

International Energy Agency (IEA) Figures Show That Iran Has Increased Its Oil Production by a Significant Amount Over the Past Year Despite Continued U.S. Sanctions Aimed at Restricting the Country's Ability to Produce and Export Crude Oil

IRAN NEWS

Mohammad Ishaq Dar, Foreign Minister of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, Held a Telephone Conversation With Seyyed Abbas Araqchi on Sunday to Discuss Bilateral Relations and Regional Developments

VOL. XXIX, No. 8445 TEHRAN Price 50,000 Rials

www.irannewsdaily.com

TUESDAY DECEMBER 23, 2025 DEY 02, 1404

2 DOMESTIC



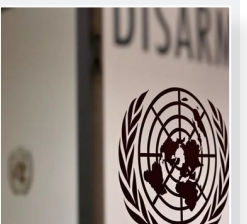
Joint Iran–Vietnam Investment and Financial Opportunities

> SEE PAGE 2

3 INTERNATIONAL

Global Nuclear Arms Control Under Pressure in 2026

> SEE PAGE 3



Iran Navy Dispatches Task Groups to South Africa



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's Navy commander praised the country's "expanding maritime presence" beyond the region, announcing that the Navy's 103rd and 104th task groups have set sail on overseas missions and are currently en route to South Africa.

Speaking at a gathering of clerics hosted by the Navy on Sunday, Rear Admiral Shahram Irani said the Islamic Republic is a leading contributor to maritime security in the region and beyond.

He emphasized that the deployments reflect the force's growing reliance on domestic capabilities, trans-regional operational experience, and a sustained presence in open waters.

According to the commander, one of the fleets has been tasked with escorting commercial vessels, while Fleet 103 is also scheduled to take part in a joint naval exercise with BRICS countries.

He said the participation is in line with directives from Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei and aims to strengthen defense and maritime diplomacy.

Irani further asserted that Iran's position in the maritime domain has been firmly established, adding that the Navy has become "one of the influential players in maritime security in the region and beyond."

He also criticized efforts by hostile media to portray Iran as isolated, saying such attempts have failed in the past and will fail in the future.

First VP Opposes Restrictions on Cyberspace



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Iran's First Vice President Mohammad Reza Aref has voiced opposition to imposing restrictions on cyberspace, stressing that there is no alternative to embracing the digital economy if the country seeks sustainable economic, scientific, and technological progress.

Speaking at a meeting of the Headquarters for Digital Economy Development attended by key players in Iran's digital ecosystem, Aref questioned the effectiveness of internet filtering from a national security perspective. "Is filtering really correct in terms of national security? The answer is clear—such measures often turn into their opposite," he said. He pointed to countries such as France, where regulatory oversight is designed in a way that does not create a sense of coercion among users, while families themselves decide on restrictions for children. He added, however, that in political and security matters, no country in the world shows leniency.

Aref said Iran's development plans are fundamentally based on the governance of emerging technologies, drawing on the potential of educated and motivated young people who want to remain in Iran and serve their country. He noted that a major transformation occurred with the adoption of the 20-Year Vision Plan, which placed national development on the foundation of new technologies—despite historical resistance within Iranian society to technological innovation.

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - In a message addressed to the meeting of the Supreme Council of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), President of the Islamic Republic of Iran Masoud Pezeshkian emphasized that cooperation between Iran and the member states of the Union represents a long-term strategic approach aimed at building a powerful region through the strengthening of national sovereignties.

President Pezeshkian's message was delivered by Kazem Jalali, Iran's ambassador to Russia, at the EAEU summit. The meeting opened on Sunday afternoon, December 21, 2025, in St. Petersburg, with the participation of the presidents of Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan, as well as the prime minister of Armenia, the five member states of the Union.

In his message, President Pezeshkian expressed appreciation to the Russian government and people for hosting the summit and extended New Year greetings in advance to the leaders attending the meeting. He noted that, as previously stated at earlier summits, cooperation between Iran and EAEU member countries constitutes a long-term strategy for creating a strong region through enhanced national sovereignty, facilitation of transport and trade, strengthening energy security, technological development, the creation of joint financial and banking infrastructures, and the expansion of people-to-people ties.

Pezeshkian underlined that shared cultural and historical ties, combined with geographic proximity, provide a solid foundation for presenting a successful model of regional integration. "With strong determination and collective will, we can turn this historic opportunity into a turning point for shared growth," he said, adding that the future belongs to nations that pave the way for progress through cooperation and mutual trust.

The Iranian president reiterated that the Islamic Republic places growing importance on regional and multilateral mechanisms and seeks to be a reliable and effective member and partner in regional arrangements and blocs. He pointed to Iran's active participation in organizations such as the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), BRICS, the Developing Eight (D-8), the Asia Cooperation Dialogue (ACD), the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization as clear evidence of this approach.

Pezeshkian stressed that the Eurasian Economic Union holds a special position in Iran's foreign policy and economic diplomacy. He said the implementation of the free trade agreement between Iran and the EAEU, along with Iran's attainment of observer status in the Union, marks the



beginning of a productive and influential Iranian presence in this important economic body.

He added that in today's world, economic convergence and regional cooperation are key drivers of sustainable growth and shared prosperity. The current summit, he said, reflects the collective determination of EAEU members and Iran to expand strategic cooperation in vital areas such as trade, energy, transport, and advanced technologies.

In another part of his message, President Pezeshkian described the implementation of the Iran–EAEU Free Trade Agreement, effective since May 2025, as the most significant achievement of the year and a major step toward deepening mutual economic relations. He noted that the agreement has created unprecedented opportunities for national economies and traders, laid the groundwork for expanding trade volumes, and has already resulted in increased bilateral trade.

Emphasizing that trade capacity between Iran and EAEU member states far exceeds current levels, Pezeshkian expressed confidence that the upward trend would continue, leading to a significant surge in mutual trade. He highlighted Iran's high-level participation in multiple EAEU summits and intergovernmental council meetings as a sign of Tehran's firm resolve to expand economic ties with all five Union members.

