

Iranian Defense Minister Brigadier General Aziz Nasirzadeh Says the Country's Missile Power Cannot Be Destroyed by Bombs, Negotiations, Or the Cowardly Assassination of Scientists and Commanders

# IRAN NEWS

Iran Foreign Ministry in a Statement Warned the U.S. Against Any Interference in its Internal Affairs, Vowing a “Swift, Decisive, and Comprehensive” Response to Any Act of Aggression Following Threatening Remarks by Donald Trump

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## Iran Calls for U.S. to Be Held Accountable Over 2020 Assassination of General Soleimani



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran has condemned the United States' 2020 assassination of Lieutenant General Soleimani as a "cowardly act of terrorism" and a blatant violation of international law, calling for full accountability for this unlawful act.

"On the sixth anniversary of the cowardly assassination by the United States of Major General Qassem Soleimani—a top commander of the Iranian Armed Forces and a central figure in the fight against terrorist organizations, including Da'esh (ISIS)—I wish to underscore, once again, the legal consequences and the unequivocal responsibility of the United States for committing such a criminal and unlawful act," Amir-Saeid Iravani, Iran's permanent ambassador to the world body wrote in a letter addressed to the UN secretary-general and members of the Security Council on Saturday.

Martyr Soleimani – also known as 'Haj Qassem' – commander of the Quds Force of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC), was assassinated alongside Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, the deputy head of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Units (PMU), and other companions in a US drone strike authorized by President Donald Trump near Baghdad International Airport in January 2020.

"This deliberate and unlawful targeting of a senior official of a sovereign Member State of the United Nations—who played a pivotal role in the fight against terrorism in the region—constitutes a flagrant violation of international law," the statement said.

## Iran's Armed Forces Ready to Respond, Following Trump's Reckless Threat



### IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi has warned US President Donald Trump against meddling in Iran's internal affairs, slamming his latest remarks as "reckless and dangerous," and stressing that Iran's armed forces are fully prepared to defend the country's sovereignty.

"Those in Iran impacted by transient exchange rate volatility have recently been peacefully protesting, as is their right," the foreign minister said in a post on X on Friday. "Separate from that, we have witnessed isolated incidents of violent riots—including attacks on a police station and throwing of Molotov cocktails at police officers."

Referring to Trump's domestic record, Araqchi said the US president should understand that violence against public property cannot be tolerated anywhere.

"Given President Trump's deployment of the National Guard within US borders, he of all people should know that criminal attacks on public property cannot be tolerated," he said.

Araqchi was responding to a social media post by Trump in which he said US forces are "locked and loaded," threatening Iran with military action under the guise of supporting protests triggered by the sharp fall of the national currency.

The Iranian foreign minister warned that such language only fuels instability.



## Leader Says Foes Behind Currency Devaluation

TEHRAN (PressTV) – Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei says the national currency devaluation is "unnatural" and involves "the hand of the enemy."

The Leader made the remarks on Saturday, during a meeting with families of martyrs, including the family of Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani, who was assassinated by the U.S. military in Baghdad, Iraq, on January 3, 2020.

Referring to the recent unrest across the country, which began at Tehran's Grand Bazaar last week, Ayatollah Khamenei said the bazaar class is "among the most loyal segments of the country to the Islamic Revolution," stressing that "one cannot clash with the Islamic system in the name of the bazaar and merchants."

He said merchants' concerns were justified, noting that when a merchant looks at the country's monetary conditions, the decline in the value of the national currency and its instability, "he says 'I cannot do business,' and this is true."

Ayatollah Khamenei said that the president and senior officials are seeking remedies, adding that the unchecked rise in foreign currency is unnatural and involves "the hand of the enemy," which he said must be stopped.

The Leader warned against the exploitation of legitimate economic grievances by hostile elements, saying what matters is that "a number of provoked individuals who are mercenaries of the enemy stand behind the bazaaris and chant anti-Islamic, anti-Iranian, and anti-Islamic Republic slogans."

Ayatollah Khamenei stressed that "protest is legitimate, but protest is different from rioting," adding that officials must engage with protesters, because "talking to the protester is different from talking to the rioter; talking to the rioter is of no use, and the rioter must be put in his place."

He underlined that it is "absolutely unacceptable" for groups to come "under various titles and names with the intention of sabotage and creating insecurity," stand behind "faithful, healthy and

revolutionary bazaaris," exploit their protests and engage in unrest.

The Leader emphasized the need to recognize the enemy's tactics, saying the enemy "does not sit idle and exploits every opportunity," adding that officials are and will remain present on the ground, but "what matters is the collective nation."

Ayatollah Khamenei added that when the enemy seeks to impose demands arrogantly on the country, the government and the nation, one must "stand firmly against the enemy and bare one's chest."

"We will not back down before the enemy, and by relying on Almighty God and the support of the people, God willing, we will bring the enemy to its knees."

The Leader further elaborated on the defining traits of Martyr Qassem Soleimani, saying three qualities — "faith, sincerity and action" — were the core characteristics of the revered martyr, who he described as "a comprehensive and complete human being of our time."

Elsewhere in his remarks, Ayatollah Khamenei highlighted General Soleimani's deep faith in God, divine support and the righteousness of his cause as his most prominent attributes.

He said Martyr Soleimani was "a man of divine sincerity" who never acted for reputation, praise, or public acclaim, but solely out of duty and devotion.

