to begin the impeachment process."

In response to a point of order raised by the representative of Shahin Shahr, the Speaker criticized the intervention of the High Supervisory Board of the Expediency Discernment Council in parliamentary legislation, stating that no authority other than the Guardian Council has the right to comment on laws passed by Parliament.

Hossein Ali Hajji Deligani, while reviewing the report of the Planning, Budget, and Audit Commission on the urgent bill concerning requirements and provisions needed for annual budget



laws, raised a point of order based on Articles 197, 198, 199, and 200 of the Parliament's internal regulations. He said these articles stipulate that all parliamentary approvals are officially sent to the Guardian Council, and if the Council does not announce its objection within ten days, the approval proceeds through its normal process.

The Shahin Shahr lawmaker emphasized that, accordingly, the only body authorized to review such matters is the Guardian Council. He added that under Article 198, parliamentary approvals remain on the agenda until the Guardian Council issues its final opinion.

Hajji Deligani stressed, however, that according to a submitted report, bodies other than the Guardian Council had also been mentioned, raising the question of how this other institution—the High Supervisory Board of the Expediency Discernment Council—had become involved.

He said that if another body is to announce opinions alongside the Guardian Council, or if the Parliamentary

Legal Affairs Department intends to send approvals somewhere else in addition to the Guardian Council, this should be clearly stated so it is known that another body is being placed alongside the Guardian Council.

He added: "If Parliament does not act in accordance with the law, how can we expect others to do so? Traditionally, ministers, agencies, and other bodies that have objections could convey them to the Guardian Council. But creating a 'partner' for the Guardian Council is not an appropriate practice."

In response, Qalibaf said the point of order was valid and that mentioning the title of the High Supervisory Board in the approvals of this bill was a mistake. He stated: "All correspondence and timelines of Parliament are solely with the Guardian Council, and our counterpart is the Guardian Council. If this Council, under Article 110 of the Constitution, designates its own reference as the High Supervisory Board, that is their decision. However, we have no correspondence with this board."

He added that a warning had also been issued to the Parliament's Deputy for Laws, Mr. Norouzi, to ensure that no correspondence takes place with this body and that its name should not be mentioned here.

Noting that the Guardian Council does not intervene in parliamentary approvals except in cases of inconsistency with Sharia law or the Constitution, Qalibaf said: "If an issue is returned to Parliament without an objection from the Guardian Council, the Council cannot raise objections again unless the matter is contrary to Sharia."

He concluded: "Likewise, we cannot intervene in matters beyond the Guardian Council's objections, nor should we amend other provisions in the process of securing its approval. Therefore, this point of order was valid and must be observed."

1,500 Trillion Rials' Worth of Gold Stockpiled Daily at Iran Mercantile Exchange

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Ali Aghamohammadi, head of the Economic Group of the Office of the Supreme Leader, said Iran's main economic challenge is investment, noting that a large share of household savings is flowing into gold rather than productive sectors. He revealed that gold worth around 1,500 trillion rials per day is currently being stockpiled at the Iran Mercantile Exchange—an amount that, he said, exceeds the Central Bank's gold holdings.

Speaking at the inauguration ceremony of the Energy Flow Assurance Laboratory at the University of Tehran's Oil Institute, Aghamohammadi welcomed the opening of the facility and emphasized the role of youth and paradigm shifts such as the digital economy. He said these pillars provide a path forward that runs through universities, with oil as the key resource, adding that greater private-sector participation is essential.

He described oil as Iran's most important national resource, noting that under the 1430 Vision currently being drafted, the country aims to reach 7.4 million barrels per day of oil production capacity and increase natural gas production capacity by 50 percent—targets he said are achievable.

Aghamohammadi said there is consensus on the possibility of increasing daily oil production capacity by 3.4 million barrels. He recalled that during the 12th administration, studies presented to the Supreme Leader indicated Iran could reach 6.5 million barrels per day, a finding reaffirmed in updated studies under the 13th administration. New assessments, he added, now point to a potential capacity of 7.4 million barrels per day.

He also called for the adoption of new types of oil contracts to facilitate development, saying the Iran Petroleum Contract (IPC) marked progress but was limited by sanctions that restricted foreign cooperation. As a result, he said, the private sector stepped in, opening what he described as a promising horizon. He added that the 14th administration's approval to raise the IRI share from 15 percent to 23 percent was a successful step.

Highlighting Iran's high savings rate, Aghamohammadi said the country currently has the highest



monetary savings in the region, with a savings rate of 37 percent—a level he said is unmatched in countries such as Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. "The problem is not a lack of savings, but investment," he said, explaining that people are turning to gold primarily to preserve the value of their money.

"If returns from oil become higher than gold," he said, "people will direct their funds toward oil."

He stressed that no country has investment potential among its population comparable to Iran's, but added that disrupted working relationships must be reorganized, with oil being the most suitable sector to absorb public investment.

Aghamohammadi also delivered strong geopolitical remarks, saying Iran's path forward lies within the country itself. He warned against reliance on external powers, arguing that aligning with them would lead only to humiliation. He said U.S. policy—regardless of who is in office—seeks dominance and a return to old power structures, citing examples from U.S. approaches toward China, Iran, and Gaza.

He further cautioned against the belief that the world is moving toward peace, saying global trends point instead toward war. He noted that countries such as Germany, Japan, and South Korea have significantly increased military-related investment and that the share of war-related spending in their GDPs has risen sharply. Between 2008 and 2023, he said, factors contributing to conflict increased in 97 countries.

Aghamohammadi argued that Iran's resistance has been a source of deterrence, claiming that had Iran not stood firm during what he described as a "12-day war," two nuclear powers that attacked Iran would not have agreed to a ceasefire. "This is about power and authority," he said, adding that oil strengthens Iran's power, while knowledge amplifies the power of oil.

