

A Statement From the Iraqi Ministry of Electricity's Spokesman, Saying That Iran Had Officially Notified Iraq of a Complete Halt in Gas Deliveries Due to "Emergency Circumstances"

IRAN NEWS

Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi and His Egyptian Counterpart, Badr Abdelatty, in a phone Call Exchanged Views on Ways to Continue Consultations Aimed at Strengthening Relations Between the Two Countries

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Iran's Tourism Sector Moving Toward Stability as Visitor Numbers Rise in Autumn

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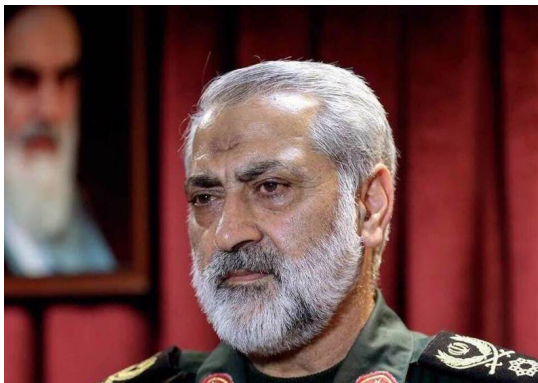
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U.S. Accused of "Greatest Extortion Known in Our History" Over Venezuela at UN

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Iranian Missile Pierced Window of Israeli Intel Chief's Office in June



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - The spokesman for the Iranian Armed Forces has revealed details regarding the precision of Iranian missile technology, saying that a Fattah hypersonic missile successfully entered through the window of a senior Israeli military intelligence official's office during the 12-day war of June.

Speaking at a Tuesday meeting at Sharif University in Tehran, Brigadier General Abolfazl Shekarchi said the advanced nature of Iran's weaponry has outdone even the most expensive Western defense systems.

General Shekarchi addressed the reputation of the American-made THAAD (Terminal High Altitude Area Defense) system, often promoted as an impenetrable shield with interceptor missiles costing between \$10 million and \$12 million each.

"Fattah missiles, produced at a fraction of the cost of a THAAD missile, successfully bypassed the world's most advanced defense systems," Shekarchi stated.

He said the strikes during the war were not "blind or wandering" but hit pre-determined coordinates with precision.

"One of those targets was the window of the workspace of the Zionist regime's army intelligence chief. The missile went through that window and destroyed the building. They simply cannot tolerate this progress."

Departure of 1.6m Undocumented Foreign Nationals and Its Impact on Iran's Labor Market



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The exit of approximately 1.6 million undocumented foreign nationals from Iran since the beginning of the year has had noticeable effects on the country's labor market, presenting both challenges and opportunities for employment policy, according to a senior official at the Ministry of Cooperatives, Labour and Social Welfare.

Speaking to ILNA, Ali Bagheri, Director General for Foreign Nationals at the ministry, said that a major wave of departures occurred during the summer. He noted that more than 1.6 million undocumented migrants have left the country so far this year, although the pace of departures has slowed due to exemptions granted to certain groups, including individuals married to legally resident foreign nationals and those undergoing medical treatment.

Bagheri emphasized that the departure of undocumented foreign nationals has largely affected the informal segment of Iran's labor market. "Authorized foreign workers continue their activities, but the exit of unauthorized labor has led to vacancies in some jobs," he said. He added that amid economic stagnation and the post-war environment, many small businesses are struggling, and layoffs of Iranian workers have also increased.

Iran Rejects Coercion, Calls on West to Reverse Course for Trust-Building

IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Iran has firmly rejected any form of coercion, intimidation, or political pressure, calling on Western powers to reverse their current approach and adopt concrete, credible measures aimed at rebuilding trust and confidence.

In a speech during a UN Security Council session to discuss Iran's peaceful nuclear activities on Tuesday, Iran's Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the United Nations Amir Saïd Iravani firmly rejected the legitimacy of the meeting itself.

"Security Council resolution 2231 contains a clear, deliberate, and self-executing termination clause. This resolution expired on October 18, 2025. As of that date, it ceased to have any legal effect or operative mandate. Accordingly, the Security Council's role under resolution 2231 came to a definitive end," he said.

He added that therefore, there is "no mandate" for the Secretary-General to submit a report, "no mandate" for the council to discuss it, and "no legal basis whatsoever" to convene the meeting under the "Non-proliferation" agenda.

Resolution 2231 endorsed the 2015 nuclear deal, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), terminated previous sanctions, and set a clear timetable for their permanent expiration on 18 October 2025.

Earlier this year, the European troika - namely the UK, France, and Germany - triggered the so-called snapback mechanism that led to restoration of sanctions against Iran.

On the issue of the "snapback" of UN sanctions, Iravani reiterated that Iran considers all such claims legally invalid, arguing that Resolution 2231 has terminated and that countries in non-compliance lack standing to invoke its mechanisms.

He underscored that Iran "remains fully committed to principled diplomacy and genuine negotiations. It will never submit to coercion, intimidation, or political pressure."

"It is now incumbent upon France, the United Kingdom, and the United States to reverse course and take concrete, credible steps to restore trust and confidence," he underlined.

The ambassador also criticized France and the United Kingdom for choosing escalation over diplomacy, slamming them for undermining Iran's cooperation with the IAEA and contributing to the collapse of diplomatic initiatives, including a memorandum of understanding signed in Cairo earlier this year.

According to Iravani, the unilateral US withdrawal from the JCPOA, sustained non-compliance by France, Germany, and the UK, and subsequent "military aggression" by the US and Israel against Iran's safeguarded nuclear facilities are the origin of the crisis.

