

Ali Shamkhani, Former secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, Warned That Any Hostile Action Against the Islamic Republic Could Provoke a Decisive Response, Including Strikes Deep Inside the Occupied Territories

IRAN NEWS

President Masoud Pezeshkian in a Phone Conversation With President of the United Arab Emirates Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan Said Tehran Will Never Welcome War, While Simultaneously Issues a Stern Warning That Any Aggression Against the Country Or Its People Will Be Met With an "Immediate and Decisive" Response

VOL. XXIX, No. 8459 TEHRAN Price 50,000 Rials

www.irannewsdaily.com

SUNDAY FEBRUARY 01, 2026 BAHMAN 12, 1404

2 DOMESTIC



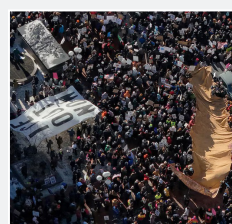
Only 5,000 Iranians Among Vietnam's 20m Foreign Tourists

> SEE PAGE 2

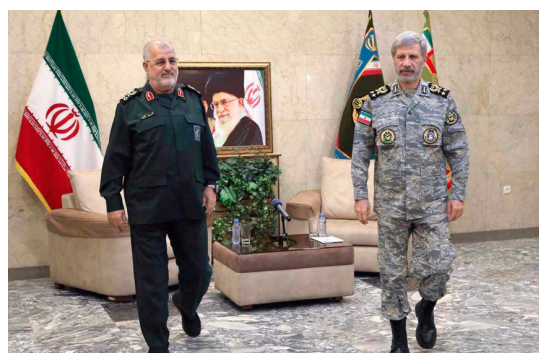
3 INTERNATIONAL

Thousands Demonstrate in Minnesota and Across U.S. to Protest ICE

> SEE PAGE 3



Iran Army Slams EU's Blacklisting of IRGC as "Shameful, Irresponsible"



TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Iran's Army has condemned the European Union's move to add the country's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) to its so-called terrorist list as "shameful" and "irresponsible".

"This hostile action... adds another stain of shame to the black record of European colonialists," the Iranian Army said in a statement on Friday.

The statement noted that this action comes as "today's Europe is divided" and "doesn't play an important role in the current international system", adding that the move aims to please US President Donald Trump and gain his support in resolving Europe's problems, including the war in Ukraine, the issue of Greenland, which Trump wants to take over, and the weakening of NATO.

The EU move to add IRGC, "the largest force fighting terrorism in the region and the world", to its "fabricated and self-created" list of terrorist group, the Iranian Army said, comes while the European bloc fully supports the terrorist Zionist regime and terrorist groups in the region.

"Undoubtedly, this deceitful and irresponsible action by the European Union will not undermine the determination and resolve of the brave nation of Iran, and the armed forces of the Islamic Republic will continue to stand against Western-backed terrorism," the statement read.

The EU designated IRGC on Thursday in reaction to Tehran's response to foreign-backed riots.

Cargo Transfers To and From Iran Continue Normally



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The Secretary-General of the Iranian Shipping Association and Related Industries said that the process of transporting goods to and from Iran is continuing in its normal and routine manner, stressing that there is no cause for concern regarding maritime trade operations.

Speaking in an interview with IRNA, Masoud Polmeh said that over the past 47 years, amid persistent hostility from the United States and various actions taken against the Islamic Republic, Iran has at times witnessed harassment by hostile military forces operating in the Persian Gulf and other parts of the Middle East region. However, he emphasized that the armed forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran have consistently and decisively addressed such actions.

Polmeh noted that to date, hostile U.S. forces have not created any threats, obstructions, or problems for vessels operating under the flag of the Islamic Republic of Iran. He added that Iran's armed forces have remained vigilant and fully prepared to support and protect the national fleet and continue to do so.

"The transfer of goods to and from Iran is proceeding in its usual and normal course," the shipping official said. "There is absolutely no reason for concern in this regard.

Pezeshkian: Officials Must Change Their Conduct Toward the People

IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - President Masoud Pezeshkian said on Saturday that many of the country's current problems stem from officials' failure to follow the guidance of the late Imam Khomeini and from neglecting the people, stressing that authorities must fundamentally change how they treat society and listen to public grievances.

Speaking after visiting the mausoleum of the Founder of the Islamic Revolution alongside members of the Cabinet on the eve of the Ten-Day Dawn commemorating the 47th anniversary of the Revolution, Pezeshkian said the nation has endured difficult weeks due to behavioral and governance failures, adding that officials themselves are "both part of the problem and the solution."

He said many crises could have been avoided had officials aligned their conduct with the Imam's recommendations and recognized the people as the pillars of society. "What should never have happened did happen," he said, "because we failed to see the people."

Referring to Imam Ali's (AS) guidance to Malik al-Ashtar in Nahj al-Balagha, the President emphasized that rulers must prioritize justice, truth, and public satisfaction. "When the general public is dissatisfied, the approval of a small elite is meaningless," he said, adding that elite groups often place the greatest burden on rulers while offering the least support in times of crisis.

Pezeshkian stressed that governance must be centered on service to the people, not authority over them. "People judge us by our behavior and our justice, not by slogans or speeches," he said. "We have no right to ignore the rights of even a single human being."

The President underlined the need for officials to change their behavior toward citizens, calling the people the true backbone of the nation. "If we wish to follow the path shown by Imam Ali and the late Imam regarding justice and people's rights, we must stand with the people and treat them with compassion," he said.

He added that anyone who seeks leadership must first reform themselves before instructing others. "Self-discipline must be demonstrated through action, not words," he noted.

Pezeshkian said no society governed by justice can be brought to its knees. "We cannot claim adherence to religious values while acting unjustly," he said. "If we act fairly, people



will accept it, and no power can destabilize a nation built on justice and truth."

He emphasized that justice must be applied without discrimination based on ethnicity, gender, language, race, or belief, warning that hostility toward any group must not lead to unjust behavior.