He concluded by expressing hope that Iran's youth would further consolidate the country's strength through the combination of energy resources and scientific advancement.

The Gordian Knot of Ukraine and Europe's Quagmire

By: Hamid Reza Naghashian

After Donald Trump pulled the United States out of Ukraine and left Europe on its own, the United Kingdom, in order to protect its nurtured protégé Volodymyr Zelensky, imposed costs on Europe. As a result, the leaders of the European Union reached an agreement on December 19, 2025 (Azar 28, 1404) to grant a large €90 billion loan to Ukraine. This loan is interest-free (0%).

The purpose of this loan is to meet Ukraine's needs for the years 2026 and 2027, and it will be paid in the form of covering military and budgetary expenses (such as ammunition and reconstruction).

Ukraine is obliged to repay the loan only if Russia pays war reparations. Otherwise, the European Union had reserved for itself the right to use frozen Russian assets to compensate for the loan. This option, however, was vetoed by Belgium, which is the custodian of Russia's frozen assets.

The initial proposal to use Russian assets was put forward by London, but due to Belgium's opposition (since most of these assets are held there) and legal and security concerns, it was abandoned. In other words, Belgium was unwilling to take the risk of openly antagonizing Russia and, in the event of changing circumstances, to be obliged to compensate Russia for the use of those assets.

Therefore, this loan will not be financed from frozen Russian assets, but rather through borrowing by the European Union from capital markets.

In addition, Hungary, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic initially opposed the loan package. Eventually, they agreed to it only after being exempted from any financial obligations.

Thus, up to this point, the remaining EU member states have committed to financing the loan.

Volodymyr Zelensky, the imposed and now time-expired president of Ukraine, has described this loan as guaranteeing "financial certainty for the coming years." This is despite the fact that he had requested \$160 billion, but ultimately agreed to a \$106 billion package.

In response to the lack of US support for this plan, leaders such as the German chancellor and the French president described the decision as a major, practical step and a sign of Europe's continued support for Ukraine. They warned that Ukraine is facing a severe liquidity shortage. The International Monetary Fund estimates that the country will need €137 billion (\$161 billion) for the years 2026 and 2027. Without this assistance, the Ukrainian government would have been on the brink of absolute bankruptcy by spring 2026.

Under these circumstances, overall, this \$106 billion loan is an emergency financial measure by the European Union to prevent Ukraine's bankruptcy and to support its military and economic efforts over the next two years. However, this agreement was the result of a complex political bargaining process in which the EU, instead of the bolder plan of using Russian assets, chose the more traditional method of borrowing in order to preserve its unity and to put on a show of strength in response to Trump's withdrawal.

Nevertheless, it is quite clear that this loan will, on the whole, do little to solve Ukraine's problems and will instead draw Europe deeper into the Ukrainian quagmire. This is because Russia has fully adapted to this war of attrition and, through various measures, has pushed the United States out of the scene, further separated Europe from NATO, and made the Ukrainian knot even tighter.

Israeli Threats Signal Disarray as Iran Closely Monitors Developments



TEHRAN (IRNA) - The deputy chief of General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran has said that repeated threats by the Israeli regime are a sign of turmoil and weakness, stressing that Iran is closely monitoring all regional and international developments.

In an interview with the Lebanese Al Mayadeen TV network on Saturday, Brigadier General Ahmad Vahidi commented on the anticipated visit of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to the United States and the regime's escalating rhetoric against Iran. He said the Israeli regime is facing serious and evident challenges and has failed to achieve its objectives.

Vahidi emphasized that Israel has not succeeded in realizing any of its goals in the June aggression against Iran. He added that Tehran is carefully tracking all developments and assessing the situation with full awareness.



Iran Imports 6.4m Mobile Phones in Eight Months

TEHRAN (ILNA) - Iran imported a total of 6.4 million mobile phones during the first eight months of the current Iranian calendar year, according to an official from Iran's Customs Administration.

Arzou Ghanioon, Director General of the Office of Statistics and Customs Data Processing at Iran Customs, said that 5.926 million mobile phones were imported through commercial channels, while 474,000 units entered the country via passenger imports, bringing the total to 6.4 million devices.

She noted that passenger-based mobile phone imports recorded significant growth compared with the same period last year, rising by 107 percent in volume and 186 percent in value.

Half of Iran-Austria Trade Balance Linked to Pharmaceuticals



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Neryman Sadri, head of the Iran-Austria Joint Chamber of Commerce, highlighted the significant role of pharmaceuticals in bilateral trade and expressed optimism that the appointment of Austria's new ambassador to Tehran could boost economic relations.

In an interview with Otagh Iran Online, Sadri noted that despite international sanctions limiting Iran's economic interactions with European countries, cooperation between Iran and Austria continues, particularly in the pharmaceutical sector. He emphasized that Austria serves as a regional hub in Europe, facilitating the supply of medicines to Iranian patients.

Sadri expressed hope that ongoing negotiations during the new ambassador's tenure would lead to further opportunities for expansion. "Friedrich Stift, Austria's ambassador in Tehran, has a positive outlook toward developing cooperation with Iran. There is potential to create openings and strengthen bilateral engagement, although sanctions have caused hesitation among small and medium-sized European businesses in partnering with Iranian counterparts," he said.

According to Sadri, the current trade balance between Iran and Austria is significant, with over 50 percent attributed to pharmaceuticals, medical equipment, hospital supplies, and food products. He added that these sectors offer strong potential for growth and further development, reinforcing Austria's traditional role as a bridge between East and West.

Sadri concluded that with sustained efforts and diplomatic support, the coming years could see substantial improvements in trade relations between the two countries, particularly in healthcare-related exports.

