

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov on Wednesday Said Talks On Salvaging the 2015 Iran nuclear Deal, Which Were Paused at Iran's Request Last Week, Would Resume Before the End of This Year

IRAN NEWS

Health Ministry Announced on Wednesday That the Number of Deaths From the Coronavirus Pandemic in Iran Increased to 131,211 With 44 More Iranians Killed by the Virus Over the Past 24 Hours

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FM Seeks to Expand Cooperation With Azerbaijan



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DOMESTIC

Sri Lanka Inks \$251m Tea for Oil Debt Deal With Iran

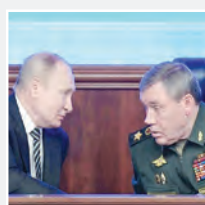


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Kurdish Companies Urged To Export Goods to Iran

ERBIL (Dispatches) - Iranian Ambassador to Iraq Iraj Masjedi said on Tuesday that he hopes Kurdistan Region's companies will begin exporting goods to his country, adding that they are ready to support the Region to prosper in industry, agriculture and advanced technology.

Attending the second trade and industrial fair in Erbil, organized for Iranian companies, Masjedi told Kurdish companies that Tehran "wants to further strengthen its economic ties with the Kurdistan Region in the field of business, exportation, investment and transportation. This will be in the interest of both countries. The Islamic Republic of Iran wants the Kurdistan Region to prosper in industry, agriculture and advanced technology. We are ready to help."

"We would like the Kurdistan Region to import [goods] to Iran as well. We do not want our relations to be unilateral," he added. The expo opened on Tuesday and will last for five days. About 135 Iranian companies from 10 sectors are participating.

The Kurdistan Region and Iran have enjoyed good relations in the past, and share several border crossings. Tehran-Erbil trade volume is estimated to be around \$13 billion.

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Iran Trade With EAEU Up 73% y/y

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The Iranian customs administration (IRICA) says trade between the country and members of the EAEU bloc rose by 73% in value terms in March-November compared to the similar period last year.

IRICA spokesman Rouhollah Latifi said that the value of trade with the Eurasian Economic Union had reached \$3.626 billion in the eight months to November 22.

Iran's exports to the five-member EAEU rose by 18% year on year in March-November to more than \$763.6 million, said Latifi.

He said the value of imports from the bloc into Iran had nearly doubled over the same period to over \$2.862 billion, adding that shipments imported from the EAEU had risen by 66% in volume terms year on year.

Iran signed a preferential trade agreement with the EAEU in November 2019 amid efforts by the government to diversify trade routes and to offset the impacts of American sanctions on the country's economic exchanges with the rest of the world.

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President Says Current Price Regulation "Unacceptable"



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - President Seyed Ebrahim Raisi expressed his dissatisfaction over the current situation of price regulation in the country despite some economic achievement in the international trade.

Referring to the achievements of the 13th government in various fields, including significant growth in oil sales, boosting trade with Eurasian countries and the like, Raisi said, "Despite promising achievements in various fields, the current situation in regulating and controlling the market and prices is not acceptable".

Speaking in a cabinet meeting, the President stressed the cooperation and synergy between the government and parliament to solve the country's problems, and said, "The most important way to create this synergy in the interaction between government and parliament are parliamentary liaisons of executive bodies".

On the existing problems in the supply of paper needed by the country, especially for publications, he said, "The relevant officials seriously put the issue of nationalization of the needs of the publishing field, especially paper, on the agenda".

Emphasizing the need for full coordination in the government in the field of information, the President said, "Announcing positions and informing about issues related to the government should be done in full coordination with the government spokesman".

During the meeting, the Governor-General of Khuzestan Sadegh Khalilian presented a report on the actions taken in the province, and the President said, "We owe a lot to this province and its noble and devoted people".

Ayatollah Raisi also stated that part of the resolutions of the Supreme Leader's visit to Khuzestan province has not been fully implemented yet, adding, "We believe that one of the ways out of the problems of this province is the full implementation of the plans approved during the Supreme Leader's visit".