"Justice is not a matter of dispute," he said. "It is established through clear standards. People see our actions, not our claims."

Referring to remarks by Seyed Hassan Khomeini, Pezeshkian said the late Imam's path was rooted in the people, not in violence or bloodshed. "Those who initiated armed struggle were not accepted by the Imam," he said.

He added that the martyrs of the Revolution did not sacrifice their lives so that officials could dominate or mistreat the people. "They gave their lives so that justice and service to the people would prevail."

Addressing recent unrest, the President said foreign actors, including the United States, Israel, and some European countries, sought to incite division and exploit domestic problems. He acknowledged that some innocent citizens were drawn into the unrest.

However, he distinguished between peaceful protest and violent actions. "In ordinary social protests, people do not take up arms, kill security forces, or burn ambulances and markets," he said.

"We are duty-bound to hear the voices and concerns of protesters and to resolve their issues," Pezeshkian stressed, adding that the government is prepared to do so. At the same time, he said enemies have attempted to exploit protests to fracture society.

Pezeshkian said the presence of the country's leadership has neutralized hostile plots and will continue to do so, but emphasized that this does not absolve officials from reforming their behavior.

In closing, he said unity around justice and truth is essential, warning that efforts to establish fairness will face resistance from those who have benefited from corruption, rent-seeking, and privilege. "These groups will oppose reform," he said, "but justice must prevail."

Iran Ready for Both War and Dialogue, Will Not Accept Dictation

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Iran is prepared for both war and negotiations but will not accept imposed terms, Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi said amid continued Washington's military threats against Tehran.

"Iran is ready to enter nuclear negotiations if they are conducted from an equal position, based on mutual interests and mutual respect," Araqchi said on Friday in a joint press conference with this Turkish counterpart, Hakan Fidan, in Ankara.

"If the negotiations are fair and just, Iran is ready to participate in these talks and negotiations," He added: "We will by no means accept dictation and imposition."

Araqchi said he was pleased to be in Turkey and described his discussions with Fidan as "good and useful." He noted that Iran and Turkey are neighbors and friends who have stood by each other "in both easy and difficult days."

He said Iran welcomes "any initiative that leads to peace and stability in the region, reduces tensions, and neutralizes the sinister plots of Israel."

He added that Tehran supports Turkey's approach to regional dialogue and is ready to take part in any talks among regional countries aimed at peace, de-escalation and lasting stability.

Responding to questions about contacts with Washington, Araqchi said the U.S. government has sought negotiations through various intermediaries. "Iran has no problem with negotiation," he said. "But negotiations cannot take shape under the shadow of threats. They must abandon threats and be ready for fair negotiations."

"Iran has never abandoned diplomacy and will never abandon it," highlighted the top diplomat.

Asked whether he might meet a US official in the coming hours or days, Araqchi said: "No plan has yet been arranged for a meeting between us and the Americans."

He reiterated Iran's readiness for "fair and just negotiations," but said preliminary arrangements must first be made, including the format, venue and subject of talks.

"I had very good discussions with Mr. Fidan today on these issues," he said. "We will continue these consultations with friends in the region, and I hope we can soon reach a clear framework that guarantees honorable negotiations."

At the same time, Araqchi issued a stark warning over US threats. "We have said many times, and I repeat once again: Iran, just as it is ready for negotiations, is also ready for war," he said.

"We are even more prepared than before the 12-day war," said the minister, referring to the US-Israeli aggression on Iran in June. The attacks came as Tehran and Washington were holding indirect talks on the nuclear issue mediated by Oman.



He said any future conflict would be different, particularly if the United States were directly involved, and warned it could "expand beyond a bilateral war."

"I hope rationality prevails and those who seek to drag the region into an all-out war fail in their objectives," he said.

Araqchi also made clear that Iran's defensive capabilities are not up for discussion. "Iran's defensive capability and missiles will never be the subject of any negotiation," he said.

"The security of the Iranian people is not related to anyone else, and we will preserve and expand our defensive capabilities to whatever extent is necessary to defend the country."

He added that Iran and Turkey agree regional developments are moving in a dangerous direction due to "illegitimate interventions by some extra-regional powers."

He said Israel has been pursuing "sinister plots" to push others toward war, weaken and fragment regional countries, and continue its expansionist ambitions.

Fidan, speaking alongside Araqchi, reiterated Ankara's opposition to military action against Iran. "We have conveyed our opposition to a military intervention against Iran to our interlocutors at every opportunity," he said.

He added that Iran's internal issues should be resolved peacefully by the Iranian people without foreign interference.

Fidan also warned that Israel is trying to persuade the United States to launch a military attack on Iran. "Israel's efforts have the potential to cause great harm to our region's fragile stability," he said, expressing hope that the US administration would act with "common sense" and not allow such a scenario.

He said restarting talks between Tehran and Washington over Iran's nuclear program is "vital" to reducing tensions.

The remarks came amid a sharp rise in threatening rhetoric from Washington. US President Donald Trump recently said "another beautiful armada" of warships was heading toward Iran. He later said the deployment was meant to pressure Tehran into negotiations, warning that failure to reach a deal would trigger a military strike "far worse" than the US attack on Iranian nuclear facilities in June 2025.

A US naval strike group has been in Middle Eastern waters since Monday, and Trump has said it is "ready, willing and able" to strike Iran "if necessary."

Iran has repeatedly rejected threats and coercion, insisting diplomacy cannot succeed under pressure or intimidation. It has warned that any military attack by the US or its allies will be met with a swift and decisive response.

Larijani, Putin Discuss Economic Cooperation, Regional Issues



TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Iran's top security official and Russian President Vladimir Putin have held senior-level talks during an official visit by the former to Moscow.

Iranian Ambassador Kazem Jalali announced the meeting on Friday, noting that it focused on expanding bilateral cooperation between Tehran and Moscow, with particular emphasis on economic relations. The discussions also covered developments in the West Asia region and broader international issues, the envoy added.

Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov earlier confirmed that Putin had received Ali Larijani, secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, at the Kremlin, underlining the significance Moscow attached to its engagement with the Islamic Republic, particularly in areas related to regional diplomacy, energy, and security coordination.

Iran's official broadcaster IRIB quoted Jalali as saying, "The main topic of the talks was expanding bilateral relations, particularly economic ties between the two countries. At the same time, the two sides held consultations on important regional and international issues."

The talks came amid heightened regional tensions following threats of military action against Iran by US President Donald Trump.

Russia has continued to call for diplomatic solutions, while emphasizing respect for Iranian sovereignty.

Foreign Currency Held by Iranians Abroad to Be Accepted



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Minister of Economic Affairs and Finance has announced details of the operation of new foreign-currency investment funds, stating that the funds will offer returns of up to 12 percent in foreign currency and will also accept deposits from Iranians living abroad.

In an interview with ILNA, Ali Madani-Zadeh, the Minister of Economy, outlined the framework and expected impact of the planned currency funds on the national economy. He said the government has proposed the establishment and operation of three foreign-currency funds, which will begin operating once their licenses are approved by the Central Bank of Iran.

Madani-Zadeh emphasized that the currency funds will be open to the general public and not limited to specific groups. "These foreign-currency funds are designed to serve all people," he said. "Individuals will be able to deposit and hold their foreign currencies in these funds and, in return, receive profits denominated in foreign currency."

According to the minister, the operational structure of the currency funds will be similar to that of fixed-income investment funds. "People can deposit any amount of foreign currency they wish into these funds," he explained, adding that the mechanism is intended to provide a secure and transparent investment option for holders of foreign currency.



Chabahar Port to Be Connected to National Rail Network by Yearend

TEHRAN - Iran's Minister of Roads and Urban Development has announced that Chabahar Port will be connected to the country's rail network by the end of the current year.

Farzaneh Sadegh Malvajerd said that 14 projects in port infrastructure, equipment, and maritime safety have been inaugurated or launched, some on a symbolic basis. These include projects related to bunkering and heavy oil products.

She emphasized Chabahar's strategic role in the North-South transport corridor, noting that the port serves as the corridor's final destination. This position enables neighboring and landlocked countries to gain access to open seas.

Russia Committed to Expanding Strategic Cooperation With Iran



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Russia's Minister of Energy emphasized that Moscow remains committed to expanding strategic cooperation with Tehran.

Sergei Tsivilev made the remarks on Wednesday following the conclusion of a meeting of the Russian side of the Permanent Iran-Russia Joint Commission on Trade and Economic Cooperation.

Tsivilev, who heads the Russian side of the joint commission, noted that Tehran and Moscow are preparing to hold the next meeting of the commission in Iran.

He stressed that efforts to develop Russia-Iran relations are ongoing and that the planned events of the intergovernmental commission will be held as scheduled.

According to the report, the 19th session of the Iran-Russia Intergovernmental Joint Commission on Trade and Economic Cooperation will be held in Tehran from 16 to 18 February 2026.

The report adds that during the meeting of the Russian side of the joint economic cooperation commission with Iran, representatives of Russian government agencies and businesses briefed the country's energy minister on the implementation of agreements reached at the commission's 18th session.

They also presented proposals aimed at enhancing bilateral relations between Iran and Russia.

During the meeting, prospects for cooperation in energy, agriculture, transportation, healthcare, education, as well as cultural and humanitarian projects between Iran and Russia were reviewed.

Only 5,000 Iranians Among Vietnam's 20m Foreign Tourists

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Despite the rich tourism potential shared by Iran and Vietnam, the lack of direct flights and limited cultural familiarity between the two nations remain major obstacles to the development of bilateral tourism exchanges, Vietnam's ambassador to Iran said.

Speaking in an interview with ILNA, Nguyen Luong Ngoc, the newly appointed ambassador of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam to Iran, outlined the latest tourism statistics and programs in Vietnam and highlighted his country's efforts to expand tourism cooperation with Iran, while proposing practical solutions to strengthen ties.

Iran and Vietnam began efforts to open tourism routes between the two nations more than a decade ago. However, despite mutual interest by both governments in launching direct flights, such connections have yet to be established, increasing travel costs and limiting tourist flows between the two countries.

Tourism exchanges between Iran and Vietnam face several challenges, the most significant being the absence of direct flights, which makes access difficult for travelers. Limited mutual cultural awareness has also resulted in Vietnamese people largely associating Iran with oil or political issues, while Iranians generally lack in-depth knowledge of Vietnam's tourism destinations.

Nguyen Luong Ngoc emphasized the lack of cultural familiarity between the two nations, saying that unfortunately, the Vietnamese people have limited knowledge of Iran. He noted that addressing this issue should be a priority, adding that Iran's embassy in Vietnam could play a greater role in promoting Iran's tourism attractions.

The Vietnamese ambassador reported strong growth in inbound tourism to Vietnam in recent years, stating that tourism is one of Vietnam's top national priorities. Over the past decade, Vietnam has consistently recorded increases in foreign tourist arrivals. He noted that more than 20 million foreign tourists visited Vietnam last year—surpassing the number of inbound tourists to countries such as China, Australia, and the United States.

“Out of these 20 million foreign tourists, only about 5,000 were Iranians,” he said, expressing hope that this figure would rise through the expansion of direct flights and closer cooperation between travel agencies in both countries.

Ngoc said there are no precise statistics on the number of Vietnamese tourists traveling to Iran, but expressed optimism that the figure would grow. He described Iran as a highly attractive destination for Vietnamese travelers, citing its mountains, deserts, UNESCO-listed historical and cultural sites, and rich civilization.

Referring to cultural initiatives aimed at introducing Iran to the Vietnamese public, the ambassador said Iran recently held a cultural and artistic festival in Hanoi, where performances by Iranian traditional music groups were warmly received and broadcast on Vietnamese television.