Israel launched a war of aggression against Iran on June 13, killing at least 1,064 people and



targeting civilian infrastructure.

More than a week later, the United States violated international law by joining the war and targeting three Iranian nuclear sites.

On June 24, Iran managed to impose a halt to the aggression after conducting waves of successful retaliatory operations.

"The war of aggression launched by the United States and Israel—including deliberate attacks on facilities under IAEA safeguards—constitutes a blatant violation of Article 2(4) of the UN Charter and the peremptory norm prohibiting the use of force, and represents a direct assault on the international non-proliferation regime," Iravani noted.

The Iranian envoy also criticized the West for its silence—and at times implicit approval—regarding these acts of aggression, arguing that such inaction undermines their credibility to invoke non-proliferation norms or claim concern for the integrity of the global non-proliferation regime.

He decried a "blatant double standard" where Iran is punished while attackers "enjoy complete impunity."

"The victim is treated as the perpetrator, Iran is punished, and those who attack IAEA-safeguarded nuclear facilities enjoy complete impunity. This blatant double standard gravely undermines the integrity, credibility, and authority of the global non-proliferation regime," he explained.

He highlighted that despite "unlawful sanctions, sabotage, assassinations... and armed attacks," Iran's program remains peaceful and under the world's most extensive verification.

The Iranian envoy thanked Russia and China for their principled and consistent support for the JCPOA. He also praised Algeria, Pakistan, and other council members for taking independent and principled stances.

Concluding his remarks, he said the core principles of the JCPOA—peaceful nuclear assurances in exchange for recognition of Iran's rights under the NPT, including uranium enrichment—remain valid and could form the basis of a new agreement if Western states abandon a failed zero-enrichment policy.

Following Ambassador Iravani's address, a US diplomat, Morgan Ortagus, stated that the United States is prepared to engage only in direct negotiations and maintains that Iran does not possess the right to enrich uranium on its own soil.

In a subsequent right of reply, Iran's ambassador responded to calls by the United States for zero enrichment on Iranian territory, saying such demands contradict Iran's rights under the NPT and demonstrate a lack of genuine interest in fair negotiations.

He stressed that Iran would not submit to intimidation or political pressure in the international arena.

Foiled Hijacking Attempt on Mashhad Flight; Bomb Threat Neutralized

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - The commander of the IRGC Aviation Security Force announced that an individual who attempted to disarm the head of the in-flight security team and carry out a hijacking was neutralized by security personnel, and the aircraft landed safely in the holy city of Mashhad.

Speaking to Tasnim News Agency on the eve of the 41st anniversary of the establishment of the IRGC Aviation Security Force by order of Imam Khomeini, Brigadier General Hadi Mollanouri outlined the force's missions, performance, and the current state of flight and airport security in Iran.

Mollanouri said that in 1984, at the height of the imposed war, urban warfare, and simultaneous attacks by terrorist groups against the Islamic Republic of Iran, aircraft hijackings peaked between June and September of that year, with several incidents occurring. In response to those critical conditions, he said, the late Imam Khomeini issued a decisive order assigning the mission of countering hijackings and hostile actions to the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps.

He expressed hope that, as in the past 41 years, the force would continue to carry out its mission successfully and around the clock, relying on divine assistance, the guidance of the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, and the support of the Iranian people.

The commander noted that since the issuance of Imam Khomeini's order, IRGC personnel active in aviation security have fulfilled their duties successfully, emphasizing that the prayers of the people and the legacy of the martyrs remain central to their work.

Addressing the impact of sanctions on Iran's aviation sector, Mollanouri said that over the past year, in addition to aviation-related sanctions—particularly in Europe—the country also faced a 12-day imposed war. Except for several days in June 2025, when airspace restrictions grounded flights and forces focused solely on ground and airport security, aviation security operations continued uninterrupted.



He added that over the past 41 years, an average of around 500 flights have operated daily, and in the past year approximately 45 million passengers at 67 operational airports—on both domestic and international flights—were screened by IRGC aviation security personnel.

Mollanouri said a notable threat occurred in mid-November on a Tehran-Mashhad flight, when a physically strong individual attempted to disarm a flight security guard and made references to hostage-taking. The attempt was foiled through the vigilance of security personnel, and the aircraft landed safely in Mashhad. He added that other threats, including bomb threats, have also been raised in recent months, but preventive measures ensured none escalated into serious incidents.

He stressed that despite sanctions, necessary equipment such as X-ray machines, scanners, and auxiliary inspection tools have been procured through domestic and limited foreign sources, and efforts to update equipment are ongoing without major difficulties.

Mollanouri also underlined close coordination between the IRGC, law enforcement, intelligence agencies, airport security units, and other relevant bodies, describing the level of cooperation as optimal.

Addressing recent controversy surrounding the inspection of the Minister of Roads and Urban Development at Ardabil Airport, he said all actions were carried out strictly in accordance with regulations, noting that security requirements apply equally to all individuals without exception.

In conclusion, Mollanouri said that following the June imposed war, despite losses and hardships, Iran's armed forces identified and addressed potential weaknesses through exercises and operational reviews. He emphasized that the experience enhanced readiness and reinforced aviation security, adding that all flights resumed promptly after the ceasefire to continue serving the public.

Expert-Led Governance and National Unity Essential for Reform



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - President Masoud Pezeshkian addressed Parliament, presenting an expert report on reforming water governance and reducing agricultural consumption, warning that past policies have exacerbated Iran's water crisis.

"According to this report, all laws enacted since the 1979 revolution aimed at controlling and improving water usage have, in fact, worsened the situation," the President said, emphasizing that at minimum, previous mistakes should not be repeated.

