

In a Post on His X Account, President Masoud Pezeshkian Has Stressed That He Highly Considers the Iranian People's Livelihood on a Daily Basis

IRAN NEWS

Abdolnasser Hemmati Has Reportedly Been Reappointed as the Governor of the Central Bank of Iran (CBI), as He Had Formerly Served as the CBI Governor and the Minister of Economy in the Current and Previous Administrations in Iran

VOL. XXIX, No. 8452 TEHRAN Price 50,000 Rials

www.irannewsdaily.com

WEDNESDAY DECEMBER 31, 2025 DEY 10, 1404

2 DOMESTIC



Iran Recovers from Tourism Slowdown Faster Than Many Countries

> SEE PAGE 2

3 INTERNATIONAL

Trump Urges Hamas to Disarm After Meeting Netanyahu



> SEE PAGE 3

Assassination of Qassem Soleimani Strengthened Regional Resistance



IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Six years after the U.S. drone strike that killed Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani, commander of Iran's Quds Force, and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, deputy head of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces, Iran's ambassador to Iraq has said that the assassination ultimately strengthened regional resistance rather than weakening it.

Mohammad Kazem Al-Sadegh told IRNA that the killing of Soleimani on January 3, 2020, near Baghdad Airport "was designed to collapse the security structure of the resistance," but the reality on the ground has shown the opposite.

"The resistance structure has reached institutional maturity," Al-Sadegh said. "In the past two years, the occupying regime [Israel] has faced unprecedented crises, showing the failure of its calculations regarding Soleimani's legacy. He shifted regional security from reliance on a single individual to a cohesive, locally-rooted network."

The assassination triggered global outrage, widespread condemnation, and massive funeral ceremonies in Iran and Iraq. While it escalated tensions between Tehran and Washington, the ambassador said the effects continue to shape political and security dynamics in West Asia.

Iran continues to pursue legal and political accountability for Soleimani's assassination in Iraq. Al-Sadegh described the case as "beyond a judicial issue," calling it a measure of Iraqi national sovereignty. He noted that the Iraqi parliament's approval of foreign troop withdrawals represented a strategic blow to the perpetrators.

Enemy Made Major Miscalculation of Iran's Military Power



IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Ali Akbar Velayati, Secretary-General of the World Islamic Awakening, said in a statement that Israel and its allies made a "major miscalculation" regarding Iran's military capabilities. The successful targeting of critical sites in the occupied territories by Iran's precision missiles, bypassing multiple layers of advanced defense systems, demonstrates a fundamental shift in the regional balance of power, he said, a reality that compelled the enemy to request a ceasefire.

Velayati issued the statement on the occasion of the sixth anniversary of the martyrdom of Iranian General Qassem Soleimani, addressing a specialized conference titled "Clarifying Narratives and Responding to the Misconceptions of the 12-Day War between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Zionist Regime."

He praised God for granting victory to Iran in the historic struggle between truth and falsehood and hailed the Iranian people as champions defending the oppressed worldwide. "Once again, in this historic battlefield of right and wrong, the light of truth has prevailed over the darkness of arrogance, occupation, and oppression," he said.

Addressing scholars, intellectuals, and faithful participants, Velayati said the meeting aimed to provide an analytical, evidence-based, and realistic narrative of the 12-day conflict while countering enemy misinformation and cognitive warfare.

Gov't Recognizes Protests, Pledges Economic Reforms

irna images

PHOTO: Marzieh Mousavi

IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - The Iranian government has officially acknowledged recent public protests and emphasized its commitment to citizens' constitutional right to peaceful assembly, while outlining plans to address economic grievances and rising inflation. Government spokesperson Fatemeh Mohajerani said Tuesday that authorities view the current crisis as both a challenge and an opportunity to strengthen social cohesion and improve public trust.

Speaking at a press briefing, Mohajerani said, "We see and hear both protests and crises, and we recognize them. The President has instructed the Ministry of Interior to establish mechanisms for dialogue. We consider this a chance to repair social structures and respond to the legitimate concerns of citizens." She emphasized that Iranians are patient but noted that public demonstrations signal serious underlying issues. "When voices are raised, it reflects an important concern that needs attention," she added.

The government spokesperson stressed that the protests are a natural reaction to rising living costs and economic difficulties. She underscored the constitutional right to peaceful assembly and said that the government is committed to facilitating dialogue and addressing citizens' concerns. "We view this as an opportunity to strengthen the social body and reaffirm citizens' rights," she said.

Mohajerani provided an overview of the government's response to economic challenges, highlighting a 20-point plan discussed in a recent meeting with President Ebrahim Raisi at the Central Bank. The plan is aimed at improving public welfare, stabilizing the economy, and ensuring the proper distribution of subsidies. "The current situation is not ideal, and we acknowledge it. We have high inflation, over 50 percent, and the government is acutely aware of its effects on purchasing power," she said. "It is natural that such high inflation provokes public concern."

She explained that while the government has invested billions of dollars in supporting citizens' livelihoods, subsidies have not always reached the most critical areas. Measures in the 2026 budget are designed to ensure that financial support reaches the end users effectively. "We are working to connect subsidies directly to the points where they are needed most, and we are pursuing strategies to improve the overall economic situation," Mohajerani said.

Addressing budgetary concerns, Mohajerani emphasized the need to prevent a deficit and control borrowing from both banks and the Central Bank, as such measures could destabilize financial markets. She said that structured allocations in the upcoming budget are intended to manage a projected deficit of 500 trillion rials. "We aim to reduce fiscal pressure and control

inflation to minimize the impact on citizens," she explained.