“Today, Vietnamese children read One Thousand and One Nights and are fascinated by it,” he said. “They want to see Iran and its ancient civilization firsthand. In the minds of Vietnamese people, Iran is a land of wonders, rich in history and culture.”

The ambassador said the Vietnamese embassy in Tehran has an extensive cultural agenda. In the coming months, celebrations marking the Vietnamese New Year and Nowruz will be held, which, through journalist exchanges and cooperation with travel agencies, can help enhance mutual understanding.

He added that visits by Vietnamese artists to Iran—including musicians and puppet theater performers—will continue in the future.

Discussing Vietnam's long-term tourism outlook, Ngoc said the country aims to become a regional tourism hub by expanding airport capacity and tourism infrastructure. A new airport in southern Vietnam will have the capacity to handle up to 100 million passengers annually, while a similar project is under construction in Hanoi.

“Our goal is to increase the number of Iranian tourists to Vietnam from the current 5,000 to between 20,000 and 30,000 through the expansion of direct flights and infrastructure,” he said, adding that Vietnam also hopes more Vietnamese tourists will choose Iran as an international travel destination.

Ngoc outlined several practical measures to boost tourism cooperation, including B2B and B2G meetings, collaboration between Iranian and Vietnamese travel agencies, journalist exchanges, familiarization trips, and cultural programs hosted by the two embassies.

He stressed that cooperation with airlines, the launch of direct flights, and the promotion of cultural and tourism capacities in both countries would strengthen tourism ties, encourage investment, and bring the two nations closer together.

Vietnam is home to around 40 historical and natural sites listed as UNESCO World Heritage sites. Ha Long Bay, with its breathtaking natural scenery, is among the country's most iconic attractions. Other highlights include the ancient landscapes of Ninh Binh with its rivers, caves, and temples; historic churches and the 400-year-old Ho Chi Minh City Post Office from the French colonial era; the vibrant capital Hanoi; the historic city of Hoi An, renowned for its handicrafts and cultural heritage; the “Mountain of a Thousand Temples”; the Vietnam War Museum; and the coastal city of Da Nang, Vietnam's tourism capital, known for its beachfront hotels and seafood restaurants.

Iran, meanwhile, has become somewhat more familiar to Vietnamese audiences in recent years. Previous Vietnamese ambassadors in Iran worked to send journalists and travel influencers to Vietnam in hopes of paving the way for direct flights—efforts that have so far remained unsuccessful.

Nevertheless, cultural programs organized by Iran in Vietnam have helped introduce Iranian culture to the Vietnamese public. As the current Vietnamese ambassador in Tehran told ILNA, these efforts have led Vietnamese children to read One Thousand and One Nights and view Iran as a mysterious and fascinating destination rich in travel appeal.

Petrochemical Products and Precious Metals Dominate Iran-Turkey Trade



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - A review of Iran-Turkey trade data for the first half of the current Iranian year shows that petrochemical products topped Iran's exports to Turkey, while Iran imported \$835 million worth of precious metals from its neighbor during the same period.

According to figures published by Mehr News Agency, total trade between Iran and Turkey reached \$7.042 billion in the first six months of the year, accounting for 13.2 percent of Iran's total foreign trade. With this share, Turkey maintained its position as Iran's third-largest trading partner.

Of the total trade volume, Iran's exports to Turkey amounted to \$2.718 billion, while imports from Turkey stood at \$4.324 billion.

An analysis of Iran's exports to Turkey shows that petrochemical and petroleum-based products accounted for 48 percent of total exports, followed by mining and mineral industries with 33 percent, industrial goods with 15 percent, and agricultural products with 4 percent.

In contrast, imports from Turkey were dominated by industrial products with a 52 percent share, followed by agricultural goods at 25 percent, mining and mineral products at 22 percent, and petrochemical and petroleum-based products at 1 percent.

Data on Iran's exports indicate that 25 commodity categories accounted for the bulk of shipments to Turkey. Natural gas led the list with \$855 million, followed by granular urea at \$294 million, aluminum and aluminum products at \$279 million, containers at \$181 million, unwrought zinc and zinc products at \$121 million, copper cathodes and anodes at \$93 million, refined copper at \$80 million, long iron and steel products at \$65 million, steel billets at \$50 million, and copper wire rods and copper profiles at \$45 million.

Iran's Economy Highly Fragile

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The head of Tehran Chamber of Commerce has warned that Iran's economy is currently in a fragile state, emphasizing the need for market stability, reduced external risks, and careful management of energy imbalances—particularly preventing gas and electricity cuts in factories—as critical measures to stabilize production prices and ease economic pressures.

Speaking at a session of the Tehran Chamber's Board of Representatives, Mahmoud Najafi-Arab described Iran as going through unprecedented and challenging times. He noted that economic pressures and deteriorating living conditions have sparked public protests and unrest, underscoring the seriousness of the country's current situation.

Najafi-Arab reflected on the concepts of hope versus expectation, arguing that while hope inspires optimism and energy for life, expectation is a logical calculation. “What has happened in recent months is the non-fulfillment of expectations,” he said. “For example, everyone expected the 14th government to restore stability to the economy. These expectations arose logically from the government's previous claims and actions. When those expectations are not met, people and the private sector become disillusioned.”

He highlighted the government's recent removal of the preferential currency (subsidized exchange rate) as a step toward long-term economic reform, aimed at reducing rent-seeking and promoting fairer wealth distribution. However, Najafi-Arab cautioned that in the short term, such policies shock society. He criticized the implementation process, noting that previous reforms, such as energy price adjustments under the 12th government, failed to adequately prepare the public or establish proper infrastructures, resulting in public backlash—a pattern he sees repeated today.

While the government's goal is to promote social justice, rising prices, continued stagnation in businesses, and external pressures, particularly sanctions, have made Iran's economy highly vulnerable and reduced household purchasing power.