Iran–Eurasia Free Trade Deal Saves Traders \$100m in Tariffs



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - An international affairs adviser at Iran's Trade Promotion Organization (TPO) said Iran's trade volume with the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) has tripled over the past six years, adding that the implementation of the free trade agreement (FTA) with the bloc has saved Iranian traders around \$100 million in customs duties in the current year alone.

According to the Public Relations Office of the Trade Promotion Organization of Iran, Mirhadi Seydi, the TPO's international affairs adviser and chief negotiator of the Iran–Eurasia Free Trade Agreement, outlined the impacts of the deal, noting that the agreement officially entered into force on May 15 and has already delivered significant positive results for trade.

Seydi said that prior to the current FTA, a previous trade agreement with the five member states of the Eurasian Economic Union had been in effect for about five and a half years. "Altogether, for nearly six years under these two agreements, Iran has maintained preferential trade relations with Eurasian countries, during which notable positive developments have occurred in bilateral economic and trade ties," he said.

One of the most visible outcomes of these agreements, Seydi noted, has been the Eurasia Trade Exhibition, which will be held for the fourth consecutive time this year. "The exhibition has drawn the attention of traders, economic operators, producers, and policymakers to the Eurasian market," he said, adding that participation has increased significantly each year.

Tehran Urged to Establish a Permanent Iranian Trade Hub in Uzbekistan

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The head of the Arak Chamber of Commerce has stressed that Iran's private sector must assume greater responsibility and move beyond day-to-day concerns, highlighting the need to establish a permanent trade hub for Iranian businesses in Uzbekistan.

According to the Public Relations Office of the Arak Chamber of Commerce, Nasser Biki made the remarks at a meeting of economic operators from Markazi Province with the Ambassador of Uzbekistan to Tehran. He said structural problems and economic pressures have trapped many businesspeople in routine activities, diverting them from their core mission of export development.

"Currency depreciation, personnel issues, and difficult economic conditions have distanced us from our main responsibility—exports," Biki said. "These challenges have prevented forward momentum."

Criticizing weak market intelligence, he added that while Iranian firms produce goods, they often lack the know-how to export them effectively. "A Chinese producer can visit a market with a simple camera, identify demand, and manufacture the right product. This weakness lies with us, and we must acknowledge it," he said.

Referring to Uzbekistan's foreign trade figures, Biki noted that the country's international trade reached about \$47.8 billion in 2024 and has recently approached \$100 billion. "Yet Iran's share of this vast market is less than one percent, despite being a neighboring country. Our presence should be far more substantial," he said.

He urged Iran's private sector to capitalize on opportunities in Central Asia and prevent competitors from dominating regional markets.

Biki also pointed to shortcomings in internal coordination, saying visits by foreign ambassadors to provinces should be planned in advance to include tours of major production units. "Having to submit multiple requests is not befitting of a chamber of commerce," he said.

Highlighting the need to facilitate trade ties, he announced efforts—together with the Uzbek ambassador—to establish a permanent base in Uzbekistan for Iranian traders. "This hub would enable practical, organized, and sustainable engagement and serve as a point of connection for economic actors in both countries," he said, calling on businesspeople to remain engaged with the chamber to strengthen the initiative.

Addressing the role and limitations of government, Biki said the state is naturally preoccupied with political, security, and cultural issues, while non-oil economic growth depends on the private sector. "Without effective efforts by economic actors, no sustainable transformation will occur," he warned.

He also cited Iran's weak performance in tourism, noting that in 2023 Iran earned around \$1 billion from tourism, compared with Turkey's \$54.7 billion. "This gap shows we have overlooked many capacities," he said.

Biki further noted that new authorities granted to provincial governors allow for the establishment of economic bases in neighboring countries. "Uzbekistan, as an observer member of the Eurasian Economic Union, is the best option for this initiative, and we must seize the opportunity," he said.

In closing, he addressed the Uzbek ambassador, saying: "You have set a \$2 billion trade target with Iran. We are ready to establish a permanent base for Uzbek economic actors in Markazi Province and provide all necessary facilities. We hope to achieve this shared goal together."

At the outset of the meeting, the Deputy for International Affairs of the Arak Chamber of Commerce described the presence of the Uzbek ambassador and deputy head of mission as a valuable opportunity to showcase the province's capacities. Saeed Beigzadeh said the main objective of hosting foreign delegations is to familiarize them with the industrial, economic, and commercial strengths of Markazi Province and to create platforms for joint cooperation.

He added that an economic delegation from the province is scheduled to visit Uzbekistan next month, with a specific Uzbek province to be selected as the destination to streamline official coordination and avoid procedural complications.

A member of the Arak Chamber's Board of Representatives, Abolfazl Babaei, said the visit



by the Uzbek diplomatic delegation reflects the serious intent of both sides to expand economic ties. He highlighted Markazi Province's strong industrial, agricultural, and export capacities, describing it as a reliable partner for Uzbek businesses.

Babaei said the chamber stands ready to facilitate private-sector engagement between the two countries and noted that an upcoming trade mission to Uzbekistan aims to conduct on-the-ground assessments of investment opportunities and export potential.

Later in the meeting, Seyed Mehdi Mirashrafi, Executive Secretary of the Arak Chamber, said bilateral trade between Iran and Uzbekistan currently stands at around \$500 million, despite a target of \$2 billion set during recent presidential talks. He described the goal as achievable given the political will and complementary geographic positions of the two countries.

Mirashrafi highlighted Iran's strategic role in international transport corridors and Uzbekistan's position along East–West land routes, calling the two countries natural partners. He also cited limited mutual awareness among private sectors as a key obstacle, while noting progress through recent visits, including tours of industrial and agricultural sites and participation in the Saveh pomegranate festival—an event that could pave the way for sister-city partnerships.