On the issue of employment, Mohajerani highlighted the government's approach to the law on converting contractual employees to permanent positions. She stated that the law goes beyond the scope of the annual budget and requires coordination with Parliament. "Decisions on this matter will be made jointly by the government and the legislature," she said, indicating that legal and regulatory steps are being prepared to implement the measure.

Education was also a priority in Mohajerani's briefing. She noted that the government is focused on strengthening teachers' salaries, school milk programs, support for education in underserved areas, student transportation, and the implementation of a teacher ranking system. "These measures are essential for improving educational quality and ensuring that the education system meets the needs of all students," she said.

Regarding inflation and living standards, Mohajerani stressed that the government's goal is to preserve purchasing power. She explained that past increases in wages have not kept pace with inflation, and the administration is committed to preventing further erosion of real income. Policies will include budget restructuring, targeted subsidies, and the use of ration cards to secure essential goods. "Our primary objective is to protect citizens' livelihoods and ensure that economic pressure is not passed on to the general population," she said.

Mohajerani also addressed the role of the Central Bank in stabilizing the economy. She stressed that the bank's mission is to restore monetary policies, control inflation, and ensure transparency in financial operations. Additionally, she confirmed that strategic reserves have been prepared for periods of high consumption, including Ramadan and other religious holidays, to maintain stability in the supply of essential goods.

Other topics covered included the government's monitoring of an Iranian soldier present in Russia during the Ukraine conflict and the resignation of political deputy Senaei. Mohajerani stated that resignations do not necessarily indicate internal conflict and that individuals leaving government positions may continue to support the administration.

In conclusion, Mohajerani reiterated the government's commitment to responding to citizens' concerns, improving economic conditions, and maintaining social stability. She said, "We acknowledge the protests, recognize citizens' rights, and are working to implement policies that will reduce economic pressure, improve living standards, and strengthen the social fabric of our country."

People's Economic Concerns Must Be Addressed with Full Responsibility

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Majlis Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf emphasized that public concerns and protests regarding economic hardships must be addressed with full responsibility. He called for dialogue—especially with representatives of various trades—and urged that necessary measures be taken to strengthen purchasing power and reform economic decision-making processes.

Speaking during the parliamentary session on Tuesday, Qalibaf began his remarks by commemorating the anniversary of the 9th of Dey uprising, describing it as a day of insight and the nation's pledge to the leadership. He praised the Iranian people for thwarting enemy plans, safeguarding the country from unrest, and supporting the revolution through sacrifice, resilience, and patience—even tolerating occasional mistakes or weak governance by officials to protect national interests.

"The minimum duty we owe to our people is to preserve unity and cohesion and protect their purchasing power. Any managerial weakness only emboldens our enemies, so we must act decisively to resolve issues affecting the public," Qalibaf said.

Highlighting Iran's technological achievements, he congratulated young scientists for the successful launch of the Kowsar, Zafar-2, and Paya satellites and the reception of their first signals. "These satellites were developed by knowledge-based companies and university teams within the country. Our young experts have proven the motto 'We can,' demonstrating that no force can stop Iran's progress," he added. Qalibaf noted that the development of Zafar-2 alone required approximately 340,000 specialized work hours and the production of dozens of complex components.



irna images

PHOTO: Mohsen Vahidi

"Just as our youth can build satellites and missiles, they can also help resolve managerial imbalances if given the opportunity and if narrow, monopolistic thinking does not hold them back," he said.

On national defense, Qalibaf reiterated, "Iran seeks no permission from anyone to defend itself. The Iranian people's response to any aggression is decisive, comprehensive, and sometimes unpredictable. Our actions to protect national interests and exercise legitimate self-defense will not necessarily follow past patterns."

Returning to domestic concerns, he stressed that public grievances about economic difficulties must be met responsibly. "Dialogue, particularly with trade representatives, and decisive measures focused on increasing purchasing power and reforming economic decision-making must be prioritized by the executive authorities," he said.

He warned that adversaries seek to turn legitimate public demands into unrest through organized channels but stressed that the Iranian people have repeatedly demonstrated vigilance, awareness, and care for national security. "No one is more concerned about this country than its own people. Therefore, their protests should be met with patience, responsibility, and full accountability," he added.

He praised the timely involvement of the President and emphasized the urgent need for measures to maintain purchasing power, uphold the Central Bank's authority in making sound decisions, correct flawed procedures, and ensure coordinated, unified economic policies. "The public must be reassured that erroneous practices in economic decision-making are being corrected and improved," he conclude

Majlis Rejects Iran's 2026 Budget Citing Inflation, Purchasing Power Concerns



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The Iranian Parliament's Budget Integration Commission has rejected the general framework of the 2026 national budget, citing concerns over rising inflation, declining purchasing power, and unclear revenue sources, the commission's spokesperson said Tuesday.

Majid Yusefi, spokesperson for the commission, read a report to the Parliament explaining that after multiple formal and informal sessions with government agencies, the Planning and Budget Organization, the Supreme Audit Court, parliamentary research experts, and representatives of trade chambers, the majority of members voted to reject the budget's general provisions.

According to Yusefi, the first major concern was the proposed 20% increase in salaries for government employees, workers, and retirees, which fell short of keeping pace with actual inflation, estimated at 40-45%. "A 20% raise in the context of 40-45% inflation effectively reduces real income by 20-25%, shrinking household budgets and increasing financial pressure," he said.

The commission also cited the inflationary impact of raising value-added tax (VAT) from 10% to 12%. Concerns were raised that the increase would disproportionately affect low-income households, and that support mechanisms such as ration cards were insufficient to offset these costs. Businesses and producers similarly expressed fears that higher production costs would add to economic strain.

Yusefi highlighted a lack of transparency in projected oil revenues and their integration into the national financial system. While some improvements were noted, the report indicated that the budget still fell short of fully reflecting realistic foreign exchange income, as mandated by the country's Development Plan.