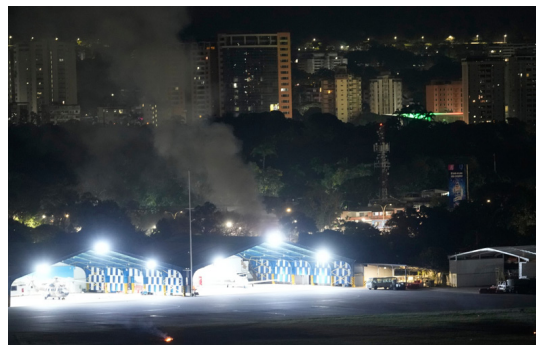
Praising his consistent presence in all necessary arenas, the Leader said General Soleimani stood in contrast to those who "understand well and speak well, but do not take action."

Ayatollah Khamenei noted that General Soleimani played a role in safeguarding and guiding the course of the Islamic Revolution and confronting acts of subversion in Kerman, and later in the Quds Force.

He also cited his contributions to defending holy shrines, confronting the Daesh terrorist group and fulfilling responsibilities in other critical fields.

The Leader underscored that General Soleimani's legacy lay not only in his strategic role but in the unity of belief, purity of intention and readiness for action that defined his life and conduct.

## Iran Denounces U.S. Strikes on Venezuela, Urges UNSC to Stop Aggression



### IRAN NEWS POLITICAL

TEHRAN - Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs has condemned in the strongest terms the US military attacks on Venezuela as a blatant violation of the Latin American country's national sovereignty and territorial integrity, calling on the UN Security Council to stop the aggression.

In a statement released on Saturday, the ministry denounced the strikes as a clear breach of the fundamental principles of the United Nations Charter and basic rules of international law, particularly Article 2, Paragraph 4 of the Charter, which prohibits the use of force.

The statement called the US attacks an obvious example of an "act of aggression" that must be explicitly condemned immediately by the United Nations and by all states concerned with upholding the rule of law, peace, and international security.

The Iranian Foreign Ministry further said that the US aggression against an independent UN member state represents a flagrant violation of regional and international peace and security, warning that the consequences of the action would affect the entire international system and further expose the UN Charter-based order to erosion and destruction.

The ministry also recalled Venezuela's inherent right to defend its national sovereignty, territorial integrity, and right to self-determination.

It underscored the legal and moral responsibility of all states and international organizations, especially the United Nations and its Security Council, to immediately halt the unlawful US aggression against Venezuela.

The ministry also stressed the necessity of measures to hold accountable those responsible for the crimes committed during this military intervention.

## Larijani Warns U.S. After Trump's Meddlesome Post



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's top national security official has warned US President Donald Trump that any American interference in Iran's internal affairs would destroy US interests in the region.

Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council Ali Larijani on Friday reacted to remarks by Trump and Israeli officials on sporadic protests over the decline of the rial, saying recent statements have exposed hidden coordination between Iran's enemies behind the scenes.

Larijani issued a direct warning to Washington, saying Trump should understand the consequences of any intervention.

"Trump should know that US interference in this internal matter would mean destabilizing the entire region and destroying America's interests," he said.

He also addressed the American public, saying, "The American people should know — Trump started this adventurism. They should be mindful of their soldiers' safety."

He stressed that Iranian authorities differentiate between legitimate economic grievances and acts of sabotage.

"We distinguish between the stance of the protesting shopkeepers and the actions of disruptive actors," he said. His comments came after Trump threatened Iran in a social media post, claiming the United States was prepared for military action against Iran.

## Iran Will Stand Firm Against Threats, Continue Path of Martyrs



TEHRAN (Dispatches) - President Masoud Pezeshkian has pledged that Iran will stand firm in the face of external pressure and continue the path of resistance commanders martyred by the US and Israel.

Speaking at a ceremony in Tehran marking the anniversary of the assassination of senior resistance figures, including Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani, Pezeshkian said Iran will not be intimidated by threats, pressure or targeted killings and will remain committed to the course it has chosen.

"We are not afraid of martyrdom, and for our nation, our revolution and our country we are ready for any sacrifice," Pezeshkian told the gathering at Tehran's Mosalla prayer complex. "We will stand with strength on this path until the end."

General Soleimani, the former commander of Iran's elite Quds Force, was assassinated in a US drone strike in Baghdad in January 2020.

Pezeshkian warned Iran's adversaries against relying on threats of death or assassination as a means of exerting pressure, saying such tactics will not alter Iran's resolve.

"Our treacherous and oppressive enemies should not think they can frighten us with martyrdom," he said, adding that Iran will continue the "path of the dear martyrs" through perseverance and sustained effort to address the problems facing ordinary citizens.

The president described General Soleimani as a unique and enduring role model, praising his conduct across ethical, social and military spheres.

He hailed the commander as a figure devoted to justice, unity and the defense of the oppressed, saying these qualities have earned him respect well beyond Iran's borders.

"Martyr Soleimani was a supporter of the oppressed, of truth and of justice," Pezeshkian said. "He worked without claim, without name and without expectation. Ethnically or socially, no one was different to him."

Addressing a large crowd, Pezeshkian said the strong public turnout demonstrated a shared determination to preserve the legacy of General Soleimani and other figures martyred in US and Israeli acts of aggression.

"We pledge that we will continue this path with all our strength and will not allow it to be abandoned," he said. "We stand against oppressors and will not bow."

Pezeshkian hit out at the US and Israel for engaging in "state terrorism" under the banner of democracy and freedom.