He acknowledged challenges in transport, finance, and customs procedures but noted that under existing trade agreements, 10 goods are exchanged tariff-free, with scope for expansion. "The private sector has consistently shown it can find creative solutions," he said.

Comparing trade volumes, Mirashrafi said Iran trades about \$1 billion with Afghanistan despite ongoing conflict, while trade with Uzbekistan remains at \$500 million. "Given Uzbekistan's vast potential and shared cultural and economic ties, this figure should be much higher," he said.

In the final segment, Uzbek Ambassador Fariddin Nasriyev said bilateral trade, which stood at around \$300 million in previous years, has now reached \$500 million and should rise to \$2 billion under agreements between the two presidents.

He pointed to improved connectivity, noting that weekly direct flights between Tehran and Tashkent have increased from one to four. He also referenced the Uzbek prime minister's May visit to Iran with a 150-member business delegation, during which an agreement was signed to allow the tax- and duty-free exchange of 10 goods from each country, with the list to expand annually.

Nasriyev said transport challenges have been resolved, with trucks no longer paying the \$400 fees previously required. However, banking transactions remain constrained due to Iran's lack of access to the SWIFT system. Until this issue is resolved, he said, the two sides have agreed to pursue trade through barter arrangements.

The ambassador expressed Uzbekistan's interest in expanding provincial-level cooperation, including proposed sister-city agreements between Arak and an Uzbek city, as well as between Saveh and another Uzbek municipality.

Inviting Iranian businesses to explore opportunities firsthand, Nasriyev highlighted Uzbekistan's advantages: a sanctions-free economy, a central location in Central Asia with a regional population of around 70 million—37 million of whom live in Uzbekistan—and strong inflows of foreign investment, including more than \$35 billion in agriculture this year.

He noted that Uzbekistan allows the duty-free export of 12,000 product categories to Europe, calling it an exceptional opportunity for Iranian manufacturers. Iranian goods, he added, enjoy competitive pricing in the Uzbek market, and participation in trade fairs could further boost their visibility. This year alone, more than 250 Iranian companies have begun operating in Uzbekistan.

"All Uzbek provinces have special economic zones," Nasriyev said, adding that Iranian investors can benefit from tax exemptions and long-term land leases.

The ambassador's remarks underscore Uzbekistan's emergence as a key destination for Iran's economic engagement—a large, growing, sanctions-free market with extensive export advantages and developing infrastructure. Observers say that with financial barriers eased and subnational ties strengthened, industrial and commercial cooperation between the two countries could expand significantly.

Corridor Development Tops Priorities of the Ministry of Roads and Urban Development

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The Minister of Roads and Urban Development said the development of transport corridors is at the top of the ministry's priorities, noting that, in cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, operationalizing projects and fostering rapprochement in the transport sector with neighboring countries are embedded in all work plans.

Farzaneh Sadegh Malvajerd made the remarks on Saturday at a ceremony marking Transport Week, attended by President Masoud Pezeshkian and Foreign Minister Seyed Abbas Araghchi. She expressed appreciation for all transport-sector stakeholders across road, rail, air, and maritime fields, stating that all professions and associations—from truck, van, bus, and passenger car drivers inside and outside cities to fuel tankers—keep the country's transit moving.

Sadegh said she had visited the Gachsar road maintenance station the previous night to honor road workers, noting the calloused hands and deep cracks caused by extreme cold and heat. "Their dedication and courage in serving their country truly deserve the highest respect," she said.

She also thanked private-sector rail workers and all those involved in operations and maintenance—from locomotive drivers and signal operators to workers who clear sand- or snow-covered tracks in harsh weather.

The minister further praised aviation industry workers, saying that during the recent 12-day conflict, despite the closure of airspace, they vigilantly safeguarded public assets. She also expressed gratitude to maritime transport workers, from cargo handlers to sailors and seafarers.

Sadegh added that colleagues at the Meteorological Organization, through accurate forecasting—particularly recent forecasts—helped improve preparedness and reduce risks during rainfall events.

Addressing challenges, the minister said the sector faces significant imbalances as well as accumulated debts owed to contractors and workers. She emphasized that private-sector actors in transport have



stood by the nation and that greater regulation and facilitation are needed.

She noted that Iran's transport and logistics industry differs from others, as supply chains remained active during the COVID-19 pandemic, the 12-day conflict, and other crises—an outcome she attributed to the commitment and resilience of workers, which she described as a defining feature of the country's logistics sector.

Sadegh said that, following the president's direct follow-up and emphasis, the government is advancing transport development despite challenges and imbalances. She stressed a program-driven approach, citing the recent promulgation of the National Transit Document by the president, which will bring integrated management with government efforts. The private sector will be a partner, while the government acts as regulator and facilitator.

The minister said efforts are underway to restore Iran's position as a transit and logistics hub, with corridor development prioritized in line with the president's emphasis. In transport diplomacy, she noted, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is actively working, and operational measures to foster cooperation and reconciliation in transport with neighboring countries are integral to all plans.

She underscored the goal of removing obstacles facing the private sector, adding that facilitation is embedded across all programs. As examples, she cited the addition of 2,000 airline seats to the aviation industry over the past week, promising rail contracts signed with the private sector, and upcoming contracts in roads and freeways, as well as transport investment packages to be unveiled within the next two months.

In closing, Sadegh said the ministry aims to move the transport industry forward and expressed hope that Transport Week would renew the sector's collective commitment to the ideals of the late Imam. She said all stakeholders are serving the people, expressing optimism that, with the president's prudent leadership, strong support from the Ministry of Roads, and robust backing from Parliament—particularly the Civil Commission—the ministry will fulfill its responsibilities to the public with success.