The report, prepared by about 80 university professors and experts in agriculture, irrigation, sociology, economics, and management, analyzed the country's water challenges and proposed practical solutions. Pezeshkian stressed that water scarcity is now a critical and urgent issue: "If we fail to manage water properly, the resulting problems will be extremely difficult to resolve."

IRAN NEWS



Chabahar Gateway for Iran-Afghanistan Trade, Transit

CHABAHAR (IRNA) - CEO of the Chabahar Free Zone Organization (CFZO) Mohammad Saeed Arbabi has highlighted Chabahar's unique position as Iran's only oceanic port capable of becoming the primary gateway for trade and transit between Iran and Afghanistan.

Arbabi emphasized that the necessary infrastructure for investment and logistical collaboration between the two countries has been established.

Iran, Azerbaijan Agree on Measures to Reduce Truck Congestion at Astara Border



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Iranian and Azerbaijani customs authorities have reached a new agreement aimed at reducing truck congestion at the Astara border crossing, a key transit point between the two neighboring countries. Under the agreement, between 120 and 140 refrigerated export trucks will be allowed to exit daily through the newly established Astara border terminal, increasing the total number of outbound trucks to between 350 and 370 per day.

A joint border meeting was held on Tuesday between senior customs officials of Iran and Azerbaijan at the Astara-Astara border bridge. The meeting was attended by the Deputy Head of the State Customs Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Director of Azerbaijan's Astara Customs, and their accompanying delegation. On the Iranian side, participants included the Director General of Astara Customs, the Director General of the Transit and International Transport Office of Iran's Road Maintenance and Transportation Organization, and the Director General of Road Maintenance for Gilan Province.

During the meeting, the two sides agreed that, on average, between 350 and 370 trucks would be allowed to exit daily through the combined capacity of the old and new Astara border crossings. This measure is expected to significantly ease congestion, particularly during peak export periods.

Earlier the same day, a coordination meeting was held in Astara to discuss the operational launch of the new border terminal specifically for the exit of refrigerated export trucks. The meeting was attended by Nader Ansarian, Director General of Astara Customs; Javad Hedayati, Director General of the Transit and International Transport Office of the Road Maintenance and Transportation Organization; Ali Damani, Governor of Astara County; and Fariborz Moradi, Director General of Road Maintenance for Gilan Province.

Explaining the outcomes of the meeting, Ansarian said discussions focused on facilitating the direct exit of refrigerated export trucks through the new Astara border crossing. He noted that it was agreed these trucks, after completing all required customs formalities, would be allowed to leave the country directly via the new terminal rather than passing through the old customs area.

360 Domestic and Foreign Companies Attend Tehran Printing and Packaging Exhibition



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The 32nd Tehran International Printing and Packaging Exhibition officially opened at the Tehran Permanent International Fairgrounds, with the participation of 360 domestic and foreign companies.

The exhibition features the presence of 40 foreign companies from China, Turkey, Germany, Italy, and Japan. The event is being held across an area of 40,000 square meters, spanning 10 exhibition halls as well as open-air spaces. It showcases the latest technologies in the printing and packaging industry and is hosting regional trade delegations from Iraq, the Republic of Azerbaijan, and Afghanistan.

In addition, representatives from leading countries in the printing and packaging industry—including Indonesia, Switzerland, Italy, the United Kingdom, India, Germany, Turkey, and Japan—are participating either as exhibitors or as special visitors. Trade delegations from regional countries such as Iraq, the Republic of Azerbaijan, Armenia, Afghanistan, Turkey, and Turkmenistan are also scheduled to attend the exhibition.

Speaking at the opening ceremony, Sediq Beikzadeh, Managing Director of the Iran International Exhibitions Company, emphasized that one of the primary missions of international exhibitions is to promote trade development and exports. He noted that packaging, printing, and the presentation of goods to consumers are among the most critical components of export-oriented marketing.

Iran's Tourism Sector Moving Toward Stability as Visitor Numbers Rise in Autumn

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Iran's Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts has said the country's tourism sector is entering a phase of stability, noting a clear increase in the number of tourists during the autumn months and emphasizing that tourism has now become a national, cross-sectoral responsibility within the government.

Speaking on Tuesday at a joint meeting of provincial hotel association heads, free zone representatives, investors, and managers of chain hotels, Seyed Reza Salehi-Amiri said recent developments show encouraging signs of tourism returning to its peak levels. He attributed this trend to targeted foreign engagements and the activation of tourism diplomacy aimed at attracting international visitors.

Salehi-Amiri said the ministry's main focus in recent months has been reopening and expanding channels for inbound tourism to Iran. He explained that this strategy has been pursued through direct dialogue, the removal of political obstacles, and structured, country-by-country negotiations with regional and international partners.

The minister noted that Iran has held constructive talks with tourism ministers and senior officials from various countries. He cited discussions with Saudi Arabia's tourism minister in Riyadh and highlighted the positive outcomes of meetings held during a global tourism assembly attended by more than 150 delegations and 90 ministers. He added that negotiations with Iraq, Oman, and several other countries have also produced promising results.

Salehi-Amiri described China as a key and accessible strategic market for Iran. He said more than 160 million Chinese tourists currently travel abroad each year, a figure expected to reach around 200 million in the medium term. Iran's current share of this market, he noted, remains limited but offers significant growth potential.

"Our initial goal is to attract at least four million Chinese tourists, which represents only about two percent of China's outbound tourism market and is entirely achievable," he said. Salehi-Amiri added that discussions with China's minister of culture and tourism have resulted in agreements to expand cooperation, organize joint exhibitions, and strengthen links between tourism agencies and



private sector stakeholders in both countries.