Iran, Oman FM's Stress Confronting Sources of Unrest in Region



TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi and his Omani counterpart, Sayyid Badr bin Hamad bin Hamood Albusaidi, have emphasized the importance of continued consultation and coordination among Islamic countries to confront factors fueling division and unrest in the region.

During a telephone conversation on Monday, the two ministers discussed bilateral relations as well as regional and international developments.

They exchanged views on various aspects of Iran-Oman ties and ways to further strengthen cooperation.

Araqchi expressed concern over the course of developments in southern Yemen, stressing the need for regional countries to make efforts and cooperate to preserve Yemen's territorial integrity and to consolidate stability there.

Tensions in Yemen intensified on December 3 as the UAE-allied Southern Transitional Council (STC) forces seized control of Hadramout after clashes with Saudi-backed militants.

The STC subsequently extended its reach into the eastern governorate of al-Mahrah without encountering any reported resistance and has been recruiting local forces in both regions.

IRAN NEWS



Iranian Ambassador Meets With Lebanese Defense Minister and Army Commander

TEHRAN (IRNA) - The ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran to Beirut has reviewed developments in Lebanon and the region in separate meetings with the Minister of Defense and the Commander of the Lebanese Army.

Iranian Ambassador to Lebanon Mojtaba Amani met with Lebanese Defense Minister Michel Mansi on Monday and congratulated him on the birth anniversary of Jesus Christ (PBUH) and the New Year.

During the meeting, bilateral relations and a number of issues of common concern, especially the general situation in Lebanon and the region, were also discussed, within the framework of emphasizing the importance of stability and strengthening diplomatic communication channels.

Details of Chinese Financing for Gas Well Pressure-Boosting Projects



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - A presidential adviser on economic cooperation said that favorable contracts have been signed with Chinese partners for pressure-boosting projects at gas fields and wells.

Masoumeh Aghapour, Adviser to the President for Economic Cooperation, told ILNA that with the formation of the Emergency Economic Investment Task Force, domestic obstacles to attracting investment in the oil industry will be removed. "If changes to bylaws or directives are required, they will be implemented. Likewise, if amendments to certain parliamentary laws are needed, they will be pursued," she said.

Emphasizing that short-term solutions within the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Finance and the Investment Organization can facilitate capital inflows, Aghapour added: "The government firmly believes that the private sector and the public are the ones who can save the country's economy."

Referring to the task force's plans to attract foreign investment, she noted that regulations and directives concerning the import of gold bullion, the entry of machinery for the mining sector, and the repatriation of investment profits will be eased. "The Central Bank guarantees that investors will be able to transfer foreign currency abroad, and banks will provide guarantees for letters of credit and accept domestic conditions," she said.

She also stressed that incentives will be provided for joint domestic and foreign investment projects.

Regarding investment in the gasoline sector, Aghapour said that certain measures are being examined by specialized committees and commissions, and their outcomes will be reviewed and announced by the main commission.

On China's role in upstream oil and gas investment, she explained that pathways have been facilitated for most Chinese financiers and companies entering the sector. "Good contracts have been concluded with Chinese partners for pressure-boosting gas resources and wells," she said, adding that various technology transfer agreements can also be defined and implemented under judicial oversight. "Overall, positive developments are underway."

Domestic Production Key to Sustainable Development of Public Transportation



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The Executive Vice President of Iran underscored the pivotal role of domestic production in developing public transportation, saying that accelerating the construction of metro cars and related equipment will reduce passenger waiting times and improve urban quality of life. He added that the government appreciates the efforts of engineers and workers in this sector.

Mohammad Jafar Qaempanah made the remarks on Tuesday during a visit to the Tehran Metro Wagon Manufacturing Company in Baghershahr, Shahr-e Rey County. Highlighting the importance of public transportation—particularly metro systems and suburban rail buses around Tehran—he said public transport forms the foundation of urban development, with metro use at its core, directly linked to public welfare and the reduction of traffic congestion and environmental challenges in cities.

Noting that part of the rail fleet's needs are met through imports, Qaempanah stressed that the most important, fundamental, and sustainable path lies in relying on domestic production. "During this visit, it was very encouraging to see that both the manufacturing of bogies and the production of the carriage bodies installed on them are being carried out with precision, attention to detail, and fully domestic technical capabilities," he said.

Iran Recovers from Tourism Slowdown Faster Than Many Countries



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - The Director General of Marketing and Foreign Tourism Development at Iran's Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts said that while inbound tourism in many countries can drop by up to 50 percent after a natural disaster or security incident, Iran managed to recover more quickly following the 12-day war, surpassing the pace of many other nations.

Moslem Shojaei explained that events such as the short regional war or even minor terrorist incidents could cause a tourism downturn lasting up to two years in other countries. However, Iran's diverse culture, four-season climate, and unique historical and social attractions helped the country return to near-normal tourism levels in a short period.

Shojaei noted that last year, 7.4 million foreign tourists visited Iran. He added that in October and November of this year, inbound tourism grew by 10.9 percent and 12.7 percent compared to the same months last year. However, regional developments since May led to declines in subsequent months: 20 percent in June, 52.6 percent in July, 22.7 percent in August, and approximately 18 percent in September.

He continued that in April 2025, foreign tourist arrivals increased by 48.5 percent compared to April 2024, reflecting positive trends prior to the crisis. Nevertheless, growth was interrupted by the onset of the war, and overall, foreign tourist numbers fell

by around eight percent over the first eight months of this year compared to the same period last year.

Shojaei emphasized that Iran's overarching tourism policy, in coordination with the Ministry, focuses on maximum engagement with other countries. For instance, the International Nowruz Conference is being held again this year after a multi-year hiatus. Iran is also seeking to host various international events to further boost tourism.