The president also noted that Iran's Minister of Industry, Mine and Trade has held meetings with his Eurasian counterpart to review implementation challenges related to the free trade agreement and to approve a roadmap for more effective execution.

Looking ahead, Pezeshkian announced Iran's plan to host a meeting of Eurasian trade ministers alongside the fourth Eurasia International Trade Exhibition (Eurasia Expo) in Tehran in February 2026, expressing hope for strong participation by officials, traders, and economic actors from member and neighboring countries.

In closing, President Pezeshkian wished success, prosperity, and well-being to the governments and peoples of EAEU member states. He also commended Belarus for its role during its 2025 rotating presidency of the Union and extended best wishes to Kazakhstan as it prepares to assume the chairmanship in 2026.

The Eurasian Economic Union comprises Belarus, Kazakhstan, Russia, Kyrgyzstan, and Armenia. Iran, Uzbekistan, and Cuba currently hold observer status. Iran officially joined the Union as an observer in 2024, while the free trade agreement signed in January 2024 entered into force in May 2025, eliminating customs tariffs on 87 percent of traded goods.

Missile Program Developed for National Defense, Not for Negotiations

IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesperson Esmail Baghaei said Iran's missile program has been developed solely to defend the country's sovereignty and is not subject to negotiation, adding that regional "resistance" movements are deeply rooted and will continue as long as occupation persists.

Speaking at the Foreign Ministry's weekly press briefing, Baghaei addressed regional developments, Iran's foreign relations, and recent allegations against Tehran.

Baghaei said the region continues to face what he described as the ongoing problem of Israeli aggression "in various forms," citing arrests and killings of Palestinians as examples of crimes against humanity. He said these actions align with what a UN rapporteur has described as a project to erase Palestine, and argued that such crimes increase the responsibility of the international community to act to restrain Israel.

Responding to questions about alleged false-flag operations, Baghaei said Israel has a long record of planning and carrying out such operations to discredit its opponents. He referenced the 1954 "Lavon Affair" in Egypt, in which, he said, Israeli operatives carried out bombings against U.S. and British interests using Egyptian Jews in an attempt to justify continued British military presence. He noted that Israel denied the incident until 2005, when surviving participants were officially honored and admitted their roles. He said exposing such actions is the most effective way to counter them.

Baghaei dismissed a recent statement by the European Council alleging Iran's complicity in the Ukraine war as a "repetitive claim." He said Iran has consistently called for resolving the conflict through dialogue and has had no involvement in the war.

He added that expecting countries to sever relations with Russia is unreasonable, and said Iran–Russia relations are not directed against any third country. Baghaei argued European countries should examine their own actions, saying NATO's hostile behavior has put Europe's security at risk, and called on Europe to stop what he described as unfounded accusations.

Commenting on Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi's visit to Moscow and a simultaneous meeting in Tehran between Ali Larijani and a Russian official, Baghaei said the timing was coincidental. He described Iran–Russia relations as broad and said frequent exchanges of delegations are natural.

He said Araqchi's trip was part of ongoing consultations, during which a range of bilateral and international issues were discussed with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov. Baghaei said both sides are determined to make full use of their strategic partnership agreement.

On Iranian assets held in Qatar, Baghaei said the issue is one of "hundreds of examples" of U.S.



failure to honor commitments. He said under the relevant understanding, Iranian funds were supposed to be made accessible to the government, but the U.S. violated the agreement and continues to do so.

Addressing the regional situation, Baghaei said Israel's actions amount to "nothing but violence and killing," which he argued shows the regime does not consider itself part of the region. He said the killings reflect Israel's fear of isolation.

"Resistance is deeply rooted and innate," Baghaei said, adding that as long as occupation continues, resistance will persist. He cautioned against assuming that resistance has been eliminated due to temporary setbacks, and said the abnormal situation in the region stems from Israel's continued violence.

Responding to Israeli accusations that Iran was involved in the killing of an Israeli nuclear scientist, Baghaei said, "Criminals project their own behavior

onto others." He said Israel has a record of assassinating citizens of other countries and seeks scapegoats whenever incidents occur.

Asked about media reports suggesting Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is seeking U.S. support for a potential attack on Iran, Baghaei stressed that Iran's missile program is purely defensive and "not for negotiation." He said Iran's defensive capabilities are not subject to discussion.

He added that Iran faces "open hypocrisy," arguing that Iran's defensive program is labeled a threat while massive arms transfers to Israel continue despite civilian casualties. He described what he called a media-driven atmosphere as part of a war initiated by Israel and the United States, and said Iran remains focused on its work and capable of defending itself.

In response to a detailed question about the European Council's claim that Iran, Belarus, and North Korea have provided military assistance to Russia, Baghaei reiterated Iran's denial. He said Iran has consistently maintained that the conflict should be resolved through dialogue and that Tehran has neither intervened nor provided military assistance.

He again rejected the notion that friendly relations with Russia should be curtailed at Europe's request, saying Iran–Russia ties are based on mutual respect and interests and do not target other countries.

Baghaei concluded by urging European states to focus on their own responsibilities, examine the roots of the Ukraine conflict, and assess the role of NATO's actions. He said Europe should stop blaming others and instead be accountable for its own policies, adding that continued accusations do not help resolve the crisis.

America's Betrayal of the Bretton Woods System

By: Hamid Reza Naghashian

The Bretton Woods system was an international financial and monetary system that was created after World War II. Its main objective was to establish stability in the global economy and to prevent instabilities like those experienced during the 1930s.

This system was designed in 1944 at a conference held in Bretton Woods, New Hampshire, USA, with the participation of representatives from 44 countries. The main objectives of the Bretton Woods system were:

Exchange rate stability, meaning the prevention of severe fluctuations in balances and exchange rates that could harm international trade.