The minister also pointed to growing cooperation with Indonesia, the world's most populous Muslim country. He said Indonesia has expressed strong interest in tourism collaboration with Iran, particularly in areas related to halal tourism and tourism within the Islamic world. Agreements have been reached to hold joint exhibitions, exchange cultural groups and prominent figures, and facilitate a future visit by Indonesia's tourism minister to Iran.

Describing Iraq as a strategic tourism partner, Salehi-Amiri said the neighboring country is on a path of development and shows strong interest in expanding tourism ties with Iran. He noted that agreements have been made to increase tourist exchanges, diversify destinations, and encourage travel to a wider range of provinces in both countries to ensure a more balanced distribution of tourism benefits.

He also referred to Iran's participation in a major civilizations conference in Greece, where discussions were held with tourism ministers from countries including China, Iraq, and Greece. Among the proposals discussed was the possibility of jointly registering a historical site with UNESCO, an idea that received a positive response.

In addition, Salehi-Amiri said consultations have taken place with Germany, Turkey, Russia, Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Georgia, and Malaysia, adding that the atmosphere for tourism cooperation with these countries has improved significantly in recent months.

Citing official statistics, the minister said that following a natural decline in travel during part of the year, tourism indicators showed positive growth in the months of Mehr, Aban, and Azar (October to December). He said hotel stays and bed occupancy rates have increased nationwide, sending a clear signal of a gradual and stable recovery.

He stressed that while the government's role is to facilitate the arrival of tourists to destinations across Iran—from Tehran and Mashhad to Isfahan, Shiraz, Yazd, Kerman, and Gilan—the private sector, including hotel owners, travel agencies, and tour operators, plays the central role in hospitality and service delivery.

Iran, Tajikistan Set Joint Welfare Roadmap

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Iran and Tajikistan have agreed to develop a joint roadmap aimed at expanding bilateral cooperation in the fields of social welfare and social empowerment, marking a new step in strengthening social and humanitarian ties between the two countries.

The agreement was announced by the State Welfare Organization of the Islamic Republic of Iran following a meeting between Seyed Javad Hosseini, Head of the organization, and Mohiuddin Khairullahzadeh, Deputy Minister of Health of Tajikistan. The talks took place during Hosseini's official visit to Dushanbe, the capital of Tajikistan, and focused on enhancing cooperation in social welfare services, empowering vulnerable groups, and exchanging professional expertise.

Hosseini described the meeting as part of the broader trend of expanding relations between Iran and Tajikistan. He said closer cooperation could facilitate the exchange of experience and significantly improve the quality and effectiveness of social support and welfare services in both countries. According to Hosseini, collaboration in this area would particularly benefit disadvantaged and vulnerable communities by strengthening institutional capacities and expanding access to essential services.

One of the key outcomes of the meeting was Iran's announcement that it is ready to provide training for Tajik social workers and psychologists. Hosseini said both sides also agreed to organize joint specialized conferences and sign new memoranda of understanding to further institutionalize cooperation and ensure continuity in shared initiatives.

Referring to Tajikistan's centralized administrative structure during the Soviet era and the reforms implemented since independence, Hosseini noted that while Tajikistan has made progress in fields such as rehabilitation, social work, social health, and psychological services, it still requires scientific support, professional training, and the transfer of practical experience. In response to these needs, he said Iran's State Welfare Organization is prepared to contribute through online training programs, jointly designed educational courses, and the dispatch of experienced professors and specialists to help strengthen human resources in Tajikistan's social welfare and protection sectors.



Another major area of discussion was cooperation in the production of rehabilitation equipment in Tajikistan with the involvement of Iranian knowledge-based companies. Hosseini explained that joint investment in this field could help reduce Tajikistan's reliance on imports while ensuring that rehabilitation equipment is produced in line with local needs and conditions. He added that such cooperation could also open new economic and technological opportunities for both sides.

Hosseini also highlighted Iran's extensive experience in community-based social activities. He said that more than 11,000 active social groups, supported by around 120,000 volunteers, currently operate under the supervision of Iran's State Welfare Organization. He noted that the recently launched "Salam" initiative, a neighborhood-oriented social health program, has strengthened coordination and effectiveness among these groups by promoting integrated, community-level interventions.

According to Hosseini, community-based groups such as self-help and peer-support networks, Community-Based Rehabilitation (CBR) programs, social and mental health centers, and other local organizations have gained valuable experience in providing voluntary and community-driven services. These experiences, he said, have drawn particular interest from officials at Tajikistan's Ministry of Health and Social Protection as models that could be adapted and implemented locally.

The two sides also discussed creating opportunities for Iranian entrepreneurs, philanthropists, and private sector actors to invest in Tajikistan's rehabilitation and social services sectors through government outsourcing mechanisms. Hosseini said this issue has been placed on the joint agenda of both countries and will be followed up through relevant channels. Additional agreements included organizing joint training courses, scientific conferences, study visits, and exchanges of executive experience to support empowerment and knowledge transfer.

Alireza Haghighian, Iran's ambassador to Tajikistan, also attended the meeting and welcomed the technical and professional approach taken by Iran's State Welfare Organization. Emphasizing the deep cultural, historical, and social ties between Iran and Tajikistan, he reaffirmed the Iranian embassy's full readiness to facilitate cooperation, support communication, and help expand institutional links between Iran's welfare bodies and Tajik counterparts.

First Int'l TIR Transit Shipment Departs From Iran to Kuwait Via Iraq



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Iraq's General Customs Authority has announced that the first international transit shipment operating under the TIR Convention has entered Iraq from Iran and proceeded toward Kuwait via the Shalamchah border crossing.