He cited the assassination of General Soleimani, his Iraqi trenchmate Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, Iranian scientists and military commanders as examples.

"Today, the United States and the Israeli regime, in the name of civilization, democracy and freedom,

commit state assassinations," he said. "They target elites and free people around the world."

Reiterating his government's broader approach, Pezeshkian said his administration will seek to follow General Soleimani's emphasis on unity and cohesion across ethnic and social lines.

He stressed that maintaining national solidarity and adhering to the guidance of Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei are essential to resisting external pressure.

Turning to domestic concerns, the president said protecting people's livelihoods is a "red line" for his government, as Iran continues to grapple with economic strain and external sanctions.

"We consider it our duty to work with all our strength to solve the problems of the people," he said, calling for collective effort to ensure economic stability, justice and social resilience.

Pezeshkian said the challenges facing the country are significant but insisted that unity, perseverance and a focus on social justice will enable Iran to confront both internal difficulties and external pressure.





## Iran’s Exports to Africa Rise 77% in First Eight Months of the Year

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Iran’s trade volume with African countries reached \$849 million in the first eight months of the current year, marking a 77 percent increase compared with the same period last year.

According to the Public Relations Office of the Iran Trade Promotion Organization (TPO), the director general of the organization’s Africa Office said the value of exports recorded during the eight-month period was equal to Iran’s total exports to the African continent in the entire previous year.

Mohammadreza Safari expressed hope that by the end of the year, Iran’s exports to African countries would reach \$1 billion.

## Iran’s Foreign Trade Exceeds \$85b



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Iran’s Customs Administration has released figures on the country’s foreign trade performance for the first nine months of the current Iranian year, reporting a total trade value of \$85.394 billion.

According to a statement from the Public Relations Office of Iran Customs, total foreign trade during the nine-month period amounted to 148.226 million tons of goods, valued at \$85.394 billion.

The report shows that, compared with the same period last year, the total value of foreign trade declined by 10.92 percent, while its weight increased by 1.36 percent.

During this period, Iran exported 118.901 million tons of various goods worth \$41.243 billion to different countries. This represents a 1 percent increase in weight but a 5.78 percent decrease in value compared with the corresponding period last year.

Imports over the same nine-month period totaled 29.325 million tons of goods valued at \$44.151 billion. Compared with the same period last year, imports rose by 2.75 percent in weight, while their value fell by 15.23 percent, the report said.

## 230 Domestic and Foreign Companies Take Part in Iran’s Textile and Apparel Exhibitions



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The 31st International Exhibition of the Textile Industry and the 13th Iran Apparel Exhibition, known as Irantext and Iran Mode, officially opened on Friday, with the participation of more than 230 domestic and foreign companies, marking a significant gathering for Iran’s textile and clothing sectors.

The exhibitions feature over 130 Iranian companies alongside more than 100 foreign companies from 15 countries, reflecting growing international interest in Iran’s textile and apparel market despite regional and global challenges.

Ali Moradi, head of the organizing committee for the two exhibitions, said that companies from Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, China, India, the United Arab Emirates, South Korea, Turkey, Taiwan, Malaysia, Uzbekistan, and several other countries are taking part in the events. He noted that the presence of these international firms is expected to contribute to the expansion of commercial interactions within the global apparel and textile value chain.

Moradi explained that foreign participants are showcasing the latest products, industrial solutions, equipment, and services, which can help Iranian producers upgrade their capabilities and better integrate into international supply chains. “The participation of these companies will strengthen trade relations and provide opportunities for technology transfer and joint ventures,” he said.

A wide range of products and equipment is on display at the exhibitions, including textile machinery such as circular knitting machines, sewing and cutting machines, and embroidery equipment. Raw materials, including fibers, yarns, dyes, and textile chemicals, are also being exhibited alongside home textiles, bedding products, various types of fabrics, and diverse clothing collections. These collections cover women’s, men’s, and children’s apparel, as well as accessories.

## Enemies Target Iran’s Economy to Weaken the Country

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The head of Iran’s House of Mines said that achieving economic development is not possible without effective support from the judiciary, stressing that a supportive approach by the Judicial Branch is essential to ensuring investment security and peace of mind for managers in the mining sector.

Mohammadreza Bahraman, Vice President of the Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture and Head of the House of Mines of Iran, made the remarks during a specialized meeting with judges and judicial officials involved in the mining sector of Khuzestan Province. The meeting was hosted by the Ahvaz Chamber of Commerce.

Bahraman said Iran’s enemies are seeking to weaken the country by targeting its economy, adding that under such circumstances, safeguarding capital and creating a secure environment for economic activity are unavoidable necessities. “Capital either disappears or leaves the country in an insecure environment,” he warned.

Referring to the decisive role of the judiciary in creating economic security, he said that if the impact of various institutions on national development were assessed, the judiciary would play a distinctive and determining role, as facilitating decision-making and reducing the effects of domestic and foreign sanctions depend on judicial security.



Shahla Amouri, head of the Ahvaz Chamber of Commerce, also highlighted the private sector’s significant capacity to create jobs and boost economic growth in Khuzestan, saying that realizing this potential requires reforming legal procedures and strengthening judicial support for economic actors.

Speaking at the same meeting, Amouri said the judiciary is one of the institutions trusted by economic activists, and that enhancing interaction and mutual trust between the judicial system and the private sector could play an important role in reducing unemployment and social problems.

She noted Khuzestan’s high unemployment rate, saying the province ranks at the top nationally and that the

continuation of this situation has exacerbated social harms such as divorce and addiction. “The private sector, relying solely on its own capital and without dependence on government resources, has the ability to create sustainable employment,” she said.