When asked about measures taken to promote Iran internationally and attract foreign tourists, Shojaei cited participation in global events, efforts to register cultural sites as World Heritage, production of digital tourism content under the "Visit Iran" campaign in 17 languages, and collaboration with international influencers. "Hosting the Global Nowruz event and the World Tourism Summit in Isfahan are among our recent achievements," he said.

Shojaei identified the main challenge for Iran's tourism industry as media-driven "Iranophobia," which creates a perception of insecurity for travelers. "Against media outlets reaching up to 800 million viewers daily, our budget is limited. Nevertheless, through creative strategies and multimedia content, we aim to present a realistic image of Iran," he added.

Nowruz Summit to Be Held in Tehran with Ministers from 18 Countries



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - The Nowruz Summit will take place from March 26–28, 2026 (7–9 Farvardin 1405) at the Tehran International Conference Center, with the participation of ministers from 18 countries, the Senior Advisor to the Minister and Head of the International Affairs Center at Iran's Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts announced.

Hojatollah Eyubi made the remarks during the first meeting of the Nowruz Global Summit Policy Council, held at the Ministry's Tourism Department. He stated that invitations have been sent to 27 tourism and cultural ministers from 18 countries, with five members of the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) attending as observers.

Eyubi clarified that the five ECO countries participating as observers are Shanghai, Russia, Indonesia, India, and China.

Expressing gratitude to the institutions that assisted in organizing the summit, Eyubi highlighted the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' strong support. "In previous years, we prepared to hold the Nowruz Summit but were unable to do so," he said.

The senior advisor emphasized that the international summit will feature speeches by participating ministers and the Iranian president. "This is not a Nowruz festival; the summit's declaration carries a political message that Iran is a safe country, positioned in a state of neither war nor peace," he explained.

Eyubi noted that the summit will focus on international networking rather than large-scale public celebrations. "While Tajikistan holds

grand events for Nowruz every year, we are creating a network to highlight Iran as the central hub of Nowruz globally," he said.

In addition to speeches by the president and visiting ministers, several cultural programs are planned, including performances by foreign Nowruz symphony groups, aimed at delivering a high-quality and culturally significant program reflecting Iran and Nowruz traditions.

Anoushirvan Mohseni Bandpei, Deputy Minister for Tourism at the Ministry, said that China and India will be the summit's special guests. He stressed the importance of reviewing the reasons the summit was not held in 2023 and 2024 and addressing those challenges.

Mohseni Bandpei added that a permanent Nowruz Summit Secretariat will be established in Tehran. A cultural and artistic committee under the Ministry of Culture, along with committees overseeing accommodation, security, taxation, and public relations, have been added to the summit's organizational structure.

He also highlighted the role of cultural diplomacy in boosting tourism: "Thanks to the special support of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, foreign tourist arrivals in Farvardin this year increased by 48.5 percent compared to the same period last year."

Regarding travel services, Mohseni Bandpei noted that the Travel Coordination Headquarters, with the participation of 27 agencies, will oversee travel monitoring and supervision from March 15 to April 4 (25 Esfand to 15 Farvardin).

Unbridled Dollar, Fading Tables: A 20-Day Currency Surge and the Erosion of Iranians' Livelihoods



Leila Abdollahzadeh Ramhormozi, Researcher, Assistant Professor, and Faculty Member at the University

The increase in the dollar exchange rate from around 114,000 toman to more than 135,000 toman in less than twenty days is not merely a numerical change in the currency market but rather an indication of deeper crises within the economic structure of Iran. This nearly sixteen percent surge in under three weeks has directly affected people's daily lives and once again brought the issue of shrinking household tables to the forefront of social and political debates.

Chronic and structural inflation, which has plagued Iran's economy for years, has continuously eroded the value of the rial, and every political or economic shock has intensified currency jumps. The government's budget deficit and its reliance on money printing and borrowing have increased liquidity and placed further pressure on the currency market. Oil and banking sanctions have also restricted the supply of dollars in the market, causing demand to outpace supply. Alongside these factors, widespread public distrust of Central Bank policies, rumors of managerial changes, and disputes between the government and parliament have further unsettled the psychological atmosphere of the market and heightened inflationary expectations.

This currency surge has directly impacted the prices of imported goods and indirectly affected domestic products. Bread and rice, which are among the main staples of Iranian households, have faced noticeable price increases. Meat and poultry, due to the high cost of animal feed and dependence on imported inputs, have experienced sharp price growth. Medicines and medical equipment, which rely heavily on imports, have been accompanied by shortages and higher costs, making healthcare more burdensome for families. Even domestically produced goods have risen in price because of their reliance on imported raw materials. Housing rents have also seen compounded growth, placing additional strain on middle and lower income groups.

The social consequences of this currency crisis are significant. Social inequality has increased, with the middle and lower classes suffering the most, while groups holding dollar assets or foreign investments have profited. Families, in order to survive, have been forced to reduce or eliminate consumption of non essential and even essential goods. Political tensions have also escalated, with the Islamic Consultative Assembly holding a closed session to examine the currency crisis. In the meantime, even verbal clashes occurred between the Central Bank governor and parliamentarians, reflecting the severity of the crisis and social pressure. The repetition of currency crises has severely undermined public trust in government economic policies and intensified general distrust.

Currency crises in Iran have a long history. Since the 1990s, whenever oil revenues declined or sanctions intensified, the exchange rate has surged. Between 2010 and 2012, the dollar rose from about 1,000 toman to more than 3,500 toman. Between 2017 and 2019, with the United States' withdrawal from the nuclear deal, the dollar multiplied several times. This trend shows that Iran's economy is highly dependent on oil revenues and international political conditions, and any change in these areas quickly impacts the currency market. Comparisons with countries such as Venezuela and Turkey also reveal that institutional weakness and lack of Central Bank independence are common factors in currency crises. In Venezuela, excessive money printing and declining oil revenues drove inflation to millions of percent, while in Turkey, distrust of monetary policies and political pressure on the Central Bank sharply reduced the value of the lira.