The General Customs Authority of Iraq said in a statement that the inaugural international transit cargo under the TIR Convention arrived from the Islamic Republic of Iran and continued its journey to Kuwait through Iraq, exiting via the Safwan border crossing.

The authority added that the shipment was transported using internationally approved electronic tracking systems and electronic seals, ensuring continuous monitoring and enhanced security throughout the transit process.

In its statement, the Iraqi Customs Authority described the event as a major strategic development in the expansion of transit operations in Iraq. The activation of this vital transit route, it said, will help streamline the flow of goods, improve customs security efficiency, reduce transportation time and costs, and bring Iraq's transit procedures into closer alignment with international standards set by the TIR Convention.

The statement further noted that the move would strengthen the competitiveness of Iraq's transit corridors and enhance the country's position as a regional transit hub.

Commenting on the development, Thamer Qassem Dawood, Director General of Iraq's Customs Authority, said the successful implementation of the first TIR shipment reflects a clear reform-oriented approach in customs management. He explained that this approach focuses on modernizing procedures and adopting smart digital solutions to improve performance and transparency.

Fresh and Processed Citrus Exports Reach \$200m



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Iran exported more than \$200 million worth of fresh and processed citrus products to over 30 countries worldwide in the past year, underscoring the sector's strong potential for foreign exchange earnings and its growing presence in international markets, a senior official at the Ministry of Agriculture Jihad announced.

Karim Zolfaghari, Head of the Center for Mechanization Development and Agricultural Industries, stated that Iranian citrus fruits possess significant competitive advantages in terms of quality, variety, and processing capabilities. These attributes, he said, enable Iran to compete effectively in both regional and global markets.

Zolfaghari noted that Iran is also among the world's major citrus producers in quantitative terms, with annual production exceeding six million tons. This high level of output places the country in a strategic position to expand not only fresh fruit exports but also value-added citrus-based products.

Emphasizing the need for a value-chain-oriented approach to citrus production, Zolfaghari said that given the large production volumes, the development of downstream and complementary industries is an unavoidable necessity and a natural extension of the production sector. He explained that processing industries play a critical role in reducing post-harvest losses, extending product shelf life, and improving overall efficiency across the supply chain.

"These industries contribute significantly to value creation, sustainable employment, quality enhancement, non-oil export development, and increased income for farmers and producers," he added.

U.S. Slams China Policies on Chips But Will Delay Tariffs to 2027

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) – U.S. trade officials determined that China should be punished for employing unfair tactics to dominate the semiconductor industry, but will wait 18 months to impose tariffs, American authorities said Tuesday. A US Trade Representative investigation concluded China's targeting of semiconductors "for dominance is unreasonable and burdens or restricts US commerce and thus is actionable," the agency said in a public notice. The current tariff level of 0 will be increased "in 18 months on June 23, 2027 to rate to be announced not fewer than 30 days prior to that date," USTR said.

USTR officials launched the probe in December 2024 in the final weeks of Joe Biden's presidency, extending the initiative when US President Donald Trump took office in January.



U.S. Economic Growth Surges in 3rd Quarter, Highest Rate in Two Years



NEW YORK (Dispatches) – U.S. economic growth in the third quarter came in at 4.3 percent on an annualized basis, easily topping expectations, according to Commerce Department data released Tuesday.

The report, which also showed an acceleration in inflation, provides reassurance about the world's largest economy after other recent data showing a weakening labor market. It comes as worries have moderated over President Donald Trump's tariffs and as large tech companies advance massive investments to build new artificial intelligence infrastructure.

The gross domestic product report – delayed for nearly two months due to a government shutdown – reflects increases in consumer spending, exports and government spending, partially offset by a decrease in investment, according to the department's Bureau of Economic Analysis.

The reading, an initial estimate expected to be updated in early 2026, marks the highest GDP in two years. Analysts had expected 3.2 percent growth, according to consensus estimates from MarketWatch and Trading Economics.

The report also showed the price index for domestic purchases rose 3.4 percent, a much higher inflation reading compared with 2.0 percent in the second quarter.

The data suggest faster growth and higher inflation than markets had expected – potentially changing the calculus for upcoming US monetary policy decisions.

Pope Calls for Christmas Day Truce, Laments Russia's Rejection



ROME (Dispatches) – Pope Leo XIV on Tuesday renewed his call for a worldwide truce on Christmas Day, expressing sadness that Russia had apparently rejected the appeal, as fighting in Ukraine raged on, civilians were killed in Russian air strikes, and diplomatic efforts involving the United States and Europe showed little sign of a breakthrough.

"I am renewing my request to all people of good will to respect a day of peace — at least on the feast of the birth of our Saviour," Leo told reporters at his residence in Castel Gandolfo near Rome.

Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022 and has repeatedly rejected calls for a ceasefire, saying it would only give a military advantage to Ukraine.

"Among the things that cause me great sadness is the fact that Russia has apparently rejected a request for a truce," the pope said. Referring to conflicts in general, Leo added: "I hope they will listen and there will be 24 hours of peace in the whole world."

Ukraine on Tuesday pulled troops out of a town in the east of the country after fierce battles with Russian forces, as relentless strikes by Moscow killed three civilians and cut power to thousands in freezing winter temperatures.

U.S. Accused of "Greatest Extortion Known in Our History" Over Venezuela at UN

NEW YORK (Dispatches) – Russia and China sharply criticized the United States at the UN Security Council on Tuesday over its military and economic pressure on Venezuela, accusing Washington of intimidation and violations of international law as tensions over sanctions and a naval blockade escalated.