Facilitating postwar economic reconstruction, which was considered assistance for rebuilding the economies of Europe and Japan.

Increasing economic cooperation and preventing nationalist economic policies that would harm other countries.

Under this agreement, each country fixed the exchange rate of its currency to the US dollar (with a limited fluctuation of $\pm 1\%$).

Thus, the US dollar was the only currency convertible into gold (at a fixed rate of \$35 per ounce of gold).

This made the US dollar the world's primary reserve currency. Subsequently, two important institutions were created for oversight and assistance:

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) to help countries facing balance-of-payments deficits.

The World Bank, to provide financing for development and reconstruction projects.

However, this system came under unilateral pressure from the United States in the 1960s and early 1970s and ultimately collapsed.

In essence, the United States betrayed the 43 countries of the world that were strategic partners in this agreement.

In the US Treasury, there was insufficient gold relative to the volume of dollars held abroad (due to the costs of the Vietnam War and domestic programs), and that gold had been secretly spent.

With the US balance-of-payments deficit and the declining confidence in the ability to convert dollars into gold, the world was confronted with a fait accompli and was astonished.

In 1971, US President Richard Nixon decided to halt the convertibility of the dollar into gold, an event that became known as the Nixon Shock.

It can be said that this betrayal of the global economy marked the end of the Bretton Woods system, after which a system of floating exchange rates replaced it.

The institutions that remained from that great agreement—the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank—continue to operate under US monetary policies and play an important role in the global economy.

The US dollar has remained the world's primary reserve currency, as American pressure caused oil to be traded in dollars.

In summary, the Bretton Woods system was a framework for managing the global economy after the war, based on exchange rate stability and the gold backing of the dollar. However, due to structural problems and imposed economic pressures, it collapsed after about three decades. Today, as a result of this betrayal, the world carries \$315 trillion in unpayable debt.

Iran Leaves Up to 20m Tons of Petrochemical Capacity Unused



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The managing director of the National Petrochemical Company (NPC) said that despite plans to significantly expand Iran's petrochemical capacity, a major challenge remains the underutilization of existing facilities, with around 18 to 20 million tons of current capacity going unused.

Speaking at a ceremony marking the signing of memoranda of understanding related to energy consumption reduction, Hassan Abbaszadeh said the petrochemical industry is committed to meeting the objectives set out in Iran's Seventh National Development Plan.

"According to the plan, we are supposed to reach an installed capacity of 131.5 million tons," Abbaszadeh said. "However, the key challenge is that a portion of our existing capacity—estimated at about 18 to 20 million tons—cannot currently be utilized."

IRAN NEWS



\$3bn Support Pledged for Iranian Traders’ Economic Activities in Africa

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - The head of the Iran–East Africa Joint Chamber of Commerce announced an agreement with the Export Guarantee Fund of Iran to support Iranian companies’ economic activities in Africa with coverage of up to \$3 billion. Masoud Barahman, head of the Iran–East Africa Joint Chamber of Commerce, made the announcement during a meeting with Afshar Fathollahi, CEO of the Export Guarantee Fund of Iran. Barahman emphasized the need to streamline the issuance of guarantees and expand support for Iranian traders active in African markets.

Iran’s Exports to Turkey Rise 14%



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - An assessment of Iran’s exports to Turkey during the first six months of the current year shows that exports reached \$2.718 billion, marking a 14% increase in value and a 22% rise in weight compared with the same period last year.

Iran’s imports from Turkey totaled \$4.324 billion in the six-month period, down 22% in value from \$5.529 billion recorded in the corresponding period last year.

During the first half of the year, the average price per ton of Iran’s total exports stood at \$344, while the average value per ton of exports to Turkey was \$545. The average price per ton of Iran’s total imports was \$1,508, and the average value per ton of imports from Turkey was \$1,229. Iran’s overall terms of trade were calculated at 0.23%, while the figure for trade with Turkey stood at 0.443%.

The report shows that in the first half of 1404 (2025/26), the total value of bilateral trade between Iran and Turkey reached \$7.042 billion, accounting for 13.2% of Iran’s total foreign trade and positioning Turkey as Iran’s third-largest trading partner.

Turkey ranked as Iran’s fourth-largest export destination—after China, Iraq, and the United Arab Emirates—with exports valued at \$2.718 billion (up 14%) and weighing 4.991 million tons (up 22%). Turkey also ranked first among Iran’s fastest-growing export markets in terms of value, with a 10.7% share.

At the same time, Turkey was Iran’s third-largest source of imports, after the UAE and China and ahead of India and Germany, with imports worth \$4.324 billion (down 22%) and weighing 3.519 million tons (up 4%), accounting for a 15.5% value share in the first half of the year.

The review indicates that the diversity of Iran’s export items to Turkey stood at 964 products, while the range of imported goods from Turkey totaled 2,563 items.

Iran’s main exports to Turkey were dominated by: Petrochemical and oil-based products: 48%; Mining and mineral industries: 33%; Industrial goods: 15%; and Agricultural products: 4%.

Iran’s Home Appliance Industry Ready to Enter Regional Markets



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Iran’s Minister of Industry, Mine and Trade said the country’s home appliance industry, backed by significant progress in recent years and the production of high-quality domestic goods, is now prepared to enter regional markets.

Seyed Mohammad Atabak stated that Iran’s industrial policy is increasingly focused on export-oriented growth, particularly in sectors that have achieved technological maturity and self-sufficiency. “The home appliance industry has made notable advances in recent years, both in terms of quality and production capacity, and it is now ready to compete in regional markets,” he said.

Atabak explained that foreign currency allocation remains a sensitive and carefully managed issue, stressing that priority is given to the import of essential goods. “In other sectors, currency allocation is managed based on the country’s actual needs and economic priorities,” he noted, adding that the government seeks to balance domestic production requirements with export ambitions.