Tajikistan Calls for Expanded Cooperation With Iran in Civil Aviation



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The head of Tajikistan's Civil Aviation Authority has called for the continuation and expansion of cooperation with the Islamic Republic of Iran in various areas of civil aviation, praising the Iranian team's technical expertise, professional approach, and high level of cooperation.

According to the Civil Aviation Organization of Iran, the remarks were made following the deployment of an expert team from Iran's Civil Aviation Organization to Tajikistan under a bilateral memorandum of understanding between the two countries. The mission was carried out as part of efforts to strengthen international cooperation in aviation safety.

During the visit, Iranian experts conducted an audit and assessment of Tajikistan's aviation safety oversight system. The evaluation covered eight specialized areas: legislation (LEG), organizational structure and civil aviation management (ORG), personnel licensing and qualifications (PEL), flight operations (OPS), airworthiness and continued airworthiness of aircraft (AIR), aircraft accident and incident investigation (AIG), air navigation services (ANS), and airports and ground facilities (AGA).

The audit aimed to identify strengths, shortcomings, and regulatory gaps, as well as to assist in addressing deficiencies in existing structures, regulations, and oversight processes.

In addition to assessing the current situation, the mission included the provision of specialized consultations, the transfer of experience, and recommendations for corrective actions. These measures were intended to enhance Tajikistan's civil aviation oversight capabilities and to prepare the country for the official audit by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) scheduled for 2026, while improving compliance with international aviation safety standards and recommended practices.

Iran and Turkey Advance Joint Production and Export in Health Sector



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Iranian and Turkish pharmaceutical and medical equipment industry representatives have discussed joint production and export opportunities, identifying the health sector as a strategic for future trade cooperation between the two countries.

According to the Public Relations Office of the Tehran Chamber of Commerce, the discussions were held during a joint webinar in which participants outlined the capacities and capabilities of both sides and explored practical frameworks for cooperation.

Mohammad Abdehzadeh, head of the Health Economy Commission of the Tehran Chamber, said Iran is a pioneer of the pharmaceutical industry in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. He noted that 98 percent of Iran's domestic medicine demand is currently met by 250 local companies. Referring to the pharmaceutical market's value of \$5 billion in 2023, Abdehzadeh highlighted Iran's ability to produce high-tech, nano, and biotechnology-based medicines.

He added that the quality of Iranian pharmaceutical products is ensured through membership in the international PIC/S convention, and said these products are already being successfully exported to countries including Turkey and Russia. Abdehzadeh pointed to Iran's annual imports of nearly \$1 billion in finished medicines and pharmaceutical raw materials, as well as a slightly lower figure for medical equipment imports, stressing that cooperation by Turkey's Ministry of Health in registering Iranian pharmaceutical brands could significantly expand bilateral collaboration.

Brazil's Lula Warns U.S. Intervention in Venezuela Could Be Catastrophic

SAO PAULO (Dispatches) - Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva said on Saturday that an "armed intervention in Venezuela would be a humanitarian catastrophe" in the face of escalating actions from the United States toward regional neighbor Venezuela.

On Tuesday, U.S. President Donald Trump ordered a "blockade" of all sanctioned oil tankers entering and leaving Venezuela, in Washington's latest move to increase pressure on Nicolas Maduro's government, targeting its main source of income. Lula and Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum, the leaders of Latin America's two largest economies, had already urged restraint this week, as tensions escalated.



Thai Border Clashes Displace Over Half a Million in Cambodia



PHNOM PENH (Dispatches) - More than half a million people in Cambodia have been displaced from their homes by two weeks of deadly border clashes with neighbouring Thailand, Phnom Penh's interior ministry said Sunday.

The renewed fighting between the Southeast Asian neighbours this month, including with tanks, drones and artillery, has killed at least 22 people in Thailand and 19 in Cambodia, according to officials.

The conflict stems from a territorial dispute over the colonial-era demarcation of their 800-kilometre (500-mile) border and a smattering of ancient temple ruins situated on the frontier.

"At present, more than half a million Cambodian people, including women and children, are suffering severe hardship due to forced displacement from their homes and schools to escape artillery shells, rockets, and aerial bombardments carried out by Thailand's F-16 aircraft," Cambodia's interior ministry said in a statement, giving the total number of people evacuated as 518,611.

Around 400,000 people have been displaced in Thailand due to the reignited border conflict, Bangkok has said.

Each side has blamed the other for instigating the fresh fighting and traded accusations of attacks on civilians, after five days of clashes in July killed dozens.

Zelenskiy Favors U.S. Proposal of Three-Way Talks If It Produces Results



KYIV (Dispatches) - President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said on Saturday that Ukraine would back a U.S. proposal for three-sided talks with the United States and Russia if it facilitated more exchanges of prisoners and paved the way for meetings of national leaders.

Zelenskyy, speaking to local journalists in Kyiv, also said top Ukrainian negotiator Rustem Umerov had told him of the latest discussions that took place on Friday with U.S. negotiators in the United States.

A new round was scheduled for Saturday, he said, focusing on Ukraine's post-war recovery. Russian special envoy Kirill Dmitriev was also in Miami for talks with U.S. officials.

Zelenskyy said the United States was now proposing three-sided talks -- the United States, Ukraine and Russia -- at the level of national security advisers.

"If such a meeting could be held now to allow for swaps of prisoners of war or if a meeting of national security advisers achieves agreement on a leaders' meeting...I cannot be opposed. We would support such a U.S. proposal. Let's see how things go."

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - U.S. forces on Saturday stopped an oil tanker off the coast of Venezuela for the second time in less than two weeks, following President Donald Trump's announcement of a blockade on sanctioned vessels. Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem said the operation, carried out with the Defense Department, targeted a tanker last docked in Venezuela, as Washington ramps up the pressure on Caracas.