Venezuela, which requested the emergency council meeting with the backing of Moscow and Beijing, accused Washington of "the greatest extortion known in our history."

The United States has deployed a major military force in the Caribbean and has recently intercepted oil tankers as part of a naval blockade against Venezuelan vessels it considers to be under sanctions.

At Tuesday's meeting, US Ambassador Mike Waltz responded to the criticism by saying, "The United States will do everything in its power to protect our hemisphere, our borders, and the American people."

US President Donald Trump accuses Venezuela of using oil, the South American country's main resource, to finance "narcoterrorism, human trafficking, murders, and kidnappings."

Caracas denies any involvement in drug trafficking and maintains that Washington is seeking to overthrow its president, Nicolas Maduro, in order to seize Venezuelan oil reserves, the largest in the world.

"The acts by the US side run counter to all key norms of international law," said Vassily Nebenzia, Russia's ambassador to the United Nations, calling the US blockade an "act of aggression."



"The responsibility of Washington is also evident for the constant catastrophic consequences of such cowboy-like conduct," he told the council.

"China opposes all acts of unilateralism and bullying and supports all countries in defending their sovereignty and national dignity," said the Chinese representative, Sun Lei.

Venezuelan ambassador Samuel Moncada told the council: "We are in the presence of a power that acts outside of international law, demanding that Venezuelans vacate our country and hand it over."

"This is the greatest extortion known in our history," he added.

Waltz reiterated Trump's accusations against the Venezuelan leader, saying, "Nicolas Maduro is a fugitive wanted by American justice and the head of the foreign terrorist organization the 'Cartel de los Soles.'"

Experts say there is no evidence of the existence of an organized group with a defined hierarchy that goes by that name.

The US government has offered a \$50 million reward for any information leading to the arrest of Maduro, a staunch ally of Russian leader Vladimir Putin.

Since September, US forces have launched dozens of air strikes on boats that Washington alleges, without showing evidence, were transporting drugs. More than 100 people have been killed.

Libya's top military chief killed in plane crash in Turkey

HAYMANA (Dispatches) – The head of Libya's armed forces and four other high ranking military officials died late Tuesday when their business jet crashed shortly after taking off from Ankara, officials in Turkey's capital and Tripoli said.

The wreckage of their Falcon 50 aircraft was located by Turkish security personnel in the Haymana district near Ankara, Turkish Interior Minister Ali Yerlikaya said. Three crew members were also killed.

Libya's Prime Minister Abdulhamid Dbeibah said on his Facebook page: "It is with deep sadness and great sorrow that we learnt of the death of the Libyan army's chief of general staff, Lieutenant General Mohammed al-Haddad."

Haddad earlier Tuesday held talks in Ankara with Turkish Defence Minister Yasar Guler, and his Turkish counterpart, Selcuk Bayraktaroglu, and was returning to Tripoli.

Yerlikaya said on X that Haddad's jet took off from Ankara's Esenboga airport at 1710 GMT, and "contact was lost" 42 minutes later.

The aircraft issued an emergency landing notification near Haymana -- 74 kilometres (45 miles) from Ankara -- but contact could not be reestablished, the minister said.

A senior Turkish official said the plane requested an emergency landing because of electrical failure 16 minutes after it took off.

The jet carried eight passengers including Haddad, four members of his entourage and three crew members "reported an emergency to the air traffic control centre due to an electrical failure, asking for an emergency landing," Burhanettin Duran, head of the presidency's communications directorate, said on X.

Turkish Justice Minister Yilmaz Tunc said the Ankara chief prosecutor's



office has launched an investigation into the incident.

Several Turkish media outlets broadcast images showing the sky lit up by an explosion not far from the location where the aircraft sent a signal.

Burhan Cicek, a local in Haymana, recalled the moment when the plane crashed.

"I heard a big sound of explosion. It was like a bomb," he told AFP.

Libya's ambassador to Ankara was also at the site.

Walid Ellafi, Libyan minister of state for communication and political affairs, told local television channel Libya al-Ahram that the Turkish government informed his government of the incident.

"We received a call from the Turkish authorities immediately after the incident, reporting that contact with the aircraft had been lost," the minister said.

"All contact with the aircraft was lost about half an hour after takeoff from Ankara airport due to a technical problem," he said.

"We are awaiting the conclusions of the Turkish investigation, and it appears that the plane crashed."

The minister said the others on the aircraft were Haddad's advisor, Mohammed Al-Assawi, as well as Major General Al-Fitouri Ghraibil, Major General Mohammed Jumaa, and their escort, Mohammed Al-Mahjoub.

Haddad had been the army's chief of general staff since August 2020 and was appointed by then-prime minister Fayez al-Sarraj.

Libya is split between a UN-recognised government in Tripoli, led by Dbeibah, and commander Khalifa Haftar's administration in the east.

The North African country has been divided since a NATO-backed revolt toppled and killed longtime leader Moamer Kadhafi in 2011.

Turkey has close ties with the UN-backed government in Tripoli, to which it provides economic and military support and there have been frequent visits between both sides.

But Ankara has recently also reached out to the rival administration in the east, with the head of Turkey's intelligence agency, Ibrahim Kalin, meeting with Haftar in Benghazi in August.

Ukraine Drone Attacks Target Moscow at Night, Spark Industrial Fire in Tula

MOSCOW (Dispatches) – Ukrainian overnight drone attacks targeted Moscow and sparked an industrial fire in the Tula region, which lies directly south of the Russian capital, regional authorities said on Wednesday.