Najafi-Arab noted that recent protests have occurred against a backdrop of income inequality, rising poverty, high inflation, and unemployment, compounded by uncertainty about the future. According to the latest Central Bank report, Iran's 12-month inflation rate ending in December reached 42.2 percent, while producer prices climbed 60.6 percent—the highest level since October 2021.

He described Iran as experiencing one of the longest periods of double-digit inflation in recent history, severely impacting household budgets. Data from the Ministry of Health indicate that even Iranian families struggle to meet minimum caloric needs, prompting the introduction of rationing policies to reduce inequality.

Najafi-Arab stressed that energy imbalances, shocks from conflict, currency fluctuations, and economic uncertainty have driven producer prices upward. “In the current situation, market stability, reducing external risks, and managing energy imbalances—particularly preventing gas and electricity cuts to factories—can help stabilize production prices and act as a relief for the economy,” he said.

He also criticized the upcoming national budget, noting that despite increased tax pressure on businesses, no substantial steps have been taken to streamline government operations, reduce unnecessary institutions, or address distortions caused by price controls and government intervention in the economy.

The Tehran Chamber head said economic actors are particularly concerned about currency instability, a hostile business environment, sanctions pressures, rising liquidity, and deepening stagflation—all of which cloud future prospects. “Despite these challenges, the government has taken initial steps toward economic reform. I hope citizens remain patient, the private sector continues to protect production and employment, and the government acts prudently, facilitating the country's passage through this critical period,” he said.

Najafi-Arab concluded by emphasizing that the private sector expects the government to pursue economic recovery with awareness and careful planning, preventing rising living costs from undermining citizens' livelihoods. He described this as a logical expectation rooted in the country's inherent potential and expressed hope that active participation from the entrepreneurial community will help achieve it.

Iran-Venezuela Bank Continues Operations Amid Sanctions



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The secretary of the Coordinating Council of Private Banks said that the Iran-Venezuela Bank continues to operate normally, adding that any decision regarding the Venezuelan-owned 50 percent stake rests with Venezuela itself, in accordance with its domestic laws and regulations.

In an interview with ILNA, Mohammad Reza Jamshidi commented on the status of the Iran-Venezuela Bank in light of recent developments in Venezuela. He said the bank faces no restrictions on continuing its banking operations, stressing that its activities are not limited to financial transactions related solely to Venezuela.

“The Iran-Venezuela Bank carries out the full range of banking services, similar to other banks operating in the country,” he said.

Jamshidi explained that 50 percent of the bank's capital is owned by a Venezuelan individual, while the remaining 50 percent belongs to the Export Development Bank of Iran.

He noted that while some banking activities related to Venezuela are naturally conducted through this institution, the Iran-Venezuela Bank has never been restricted from providing services to other sectors of the economy. These include retail banking services such as small consumer loans, marriage loans, childbearing incentives, and other facilities offered to the public.

Addressing questions about how the bank conducts financial transfers between Iran and Venezuela despite banking sanctions on Iran, including restrictions related to the SWIFT system, Jamshidi said not all Iranian banks are subject to the most severe international banking sanctions.

Iran-Africa Trade Up 23% Since Start of the Year



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The head of Iran's Trade Center in Algeria announced a 23 percent increase in Iran's trade with the African continent since the beginning of the current year, reporting a 5.5-fold growth in trade between Iran and Algeria.

Saeed Zareh Haghighi described Africa as one of the most important and strategic destinations for the active presence of Iran's private sector. He said Africa is not merely a continent but a major economic opportunity, with Algeria holding a key position among African countries.

According to official figures, Iran's trade volume with Africa during the first eight months of the current year grew by 23 percent, with Iranian exports rising from \$470 million to \$850 million.

Zareh Haghighi also noted a decline in Iran's imports from Africa, stating that imports from the continent fell from \$72 million to \$45 million.

He added that Iran's trade with Algeria during the same eight-month period increased from around \$2 million to \$11 million, indicating a more than fivefold growth in bilateral trade.

Highlighting Algeria's geoeconomic importance, the head of Iran's Trade Center said Algeria is a secure country with a strategic location close to Europe. He noted that Algeria's foreign currency revenues have increased in recent years from about \$50 billion to more than \$300 billion, and that the country enjoys a trade surplus of \$20-30 billion, creating significant opportunities for economic cooperation.

Online Foes Trump, Petro Set for White House Face-to-Face

BOGOTA (Dispatches) - Colombia abruptly agreed to accept U.S. deportation flights on Friday, an olive branch days before the countries' dueling presidents meet face-to-face for the first time, at the White House.

One is an alleged "racist" and "authoritarian," the other a "low rated" "drug leader" who should "watch his ass." After months of trading insults from their very active social media accounts, presidents Donald Trump and Gustavo Petro will hold an unlikely summit in Washington on Tuesday.

Trump and Petro come from opposite ends of the political spectrum, and have sparred over everything from Israeli operations in Gaza to jailed migrants to Venezuela.



Guterres Warns UN Faces Imminent Financial Collapse



NEW YORK (Dispatches) - United Nations chief Antonio Guterres warned that the world body is on the brink of financial collapse and could run out of cash by July, as he urged countries to pay their dues.

The UN faces chronic budget problems because some member states do not pay their mandatory contributions in full, while others do not pay on time, forcing it into hiring freezes and cutbacks.

"Either all Member States honour their obligations to pay in full and on time — or Member States must fundamentally overhaul our financial rules to prevent an imminent financial collapse," Secretary-General Guterres wrote in a letter.

US President Donald Trump's administration has in recent months reduced its funding to some UN agencies and has rejected or delayed some mandatory contributions.

Trump has often questioned the UN's relevance and attacked its priorities.

The organisation's top decision-making body, the Security Council, is paralysed because of tensions between the United States and Russia and China, all three of which are permanent, veto-wielding members.

Trump also launched his "Board of Peace" this month, which critics say is intended to become a rival to the UN.

Although more than 150 member states have paid their dues, the UN ended 2025 with US\$1.6 billion in unpaid contributions — more than double the amount for 2024.