The minister highlighted that expanding exports of home appliances was one of the main objectives of his recent visit to Afghanistan. According to Atabak, discussions during the trip were pursued seriously and resulted in the signing of contracts with Afghan counterparts. “Our engagement with Afghanistan demonstrated that Iranian-made home appliances can successfully meet demand in neighboring markets,” he said.

Joint Iran–Vietnam Investment and Financial Opportunities



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The head of the Iranian–Foreign Joint Investment Association said cooperation with the Iran Financial Center, the World Business Organization, and several Iran–Vietnam and ASEAN joint chambers of commerce, with a focus on joint Iranian–foreign investment, is on the agenda.

According to IRNA, citing the Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture, Mehdi Azadvari said at the association’s seasonal gathering that over the past three months the new board has succeeded in signing memoranda of understanding with domestic and international institutions aimed primarily at delivering effective services to association members.

He noted that cooperation with the Iran Financial Center, the World Business Organization, and several joint chambers of commerce has been defined within this framework, adding that negotiations with other joint and provincial chambers are also underway, centered on joint Iranian–foreign investment.

Azadvari described the association’s participation in the Kish Investment Exhibition as a turning point of the current term, emphasizing that it helped raise awareness of the association among economic actors.

Referring to the advantages of the Kish Free Zone—such as visa-free entry for foreign nationals—he said the area could become a major hub for hosting international investment events. In this regard, negotiations have been held with the Supreme Council of Free Zones and the Kish Free Zone Organization to sign joint memoranda of understanding.

Outlining the proposed framework of the association’s strategy, Azadvari said the document is still at the proposal stage and aims to position the association as a credible reference body in the development and support of joint investments between Iran and other countries.

He explained that the association’s core missions are defined across four pillars: expanding communications, providing advisory services, safeguarding members’ interests, and fulfilling social responsibility to strengthen Iran’s economic brand.

Azadvari listed attracting foreign investors, increasing joint projects, enhancing the quality of international cooperation, transferring technology, and improving Iran’s image in the investment environment as the association’s overarching goals. He stressed that achieving these objectives requires an operational plan, evaluation

indicators, and transparent reporting to members.

He added that alongside international activities, the association has plans in place for specialized training, research, information dissemination, and engagement with government bodies to improve the business environment.

At the meeting, Hadi Shahpar, a member of the association’s Investment Committee, emphasized the concept of sustainable economic engagement, saying one of the weaknesses of Iran’s foreign trade is the episodic nature of its economic relations.

He said the Joint Investment Association seeks to establish long-term, structured relationships based on regional agreements and economic blocs.

Describing ASEAN countries—including Vietnam, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, and Singapore—as major global economic hubs, Shahpar said Vietnam could play a pivotal role as Iran’s gateway to Southeast Asia.

Pointing to Vietnam’s sustained economic growth and the untapped potential in bilateral trade, he noted that despite more than five decades of diplomatic relations, the volume of trade between Iran and Vietnam does not reflect existing capacities.

He added that sectors such as construction materials, petrochemicals, technology, agriculture, and especially coffee are among the main areas of current cooperation, with numerous opportunities for expanding joint investment.

In another part of the meeting, Vietnam’s deputy ambassador and a representative of the country’s Ministry of Industry and Trade in Iran, referring to bilateral diplomatic ties and Iran’s capabilities in petrochemicals, agriculture, and advanced technologies, announced that Vietnam is ready to serve as a conduit for Iranian products and technologies to Southeast Asian markets.

It was emphasized that the Vietnamese embassy and the trade office of the Ministry of Industry and Trade in Iran are prepared to provide necessary facilitation and information to Iranian companies interested in entering the Vietnamese market.

At the conclusion of the meeting, association members raised questions and shared their views. It was agreed that practical cooperation between the Joint Investment Association and the Vietnamese embassy would be pursued to facilitate the presence of Iranian companies in Vietnam. The stated goal of these efforts is to increase Iran’s share in Vietnamese markets and strengthen sustainable economic ties between the two countries.

Iranian Fishermen to Gain Access to Mauritius and Madagascar Waters

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - A deputy head of the Iran Fisheries Organization said negotiations are underway with Mauritius and Madagascar to allow Iranian fishermen to operate in their fishing grounds, adding that several Iranian fishermen have recently been released from prisons in India.

Ataollah Raeisi, Deputy for Fishing and Fishing Ports at the Iran Fisheries Organization, outlined the country’s fishing capacity, saying around 168,000 fishermen are currently active in northern and southern Iran, operating some 20,300 vessels. These include 16,500 small boats, 3,000 traditional wooden vessels (lenj), and 132 fishing ships.

Providing the latest catch figures, Raeisi said average annual catches at northern and southern ports are estimated at about 778,000 tons for the year 1403 (2024/25). He noted that most southern vessels—particularly those from Sistan-Baluchestan and eastern Hormozgan—are engaged in offshore fishing in international waters.

“In previous years, fishing was halted for about three months, from June to September,” Raeisi said. “However, this year the 12-day war served as a wake-up call, prompting us to begin fishing operations earlier than usual.”

He added that permits for offshore fishing were issued about a month earlier than in past years, resulting in nearly a 35% increase in industrial fish catches in offshore waters so far.

Raeisi said industrial fish are primarily used for canned fish production and storage. During the 12-day war, canned fish was distributed nationwide and was the only food item whose supply faced no disruption due to sufficient reserves.

“This year, the program was designed both to build up fish reserves and to regulate the market,” he said, adding that around 1,000 lenj vessels are currently operating in offshore waters.

Addressing security concerns in offshore waters, Raeisi said parts of the Somali Sea are unsafe due to armed groups commonly referred to as pirates, but stressed that the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps



(IRGC) Navy has provided protection whenever risks were identified.

“In effect, our fishermen and vessels also act as border guards,” he said. “When we say we have 168,000 fishermen, it means we have 168,000 unpaid border guards who produce, create jobs, and help safeguard the country’s maritime borders.”