Referring to national assessments of investment security, Amouri said official reports indicate that Khuzestan faces challenges in investment security indicators, but that these could be turned into an opportunity to restore investment and rebuild trust through procedural reforms, judicial support, and inter-agency cooperation.

She also pointed to Khuzestan’s strategic role in the national economy, noting that despite the province’s oil, gas, and infrastructure resources being exploited at the national level, its trade balance remains negative due to large imports of raw materials and essential goods, reflecting a lack of a supportive, development-oriented approach.

Amouri highlighted a major private-sector investment project in the Shadegan area, saying a project valued at more than 420 trillion rials in recreational, healthcare, tourism, accommodation, and industrial sectors could significantly improve local livelihoods and enable sustainable use of the internationally registered Shadegan Wetland.

She stressed the need to facilitate licensing procedures and provide judicial and executive support for the project, saying backing such initiatives could serve as an effective model for balanced development and reducing deprivation in less-developed areas.

Addressing challenges faced by mining operators, Amouri said unfounded complaints and certain irregular actions by executive bodies—particularly in the mining sector—have placed additional pressure on operators and, in some cases, led to unfair rulings.

She also criticized the non-implementation of certain legal provisions, including Article 56 of the bylaw on the temporary suspension of mines in circumstances beyond operators’ control, saying such practices have weakened private-sector activity.

Amouri further pointed to shortcomings in the performance of the investment “single window,” saying disruptions in inquiry processes have prolonged licensing procedures and constitute a major obstacle for investors.

In closing, she emphasized the need to calculate mining royalties based on actual extraction levels and called for effective judicial support for the private sector to remove obstacles to the development of mining and downstream industries in Khuzestan.

## Accumulation of Laws Obstructs Trade, New Solutions Submitted to Gov’t

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The head of the Customs Commission of the Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA) has described the accumulation of laws and regulations as a major obstacle to trade, saying that the private sector has carried out extensive reviews to reform existing regulations and has presented new short-, mid-, and long-term solutions to the government.

Mohammadreza Faroughi said on Saturday in an interview with IRNA that Iran’s business and trade environment urgently requires regulatory streamlining and stability. “The government and the private sector need to jointly draft a bill aimed at facilitating the consolidation of regulations,” he said, adding that such a move would significantly ease the activities of economic operators.

Faroughi noted that many traders and foreign investors are confused by the multiplicity and complexity of existing rules. “We must move toward harmonization and simplification. The sheer number of overlapping and sometimes contradictory regulations discourages investment and undermines trade,” he said.

He stressed that the first and most essential step is to establish stability in the legal and regulatory framework. “Circulars and executive directives must be stable. If this stability is achieved, a significant portion of current problems will be definitively resolved,” Faroughi added.

Referring to the implementation of the Law on Continuous Improvement of the Business Environment, the head of the ICCIMA Customs Commission said that issues have been identified, categorized, and discussed within the framework of the Government–Private Sector Dialogue Council. “We have proposed short-term plans focused on amending government bylaws and mid-term programs aimed at reforming laws through



the Islamic Consultative Assembly (parliament),” he explained.

Faroughi emphasized that regulatory foresight is essential to prevent disruptions in trade flows. “If we can achieve stability through advance notice of regulatory changes and reform cumbersome rules, we will be able to prevent the accumulation and stagnation of goods at customs, and domestic economic conditions will gradually improve,” he said.

He also pointed to the prolonged process of foreign currency allocation as another serious challenge for traders. According to Faroughi, delays in currency allocation have significantly contributed to the accumulation of goods at customs. “We expect that with the launch of the second trading hall and the transfer of a large share of goods to this platform, the waiting time for currency allocation will be reduced,” he said.

Faroughi explained that a substantial portion of goods stuck at customs is linked to the remaining 10 percent of consignments that are either not included in the official list issued by the Ministry of Industry, Mine and Trade or face regulatory mismatches. “The lengthy currency allocation process prevents traders from editing their import orders, resulting in discrepancies between imported goods and export permits, which in turn creates serious problems for traders,” he noted.

In conclusion, Faroughi said economic operators need the removal of domestic barriers and more facilitative policies to be able to engage effectively in import and export activities. “Without genuine facilitation and the elimination of internal obstacles, trade cannot flourish, and economic growth will remain constrained,” he said.

## Iran, Afghanistan Railways Move Toward Deeper Strategic Cooperation



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The head of the Islamic Republic of Iran Railways (RAI) and Afghanistan’s Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs and Minister of Mines and Petroleum have reviewed a new chapter of strategic cooperation between the two countries in rail transportation and economic development.

A joint meeting was held in Kabul between Jabbar Ali Zakeri, Deputy Minister of Roads and Urban Development and CEO of Iran Railways, and Afghanistan’s Deputy Prime Minister, attended by Afghanistan’s ministers of public works and mines and petroleum, Iran’s ambassador to Afghanistan, and the CEOs of the Iranian Mines and Mining Industries Development and Renovation Organization (IMIDRO) and Mobarakeh Steel Company.

During the meeting, Zakeri referred to an unprecedented surge in rail freight transport from the Shamtigh border into Afghanistan, saying that rail cargo volumes stood at around 5,000 tons per month at the beginning of the current Gregorian year. Through targeted planning and the railway’s role in facilitating exports and transit to Afghanistan, this figure has now increased to more than 70,000 tons per month.