U.S. forces stopped an oil tanker off the coast of Venezuela for the second time in less than two weeks as President Donald Trump continues to ramp up pressure on Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro.

The pre-dawn operation comes days after Trump announced a "blockade" of all sanctioned oil tankers coming in and out of the South American country and follows the December 10 seizure by American forces of an oil tanker off Venezuela's coast.

Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem confirmed that the US Coast Guard with help from the Defense Department stopped the oil tanker that was last docked in Venezuela. She also posted on social media an unclassified video of a US helicopter landing personnel on a vessel called Centuries.

A crude oil tanker flying under the flag of Panama operates under the name and was recently spotted near the Venezuelan coast, according to MarineTraffic, a project that tracks the movement of vessels around the globe using publicly available data. It was not immediately clear if the vessel was under US sanctions.

"The United States will continue to pursue the illicit movement of sanctioned oil that is used to fund narco terrorism in the region," Noem wrote on X. "We will find you, and we will stop you."

The action was a "consented boarding," with the tanker stopping voluntarily and allowing US forces to board it, according to a US official who was not authorized to comment publicly and spoke on the condition of anonymity.

Pentagon and White House officials did not immediately respond to a requests for comment.

Trump following the first tanker seizure, of a vessel named the Skipper, this month vowed that the US would carry out a blockade of Venezuela. It all comes as Trump has ratcheted up his rhetoric toward Maduro and warned that the longtime

U.S. Forces Intercept Second Merchant Vessel Off Venezuela



Venezuelan leader's days in power are numbered.

And the president this week demanded that Venezuela return assets that it seized from US oil companies years ago, justifying anew his announcement of a "blockade" against oil tankers traveling to or from the South American country that face American sanctions.

Trump cited the lost US investments in Venezuela when asked about his newest tactic in a pressure campaign against Maduro, suggesting the Republican administration's moves are at least somewhat motivated by disputes over oil investments, along with accusations of drug trafficking. Some sanctioned tankers already are diverting away from Venezuela.

"We're not going to be letting anybody going through who shouldn't be going through," Trump told reporters earlier this week. "You remember they took all of our energy rights. They took all of our oil not that long ago. And we want it back. They took it -- they illegally took it."

US oil companies dominated Venezuela's petroleum industry until the country's leaders moved to nationalize the sector, first in the 1970s and again in the 21st century under Maduro and his predecessor, Hugo Chavez. Compensation offered by Venezuela was deemed insufficient, and in 2014 an international arbitration panel ordered the country's socialist government to pay

\$1.6 billion to ExxonMobil.

The targeting of tankers comes as Trump has ordered the Defense Department to carry out a series of attacks on vessels in the Caribbean and eastern Pacific Ocean that his administration alleges are smuggling fentanyl and other illegal drugs into the United States and beyond.

At least 104 people have been killed in 28 known strikes since early September.

The strikes have faced scrutiny from US lawmakers and human rights activists, who say the administration has offered scant evidence that its targets are indeed drug smugglers and that the fatal strikes amount to extrajudicial killings.

Escalating Russian Airstrikes Aim to Cut Ukraine Off From Sea

KYIV (Dispatches) - Russia is trying to sever Ukraine's access to the Black Sea, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said on Saturday, following days of ramped-up airstrikes on ports and energy facilities in the Odesa region and a critical route to the Moldova border.

Russia has unleashed an almost continuous drone and missile campaign against a region where ports key to Ukraine's foreign trade and fuel supplies operate, after Moscow threatened to cut "Ukraine off from the sea".

Strikes have escalated even as the U.S. pursues an uphill diplomatic drive to coax a deal to end the war. Ukraine held talks with the U.S. team on Friday, and American negotiators were set to meet Russian officials in Florida on Saturday.

"The situation in the Odesa region is harsh due to Russian strikes on port infrastructure and logistics. Russia is once again trying to restrict Ukraine's access to the sea and block our coastal regions," Zelenskyy told reporters in Kyiv.

Russia's aim is "to sow chaos, to exert moral pressure during winter... so that there is no fuel, no food supplies, so that there are problems with medical supplies," he said.

Russia's attack on Pivdennyyi port on Saturday hit reservoirs, Ukrainian Deputy Prime Minister Oleksiy Kuleba said on the Telegram messaging app, a day after a missile strike on the port killed eight people and injured at least 30.

Geneva-based vegetable oil producer Allseeds said three tanks storing sunflower oil at the site were set ablaze in Pivdennyyi, and one of its workers was killed and two injured.

Russia's Defence Ministry was not available for immediate comment. The Kremlin has said Ukraine's economic



infrastructure is a legitimate military target in the almost four-year-old full-out war.

Since Thursday, Russian forces have hit a bridge on the Dniester River near the village of Mayaki, southwest of Pivdennyyi, at least five times, Kuleba told reporters.

The bridge, which connects parts of the region divided by the river and sea inlets, is the main transport route westward to border crossings with Moldova, and is not operational now.

The route accounts for around 40% of fuel supplies to Ukraine, Kuleba said.

Ukrainian authorities have set up a pontoon bridge and re-routed logistics through other regions, securing civilian and freight logistics.

"The focus of the war may have shifted towards Odesa," Kuleba said, adding that the "crazy" attacks could escalate even further as Russia tries to undermine Ukraine's economy.

Last week, one of the war's biggest Russian air attacks on the Black Sea region damaged energy facilities and prompted a blackout in the biggest seaport Odesa, plunging hundreds of thousands of civilians into darkness for days.

Airstrikes on ports also damaged three Turkish-flagged vessels in December.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has vowed to cut Ukraine's access to the Black Sea in retaliation for Kyiv's recent drone strikes on Moscow's sanctions-busting "shadow-fleet" tankers.