Future scenarios for Iran are not very promising. If institutional reforms are not implemented, the dollar rate may rise again in the coming months. The government may be able to temporarily control the rate through currency injections or short term policies, but these solutions are not sustainable. Only with Central Bank independence, reduction of the budget deficit, and diversification of foreign currency sources can relative stability be expected. Proposed solutions include strengthening the independence of the Central Bank to prevent political interference, diversifying foreign currency sources through the development of non oil exports, reducing the budget deficit by reforming the tax system and cutting unnecessary expenditures, ensuring transparency and building trust by providing accurate and honest information to the public, and supporting vulnerable groups through targeted subsidies for essential goods and medicines.

In conclusion, the increase in the dollar rate from 114,000 to 135,000 toman in less than twenty days is not merely a currency crisis but rather a sign of institutional instability, weak policymaking, and fragile livelihoods. This surge has shrunk household tables and exacerbated social inequality. If structural and institutional reforms are not carried out, such crises will not only recur but will gradually erode public trust and social cohesion. This situation demonstrates that the currency crisis in Iran is in fact an institutional crisis, and without fundamental reforms, there will be no clear prospect for economic and social stability.

Pentagon Announces \$8.6b Boeing Contract for F-15 Jets for Israel

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) – Boeing was given an \$8.6 billion contract for the F-15 Israel Program, the Pentagon said on Monday, after U.S. President Donald Trump met Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in Florida. “This contract provides for the design, integration, instrumentation, test, production, and delivery of 25 new F-15IA aircraft for the Israeli Air Force with an option for an additional 25 F-15IA aircraft,” the Pentagon said. Make sense of the latest ESG trends affecting companies and governments with the Reuters Sustainable Switch newsletter. Sign up here. The Pentagon said the contract involved foreign military sales to Israel. The U.S. has long been by far the largest arms supplier to its closest Middle East ally.



Bangladesh's First Female PM Khaleda Zia Dies Aged 80



DHAKA (Dispatches) - Bangladesh's former prime minister and opposition leader Khaleda Zia has died at the age of 80, her party said Tuesday, just months before elections many expected would return her to power. Her death ends a turbulent political career marked by imprisonment, ill health and a dramatic comeback attempt following the fall of her longtime rival Sheikh Hasina. Zia, who many believed would sweep elections next year to lead her country once again, died on Tuesday aged 80, her Bangladesh Nationalist Party said. “The BNP Chairperson and former prime minister, the national leader Begum Khaleda Zia, passed away today at 6:00 am (0000 GMT), just after the Fajr (dawn) prayer,” the party said in a statement. “We pray for the forgiveness of her soul and request everyone to offer prayers for her departed soul,” it added. Despite years of ill health and imprisonment, Zia vowed in November to campaign in elections set for February 2026 – the first vote since a mass uprising toppled her arch-rival Sheikh Hasina last year. But in late November she was rushed to hospital, where, despite the best efforts of medics, her condition declined from a raft of health issues. Nevertheless, hours before her death, party workers had on Monday submitted nomination papers on her behalf for three constituencies for the polls.

U.S. Destroys Dock Used by Venezuelan Drug Traffickers



WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - President Donald Trump said that the United States had destroyed a docking facility used by alleged Venezuelan drug traffickers, marking what appears to be the first land strike in Washington's expanding pressure campaign on Caracas. The United States has hit and destroyed a docking area for alleged Venezuela drug boats, President Trump said Monday, in what could amount to the first land strike of the military campaign against trafficking from Latin America. The U.S. leader's confirmation of the incident comes as he ramps up a pressure campaign against Venezuela's leftist President Nicolas Maduro, who has accused Trump of seeking regime change. “There was a major explosion in the dock area where they load the boats up with drugs,” he told reporters at his Mar-a-Lago resort in Florida as he hosted Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. “So we hit all the boats and now we hit the area, it's the implementation area, that's where they implement. And that is no longer around.”

Trump Urges Hamas to Disarm After Meeting Netanyahu

PALM BEACH (Dispatches) - U.S. President Donald Trump said on Monday the United States could support another major strike on Iran were it to resume rebuilding its ballistic missile or nuclear weapons programs and warned Hamas of severe consequences if it does not disarm. Speaking beside Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu following a meeting at his Mar-a-Lago estate in Florida, Trump suggested Tehran may be working to restore its weapons programs after a massive U.S. strike in June.

“I’ve been reading that they’re building up weapons and other things, and if they are, they’re not using the sites we obliterated, but possibly different sites,” Trump told reporters during a press conference.

“We know exactly where they’re going, what they’re doing, and I hope they’re not doing it because we don’t want to waste fuel on a B-2,” he added, referring to the bomber used in the earlier strike. “It’s a 37-hour trip both ways. I don’t want to waste a lot of fuel.”

Trump, who has broached a potential nuclear deal with Tehran in recent months, said his talks with Netanyahu focused on advancing the fragile Gaza peace deal he brokered and addressing Israeli concerns over Iran and over Hezbollah in Lebanon.

Trump said he wanted to move to the second phase of the ceasefire deal between Israel and the Palestinian militant group Hamas reached in October after two years of fighting in Gaza, a progression that entails international peacekeeping forces deployed in the Palestinian enclave.

Israel and Hamas accuse each other of major breaches of the deal and look no closer to accepting the much more difficult steps envisaged for the next phase. Hamas, which has refused to disarm, has been reasserting its control as Israeli troops remain entrenched in about half the territory.