He added that based on technical and operational coordination with Afghanistan Railways, this capacity is expected to reach 100,000 tons per month in the near future.

Emphasizing the key infrastructural role of rail transport in Afghanistan’s economic development and logistics stability, the CEO of Iran Railways described the construction of the Herat–Mazar-e-Sharif railway line as the first phase of the strategic Iran–Afghanistan–China corridor. He said the project would be a decisive step toward turning Afghanistan into a strategic transit route within the East–West corridor.

Zakeri also proposed the active participation of private rail sector operators from both countries in financing and implementing the major rail project, with Afghanistan’s mineral resources serving as financial backing for the plan.

## Iran’s Dams Face 22% Water Deficit



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Iran’s water reservoirs are facing a serious shortfall, with the total volume of water stored in the country’s dams showing a 22 percent deficit compared with the same period last year, raising renewed concerns about water security, particularly in Tehran and several other provinces.

According to data released up to December 27, the volume of water currently stored in Iran’s dam reservoirs stands at 17.54 billion cubic meters, down sharply from 22.43 billion cubic meters recorded during the same period last year. This decline highlights the worsening state of the country’s water resources despite recent rainfall in some regions.

Figures cited by ILNA show that total inflows to Iran’s dams since the beginning of the current water year have reached 4.48 billion cubic meters, marking a 17 percent decrease compared with 5.42 billion cubic meters over the same period last year. As a result, the overall filling rate of dams nationwide is currently estimated at 34 percent.

Monitoring data indicate that critical conditions persist across many regions, particularly in major reservoirs such as Amirkabir, Lar, and Latiān–Māmlū in Tehran, Zayandehroud in Isfahan, Doosti and Torogh in Khurasan Razavi, Bukan in West Azerbaijan, Sefidrud in Gilan, Taleqan, Chah Nimeh reservoirs in Sistan and Baluchestan, and Saveh and Kamal Saleh dams in Markazi Province. In these areas, water levels are reported to be significantly worse than the national average.



### Cambodia Demands Thailand Withdraw Troops

PHNOM PENH (Dispatches) - Cambodia called on neighbouring Thailand to pull out its forces from areas Phnom Penh claims as its own, one week since a truce halted deadly clashes along their disputed border. The decades-old dispute between the Southeast Asian neighbours erupted into military clashes several times last year, with fighting in December killing dozens of people and displacing around one million on both sides. The two countries agreed a truce on December 27, ending three weeks of clashes. Cambodia says that during that period, Thailand seized several areas across four border provinces. In a statement today, Phnom Penh's foreign ministry demanded the withdrawal of "all Thai military personnel and equipment from the territory of the Kingdom of Cambodia to positions fully consistent with the legally established boundary".

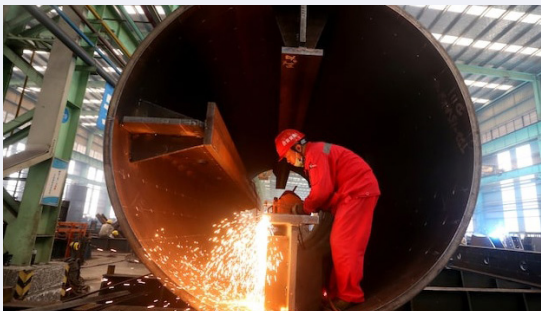


### UN Chief Urges Israel to Lift Ban on Humanitarian Groups in Gaza



NEW YORK (Dispatches) - UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres called for Israel to end a ban on humanitarian agencies that provided aid in Gaza, saying he was "deeply concerned" at the development. Guterres "calls for this measure to be reversed, stressing that international non-governmental organizations are indispensable to life-saving humanitarian work and that the suspension risks undermining the fragile progress made during the ceasefire," his spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said in a statement. "This recent action will further exacerbate the humanitarian crisis facing Palestinians," he added. Israel on Thursday suspended 37 foreign humanitarian organizations from accessing the Gaza Strip after they had refused to share lists of their Palestinian employees with government officials. The ban includes Doctors Without Borders (MSF), which has 1,200 staff members in the Palestinian territories — the majority of whom are in Gaza. NGOs included in the ban have been ordered to cease their operations by March 1. Several NGOs have said the requirements contravene international humanitarian law or endanger their independence. Israel says the new regulation aims to prevent bodies it accuses of supporting terrorism from operating in the Palestinian territories.

### European Factory Activity Ends 2025 in Deeper Contraction



BENGALURU (Dispatches) - Euro zone manufacturing activity shrank further in December but Asia's factory powerhouses closed 2025 on a firmer footing backed by a rebound in export orders and growing demand for artificial intelligence, private surveys showed. Factory activity in the common currency bloc slid into deeper contraction last month as production decreased for the first time in 10 months on further declines in new orders. The HCOB Eurozone Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI), compiled by S&P Global, fell to 48.8 in December from 49.6 in November. It was the lowest reading in nine months and below the 50 level that separates growth from contraction for the second straight month. Surveys highlighted a broad-based decline in activity in the 20-nation euro zone. Germany, the bloc's largest economy, recorded the weakest performance among the eight nations monitored with the PMI reading hitting a 10-month low. Italy and Spain also slipped back into contraction territory. "Demand for manufactured products from the euro zone is slowing down again," said Cyrus de la Rubia, chief economist at Hamburg Commercial Bank. "Companies seem neither able nor willing to build momentum for the coming year, but are instead exercising caution, which is poison for the economy."