On the detention of Iranian fishermen abroad, Raeisi said challenges occasionally arise in international waters, including encounters with Somali pirates. However, he emphasized that issues are typically resolved through coordination between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and military forces under international law.

“Pirates do not take fishermen hostage—they kill or eliminate them,” he said. “But there have been cases where vessels, due to engine failure, bad weather, or other issues, drifted from international waters into the territorial waters of another country.”

He added that when Iranian fishermen are detained in third countries over issues such as maritime border disputes, negotiations are pursued for their release. “Some countries are strict on border disputes. In this context, several Iranian fishermen were released from detention in India less than a month ago,” Raeisi said.

Raeisi also announced plans to expand offshore fishing beyond Somalia. “This year, for the first time, we plan to engage with Mauritius and Madagascar,” he said, noting that a delegation has already visited and inspected fishing grounds in both countries.

“These two countries have very good fishing grounds,” he said. “We aim to organize Iran’s distant-water fishing vessels there, as we have done in Somalia, so they can focus on industrial fishing.”

Raeisi stressed that fishing activities in southern Iran were not halted even for a single day during the 12-day war, although vessel presence declined due to storms and seasonal conditions.

“Small vessels volunteered to go to sea in support of Iran, forming a popular mobilization against the enemy,” he said. “In addition to the maritime Basij under the IRGC Navy, we have a popular mobilization of fishermen who continued production throughout the war.”

Rail Agreements with BRICS and SCO



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - A deputy minister of roads and urban development said meetings held under the BRICS and Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) frameworks are effectively aimed at coordinating member states to expand trade exchanges and various modes of transport, particularly rail transport.

Jabarali Zakeri, CEO of the Islamic Republic of Iran Railways, addressed rail agreements reached within international groupings such as BRICS, the SCO, and the Eurasian bloc. He said these summits focus on boosting commercial interactions and transport connectivity among member countries.

Zakeri noted that in both BRICS and the SCO, dedicated meetings are held with the participation of railway chiefs of member states. “Key discussions mainly revolve around common tariffs or tariff reductions, as well as convergence in using member countries’ rail networks for freight transport, which ultimately lowers the cost of moving goods among members,” he said.

Referring to rising rail transit through Iran, Zakeri said the number of transit trains on routes toward Afghanistan and Pakistan to Russia via Iran is increasing. “On some routes, such as China to Iran, the number of passing trains was only seven in previous years, but from the beginning of this year to date, it has reached 40,” he added.

On freight volumes, he said that while in the first eight months of the Iranian year 1403 (2024/25) only 15,000 tons of cargo were transported on the Afghanistan route, the figure for the same period this year has jumped to 320,000 tons—equivalent to about 80,000 tons per month.

Chinese Think Tank Representatives Attend Tehran Chamber Meeting on Strategic Cooperation



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The Tehran Chamber of Commerce hosted a joint meeting with Chinese think tank representatives and officials from Iran’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs to explore various aspects of economic and strategic cooperation between Iran and China.

Fereydoun Vardinejad, Secretary-General of the Tehran Chamber, opened the session by highlighting China’s priority status in the chamber’s strategic agenda. He detailed practical steps taken to strengthen economic relations, including the targeted dispatch of trade delegations, regular China-focused secretariat meetings, publication of analytical bulletins on China’s economy and policies, and facilitation of connections between business actors in both countries.

Feryal Mostofi, Vice President of the Tehran Chamber, emphasized joint investment opportunities in sectors such as energy, infrastructure, advanced industries, and emerging technologies, stressing the need to design sustainable mechanisms for attracting foreign investment. Abbas Argon, board member and treasurer of the chamber, highlighted the importance of financial and banking cooperation, reviewing existing platforms and solutions to facilitate cross-border financial transactions between Iranian and Chinese economic actors.

Hessameddin Hallaj, Deputy for International Affairs and Trade Development at the Tehran Chamber, underlined the necessity of institutionalizing and strengthening cooperation between chambers of commerce, think tanks, and economic bodies of both countries. He invited Chinese representatives to promote bilateral cooperation through trade delegations and the sharing of practical opportunities.

Trump to Expand Immigration Crackdown With \$170b Boost in 2026

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) – U.S. President Donald Trump is preparing for a more aggressive immigration crackdown in 2026 with billions in new funding, including by raiding more workplaces — even as backlash builds ahead of next year’s midterm elections.

Trump has already surged immigration agents into major US cities, where they swept through neighbourhoods and clashed with residents. While federal agents this year conducted some high-profile raids on businesses, they largely avoided raiding farms, factories and other businesses that are economically important but known to employ immigrants without legal status.



US, Ukraine Hail Productive Miami Talks But No Breakthrough



MIAMI (Dispatches) – U.S. and Ukrainian envoys issued a joint statement on Sunday that hailed “productive and constructive” talks in Miami but did not announce any apparent breakthrough in efforts to end the war with Russia.

Top representatives from both Ukraine and Russia, as well as Kyiv’s European allies, have been in southern Florida over the past several days for a series of separate talks hosted by U.S. President Donald Trump’s special envoy, Steve Witkoff.

The meetings were the latest in a weeks-long diplomatic blitz over plans to end the war, after Washington last month presented a 28-point proposal widely seen as echoing the Kremlin’s demands.

It has since been redrafted following Ukraine and Europe’s involvement, though its contents have not been publicly disclosed.

“Over the last three days in Florida, the Ukrainian delegation held a series of productive and constructive meetings with American and European partners,” Witkoff and Ukraine’s top negotiator, Rustem Umerov, said in separate statements on X.

They said a bilateral US-Ukraine meeting focused on developing and aligning positions on “four key documents” — a “20-point plan,” a “Multilateral security guarantee framework,” a “US Security guarantee framework for Ukraine” and an “economic & prosperity plan.”

Spain’s Ruling Socialists Suffer Historic Defeat in Regional Election



MADRID (Dispatches) - Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez’s embattled Socialists suffered a heavy defeat in Sunday’s regional election in Extremadura, slumping to their worst-ever result as the far-right Vox made strong gains, dealing another blow to the party amid mounting corruption and misconduct allegations.