Israel has indicated that if Hamas is not disarmed peacefully, it will resume military action to make it do so.



During his Monday comments, Trump heaped the blame on the militant group for not disarming more promptly, arguing that Israel had lived up to its side of the deal and warning that Hamas was inviting grave consequences.

“There will be hell to pay,” Trump warned when asked what he will do if Hamas does not lay down its arms. He has made similar statements at previous intervals during the fighting.

Netanyahu said this month that Trump had invited him for the talks, as Washington pushes to establish transitional governance for the Palestinian enclave amid Israeli reluctance to move forward.

The deployment of the international security force was mandated by a November 17 U.N. Security Council resolution.

While Washington has brokered three ceasefires involving its longtime ally - between Israel and Hamas, Israel and Iran, and Israel and Lebanon - Netanyahu is wary of Israel's foes rebuilding their forces after they were considerably weakened in multiple wars.

Overall, Trump's comments suggested he remains firmly in Netanyahu's camp, even as some aides have privately questioned the Israeli leader's commitment to the Gaza ceasefire. His comments also suggested he is willing to risk additional hostilities related to Gaza and Iran, even as Trump has taken credit for resolving Israel's wars in both places.

Trump struck a warm tone as he greeted Netanyahu before their meeting, going so far as to say that Israeli President Isaac Herzog had told him he planned to pardon Netanyahu of corruption-related charges - a conversation Herzog's office immediately denied took place.

Netanyahu reciprocated, telling reporters after the meeting that he was gifting Trump the country's Israel Prize, which he said has historically been reserved for Israelis.

Peace Hopes Dented as Russia Says Ukraine Tried to Attack Putin Residence

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russia accused Ukraine on Monday of trying to attack President Vladimir Putin's residence and vowed retaliation, providing no evidence for a claim Kyiv dismissed as baseless and aimed at derailing arduous peace talks.

The angry exchanges between the warring neighbours on Monday - including a statement by Russia that it was reviewing its stance in negotiations in response to the attack - dealt a new blow to prospects for peace in Ukraine.

U.S. President Donald Trump said Putin had told him about the alleged attack in a phone call on Monday morning, which had angered him. Still, Trump repeated his belief that a peace deal may be near.

“It’s one thing to be offensive,” Trump told reporters. “It’s another thing to attack his house. It’s not the right time to do any of that. And I learned about it from President Putin today. I was very angry about it.”

On Sunday, Trump met Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in Florida and the U.S. president said they were “getting a lot closer, maybe very close” to an agreement to end the war, although “thorny” territorial issues remained.

On Monday, Putin struck a defiant tone, telling his army to press on with a campaign to take full control of Ukraine's Zaporizhzhia region. The Kremlin repeated demands for Kyiv to pull its forces out of the last part of the Donbas area that they still hold in eastern Ukraine.

Putin told Trump in Monday's phone call that Russia, which invaded Ukraine in February 2022, was reviewing its stance following the reported drone attack, an aide said.

Zelenskyy dismissed Russia's allegation as “a complete fabrication” and the Kremlin's own refusal to take necessary steps to end the war.



After the call with Putin, Trump told reporters outside his home in Palm Beach, Florida, that he had no further information about the alleged attack. “I don’t like it, it’s not good,” Trump said. Asked if U.S. intelligence agencies had evidence of such an attack, Trump said: “We’ll find out.”

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said Ukraine had tried to attack Putin's residence in the Novgorod region west of Moscow on December 28-29 with 91 long-range drones which were all destroyed by Russian air defences. No one was injured and there was no damage, he said in comments reported by Russian media.

“Such reckless actions will not go unanswered,” Lavrov said in a statement, describing the attack as “state terrorism” and adding that targets

had already been selected for retaliatory strikes by Russia's armed forces.

Reuters could not independently verify Lavrov's comments. Neither Lavrov nor any other Russian officials offered any evidence for the attack assertions. It was not clear where Putin was at the time.

Lavrov said the attack took place during negotiations about a possible peace deal, and said Russia would review its negotiating stance but not quit the negotiations.

Denying Ukraine had planned such an attack, Zelenskyy accused Russia of preparing the ground to strike government buildings in Kyiv.

“It is clear that we had a meeting with Trump yesterday, and it is clear that for the Russians, if there is no scandal between us and America, and we are making progress – for them it is a failure, because they do not want to end this war,” Zelenskyy told reporters via WhatsApp.

He added: “I am sure they are simply preparing the ground for strikes, probably on the capital, probably on government buildings.”

Trump said his conversation on Monday with Putin was productive.

“We have a couple of issues that we’re going to get resolved, hopefully, and if we get them resolved, you’re going to have peace,” Trump said.

Zelenskyy said that on Sunday, a bilateral agreement had been outlined with Trump on security guarantees for Ukraine. Still, Trump said they were only 95% ready and Zelenskyy said on Monday that he had sought a 50-year security deal.

Lavrov, in a wide-ranging interview with state news agency RIA published late on Monday said that Ukraine and Western countries had to come to terms with the fact that Russia held the initiative on the battlefield in Ukraine.

“Our principled position remains unchanged. The strategic initiative rests wholly with the Russian army,” Lavrov said.

UN Ambassadors Condemn Israel's Recognition of Somaliland

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - UN ambassadors criticized Israel during an emergency Security Council meeting on Monday, condemning its unilateral recognition of Somaliland as a violation of sovereignty and international law. Several delegates called the move morally reprehensible and rejected any proposal to relocate Palestinians from Gaza to Somaliland. The US was the only member state to defend Israel's recognition of the breakaway region.

Israel defended on Monday its formal recognition of the self-declared Republic of Somaliland, but several countries at the United Nations questioned whether the move aimed to relocate Palestinians from Gaza or to establish military bases.