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - The U.S. struck Venezuela overnight and captured its long-serving President Nicolas Maduro, President Donald Trump said early Saturday after months of pressuring him over accusations of drug-running and illegitimacy in power. Washington has not made such a direct intervention in Latin America since the invasion of Panama in 1989 to depose military leader Manuel Noriega, over similar allegations. "The United States of America has successfully carried out a large scale strike against Venezuela and its leader, President Nicolas Maduro, who has been, along with his wife, captured and flown out of the country," Trump said in a Truth Social post. The U.S. had accused Maduro of running a "narco-state" and rigging last year's election, which the opposition said it won overwhelmingly. The Venezuelan leader, who succeeded Hugo Chavez to take power in 2013, has said Washington wants to take control of Venezuela's oil reserves, the largest in the world. Trump said the operation was carried out "in conjunction with U.S. Law Enforcement" and promised more details at an 11am (1600 GMT) press conference at his Mar-a-Lago resort in Florida. Maduro was captured by elite special forces troops, a U.S. official told Reuters.

There was no immediate confirmation by the Venezuelan government of Maduro's capture or departure, but Defense Minister Vladimir Padrino was defiant. "Free, independent and sovereign Venezuela rejects with all the strength of its libertarian history the presence of these foreign troops, which have only left behind death, pain and destruction," Padrino said in a video broadcast on state media about the same time that Trump posted his message. "Today we clench our fist in defense of what is ours. Let us unite, for in the unity of the people we will find the strength to resist and to triumph." While various Latin American governments oppose Maduro and say he stole the 2024 election, direct US action revives painful memories of past interventions and is generally strongly opposed by governments and populations in the region. The Venezuelan opposition, headed by recent Nobel Peace Prize winner Maria Corina Machado, said in a statement on X that it had no official comment on the events. In the early hours on Saturday, explosions rocked Venezuela's capital Caracas and elsewhere, prompting Maduro's



government to declare a national emergency and mobilize troops. It said attacks also took place in the states of Miranda, Aragua and La Guaira. Blasts, aircraft and black smoke could be seen across Caracas from about 2am (0600 GMT) for roughly 90 minutes, according to Reuters witnesses and images circulating on social media. Residents expressed shock and fear as they captured video of billowing smoke and bright orange flashes in the sky. "My love, oh no, look at that," said one woman in a video, gasping at blasts in the distance. Carmen Marquez, 50, a resident of the eastern part of the capital, said she went to her roof and could hear planes at different altitudes, though she could not see them. "Flare-like lights were crossing the sky and then explosions could be heard. We're worried about what's coming next. We don't know anything from the government, only what the state television says," she said. A power outage affected the southern area of Caracas, near a major military base, witnesses said. A local media outlet allied with the ruling socialist party said explosions had taken place near the Fuerte Tiuna and La Carlota military bases.

Venezuelan allies Cuba and Iran were quick to condemn the strikes. Tehran called it "a blatant violation of national sovereignty and territorial integrity" and urged the UN Security Council to intervene to stop the "unlawful aggression." The U.S., Venezuela's opposition and various other nations say Maduro rigged an election last year to stay in power. He has said there is a Western conspiracy to oust him illegally. Trump had repeatedly promised land operations in the South American oil producer and said on Monday it would be "smart" for Maduro to leave power. The Venezuelan government, in a statement before Trump's announcement, said the goal of the attack was for the United States to take possession of the country's oil and minerals. The U.S. has made a major military buildup in the region, including an aircraft carrier, warships and advanced fighter jets stationed in the Caribbean. Trump has sought a "blockade" of Venezuelan oil, expanded sanctions against the Maduro government and staged more than two dozen strikes on vessels the US alleges were involved in trafficking drugs in the Pacific Ocean and Caribbean Sea.

## Russian Strike on Ukraine's Kharkiv Kills Two, Injures 25

KYIV (Dispatches) - Russian missiles struck a multi-storey apartment building in Kharkiv in northeastern Ukraine, leaving the building in ruins and killing at least two people and injuring about 25 more, officials said. Russia denied the attack had taken place, suggesting that an explosion at the site was caused by Ukrainian ammunition. Photographs and videos posted online showed smoke rising from an area of destruction, with emergency crews making their way through rubble and large chunks of building materials. Regional Governor Oleh Syniubov, writing on Telegram, said that according to preliminary information the bodies of a woman and her son were found under rubble. Speaking earlier on Ukrainian television, Syniubov said two ballistic missiles had struck the area and "nearly destroyed a five-storey dwelling". "Rescue teams are on site," he said. "They are primarily clearing rubble and searching for people underneath." Ukraine's state Emergency Services said it was deploying find people it believed were still trapped under the ruins of the building. Syniubov earlier said 25 people were injured, with 16 in hospital, including a woman in serious condition. He said customers may have been at shops and a cafe on the building's first floor when the explosion occurred.



Russia's Defence Ministry, writing on Telegram, said reports of an attack were untrue and suggested the blast at the site had been caused by the detonation of Ukrainian ammunition. "Published video footage seconds before the explosion shows thick smoke of unknown origin which, to a high probability, would indicate that a detonation of stored Ukrainian military ammunition occurred at the 'Persona' shopping centre," it said. The ministry said the reports sought to distract world attention from a New Year's Eve strike, which it blamed on Ukraine, on a hotel in a Russian-held part of Kherson region in southern Ukraine. Ukraine responded by saying its strikes were aimed at Russian military and energy targets. The area's Russia-installed governor, Vladimir Saldo, told TASS news agency on Friday that the death toll in that incident had risen to 28. Located 30 km (18 miles) from the border, Kharkiv withstood Russian advances in the early weeks of Russia's February 2022 invasion of its smaller neighbour. With Russia's forces focused since on capturing eastern regions of the country, the city has been a frequent target of aerial attacks.