At least three drones targeting Moscow were downed, Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyanin said on the Telegram messaging app.

He said emergency services were dispatched to the sites where the drone debris fell, but he did not immediately report any damage.

Two of the four major airports servicing the capital limited operations, Russia's civil aviation authority said on Telegram.

The Russian defence ministry said its air defence units destroyed 172 Ukrainian drones overnight, nearly half of them over regions bordering Ukraine.

Debris from a downed Ukrainian drone sparked a fire at an industrial site in Russia's Tula region, Tula Governor Dmitry Milyaev said on Telegram.

Milyaev did not give details about the industrial facility.

He said that Russian air defence units destroyed 12 Ukrainian drones over the region.

Meanwhile Ukraine said on Tuesday it had pulled its forces out of a hard-fought eastern town as Russia stepped up air strikes that killed civilians,



knocked out power supplies and underlined the lack of progress in diplomatic efforts to end the war ahead of Christmas.

Kyiv said it had withdrawn forces from Siversk, a town in the heavily embattled Donetsk region on the route to two of Ukraine's last remaining strongholds in the area. Russia announced the capture of Siversk almost two weeks ago.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said the pre-Christmas strikes showed that the Kremlin had no intention of ending the invasion it launched in February 2022.

The attacks came two days after US-mediated settlement talks in Miami, which lasted several days as the warring sides worked through details of a Washington-proposed plan to end the war. There has been no sign of an imminent diplomatic breakthrough.

The Ukrainian army said that "to preserve the lives of our soldiers and the combat capability of our units, Ukrainian defenders have withdrawn from the settlement" of Siversk, adding that fighting was continuing on the outskirts.

Moscow on Monday reported "slow progress" in talks over the US plan to end the war, as Kyiv and its European allies seek to adjust an initial proposal that adhered to many of Russia's hardline demands.



Arsenal Reach League Cup Semis With Shoot-Out Win Over Palace

LONDON (Dispatches) - Kepa Arrizabalaga was Arsenal's League Cup quarter-final hero with the decisive penalty shoot-out save that completed a miserable evening for Crystal Palace defender Maxence Lacroix on Tuesday.

Lacroix's own goal put Arsenal ahead with 10 minutes left at the Emirates Stadium before Marc Guehi snatched Palace's stoppage-time equaliser in the 1-1 draw.

That set the stage for a shoot-out in which both teams scored their first seven penalties.

William Saliba converted Arsenal's eighth kick and Kepa dived to his right to save Lacroix's effort and secure an 8-7 victory.

It was a cathartic moment for the Spanish goalkeeper, who infamously refused to be substituted before Chelsea's League Cup final penalty shoot-out defeat against Manchester City in 2019.

Kepa also missed a spot-kick in the Blues' 2022 League Cup final shoot-out loss to Liverpool.

The Gunners will play London rivals Chelsea in the semi-finals over two legs in January and February, with Manchester City facing holders Newcastle in the other last four clash.

"We generated a lot and should have scored many more goals. When you don't close the games, it can always happen that you concede," Arsenal boss Mikel Arteta said.

"We had some big individual performances. Kepa, his level of commitment with the group is just incredible.

"I think the players were so composed with the penalties and in the end, Kepa managed to save one. We are where we want to be."

Arsenal are into the League Cup semi-finals for a second successive year as they chase their first trophy since winning the FA Cup in 2020.

The north Londoners have only won the League Cup twice, with their last triumph coming in 1992-93,

before any of their current squad were born.

After celebrating Christmas on Thursday, Arteta's men will turn their attention back to the title race with home games against Brighton and third-placed Aston Villa to close out 2025.

Winning their first English title since 2004 is clearly Arsenal's main aim this season, but lifting the League Cup in March would be a significant boost to a club starved of silverware in recent years.

Arteta made eight changes to the side that won at Everton on Saturday, but still fielded a strong line-up featuring William Saliba, Mikel Merino, Eberechi Eze, Gabriel Martinelli and Gabriel Jesus.

Jesus, who ruptured the anterior cruciate ligament in his left knee in January, started for the first time in 345 days after returning to action as a substitute against Club Brugge earlier this month.

Noni Madueke, another of Arteta's changes, should have put Arsenal ahead early on but he was twice denied by Palace 'keeper Walter Benitez, who produced an inspired performance.

Benitez plunged to his left to keep out Jesus's close-range header with another fine save and repelled another blast from Madueke.

By the time Jurrien Timber headed wastefully over from 10 yards, Arteta must have been wondering if Arsenal would ever make the breakthrough.

Arteta sent on Bukayo Saka and Martin Odegaard in the second half, the latter making an immediate impact with a cross that Jesus nodded narrowly wide.

Arsenal finally broke the stalemate in the 80th minute.

Not for the first time this season, it was a Gunners set-piece that did the damage as Saka's corner caused chaos and Lacroix, under pressure from Saliba, poked past Benitez as he tried to clear.

But Palace gave Arsenal a taste of their own set-piece medicine, equalising with their first shot on target in the 95th minute.

Slot Calls Van de Ven Tackle Reckless as Isak Sidelined Two Months

LIVERPOOL (Dispatches) - Alexander Isak faces two months on the sidelines after fracturing his leg in a "reckless challenge" from Tottenham's Micky van de Ven, Liverpool boss Arne Slot said.

The Sweden striker was injured in a tackle from the defender in the act of scoring the opening goal in Saturday's 2-1 victory at Spurs.

The Premier League champions said in a statement on Monday the forward had undergone surgery on "an ankle injury that included a fibula fracture" in his left leg.

"It's going to be a long injury, for a couple of months," Slot told reporters. "So, yeah, that's a big, big, big disappointment for him. And as a result also of course for us."