Ukraine says those vessels are used to transport oil, Russia's main revenue source for funding its almost four-year-old full-scale invasion of its neighbor.

Pakistan Court Hands Imran Khan, Wife 17-Year Jail Terms

LAHORE (Dispatches) - A Pakistani court on Saturday sentenced former Prime Minister Imran Khan and his wife Bushra Bibi to 17 years in prison each in a corruption case involving the under-priced purchase of luxury state gifts, the court and Khan's lawyers said.

The latest conviction adds to a series of legal troubles for Khan, who has been behind bars since August 2023, and is currently serving a 14-year sentence in a separate land graft case.

He faces dozens of cases filed since he was ousted from office in 2022, ranging from corruption to anti-terrorism and state secrets charges. Khan has denied wrongdoing in all the cases, which his party says are politically motivated.

"The court announced the sentence without hearing the defence and sentenced 17 years imprisonment to Imran Khan and Bushra Bibi with heavy fines," Khan's family lawyer Rana Mudassar Umer told Reuters.

They were handed 10 years' rigorous imprisonment under Pakistan's penal code for criminal breach of trust and a further seven years under anti-corruption laws, the special court of Pakistan's Federal Investigation Agency said in its verdict.

Khan's jail term from Saturday's ruling would begin after he has served the 14 years from the land graft case, Information Minister Attaullah Tarar said. The case relates to luxury watches gifted to Khan by Saudi Arabia's Crown



Prince Mohammed bin Salman during official visits, which prosecutors said Khan and his wife then purchased from the state at a heavily discounted price in violation of Pakistan's gift rules.

Tarrar said the purchase resulted in losses of several million rupees for the state. Zulfi Bukhari, a spokesperson for Khan, said the verdict "ignores basic principles of justice" and turns the process into "a tool for selective prosecution."

Khan has told his legal team to appeal the decision at the Islamabad High Court, Salman Safdar, another one of his lawyers, told reporters outside the jail where the trials were being held, Geo News reported.

The case is separate from an earlier state gifts prosecution linked to Khan's August 2023 arrest. Earlier sentences of 14 years for Khan and seven years for Bushra Bibi were later suspended on appeal. The couple denies wrongdoing.

The cases are commonly known in Pakistan as the Toshakhana cases, referring to the state repository where gifts received by public officials are deposited.

Following the verdict, Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party announced plans for protests across Punjab.

Khan's party also says routine family and legal visits have been blocked in recent weeks despite court orders. Authorities deny any mistreatment and say he is receiving all facilities available to prisoners.

Christmas on Top for Arsenal, City Close in, Wolves Sink



MANCHESTER (Dispatches) - Arsenal will spend Christmas atop the Premier League after a 1-0 win at Everton, reclaiming first place from Manchester City hours after their 3-0 dismantling of struggling West Ham United.

Champions Liverpool climbed to fifth with a 2-1 win over nine-man Tottenham Hotspur that was marred by an injury to the Reds' British-record signing Alexander Isak.

Newcastle United let slip a two-goal lead to Chelsea to draw 2-2 while Burnley ended a seven-match losing streak with a late equaliser at Bournemouth.

Bottom club Wolverhampton Wanderers lost 2-0 at home to Brentford -- their 10th successive league defeat, meaning they have failed to win any of their first 17 games, matching the record set by Sheffield United in 2020-21.

Leeds United climbed six points clear of the danger zone with a 4-1 thrashing of Crystal Palace.

City's win put them on 37 points, one more than the Gunners ahead of their late kick-off, but that lead lasted for only a few hours as Arsenal striker Viktor Gyokeres scored from the spot midway through the first half after a handball at a corner by Everton's Jake O'Brien.

The win moves Arsenal to 39 points, while Everton slip to 10th in the table on 24 points.

Arsenal's Bukaya Saka said there had been no added pressure from City's earlier victory.

"We take the emotions out. We focus on our job... we focus on coming here and winning. We did that today," Saka said.

"We're back on top of the table but we're not watching City too much, or the other teams. We're in control now. We know if we win every week we'll stay there."

At Etihad Stadium, Erling Haaland bagged a double to top Cristiano Ronaldo's Premier League goals

tally in less than half the time, while City have now won seven successive games in all competitions and are beginning to display the sort of consistency that was a feature of Pep Guardiola's title-winning sides.

City stamped their authority early on with Haaland firing home at the second attempt after his initial effort was parried by Alphonse Areola. Tijjani Reijnders doubled City's lead in the 38th minute with Haaland assisting.

Haaland sealed the win in the 69th minute with an easy tap-in after some woeful West Ham defending for his 104th league goal for City. The 25-year-old's 104 goals have come in 114 games with Ronaldo's 103 coming from 236 appearances.

"(Reaching top in the table) is a good job from us and we have to keep going," Reijnders told Sky Sports. "We will keep the pressure on them (Arsenal)."

West Ham are 18th in the table with 13 points.

Isak came off the bench for Liverpool in the second half after a turgid opening period in which Spurs' Xavi Simons was shown a straight red card, and put his side ahead in the 56th minute before hobbling off with a potentially serious injury.

Hugo Ekitike doubled the visitors' lead with a header in the 66th minute but Liverpool switched off and Tottenham substitute Richarlison fired home after a scramble in the area in the 83rd minute.

Tottenham ended with nine men after captain Cristian Romero was sent off for a second yellow card. Liverpool were hardly convincing but victory lifted them to fifth with 29 points while Tottenham are down in 13th place with 22 points.

"When they scored, they were pushing and it was difficult," Ekitike told Sky Sports. "It was very physical. It was a great war and we won."

Australia Beat England by 82 Runs to Win Third Test



ADELAIDE (Dispatches) - Dominant Australia collected the last four wickets they needed Sunday to win the third Test and retain the Ashes in just 11 days of cricket, crushing the dreams of a "hurting" England side who finally showed some fight.