## Yemen's Southern Separatists Set Two-Year Path to Independence

DUBAI (Dispatches) - Yemen's southern separatist movement said it aimed to hold a referendum on independence from the north in two years, as Saudi-backed forces fought to recapture areas the separatists seized last month in a move that triggered a major feud between Persian Gulf powers. The statement by the UAE-backed Southern Transitional Council was the clearest indication yet of its intention to secede, but may be seen by Yemen's internationally recognised government and its Saudi backers as an escalation of the crisis. It came hours after the government said it had launched an operation to recapture the crucial Hadramout province, one of the main areas seized by the STC last month, with Saudi military support. The surprise advance by the separatists in early December shifted power in Yemen, which has been at war for more than a decade, fracturing the coalition against the Houthis and laying bare divisions between Persian Gulf allies Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Yemen has been split for years between the northern highlands, held by the Iran-backed Houthi group, and forces including the southern separatists that are supported by Persian Gulf states under the internationally recognized government. Once the twin pillars of regional security, OPEC members Saudi Arabia and the



Saudi Arab Emirates have in recent years seen their interests diverge on issues ranging from oil quotas to geopolitics. Neither the internationally backed government nor Saudi Arabian officials could immediately be reached for comment on the STC statement. Saba news agency reported early today that Rashad al-Alimi, head of Yemen's Saudi-backed presidential council, has submitted a request to Saudi Arabia to host a forum aimed at resolving the southern issue. Al-Alimi said he hopes the forum would bring together all southern factions "without distinction," including the UAE-backed southern separatist movement. The request comes after a number of southern political factions and figures urged Al-Alimi to submit a request to Riyadh to host a forum after they condemned what they described as "unilateral measures" on the southern issue by STC leader Aidarous Al-Zubaidi. Saudi Arabia's foreign ministry welcomed the request, calling on southern factions to participate in the planned forum. The Hadramout governor under the internationally recognized government said he had launched an operation to restore control over the area, later saying his forces had taken control of a key military base.





## Giannis Dunk Lifts Bucks, NBA Champion Thunder Roll on

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - Giannis Antetokounmpo threw down the game-winning dunk with 4.7 seconds remaining to lift the Milwaukee Bucks to a 122-121 victory over the Charlotte Hornets and grab a slice of NBA history.

The Bucks trailed by as many as 16 on their home floor, but Antetokounmpo scored 12 of his 30 points in the final quarter to help seal the win in a frantic finish that saw five lead changes in the final 45.7 seconds.

The two-time NBA Most Valuable Player added 10 rebounds and five assists.

It was his 158th regular-season game with at least 30 points, 10 rebounds and five assists, overtaking Kareem Abdul-Jabbar and Oscar Robertson for the most in NBA history.

"It's an incredible accomplishment," Antetokounmpo said.

"I don't want to come here and just do my job and go back home," he said. "I just want to keep on evolving, keep on learning."

The Bucks, whose erratic season included an eight-game injury absence for Antetokounmpo in December, improved to 15-20.

"We're not there yet, but we're trending towards the right direction," Antetokounmpo said after Milwaukee's third win in four games.

The NBA champion Oklahoma City Thunder romped to an 131-94 victory over a Golden State Warriors team missing the star trio of Stephen Curry, Draymond Green and Jimmy Butler.

Reigning MVP Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 30 points and Chet Holmgren added 15 points, 15 rebounds and four blocked shots for OKC, who became the first team this season to reach 30 wins as they improved to 30-5.

In Cleveland, Donovan Mitchell scored 33 points and Darius Garland added 18 as the Cavaliers edged the injury-depleted Denver Nuggets 113-108.

Three-time NBA MVP Nikola Jokic was among four sidelined Nuggets starters as he continues to recover from a hyperextended left knee.

The Nuggets took a 97-88 lead into the fourth quarter and led 105-101 with 4:43 remaining before the Cavs reeled off 10 straight points in a spurt that included a go-ahead three-pointer from Garland.

Cleveland outscored Denver 25-11 in the final period. Jamal Murray led the visitors with 34 points but had just six in the second half.

"I feel like the first three quarters, we just really weren't ourselves," Mitchell said after the Cavaliers' third straight win, adding that the key to keeping the victories coming was "to be that team we were defensively -- we know we can be and everything else takes care of itself."

De'Aaron Fox scored 24 points and grabbed seven rebounds to lead the short-handed San Antonio Spurs to a 123-113 victory over the reeling Indiana Pacers.

San Antonio's French superstar Victor Wembanyama skipped the trip to Indianapolis after hyperextending his left knee in a win over the New York Knicks on Wednesday.

Spurs coach Mitch Johnson said Wembanyama could return for Saturday's home game against the Portland Trail Blazers.

Pascal Siakam scored 23 points for the Pacers, who trailed the entire second half on the way to an 11th straight defeat.

Atlanta forward Jalen Johnson's seventh triple-double of the season propelled the Hawks to a 111-99 victory over the Knicks in New York.

Johnson scored 18 points with 10 rebounds and 11 assists and Nickeil Alexander-Walker and Onyeka Okongwu added 23 points apiece for the Hawks.