The President mentioned the good work that has been done to rebuild the quake-hit area and resettle the people of Andika, stressing the need for jihadist action to complete rebuilding plans due to the cold season.

Raisi also tasked the Vice-President for Executive Affairs with holding meetings with the governor-general and local managers and, if necessary, travel to Khuzestan to follow up on the issues and resolutions of the President's visit.

U.S. Threatens Iran With Other Options If Vienna Talks Fail

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - The United States has once again threatened Iran with considering "other options" if negotiations in the Austrian capital fail to restore the 2015 agreement, three years after the US itself pulled out of the deal and imposed draconian sanctions on Iran.

Speaking with CNN on Tuesday, U.S. special envoy for Iran Robert Malley warned of a "period of escalating crisis" if diplomacy failed to restore the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

The remarks came days after negotiators from Iran and the remaining parties to the JCPOA concluded the seventh round of talks in Vienna, aimed at bringing the U.S. back into compliance with the agreement by removing its sanctions against Iran.

Provided that the U.S. fully honors its obligations under the accord, Iran is also expected to reverse the steps it took in the aftermath of Washington's illegal 2018 withdrawal and subsequent sanctions.

Referring to Iran's retaliatory measures, Malley said, "If they continue at their current pace, we have some weeks left [to restore the deal] but not much more than that, at which point the conclusion will be there's no deal to be revived."

"At some point in a not-so-distant future, we will have to conclude the JCPOA is no more and we would have to negotiate a wholly different deal and we would go through a period of escalating crisis," he added.

Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman said on Monday that the parties to the Vienna talks reached two agreed-upon texts in the seventh round of talks.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Tuesday that the U.S. has a strong interest in reviving the deal, warning that if the Vienna talks fail, "then we are actively looking at alternatives and options."

"I'm not going to put a time limit on it," Blinken told reporters, but the remaining runway for a deal is "getting very, very, very short."

He blamed the former American administration of Donald Trump for "the worst decisions made in American foreign policy in the last decade" by withdrawing from the accord in 2018.

"In getting out of that agreement, we were promised that it would be replaced by a stronger one ... Instead, of course, we've seen just the opposite," he said.

Iran Exports to Russia Grow by 123%

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Russia's 10-month customs statistics show that the country's exports to Iran grew by 123 percent compared to the same period last year.

Russia exported \$1.15 billion in exports to Iran during the first 10 months of last year, but in the same period this year it peaked at \$2 billion and \$565 million, according to customs statistics published on its website.

Russia is Iran's only major trading partner, which has increased sharply under sanctions. Russian customs statistics show that Russian imports from Iran also grew by 22 percent to \$779 million in the 10 months of 2021.

Thus, Russia's exports to Iran are approximately 3.5 times more than its imports from the Islamic republic.

Russian customs statistics show that the country's total exports during the first 10 months of this year were about \$387 billion and imports were \$237 billion. Therefore, Iran's share in Russian foreign trade was about half a percent.

Russia's total exports have increased by about 43 percent in 10 months, mainly due to the growth in oil prices and oil and gas export revenues. Imports also grew by more than 28% compared to the same period last year.

Iraqi Delegation Set to Visit Iran

BAGHDAD (Dispatches)- Iraq will send a technical delegation to Iran this week to negotiate the release of water into the country as the majority of its rivers and marshes are drying up.

For years, the neighboring countries have been in a dispute over water issues — especially as Baghdad relies on the Tigris and Euphrates rivers for nearly all of its water but Tehran is building dams to divert more of the flow of the two rivers.

Iraq has been suffering from acute water shortages. Iraqi experts say the country's southern marshes — which lie in some of the hardest hit areas — are drying up as a direct result of Iran's water policies.

"The southern Hawizeh marsh has been suffering from water scarcity for eight months, although the ministry of water resources have launched expenditures from the nearby Khala River but it's not enough," said Hatem Hamid, the director general of the National Centre for Water Resources Management. The Hawizeh marsh straddles the border between Iran and Iraq.

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EU's Top Court Allows European Firms to Scrap Iran Deals

BRUSSELS (Dispatches) - The European Court of Justice (ECJ) in Luxembourg has ruled that EU companies can end contracts with Iranian firms if they face "disproportionate economic loss" as a result of US sanctions.