Israel became the first country to recognise Somaliland as an independent and sovereign state on Friday.

The 22-member Arab League, a regional organisation of Arab states in the Middle East and parts of Africa, rejects “any measures arising from this illegitimate recognition aimed at facilitating forced displacement of the Palestinian people or exploiting northern Somali ports to establish military bases,” Arab League UN Ambassador Maged Abdelfattah Abdelaziz told the UN Security Council.

“Against the backdrop of Israel’s previous references to Somaliland of the Federal Republic of Somalia as a destination for the deportation of



Palestinian people, especially from Gaza, its unlawful recognition of Somaliland region of Somalia is deeply troubling,” Pakistan's Deputy UN Ambassador Muhammad Usman Iqbal Jadoon told the council.

Israel's UN mission did not immediately respond to a request for comment on the remarks or address any of them in its statement at the council meeting. In March, the foreign ministers of Somalia and Somaliland said they had not received any proposal to resettle Palestinians from Gaza.

US President Donald Trump's peace plan for Gaza states: “No one will be forced to leave Gaza, and those who wish to leave will be free to do so and free to return.”

Israel's coalition government, the most right-wing and religiously conservative in its history, includes far-right politicians who advocate the annexation of both Gaza and the West Bank and encouraging Palestinians to leave their homeland.

Somalia's UN Ambassador Abukar Dahir Osman said council members Algeria, Guyana, Sierra Leone and Somalia “unequivocally reject any steps aimed at advancing this objective, including any attempt by Israel to relocate the Palestinian population from Gaza to the northwestern region of Somalia.”

Somaliland has enjoyed effective autonomy - and relative peace and stability - since 1991 when Somalia descended into civil war, but the breakaway region has failed to receive recognition from any other country.



Curry Propels Warriors Over Nets

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Stephen Curry scored 27 points and the Golden State Warriors recovered from a slow start for a 120-107 victory over the Brooklyn Nets in New York.

Jimmy Butler added 21, while Trayce Jackson-Davis contributed 11. Gary Payton II, De'Anthony Melton and rookie Will Richard chipped in 10 apiece as the Warriors won for the fourth time in five games and rallied from an early 15-point deficit.

The Warriors shot 53.2% and hit 10-of-33 3-pointers to avoid falling under .500.

Michael Porter Jr. scored 27 and rookie Egor Demin tied a career high with 23 as Brooklyn saw a three-game winning streak stopped. The Nets were unable to earn four straight wins for the first time since winning 12 straight Dec. 7, 2022-Jan. 2, 2023.

Nic Claxton added 15 and nine rebounds, while Cam Thomas finished with 13 in his second game back from a left hamstring injury as Brooklyn shot 45% and made 18-of-42 3-point tries.

Curry made 8-of-15 shots, including 5-of-12 3-pointers, after shooting 12-of-30 in Sunday's overtime loss at Toronto. Butler made 5-of-9 shots, hit 11-of-12 free throws and hit the basket that gave the Warriors the lead for good late in the third quarter.

The Nets held a 15-point lead with just over four minutes left in the first before the Warriors ended the opening quarter with a 15-2 run to cut the lead to 30-28. Curry sat for the final 7:32 of the first half, and the Warriors held a 59-57 lead at halftime.

Curry took a break with 3:37 left in the third, and Butler took over. He scored Golden State's final 11 points of the quarter, and his three-point play with 34 seconds left gave the Warriors an 89-85 lead heading into the fourth.

Curry sank a three following an inbounds pass for a 94-88 lead a little over a minute into the fourth, and the Warriors held a 98-89 lead following a Draymond Green free throw with 8:23 left. After Demin's 3 sliced the lead to 98-95 with 7 1/2 minutes left, Golden State scored nine straight while Curry rested, and

a one-handed slam by Jackson-Davis opened a 107-95 edge with 4:37 left.

The Nets ripped off eight straight points to get within 107-103 on two free throws by Terance Mann with 2:32 left. Curry started Golden State's game-ending 13-4 run by converting a three-point play for a 110-103 lead with 2:13 left.

Meanwhile Bobby Portis scored 25 points and Giannis Antetokounmpo added 24 to lead the visiting Milwaukee Bucks to a 123-113 victory over the Charlotte Hornets.

Milwaukee has now won consecutive games for the first time since the end of October and has won three of its last four.

Antetokounmpo added seven assists in just 25 minutes with his restriction coming back from a calf strain. Myles Turner added 23 points and Kevin Porter Jr. scored 15 with 11 assists.

Charlotte's two-game win streak comes to an end. Brandon Miller led the Hornets with 31 points and eight rebounds, while LaMelo Ball scored 26 with seven assists.

Kon Knueppel (ankle) was unable to play for Charlotte, which also lost Miles Bridges to a right ankle injury in the first quarter.

It was a back-and-forth first half, with Milwaukee taking the early edge, then Charlotte going on a 14-0 run in the second that helped the Hornets go into halftime up 66-63.

Miller, Ball, and Collin Sexton combined for 44 of the Hornets' 66 points in the half, while Ryan Rollins led Milwaukee with 12.

Milwaukee found rhythm in the third, shooting 50% from the floor in the quarter and holding the Hornets to just 34.6% shooting. The Bucks went into the fourth up 95-89.

The fourth quarter started with Ball and Portis trading shots, each making two straight 3-pointers for their teams. Portis then hit another before an Antetokounmpo layup led to a Charlotte timeout as Milwaukee pulled ahead by nine points.

Boxing Star Joshua Survives Car Crash in Nigeria That Killed Two Friends



SAGAMU (Dispatches) - British former world heavyweight boxing champion Anthony Joshua was involved in a car accident in Nigeria's Ogun State that killed two of his close friends, promoter Matchroom Boxing said on Monday.