The Socialists, who lead the minority national coalition, have been rocked by corruption and sexual misconduct allegations and the vote in the rural southwestern region was seen as an indicator of the party’s wider prospects.

They won just 18 seats in the 65-seat assembly down from 28, their worst-ever regional result in Extremadura.

The Socialists had governed the region for decades but the conservative Popular Party (PP) took control with Vox’s support in 2023.

The PP called the vote hoping to get a majority and although they came out on top again on Sunday with 29 seats, they fell short.

The result means the PP will once again rely on Vox, which went from five to 11 seats, to pass legislation.

Regional governments in Spain control key policy areas such as education, healthcare, infrastructure, and culture.

Global Nuclear Arms Control Under Pressure in 2026

PARIS (Dispatches) - The fragile global legal framework for nuclear weapons control faces further setbacks in 2026, eroding guardrails to avoid a nuclear crisis.

The first half of the year will see two key events: the US-Russia bilateral treaty, New START, expires on February 5, and in April, New York hosts the Review Conference (RevCon) of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) -- the cornerstone of global nuclear security frameworks.

The RevCon, held every four to five years, is meant to keep the NPT alive. But during the last two sessions, the 191 signatory states failed to agree on a final document, and experts expect the same outcome in April.

“I think this is going to be a difficult RevCon,” said Alexandra Bell, head of US-based global security nonprofit the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, at a UN-hosted online conference in early December.

“In terms of the current state and near future prospects of nuclear arms control architecture, things are bleak,” she added.

Anton Khlopkov, director of Russian think-tank the Center for Energy and Security Studies (CENESS), took an even starker point of view, saying at the same event that “we are at the point of almost complete dismantlement of arms control architecture”.

“We should be realistic in the current circumstances. At best, I think we should try to preserve what we have,” he said.

From US strikes on Iranian nuclear sites to Russia’s test of the new Burevestnik nuclear-powered cruise missile and US President Donald Trump’s remarks about possibly resuming nuclear tests -- the international nuclear landscape darkened in 2025.

At the same time, “the arms control architecture is crumbling”, Emmanuelle Maitre of France’s Foundation for Strategic Research (FRS) told AFP.

A key challenge hinges on a shift in global relations.

Nuclear control had been built over decades around a Moscow-Washington axis, but China’s growing power and rapid technological advances have shifted the international playing field, which is simultaneously increasingly strained.

“The growing interlinkage between nuclear and conventional forces and the emergence of disruptive technologies (such as the US Golden Dome defence system and new hypersonic weapons) have transformed traditional nuclear deterrence into a multi-domain concept, especially in a multipolar world,” said Peking University’s Hua Han.



ballistic missile) silos than the US has active Minuteman III silos,” Peters said at a recent online International Institute for Strategic Studies event.

“New START does nothing to address” that issue, he added.

However, Maitre said, a New START lapse doesn’t mean the world should expect serious consequences as early as February 6.

In both Washington and Moscow, “there is a small margin to bring some weapons back into service, but the numbers cannot be very significant. There are bottlenecks” that will slow any buildup, she said.

Nor will the lack of a final document from the RevCon cause “immediate or damaging consequences” to the NPT, she said.

But, she warned, fewer safeguards risks leaving the world without diplomatic tools to resolve tensions.

“The less functional the NPT becomes, the harder it is to forge collective solutions in the event of a crisis.”

U.S. Pursuing Third Vessel Near Venezuela

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - The U.S. Coast Guard is pursuing an oil tanker in international waters near Venezuela in what would be the third in less than a week, officials said Sunday, as U.S. President Donald Trump increases pressure on the South American nation. The move comes a week after Trump announced a “blockade” of all oil tankers under sanctions entering and leaving Venezuela.

“The United States Coast Guard is in active pursuit of a sanctioned ‘dark fleet’ vessel that is part of Venezuela’s illegal sanctions evasion,” a US official said. “It is flying a false flag and under a judicial seizure order.”

Another official said the tanker was under sanctions, but added that it had not been boarded so far and that interceptions can take different forms - including by sailing or flying close to vessels of concern.

The officials, who spoke on the condition of anonymity, did not give a specific location for the operation or name the vessel being pursued.

British maritime risk management group Vanguard, along with a US maritime security source, identified the vessel as Bella 1, a very large crude oil carrier that was added last year to the sanctions list of the US Treasury Department, which said the vessel has links to Iran.

Bella 1 was empty when it was approaching Venezuela on Sunday, according to TankerTrackers.com. The vessel had in 2021 provided transportation for Venezuela’s oil to China, according to internal documents from state-run oil company PDVSA. It had also previously carried Iranian crude, according to the vessel monitoring service.



The White House did not immediately respond to a request for comment on Sunday.

US President Trump last week announced a “blockade” of all oil tankers under sanctions entering and leaving Venezuela.

Trump’s pressure campaign on Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro has included a ramped-up military presence in the region and more than two dozen military strikes on vessels in the Pacific Ocean and Caribbean Sea near the South American nation. At least 100 people have been killed in the attacks.

The Skipper, a very large crude carrier and the first Venezuela-related vessel seized by the U.S. on December 10, reached the Galveston Offshore Lightering Area near Houston on Sunday. Very large crude carriers cannot transit the Houston ship channel, as the waterway is not deep enough, and typically transfer the oil on board to smaller tankers at GOLA.

The first two oil tankers seized were operating on the black market and providing oil to countries under sanctions, Kevin Hassett, director of the White House’s National Economic Council, said in a television interview on Sunday.

“And so I don’t think that people need to be worried here in the US that the prices are going to go up because of these seizures of these ships,” Hassett said on CBS’ “Face the Nation” program. “There’s just a couple of them, and they were black market ships.”