The EU's Supreme Court has intervened to protect European companies against legal action by Iran for failing to fulfill their contractual obligations.

The European Court of Justice (ECJ) in Luxembourg has ruled that EU companies can end contracts with Iranian firms if upholding the deals would lead to "disproportionate economic loss" as a result of US sanctions.

The ruling was prompted by a lawsuit from the German branch of Iran's Bank Melli against Deutsche Telekom after the telecommunications provider terminated a contract with the bank in 2018 prior to its expiry.

The decision effectively neutralizes a "blocking statute" that prohibited individuals and companies in the European Union from complying with US sanctions imposed in 2018 by then U.S. president Donald Trump after he decided to withdraw unilaterally from the Iran nuclear deal.

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President Among Orphans, Disabled Children to Celebrate Yalda

TEHRAN (IP) - President Seyed Ebrahim Raisi spent the Yalda Night ceremony among orphans and children with disabilities in Behesht Reza charity center.

Raisi congratulated Yalda Night and expressed his happiness for being present in the gathering of the children and advised them to study well and pay attention to their sports and health.

“Dear children, thank your compassionate and kind coaches who try to provide you with peace and comfort, and know that the best appreciation for them is that you study well and be successful people so that you can serve your country,” Raisi told the children.

FM Seeks to Expand Cooperation With Azerbaijan

IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian said that Iran welcomes further economic and trade cooperation with Azerbaijan.

Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian on Wednesday made the remarks upon his arrival in Baku, the capital of the Azerbaijan Republic.

“Today, we will have high-level meetings with the officials of the Republic of Azerbaijan and we are glad that the relations between the two countries are growing, developing, and strengthening”, the Iranian Foreign Minister stated.

Amir-Abdollahian added that he has a variety of ideas for expanding bilateral cooperation which he will be discussed in a meeting with the President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev.

The Iranian and Azeri Foreign Ministers have been in touch during the past three months and have held meetings in New York, Ashgabat, and Islamabad in which the



frameworks of expanding the cooperations were discussed, according to Hossein Amir-Abdollahian.

The Iranian diplomat went on to say that during his visit, he's going to discuss and finalize the quality of the frameworks in a meeting with the President of Azerbaijan, stressing that Iran welcomes further economic and trade cooperation with Azerbaijan.

This is Amir-Abdollahian's first visit to Baku since his appointment as foreign minister.

Jeyhun Bayramov invited Hossein Amir-Abdollahian to visit Baku.

Japan Ready to Expand Cooperation With Iran



MASHHAD (IRNA)- Japanese Ambassador to Iran Kazutoshi Aikawa said on Wednesday that his country was ready to expand cooperation with Iran, highlighting the long-standing ties between the two countries.

Aikawa made the remarks in a meeting with the Vice-Chairman of Astan Qods Razavi Malek Rahmati in Mashhad.

He underscored the cooperation between Japan and Iran in fighting against the coronavirus spread taking advantage of modern medical equipment and standing against the bilateral US sanctions as well as Tokyo's humanitarian aids to the Afghan refugees settled along Iran's border with Afghanistan.

Rahmati, as his part, said that Iran and Japan were well aware of the dimensions of economic sanction which is one of the domination tools used by the global arrogance, i.e. the US.

The U.S. was the only country in history to actually use nuclear weapons, as no one in the world would forget the US' nuclear attack on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, he noted.

The very country restricts other countries under the pretext of the possibility that those states may make nuclear weapons, Rahmati went on to add.

He also mentioned the abilities of Astan Qods Razavi in various areas, including pharmacy, agriculture and architecture, saying that the entity was ready to cooperate on such projects as desalination and digital economy.

Minister Addresses Metropolitan Issues, Measures to Contain Omicron

TEHRAN (IP) - Interior Minister discussed the country's metropolitan problems in various areas and measures to contain the Omicron variant in meeting officials and mayors of the country.

In the meeting held on Tuesday afternoon Ahmad Vahidi said the problems of metropolitan cities were heard from the officials, some of which were related to laws.