Joshua, 36, sustained minor injuries when the vehicle he was in collided with another car, Ogun State Police Command said. The cause of the accident was being investigated, they added.

Nigeria's Federal Road Safety Corps said five men had been involved in the accident on the Lagos-Ibadan Expressway. Joshua suffered minor injuries, two people lost their lives and two walked away unhurt, the FRSC said.

"With profound sadness it has been confirmed that two close friends and team members, Sina Ghani and Latif Ayodele, have tragically passed away," Matchroom Boxing said in a statement.

It confirmed that Joshua had been taken to a hospital for checks and treatment. He was stable and would remain under observation, it added.

President Bola Tinubu expressed sympathy to Joshua and the families of the victims, calling the incident a "tragic accident."

The FRSC said preliminary findings suggest the vehicle was likely speeding when it lost control during an overtaking manoeuvre and crashed into a stationary truck parked by the roadside.

"The primary causes of the crash being excessive speed and wrongful overtaking constitute serious traffic violations and remain among the leading causes of fatal road crashes on Nigerian highways," the FRSC said on X.

Officials have not said who was driving the car in which Joshua was travelling.

Wawrinka at Peace With Retirement But No Plans to Go Quietly



PERTH (Dispatches) - Three-time Grand Slam winner Stan Wawrinka said today he was "at peace" with his decision to make 2026 his last year on tour but insisted there were still goals to meet.

The 40-year-old announced this month that he plans to call it quits, with the United Cup in Perth starting Friday marking the beginning of the end for the popular Swiss star.

"Of course, I'm still passionate about the game, about the sport I love," he said.

"What I received from it, the emotion playing in a different country, coming back here with a lot of fans, a lot of support, so I'm going to miss that part, that's for sure," he said.

"The last few months, I've had time to decide whether it will be my last year or not, and for me, it's quite clear," he said.

"I'm happy with the decision, I'm at peace with that," he added.

Wawrinka won the Australian Open in 2014, the French Open a year later and the US Open in 2016, at a time when Roger Federer, Rafael Nadal and Novak Djokovic were dominating men's tennis.

A former world number three, he is now ranked 157 after struggling with injuries but said he would work as hard as ever this season.

"I still want to play some good tennis, I still have goals," he said.

"Hopefully I can come back in the top 100, finish on a good ranking," he added.

"I want to play the full year, the big tournaments, the main ones, and let's see my ranking in the next few months," he said.

Wawrinka has 16 career ATP titles, although the last came in Geneva in 2017.

Infantino Defends 2026 World Cup Ticket Prices

DUBAI (Dispatches) - FIFA President Gianni Infantino on Monday defended controversial ticket prices for the 2026 World Cup, revealing that organizers had received a record 150 million requests for tickets in the past two weeks.

Speaking at the World Sports Summit in Dubai, Infantino stressed that all revenues from next year's tournament in the United States, Mexico and Canada would be pumped back into football around the world.

Infantino's comments were his first public remarks since the ticketing furore erupted earlier this month, with fan groups branding ticket prices as "extortionate" and "astronomical".

FIFA later responded to the criticism by announcing that a sliver of tickets on sale would be priced at US\$60.

"In the last few days, you've probably seen there is a lot of debate about ticketing and ticket prices," Infantino told the Dubai conference on Monday.

"We have six, seven million tickets on sale and we started two weeks ago. I can tell you in two weeks, 15 days, we received 150 million ticket requests. This shows how powerful the World Cup is."



Infantino said the majority of ticket requests had come from the United States, followed by requests from Germany and Britain.

"If you think that in 100 years of history of the World Cup, FIFA has sold 44 million tickets in total, so in two weeks for the next World Cup, we could have filled 300 years of World Cups," Infantino said. "This is absolutely crazy."

"And what is important, what is crucial is that the revenues that are generated from this are going back to the game all over the world and FIFA is the only organization in the world...that finances football in the entire world.

"Without FIFA there will be no football in 150 countries in the world. There is football thanks to these revenues that we generate from the World Cup which we reinvest all over the world."

Fan group Football Supporters Europe (FSE) had been among the most prominent critics of FIFA's pricing strategy for 2026.

The group said earlier this month tickets would cost almost five times more than tickets for the 2022 World Cup in Qatar.

Hosts Morocco Cruise as South Africa Reach Cup of Nations Last 16

RABAT (Dispatches) - Ayoub El Kaabi's brace helped Morocco to a 3-0 win over Zambia on Monday as the Africa Cup of Nations hosts cruised into the last 16 while South Africa beat Zimbabwe 3-2 to also secure a berth in the knockout phase.

African player of the year Achraf Hakimi made his comeback from almost two months out injured for Morocco as Mali also qualified for the next round and Mohamed Salah was rested for Egypt's 0-0 draw against Angola.

Morocco are the tournament favourites as the host nation and Africa's top-ranked team but they were booed off by supporters following a 1-1 draw against Mali in their last outing.



Nevertheless, Walid Regragui's team knew a win against Zambia at the Prince Moulay Abdellah Stadium in capital Rabat would guarantee their progress to the next round in first place in Group A and they outclassed their opponents.

Olympiakos striker El Kaabi nodded in an early opener and scored an overhead kick shortly after half-time, with both of his goals set up by the outstanding Azzedine Ounahi.

In between, Real Madrid attacking midfielder Brahim Diaz swept home Morocco's second goal on 27 minutes at the end of a fine team move, again involving Ounahi.

Diaz has found the net in all three of Morocco's games so far and he and El Kaabi join Algeria captain Riyad Mahrez on three goals at the top of the Cup of Nations scoring charts.