Oil prices rose on Monday in early Asian trading hours. Brent crude futures rose 42 cents, or 0.7%, to \$60.89 a barrel as of 0020 GMT. U.S. West Texas Intermediate crude CLC1 was up 37 cents, or 0.7%, at \$56.89 per barrel.

Macron, on UAE Visit, Announces New French Aircraft Carrier

ABU DHABI (Dispatches) - French President Emmanuel Macron said on Sunday he had given the official go-ahead to replace his country’s flagship, the nuclear-powered Charles de Gaulle aircraft carrier.

That vessel, the only nuclear-powered carrier outside the US Navy, entered service in 2001 following more than a decade of construction.

“In line with the last two military programming laws, and after a thorough and comprehensive review, I have decided to equip France with a new aircraft carrier,” Macron said, speaking during a visit to French troops in the United Arab Emirates.

The decision to give the final go-ahead was made this week, he added.

“In an age of predators, we must be strong in order to be feared,” Macron said.

France first launched studies into replacing the Charles de Gaulle in 2018, with preliminary work beginning two years later.

The announcement of the official start of construction comes despite a budgetary deadlock gripping the European Union’s second-largest economy.

Criticism in France, including from military chief General Fabien Mandon, had focused on whether other more pressing areas should be prioritised amid fears of a European war with Russia.

This official launch will make it possible to sign all of the contracts necessary for the project, Macron’s office said.



Also nuclear-powered, the new carrier will be far larger than the current flagship.

It will displace nearly 80,000 tons and be around 310 metres long, compared with 42,000 tons and 261 metres for the Charles de Gaulle.

With a crew of 2,000, it will be able to hold 30 fighter jets.

While the future ship will still be dwarfed by the 11 vast supercarriers of the US Navy, which each displace more than 100,000 tons, only China and Britain’s Royal Navy currently operate similarly sized carriers, all of which are conventionally powered.

Macron was speaking during a visit to the UAE to celebrate Christmas with French troops and to discuss bilateral ties with the Persian Gulf state, with Paris hoping for more cooperation in its fight against drug trafficking.

Macron met Emirati President Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan on Sunday, with the French leader posting on X that they had discussed how to strengthen their strategic partnership, particularly for “stability in the Middle East”.

The UAE is a major buyer of French military hardware and Paris is reportedly considering turning to Abu Dhabi to rescue its troubled future fighter jet program with Germany on the brink of pulling out.

The French president traditionally celebrates the end-of-year holidays with troops deployed abroad, of whom there are more than 900 in the UAE.



Steelers Edge Lions as Bears, 49ers Reach Playoffs

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - Aaron Rodgers' Pittsburgh Steelers clung on for a dramatic 29-24 win against the Lions Sunday, leaving Detroit's playoff hopes hanging by a thread and sending two other NFL teams through to the post-season.

Lions quarterback Jared Goff twice thought he had delivered a winning touchdown in the game's final seconds, only for both to be ruled out for offensive pass interference, sparking furious scenes at Ford Field. "Crazy game...so happy to get a win," said Rodgers, describing the high-stakes clash's final moments as "chaos."

Pittsburgh's win means the Chicago Bears and the San Francisco 49ers are guaranteed for the NFL playoffs.

The Steelers themselves took a giant step closer to post-season football, with their destiny in their own hands as they sit two wins clear of divisional rival Baltimore, who play later Sunday against New England. "I'm going to enjoy this one, and we're going to turn on the Sunday night game and root for the Patriots," said Rodgers.

A dour first half was notable mainly for an incident involving Pittsburgh receiver DK Metcalf, who reached into the stands and appeared to throw a punch at a Lions fan.

Though the Detroit supporter did not appear to be hurt, Metcalf may face disciplinary action.

Pittsburgh took a third-quarter lead with a two-point safety for sacking Goff in his own endzone, and never relinquished the advantage.

Steelers running back Kenneth Gainwell made one of the catches of the season, seizing the ball with one hand while horizontal on the floor before rising to sprint across the line for a touchdown.

With barely two minutes left, Steelers kicker Chris Boswell missed a 37-yard field goal that could have put the game almost beyond reach.

But the Lions could not quite capitalize, with an Amon-Ra St Brown catch and a Goff rush across the

line both ruled out after extensive discussion among officials.

Elsewhere on Sunday, a battle of two of the NFL's most in-form teams saw the league-leading Denver Broncos' 11-game win streak snapped by the Jacksonville Jaguars.

The impressive Jaguars won 34-20 for a sixth win in a row, breaking Denver's unbeaten home record this season, and moving to an 11-4 record.

Asked if Jacksonville -- now dark horses for the number-one seed spot -- would finally get respect from other teams, quarterback Trevor Lawrence joked: "Honestly, I hope not."

"Hope we don't get any. Everybody out there, just keep it up -- it's great."

Justin Herbert threw two touchdowns and rushed for another as the Los Angeles Chargers beat the already-eliminated Dallas Cowboys 34-17.

Quarterback Herbert produced a near flawless performance, with 300 passing yards from 23-of-29 attempts with no interceptions.

The Buffalo Bills also powered towards the playoffs with a 23-20 win over the Cleveland Browns.

Bills quarterback Josh Allen had a quiet afternoon, leaving the Bills ground game to grind out victory, with running back James Cook rushing for two touchdowns and 117 yards.

The wins mean both the Chargers and Bills could wrap up a playoff berth Monday if the Indianapolis Colts fail to beat the 49ers.

The faltering Tampa Bay Buccaneers stumbled to a 23-20 defeat on the road to the Carolina Panthers in a crucial NFC South divisional tussle.

The Panthers vaulted into first place in the division following the win, which leaves them with an 8-7 record with the Bucs second on 7-8.

The loss was another hammer blow for Tampa Bay, who have taken just one win from their last seven games to allow Carolina to edge past them in the divisional standings.