Jalen Brunson scored 24 points to lead the Knicks, who heard boos from a Madison Square Garden crowd unwilling to make allowances for a team missing Karl-Anthony Towns and Mitchell Robinson.

## Kyrgios Calls Himself a Chaotic Mess But Vows to Enjoy Return After Injuries

BRISBANE (Dispatches) - A philosophical Nick Kyrgios said today he had been a "chaotic mess" throughout his career and now just wants to enjoy himself when he returns to the tour this week.

The temperamental 2022 Wimbledon finalist, one of tennis's most dynamic players when at the top of his game, makes his comeback at the season-opening Brisbane International.

The 30-year-old Australian has slipped to 671 in the world after an injury-ravaged three years which saw him play only six singles matches on the ATP Tour.

Speaking ahead of his opening-round match, Kyrgios said he was feeling fit and had been playing as well as ever in the build-up.

"I think after every injury I have had the last couple of years, and to see how quickly something can be snatched away from you, I have a day-by-day



mindset," the former world number 13 said.

"I don't know if I'm a player that needs to prove himself any more than he has. I just want to get through this and be happy with my performance.

"Ultimately, I just want to go out there and put on a show for the crowd and for the fans and the people, to be honest.

"I have no agenda and I don't care what my ranking is, don't care what titles I win. I just want to go out there and give the people a good show.

"That's ultimately I guess what I'll go down as, as an entertainer and someone who just was a bit of a chaotic mess, but an entertainer at the end of the day."

Kyrgios, who was granted a wildcard to play in Brisbane, begins his tour comeback against US world number 60 Aleksandar Kovacevic.

## Sabalenka Focused on Improvement, Not Revenge at Australian Open



BRISBANE (Dispatches) - World number one Aryna Sabalenka said today she isn't out for revenge after losing her Australian Open crown in a shock loss to American Madison Keys last year.

Sabalenka went into the final at Melbourne Park aiming to become the first woman since Martina Hingis to win three consecutive Australian Opens.

But she was undone by Keys, who won her maiden Slam in an inspired performance on Rod Laver Arena.

The Belarusian said there was no difference coming to Australia as the champion or as the runner-up.

"It doesn't matter which tournament it is," she said ahead of a warm-up event in Brisbane.

"If I'm defending champion, if I lost in the first round last year, the goal is always the same—to bring my best tennis and to improve my game.

"Honestly, that's it. I always just focus on myself, on developing my game, and making sure that I'm 100 per cent there."

Sabalenka had an unusual lead-in to the Australian Open starting this month, playing Nick Kyrgios in a much-criticised "Battle of the Sexes" in Dubai.

But she said she was glad to be back in Australia, where she enjoys the conditions and has had great success.

"I definitely don't like the heat, but the people, yeah," she said.

"I think the atmosphere — it's always a full crowd (in Brisbane).

"Everyone really engages a lot with tennis. Also in Melbourne, the support there is incredible.

## Zverev Concedes a Lot of Catching Up



SYDNEY (Dispatches) - World number three Alexander Zverev admitted that he has "a lot of catching up to do" to challenge Carlos Alcaraz and Jannik Sinner.

The 28-year-old German finished the 2025 season with only one title, in Munich, having been beset by injuries.

He still did enough to bag the number three ranking behind Spain's Alcaraz and Italian Sinner, although he trails the dominant pair by more than 6,000 ranking points.

"Of course, number one and two are quite far ahead, which was not the case at the end of 2024, when I finished number two in the world (behind Sinner)," Zverev said in Sydney, where he is playing the United Cup.

"I feel like I have a lot of catching up to do, but so does the rest of the tour."

While Zverev made the final of the season-opening Australian Open last year, losing to Sinner, he disappointed at the other three Grand Slams and also at the year-end ATP Finals.

Despite this he considers 2025 as a step forward, all things considering.

"I had issues with my body, I had injuries throughout the entire season. So for me, finishing three in the world, I feel like looking back at it, it's still something to be proud of," he said.

"Of course it wasn't the season that I wanted to have," he added. "There weren't the titles that I wanted to have, the big titles especially."

Along with his physical problems, Zverev also struggled with his mental health, taking a one-month break after losing in the first round at Wimbledon.

"I took some vacation, spent time with my friends, then went back to training. Changed the scenario a little bit," he said.

## Guardiola Reaffirms City Contract as Maresca Speculation Builds

LONDON (Dispatches) - Pep Guardiola has reiterated his desire to stay on at Manchester City despite reports that former Chelsea manager Enzo Maresca has held talks about potentially taking over at the Etihad.

The long-serving City manager, 54, said last month he intended to see out his contract at City, which runs until the end of the 2026/27 season.

That followed speculation City had identified Maresca, a former assistant of Guardiola's, as a possible successor to the Spaniard should he decide to step down at the end of this season.

Maresca has since parted company with Chelsea -- leaving Stamford Bridge on New Year's Day. It is understood the



Italian's exit came after he informed the club he had held talks with City.

Guardiola, who will celebrate the 10th anniversary of his appointment this year, said: "The only (thing) I can say is that Chelsea, I think, from my point of view, lose an incredible, incredible manager, incredible person.

"But this (is a) decision from the hierarchy from Chelsea, so (I have) nothing to say."

Guardiola, who has won six Premier League titles with City, added: "I have a contract. I said a thousand million times. It's 10 years here, I will leave one day but I have a contract. I'm happy. I want to fight with my team.