Problems of revenue sources, transportation, clean air, environment, and human resources were raised in this meeting. He emphasized that due to the importance of municipalities in providing services and creating a calm environment for the people, the necessary decisions were made, and some follow-ups with some organizations are required.

IRGC Ground Force Employs New Homegrown Tank in Military Drill

TEHRAN (PressTV)- Marking the third day of massive joint military exercises, the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC)'s Ground Force has employed an advanced homegrown tank dubbed Karrar for the first time.

Karrar, an upgraded version of the T-72m tanks, came into service during the Great Prophet 17 joint drills in the country's southern coasts on Wednesday.

The new tank is furnished with special coatings to withstand heatwaves and can hide from heat-seeking missiles. It is also equipped with GPS navigation systems.

The Great Prophet 17 drills kicked off on Monday, covering the coastlines of the southern Iranian provinces of Hormozgan, Bushehr, and Khuzestan.

The IRGC Ground Force's special units practiced their defensive skills in Lark Island.

They used new weapons and military equipment as well as new tactics to carry out offensive and defensive operations. After receiving intelligence on the hypothetical enemy, they hit the identified targets with heavy and semi-heavy weapons.

Iran's Armed Forces hold routine military exercises throughout the year. Iranian military experts and technicians have in recent years made great progress in developing and manufacturing a broad range of domestically-manufactured equipment, making the armed forces self-sufficient in this regard.

Tehran to Host 18th Astana Summit

TEHRAN (MNA)- Russia, Iran, and Turkey have agreed to hold the next Astana format summit in Tehran in February-March 2022, Senior Assistant to Iranian Foreign Minister for Special Political Affairs Ali Asghar Khaji said on Wednesday.

“Yes, it [the summit] is planned. We are preparing to hold it early next year. It will depend on the pandemic situation. But in general, we have agreed to hold the summit. Most likely, we will be able to hold it in February or March,” the Iranian diplomat said told TASS.

Khaji said the issue was on the agenda of talks in Nur-Sultan and will be reflected in a separate provision of the guarantor nations' final statement.

When asked whether the summit will be preceded by a foreign ministers' meeting, he replied, “Yes, we have agreed on the matter. It will be next year. In January or early February, we will hold a meeting of foreign ministers, and a summit will follow that.”

He also said that the next international Astana format meeting on Syria will be convened within a few weeks after the summit of Russia, Iran, and Turkey. “It [the date] depends on the summit, several weeks after the summit,” the Iranian diplomat said.

On July 1, 2020, Russian, Iranian and Turkish leaders held an online summit dedicated to Syrian regulation, discussing the prospects of a face-to-face meeting in Tehran when the epidemiological situation improves.

Industry Ministry Urged to Set Up an Independent Department for SMEs

TEHRAN (MNA) - Given the importance of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), at least one independent department should be established in Ministry of Industry, Mining and Trade for them so that they will be specifically supported, a board member of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines, and Agriculture (ICCIMA) stressed.

Criticizing the same view toward the SMEs as that toward the large industries, Keyvan Kashefi said: “The rules and regulations are the same for both categories of industries, which puts double pressure on small and medium industries.”

Today, about 80 percent of Iran's exports are made by about 1,200 large companies, and this has led to the focus of attention and resources, especially the governmental resources, on these industries; he lamented, adding, “Although large industries are drivers of the economy and should be considered, small and medium industries should not be neglected.”

He further considered the neglect of small and medium industries as the main harm to the country's economy.

Iran's Ministry of Industry, Mining and Trade's data show that 31.187 trillion rials (about \$107.5 million) has been paid to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and semi-finished industrial projects with an over 60 percent physical progress during the first three months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21-June 21).

The mentioned facilities, which are provided for renewing machinery, equipping production units, or completing semi-finished projects, have been paid in the form of bank loans to 917 projects and production units.

The program for offering bank facilities to SMEs and semi-finished projects was kicked off in February 2019 by the Industry Ministry in collaboration with the Central Bank of Iran (CBI).