"The current trajectory is untenable. It leaves the Organisation exposed to structural financial risk," Guterres wrote.

Kremlin Says Putin Agreed to Halt Strikes on Kyiv at Trump's Request



KYIV (Dispatches) - The Kremlin on Friday said President Vladimir Putin had agreed to stop striking Kyiv for a week — ending tomorrow — following a request by his US counterpart Donald Trump.

Trump had said he asked Putin to halt strikes on the Ukrainian capital and the surrounding area due to extreme cold weather.

Moscow, meanwhile, said the US leader had made the appeal to help the Washington-driven negotiation process to end almost four years of war between the neighbours.

Russia's battering of Ukraine's energy grid has left whole districts without heating, with temperatures expected to plunge to around -30C in Kyiv in the coming days, raising fears of a humanitarian crisis.

"I can say that President Trump did indeed make a personal request to President Putin to refrain from striking Kyiv for a week until February 1 in order to create favourable conditions for negotiations," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

Neither the US leader nor Moscow clarified when Trump had asked Putin.

"I personally asked President Putin not to fire into Kyiv and the various towns for a week," Trump told a cabinet meeting at the White House a day earlier, adding it was "because of the cold, extreme cold."



Thousands Demonstrate in Minnesota and Across U.S. to Protest ICE

MINNEAPOLIS (Dispatches) - Thousands of protesters took to the streets in Minneapolis and students across the United States staged walkouts on Friday to demand the withdrawal of federal immigration agents from Minnesota following the fatal shootings of two U.S. citizens.

Students and teachers abandoned classes from California to New York on a national day of protest, which came amid mixed messages from the Trump administration about whether it would de-escalate Operation Metro Surge.

Under a national immigration crackdown, President Donald Trump has sent 3,000 federal officers to the Minneapolis area who are patrolling the streets in tactical gear, a force five times the size of the Minneapolis Police Department.

Protesting the surge and the tactics used by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, several thousand people gathered in downtown Minneapolis in sub-freezing temperatures, including families with small kids, elderly couples and young activists.

Katia Kagan, wearing a "No ICE" sweatshirt and holding a sign demanding the agency leave the city, said she was the daughter of Russian Jews who immigrated to America seeking safety and a better life.

"I'm out here because I'm going to fight for the American dream that my parents came here for," Kagan said.

Kim, a 65-year-old meditation coach who asked that her last name not be used, called the surge a "full-on fascist attack of our federal government on citizens."

In a Minneapolis neighborhood near the sites where Alex Pretti and Renee Good, two U.S. citizens, were fatally shot this month by federal immigration agents, about 50 teachers and staff members from local schools turned out to march.

Rock star Bruce Springsteen lent his voice to the protest, taking the stage at a fundraiser for Good and Pretti in downtown Minneapolis and playing his new song "Streets of Minneapolis."

Protests stretched well beyond Minnesota as organizers forecast 250 demonstrations across 46 states and in major cities

such as New York, Los Angeles, Chicago and Washington under the slogan, "No work. No school. No shopping. Stop funding ICE."

Trump in turn offered a vote of confidence for Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem, whose department oversees ICE. Critics have called for her resignation but Trump said on social media that Noem "has done a really GREAT JOB!", asserting that "The Border disaster that I inherited is fixed."

Meanwhile, events in Minneapolis reverberated through the federal government.

The acting head of the Minneapolis FBI field office, Jarrod Smith, was removed from his post, according to two sources familiar with the move. Smith was reassigned to FBI headquarters in Washington, according to one of the sources.

The Minneapolis field office has been involved in the federal surge as well as investigations into the Pretti shooting and a church protest that led to charges against former CNN anchor Don Lemon.

The FBI arrested Lemon on Friday and the Justice Department charged him with violating federal law during a protest inside a St. Paul, Minnesota, church earlier this month in what his lawyer called an attack on press freedom.

After pleading not guilty, Lemon told reporters, "I will not be silenced. I look forward to my day in court."

The New York Times, citing an internal ICE memo it reviewed, reported on Friday that federal agents were told this week they have broader power to arrest people without a warrant, expanding the ability of lower-level ICE agents to carry out sweeps rounding up suspected undocumented immigrants they encounter.

Backlash against the administration's immigration policy also threatened to spark a partial U.S. government shutdown as Democrats in Congress opposed funding for the Department of Homeland Security, which oversees ICE.

Venezuela Plans Amnesty Law for Prisoners

CARACAS (Dispatches) - Venezuela's interim president Delcy Rodriguez announced a proposed "amnesty law" for hundreds of prisoners in the country, and said the infamous Helicoide detention centre in the capital Caracas will be converted into a centre for sports and social services.

"May it be a law that serves to heal the wounds left by political confrontation, violence, and extremism. May it serve to restore justice in our country and restore peaceful coexistence among Venezuelans," Rodriguez said at an event at the Supreme Court of Justice. The proposed law could affect hundreds of detainees who remain behind bars in the South American country, as well as former prisoners who have already been conditionally released. The new law will cover cases running from 1999 until today, but will exclude those who may have participated in killings, serious abuses of human rights and drug trafficking, Rodriguez said.

Rights group Foro Penal welcomed the announcement "with optimism, but with caution" in a statement, adding it hopes the law will contribute to justice, freedom, peace and national reconciliation. The group said that current prisoner releases announced earlier this month should continue while the law is being approved. It has tallied 711 remaining political prisoners.

Families and rights advocates have long demanded that charges and convictions against detainees who are considered political prisoners be dropped. Opposition politicians, dissident members of the security services, journalists and rights activists are often subject to charges like terrorism and treason, which their families say are unjust and arbitrary.

The X social media account for the US embassy in Venezuela — closed



since 2019 — said late yesterday that all US citizens held in the country had been released.