The Dutchman, whose team are fifth in the Premier League, described Van de Ven's tackle as "reckless".

"The tackle of Van de Ven, if you make that tackle 10 times, I think 10 times there's a serious chance that a player gets a serious injury," he said.

Tottenham boss Thomas Frank was unimpressed with Slot's verdict and jumped to Van de Ven's defence when



he faced the media just hours after the Liverpool manager's blast.

"I am obviously disagreeing in many ways. Unfortunately Isak plants his foot so it makes it look worse than it is, but that is a natural action for a defender," Frank said.

"Reckless challenge? I don't think you see anything like that from Micky. He is very fair and I know the two players have sorted it out, so that's a good sign."

Isak's injury is the latest setback for the 26-year-old after he signed from Newcastle for a British record fee of £125 million (RM682 million) on transfer deadline day in September.

He arrived at Anfield lacking match fitness after his protracted move and subsequently suffered a groin injury, which set him back further.

Slot admitted it had been a "challenging and difficult period" for his new striker, who has scored just three goals in 16 appearances in all competitions.

But he believes Isak could still play a valuable role later in the season.

Wasteful Nigeria Open AFCON Campaign With Narrow Win Over Tanzania



FES (Dispatches) - Ademola Lookman secured a 2-1 win for a wasteful Nigeria against Tanzania in Fes on Tuesday in their opening Africa Cup of Nations match.

After the disappointment of failing to qualify for the 2026 World Cup, Nigeria coach Eric Chelle would have hoped for more goals given the opportunities his side created.

Star striker Victor Osimhen was among the culprits. He failed to score but could have claimed a hat-trick with better finishing.

Nigerian centre-half Semi Ajayi opened the scoring in the first half, before Charles M'Mombwa levelled soon after half-time.

However, Atalanta attacker Lookman struck the winning goal shortly after the equaliser to spare Nigeria's blushes.

The first half followed a predictable pattern with three-time champions Nigeria pressing and Tanzania soaking up pressure as they sought a first win after three draws and six losses in three previous AFCON appearances.

Tanzania goalkeeper Zuberi Masudi suffered a facial injury after advancing off his line to block a shot by Akor Adams.

From the resultant corner, Sevilla striker Adams came close as his near-post header hit the top of the crossbar.

The east Africans threatened for the first time on 14 minutes with an acrobatic shot from Saimon Msuva comfortably saved by Stanley Nwabali.

As rain began to fall in Fes, Nigerian frustrations surfaced with 2023 African player of the year Osimhen upset after being fouled by Ibrahim Hamad.

Norwegian Biathlete Sivert Guttorm Bakken Found Dead in Hotel



OSLO (Dispatches) - Norwegian biathlete Sivert Guttorm Bakken, 27, has been found dead in his hotel room in Lavaze, Italy, the Norwegian Biathlon Association said Tuesday, adding that the cause of death was unknown.

The sports governing body said the athlete's death had been confirmed by Italian authorities.

"Our thoughts are first and foremost with Sivert's family and with everyone close to him, both in Norway and abroad. We are cooperating with the Italian authorities on site," acting secretary general Emilie Nordskar said in a statement.

The association said crisis teams would follow up with fellow athletes and next of kin.

Bakken won his first World Cup race in the 15-kilometre mass start in Oslo Holmenkollen in 2022.

However, after his successful 2021-2022 season, his career was halted due to heart problems.

Norwegian public broadcaster NRK reported that Bakken had previously been open about contracting heart problems following his third dose of the Covid-19 vaccine in 2022.

But after a long way back he has represented Norway in the Biathlon World Cup over the past few weekends.

Bakken competed in the World Cup event at Le Grand Bornand in France at the weekend and was 13th in this season's overall standings.

NRK said Bakken had travelled to Lavaze for a high-altitude training camp.

In a post to Instagram, teammate Sturla Holm Laegreid called Bakken "one of the toughest".

"You had the ability to work your way out of the worst situations. Where everyone else would have given up, you pushed on. Sivert, you were a role model, an inspiration, with a determination that the rest of us could only dream of," Laegreid said.

In an interview published by the Norwegian Biathlon Association earlier in December, Bakken said he was happy he had "stuck with it" and put in the work to come back.

Curry, Warriors Blow Out Magic to Avenge Earlier Loss

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Stephen Curry went for a game-high 26 points, Quentin Post contributed three hoops to a 19-2 flurry bridging the third and fourth quarters, and the Golden State Warriors ran away from the Orlando Magic for a 120-97 victory in San Francisco.

Jimmy Butler III chipped in with 21 points and Moses Moody 20 for the Warriors, whose 23-point margin of victory was their second-largest in a home game this season.

Paolo Banchero had 21 points, Desmond Bane added 20 and Anthony Black 19 for the Magic, who fell to 1-2 on a Western swing that wraps up in Portland on Tuesday night.

Down by as many as seven points earlier in the game and still trailing 81-80 after a Jase Richardson layup with 3:59



remaining in the third quarter, the Warriors finished the period on a 9-2 run, getting a dunk from Post and a 3-pointer from Butler among their four hoops.

The short break between periods didn't stall the Golden State momentum, as Post added two more basket, Moody sank a 3-pointer and Brandin Podziemski had a three-point play in a 10-0 flurry that blew the game open at 99-83 with 9:11 to go.

The Magic were never closer than 14 the rest of the way en route to their smallest point total of the season.

Butler made seven of his nine shots and Moody eight of his 11 for the Warriors, who wound up at 51.7% for the game. The Magic finished at 41.4%.