England's dogged resistance on day five at Adelaide Oval lasted into the second session before Scott Boland removed Josh Tongue for an 82-run victory to ensure the famous urn remains in Australian hands.

"It feels pretty awesome," said Australia captain Pat Cummins.

"It wasn't easy today, but we got it done. It's an exciting changing room.

"The last two months have been a bit of a grind," he added.

"But it's all worth it for days like this. That's when we are at our best ... it's good old-fashioned grind, and I love the toil from all the guys."

The tourists needed a win to keep the five-match series alive after being crushed by eight wickets at Perth and Brisbane, with two more Tests still to play at Melbourne and Sydney.

But despite showing more grit, they were again outplayed by an Australian team who suffered a setback with spin wizard Nathan Lyon hurting his hamstring and hobbling off.

Chasing 435 was always going to be a huge challenge, with no side ever reeling in more than 418 to win in Test history, but England at least gave it a crack as they got to 352.

Their demise in just 11 days is the joint second quickest in more than a century since the 1921 series was completed in eight days, with their "Bazball" style of ultra-attacking cricket exposed.

Mbappe Matches Ronaldo Record as Real Madrid Beat Sevilla



MADRID (Dispatches) - Kylian Mbappe matched Cristiano Ronaldo's club record for goals in a calendar year and Jude Bellingham also scored as Real Madrid beat Sevilla 2-0 on Saturday in La Liga.

French superstar Mbappe levelled Ronaldo's tally of 59 goals in 2013 by stroking home a late penalty, after Bellingham sent Madrid ahead with a first half header.

The victory allowed Los Blancos, second, to cut the gap on leaders Barcelona to one point before the Catalans visit Villarreal.

Gaining a third consecutive win across all competitions, after managing just two in the previous eight games, marginally eases the pressure on coach Xabi Alonso.

Sevilla, who thrashed champions Barcelona 4-1 in October, started strongly with veteran Chilean forward Alexis Sanchez heavily involved.

Odysseas Vlachodimos made a fine save to thwart Fran Garcia at the other end, and as the minutes ticked by Madrid began to find more of a foothold.

Bellingham headed the hosts in front at the Santiago Bernabeu after Rodrygo Goes whipped in a dangerous free-kick.

The Brazilian forward was booked for diving before the break as he tumbled in the box under little pressure.

Sanchez landed the ball on the roof of Thibaut Courtois's net before the break with an acrobatic effort.

Sevilla coach Matias Almeyda was sent off at half-time for dissent, but his team plugged away in search of an equaliser regardless.

Courtois twice denied Isaac Romero early in the second half, while Mbappe intensified his search to emulate Ronaldo's record.

Mbappe headed against the crossbar and whipped a shot narrowly wide, while Vlachodimos fended off another effort from the 27-year-old on his birthday.

Durant Shines as Rockets Avenge Nuggets Loss

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - Kevin Durant scored 31 points as the Houston Rockets bounced back from a controversial overtime loss to beat the Denver Nuggets 115-101 on Saturday.

Houston coach Ime Udoka was fined \$25,000 by the NBA earlier this week after lambasting the officiating in the Rockets' 128-125 defeat to Denver on Monday.

But the Rockets avenged that loss with a hard-fought victory as the Western Conference rivals faced off again in Denver on Saturday.

Durant delivered a talismanic performance which included five three-pointers, while Reed Sheppard came off the bench to score 28 points after making six-of-nine from outside the arc.

Durant was involved in an angry exchange with Denver's Bruce Brown late in the third quarter which saw both players separated by team-mates.

Brown later refused to elaborate on what had happened between him and Durant.

"Some words were said that were a little bit disrespectful,"



Brown said. "I can't wait to see him next time. There are certain things you don't say to another man."

Durant appeared nonplussed by the spat, while admitting that he had deliberately taken a combative approach into the game.

"I definitely wanted to cross the line tonight," Durant said.

"That's basketball... it's part of the game. Some people can talk and play. Some people can't. I had to learn how to talk and play as a player.

"I think Bruce is probably learning the same thing."

Houston improved to 17-8 with the win to remain fifth in the Western Conference, while Denver are third in the table at 20-7.

In Toronto, Payton Pritchard's 33 points helped the Boston Celtics to a 112-96 defeat of the Raptors.

Pritchard added eight rebounds and 10 assists while five other Boston players finished in double figures as the Celtics improved to 17-11.

Eagles Win Division as Commanders Clash Descends Into Brawl

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - Saquon Barkley ran the Philadelphia Eagles to back-to-back divisional titles Saturday with an ill-tempered 29-18 win over the Washington Commanders that guarantees playoff football for the reigning NFL champions.

The Eagles (10-5) are the first consecutive winners of the historically competitive NFC East for two decades, in the process ensuring their bitter rival Dallas Cowboys (6-7-1) can no longer reach the post-season.

Running back Barkley rushed for 132 yards and quarterback Jalen Hurts threw two touchdowns, in a game that saw a full-out fourth quarter brawl with multiple punches thrown and three players ejected.

"Back-to-back division champs, hasn't been done in 20



years, so that's big," said Barkley.

"I love the way we finished. We stood together and most importantly got the win."

Already eliminated from the playoffs, Washington (4-11) had protectively benched injury-hit rising-star quarterback Jayden Daniels for its remaining games.

But Daniels' replacements could not deliver a Christmas gift for home fans Saturday.

After a false start "tush push," Philadelphia's DeVonta Smith grabbed a short Hurts pass on second down for an early touchdown.

Washington running back Jacory Croskey-Merritt burst in for a hard-fought one-yard touchdown run shortly before halftime.