Venezuela's interim President Delcy Rodriguez attends the opening of the new court term with Supreme Court magistrates, in Caracas January 30, 2026. — Miraflores Palace handout pic via Reuters

Venezuela's interim President Delcy Rodriguez attends the opening of the new court term with Supreme Court magistrates, in Caracas January 30, 2026. — Miraflores Palace handout pic via Reuters

Rodriguez also said that the Helicoide prison, a long-standing symbol of alleged government repression that rights groups have long denounced as

the site of prisoner abuse, will instead be converted into a sports and social services centre.

In 2022, a United Nations report claimed that Venezuela's state security agencies subjected detainees at the infamous prison, originally designed as a mall, to torture. The government rejected the UN's findings. Relatives of prisoners at the Helicoide have held vigils and camped overnight outside the prison in recent weeks, demanding their relatives be freed.

Foro Penal says it has verified 303 political prisoners have been let go since the government announced a new series of releases on January 8.

Government officials — who deny holding political prisoners and say those jailed have committed crimes — have said more than 600 people have been released, but have not been clear about the timeline and appear to be including releases from previous years. The government has never provided an official list of how many prisoners will be released nor who they are.

Among the long-time advocates of releases and amnesty is Nobel Peace Prize winner and opposition leader Maria Corina Machado, who has several close allies imprisoned.

Machado said the new amnesty law "isn't something the regime wanted to do voluntarily, but is rather a product of the real pressure it has received from the United States government," adding that hopefully the prisoners held can be reunited with their families very soon.

The recent releases were announced after the US captured President Nicolas Maduro on January 3 and brought him to New York for arraignment in court on narcoterrorism charges, which he denies.

U.S. Signs Off on Apache Helicopters for Israel, Patriot Missiles for Saudi Arabia

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - The United States yesterday approved multibillion-dollar weapons sales to both Israel and Saudi Arabia, at a point of high tensions with Iran.

The State Department said it green-lighted a US\$3.8-billion sale of 30 Apache attack helicopters to Israel, which has agreed to a fragile ceasefire in Gaza.

"The United States is committed to the security of Israel, and it is vital to US national interests to assist Israel to develop and maintain a strong and ready self-defence capability," the State Department said in a statement.

"This proposed sale is consistent with those objectives," it said.

Also in the package was a US\$1.8 billion sale of joint light tactical vehicles.

The United States sends billions of dollars worth of military supplies per year to Israel, largely in aid rather than sales.

Israel and Hamas reached a US-backed ceasefire in October that largely paused two years of war.

Tensions are high elsewhere in the region as the United States deploys a major military contingent in waters near Iran.



The State Department also approved a US\$9-billion sale to Saudi Arabia for 730 Patriot missiles, which are used to defend against incoming attacks.

Israel last year carried out a major bombing campaign against nuclear and other military sites in Iran.

Saudi Arabia, while no friend of Iran, has voiced caution about an attack on Iran as Gulf monarchies fear instability that could jeopardise their reputation as business havens.

Saudi Arabia for years has been considering a historic normalisation with Israel, which increasingly seems distant as the kingdom looks warily at Israel's military campaigns in the Palestinian territories.

The Trump administration has said that the Gaza ceasefire is now in its second phase, with a focus on disarming Hamas.

Hamas attacked Israel on October 7, 2023, resulting in the deaths of 1,221 people on the Israeli side, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally that includes hostages who died or were killed during their captivity in the Gaza Strip.



Jokic Scores 31 to Propel Nuggets Over Clippers in Injury Return

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - Denver superstar Nikola Jokic returned from a 16-game injury absence to post a 31-point, 12-rebound double-double on Friday and propel the Nuggets to a 122-109 NBA victory over the Los Angeles Clippers.

Three-time NBA Most Valuable Player Jokic had not played since suffering a bone bruise in the left knee he hyperextended in a game against Miami on December 29.

The Serbian big man did not miss a beat. He led all scorers, connecting on eight of 11 shots from the field, and also handed out five assists with three steals while playing just 24:32 minutes as the Nuggets halted the Clippers' winning streak at three.

"I feel good out there," Jokic said in an on-court post-game interview. "I think I did a really good job with the recovery, really good to prepare myself."

Jokic's return was a welcome boost for a Nuggets team that just saw forward Aaron Gordon join Christian Braun and Cameron Johnson on the injured list.

Nuggets coach David Adelman was delighted to have Jokic at his disposal, even on a minutes restriction.

He tried to temper expectations for Jokic before the game, but Clippers coach Tyrone Lue admitted the presence of Jokic -- who was averaging a triple-double with 29.6 points, 12.2 rebounds and 11 assists per game when he was hurt -- "adds a different dimension to what you want to do defensively."

James Harden scored 25 points and handed out nine assists for the Clippers, who had won 16 of their previous 19 games climb into 10th place in the West.

Elsewhere, Los Angeles Lakers star Luka Doncic had a triple-double by halftime, sparking the Lakers to a 114-111 rout of the Wizards in Washington.

Doncic finished with 37 points, 11 rebounds and 13 assists for his sixth triple-double of the season.

He had racked up 26 points, 10 rebounds and 11 assists in less than 19 minutes on the floor when the Lakers took a 77-48 lead into halftime.

"I just played my game, whatever the defense gives me," said Doncic, who was backed by 28 points from Deandre Ayton and 20 from LeBron James as the Lakers connected on better than 61 percent of their shots from the field.

"It's a little bit like chess, just trying to read the defense, share the ball," Doncic said. "I think we did a great job today."

In Boston, the absence of Celtics star Jaylen Brown with knee and hamstring injuries proved immaterial as the hosts pummeled the Sacramento Kings 112-93.

Payton Pritchard scored 22 of his 29 points in the first half and handed out eight assists for Boston, leading six Celtics players in double figures.

Djokovic Sets Up Alcaraz Showdown for Australian Open Title

MELBOURNE (Dispatches) - Novak Djokovic turned back the clock to dethrone Jannik Sinner in a five-set classic and set up a final showdown with world number one Carlos Alcaraz after the Spaniard slogged through the longest Australian Open semi-final against Alexander Zverev.