Hosts Morocco Off to Winning Start at Africa Cup of Nations



RABAT (Dispatches) - Braham Diaz and Ayoub El Kaabi scored second-half goals as hosts Morocco got their Africa Cup of Nations bid off to a winning start by beating minnows Comoros 2-0 in the tournament's opening game.

Soufiane Rahimi had a penalty saved in a frustrating first half for much-fancied Morocco, but Diaz fired home from inside the area 10 minutes after the interval at the Prince Moulay Abdellah Stadium in the capital Rabat.

Substitute El Kaabi then got the second with a stunning overhead kick, and the victory on a wet and cold night sets the Atlas Lions up for the potentially tougher tests to come in Group A against Mali and Zambia.

The result also allowed Morocco, Africa's best team in the FIFA rankings in 11th place, to extend their world-record winning run to 19 consecutive matches.

"The match went as we thought it would, because the opening game is always difficult for the host nation due to all the expectation," said coach Walid Regragui.

"We have been preparing for this for two years so there was a lot of tension.

"The 2-0 scoreline is well deserved, and we could even have scored a third had we not relaxed a little in the last five minutes.

"It is great for the fans but the objective was not to produce our best possible performance in the first match."

The game was played out before a crowd of 60,180, with Moroccan Crown Prince Moulay Hassan -- who appeared on the pitch ahead of kick-off -- and FIFA president Gianni Infantino among those in attendance.

NZ Crush West Indies to Win Series 2-0



LONDON (Dispatches) - New Zealand crushed West Indies by 323 runs after tea to win the third Test at Mount Maunganui and seal a 2-0 series victory, with Jacob Duffy's five-wicket haul proving crucial to the win.

The hosts set a target of 462 and bowled out the tourists for 138, wrapping up the innings in just four overs after tea following a dramatic collapse either side of lunch.

Duffy finished with 5-42, backed up by Ajaz Patel, who claimed 3-23, while opener Brandon King top-scored for West Indies with 67.

New Zealand's Devon Conway scored 227 and 100 in two innings, while captain Tom Latham scored 137 and 101 -- the first opening pair in first-class cricket history to score twin centuries in the same match -- to help set up the Black Caps' win.

The series began with a draw in Christchurch, before New Zealand won the second Test in Wellington.

On a cracked surface offering uneven movement and bounce, seamer Duffy and spinner Patel posed constant danger to both edges of the bat.

West Indies collapsed from 87-0 to 112-8 either side of lunch.

The visitors had started the day 43-0, with Brandon King on 37 and John Campbell on two.

King dominated early, hitting a flurry of cuts and drives and scoring 53 of the teams first 59 runs.

Initially, New Zealand captain Latham's fields lacked aggression on a pitch that looked increasingly difficult to bat on, but that changed after the drinks break.

Duffy broke the opening stand at 87, King gloving a rising delivery to Glenn Phillips at gully for 67.

Patel struck in the next over, removing Campbell for 16 after a rash attempt to slog down the ground. Phillips then took another good catch in the deep.

Patel claimed another soon after, first-innings centurion Kavem Hodge falling for a duck with Rachin Ravindra taking a catch at silly square leg.

Schwarz Breaks World Cup Duck With Alta Badia Giant Slalom Victory

ALTA BADIA (Dispatches) - Marco Schwarz claimed his first alpine skiing World Cup win in two years with victory in the giant slalom in Alta Badia.

Austrian Schwarz clocked a combined time of two minutes and 35.02 seconds over two runs down the Gran Risa piste in northern Italy, 0.18sec ahead of Brazil's Lucas Pinheiro Braathen who was denied a first-ever World Cup win at the last.

His last World Cup victory came at the Madonna Di Campiglio slalom almost two years ago to the day, although he did begin this season with a second-placed finish in the giant slalom in Soelden.

Schwarz has come back from a serious knee injury suffered in Bormio in December 2023 which ended that season for the 30-year-old, whose win comes with the Milan-Cortina Winter Olympics around the corner.

"I've had some tough moments these last two years, I'm much more than happy... I was nervous but I think that's normal when you're the last to go," said Schwarz, who, as



leader after the first run, skied last in the second.

"I have a lot of people that I'd like to thank after the difficult moments I've gone through. This win is also for them."

Stefan Brennsteiner's third place, 0.22sec off the pace, was enough for the Austrian to take a five-point lead in the giant slalom standings over Marco Odermatt, who was 0.82sec back in sixth.

Schwarz, who also led after the first run, is second in the overall World Cup standings but trails Odermatt by a whopping 454 points.

Henrik Kristoffersen lost further ground in the race for the giant slalom and overall World Cup title after finishing more than a second behind Schwarz in 11th.

The Norwegian, who trails Odermatt by 479 points in the overall standings, will have another chance to close the gap with Monday's slalom, a discipline in which he is the reigning World Cup champion.

Rogers Stars as Villa Beat Man Utd to Boost Title Bid

BIRMINGHAM (Dispatches) - Aston Villa stepped up their unexpected Premier League title challenge as Morgan Rogers' brilliant brace sealed a 2-1 win against Manchester United.

Unai Emery's side took the lead through Rogers' stunning strike late in the first half at Villa Park.

Matheus Cunha levelled for United moments later but Rogers bagged his sixth goal in his last six league appearances after the interval to clinch Villa's 10th successive victory in all competitions.

Unai Emery's third-placed side are just three points adrift of leaders Arsenal and one behind second-placed Manchester City as they chase a first English title since 1981.

Villa are on their best winning run in all competitions since 1914, when they secured 11 successive victories.



They have won seven consecutive top-flight matches for the first time since 1989-90, when they finished second under Graham Taylor.

Villa's ascent into the title race is even more remarkable as it comes after their worst start to a league campaign for 28 years, featuring just two points and one goal scored in their opening five matches.

Emery has turned Villa Park into a fortress, with just one Premier League home defeat in 2025, fewer than any other team.

Arsenal have already lost there this season and even United, beaten just once in their previous 26 trips to Villa, were unable to derail Emery's title charge.