Stopped in the semi-finals of the last four Grand Slams, Djokovic sent the Italian double defending champion packing with a 3-6 6-3 4-6 6-4 6-4 win completed in the early hours of Saturday morning.

Less than four months before his 39th birthday, the 10-times champion eclipsed Ken Rosewall as the oldest man to reach the final in the professional era, while snapping a five-match losing streak to Sinner.

He will bid for a record-extending 11th title at Melbourne Park and the unprecedented 25th major crown that has eluded him against Spaniard Alcaraz, who needed five hours and 27 minutes to fell Zverev 6-4 7-6(5) 6-7(3) 6-7(4) 7-5 earlier at Rod Laver Arena.

"I saw Carlos after the match and he told me 'I'm sorry to delay the start' and I told him 'I'm an old man, I need to go earlier to sleep'," Djokovic said on court.

"Looking forward to seeing him in a couple of days."



At a tournament short on thrillers and major upsets, all four semi-finalists played their part to deliver drama in spades.

Djokovic needed to draw on 20 years of Grand Slam experience and his famed mental toughness to hold out Sinner, who was relentless in attacking the Serb's serve but failed to convert eight break-point chances in the final set.

"I had my chances ... Many break points, couldn't use them," said Sinner.

"He came up with some great shots.

"I know he's won 24 Grand Slams. We know each other very well, how we play.

"I feel like he's the greatest player for many, many years."

Alcaraz fought through a leg cramp to deny Zverev and whereas Djokovic can become the oldest winner, the Spaniard will bid to become the youngest man to complete the career Grand Slam with his first Melbourne title.

The semi-finals overwhelmed Alcaraz and Djokovic physically, with both vomiting during the matches.

Harrison, Skupski Win Australian Open Men's Doubles Title



MELBOURNE (Dispatches) - Christian Harrison of the United States and Britain's Neal Skupski beat popular home wildcards Jason Kubler and Marc Polmans to win the Australian Open men's doubles title on Saturday.

Harrison and Skupski defied a pro-Australian crowd at Rod Laver Arena to win 7-6 (7/4), 6-4.

The roof was on ahead of the women's singles final with light rain in Melbourne.

It was the sixth seeds' first title as playing partners, having only teamed up at the start of the year.

"It was not easy out there today," said 31-year-old Harrison, whose older brother Ryan won the French Open men's doubles in 2017.

Addressing the 36-year-old Skupski, a Wimbledon doubles winner in 2023, he said: "Some tough moments but I knew your experience would pay off.

"It was fun to battle this match together."

Meanwhile Belgium's Elise Mertens and Chinese partner Zhang Shuai clinched their first Grand Slam women's doubles title as a team when they downed Anna Danilina and Aleksandra Krunic at the Australian Open.

The fourth seeds, in only their seventh event together, were too good for the seventh-seeded Kazakh and Serbian pair on Rod Laver Arena, winning 7-6 (7/4), 6-4.

Currently ranked sixth, Mertens will reclaim the women's doubles world number one ranking with the victory.

It was a third Australian Open doubles crown for the experienced Belgian, who won in 2021 alongside Belarusian Aryna Sabalenka and again in 2024 playing with Taiwan's Hsieh Su-wei.

Vonn Says Olympic Dream Not Over Yet



CRANS-MONTANA (Dispatches) - U.S. Alpine ski great Lindsey Vonn said her dream of competing at the Milano Cortina Winter Olympics was not over yet despite being taken to hospital for checks earlier on Friday after a crash at the World Cup downhill.

Organisers cancelled the race in worsening conditions with snow falling and Vonn, leader of the downhill standings, the sixth and last of those out of the start hut.

"I crashed today in the Downhill race in Switzerland and injured my left knee," Vonn said on social media just days before the start of the Winter Olympics in Italy.

"I am discussing the situation with my doctors and team and will continue to undergo further exams. This is a very difficult outcome a week before the Olympics... but if there is one thing I know how to do, it's a comeback."

The Olympics kick off on February 6 with the opening ceremony in Milan's San Siro stadium.

"My Olympic dream is not over. Thank you for all the love and support. It's not over until it's over," Vonn said.

The 41-year-old, in winning form as she prepares for an age-defying Olympic comeback next week, lost her balance on Friday and crashed into the side netting, with her airbag inflating.

She was able to get back up on her skis but was seemingly in pain from her left leg, stopping at one point to clutch her knee.

"She has some pain so it's better to have some checks, the physio did some checks they seemed OK but there were things he was not 100% sure so it was good to have it checked (at the hospital)," two-time Olympic champion Aksel Lund Svindal, Vonn's coach this season, told Reuters.

Real Madrid Draw Benfica Again as PSG Handed Monaco Tie

PARIS (Dispatches) - Real Madrid were handed a quick rematch with Jose Mourinho's Benfica in the draw for the Champions League play-off round, while reigning European champions Paris Saint-Germain will face domestic rivals Monaco.

Benfica beat Real 4-2 in their final game of the league phase on Wednesday, with a 98th-minute goal by goalkeeper Anatoliy Trubin proving decisive in allowing the Portuguese side to snatch the last play-off spot ahead of Marseille, who were eliminated altogether.

The defeat also nudged Madrid out of the top eight places in the league standings, which give direct access to the last 16, forcing them into this extra round.

Benfica staged a remarkable recovery to take a play-off place



— they finished 24th in the 36-team league phase, the last qualifying spot — by winning three of their last four matches after losing their opening four games.

Mourinho, 63, returned to the Lisbon giants for a second spell as coach in September. He was in charge of Real from 2010 to 2013 and won one La Liga title and one Copa del Rey while also taking them to the Champions League semi-finals in each of his three campaigns.

The clubs played each other in the 1962 European Cup final, with Benfica winning 5-3 to claim the last of their two titles to date.

PSG slipped out of the top eight after winning only one of their last five outings in the league phase and finishing in 11th place.