Martyrdom of Iran Envoy Biggest Evidence for Saudi Crimes in Yemen

TEHRAN (IRNBA) - Yemeni Ambassador to Iran Ibrahim Dailami said on Wednesday that Ambassador Hassan Irlou's martyrdom was the biggest evidence for the crimes Saudi Arabia committed against the Yemeni people.

Irlou who had tested positive for COVID-19 in Yemen last week passed away on Tuesday after coming back to Iran for remedy.

Speaking in the concession ceremony of Irlou, Dailami said that the late ambassador was the best person to represent Iran in Yemen and the Yemeni people would never forget his struggles for Yemen.

Irlou had been also suffering from injuries inflicted by chemical weapons used by the ousted regime of Saddam Hussein during the eight-year war between Iran and Iraq in the 1980s.

Iran's Foreign Ministry has said that he was brought back to Iran in an inappropriate condition due to a delay in required cooperation by some countries in the region.

Iran had contacted some states in the region to bring Irlou back to the country.

Tokyo to Cooperate With Tehran In Fight Against COVID-19

MASHHAD (IRNA) - Japanese Ambassador to Iran Kazutoshi Aikawa said on Tuesday that the fight against COVID-19 has not ended yet and the Japanese government tries to cooperate with Iran in this fight.

The Japanese ambassador said that Japan has donated some 3 million doses of its domestically-developed COVID-19 vaccines to Iran part of which were inoculated to Afghan immigrants in the country.

Aikawa said that during his visit to the northeastern Iranian province of Khorasan Razavi he visited the joint border between Iran and Afghanistan.

Referring to the recent developments in Afghanistan, he said that Tokyo tries to have more cooperation with Iran to help the Afghan refugees.

Iran Makes Technology of Producing Drone Indigenous

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Ground Force has said that the country achieved technology of producing drone and made this technology as indigenous.

“Our military drones” can target any needed point, Brigadier General Mohammad Pakpour said on the sidelines of military drills named Great Prophet 17, according to report of IRGC information center on Wednesday.

Islamic Republic of Iran has updated its tactical doctrine corresponding to new threats, the commander noted.

IRGC has to keep itself updated and ready for facing the enemies, he added.

Iran's defense system is now equipped with missiles with pinpoint accuracy thanks to efforts by indigenous experts, the commander announced.

The Great Prophet 17 drills kicked off on Monday (December 20) in the southern Iranian coastlines in Khuzestan, Bushehr and Hormuzgan provinces.

New Iran-Azerbaijan-Georgia Corridor To Facilitate Transit to Europe

TABRIZ (IRNA) - A new corridor among Iran, Azerbaijan and Georgia will facilitate transit of commodities to Europe, an Iranian official said.

Orujali Alizadeh, head of Eastern Azerbaijan's Road Maintenance and Transportation Organization, told IRNA on Wednesday that the new corridor has been constructed following a memorandum of understanding inked by these three countries.

Three vehicles carrying flags of Iran, Azerbaijan and Georgia departed Tabriz, the capital city of East Azarbaijan province in Iran, to Batumi port city in Georgia's Autonomous Republic of Adjara symbolically, Alizadeh noted.

According to the official, the transit corridor not only facilitates the export of cargos from Iran to Batumi on the coast of the Black Sea but also provides the Islamic Republic with the opportunity to export to other regional states, adding that it will increase the transit of goods from former republics of the Soviet Union to Europe.

Pointing to the fact that Batumi port city is the biggest port to reach Europe via the Black Sea, he added that the corridor will also help Iran in particular Tabriz develop trade ties with European countries.

Moreover, the European nations can also export their goods to Iran through Batumi port, he said.

The Iran-Azerbaijan-Georgia transit corridor is considered one of the shortest routes and the most cost-effective corridors between Europe and Iran, he said, noting that the corridor is a proper alternate for existing routes.

The distance between Tabriz to Batumi on the map is 557 kilometers.

The Islamic Republic of Iran also conducts trade exchanges with European states via Turkey.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	12:03
■ Evening (Maghreb)	17:16
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	05:41
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	07:11

23. He cannot be questioned for His acts, but they will be questioned (for theirs).
 24. Or have they taken for worship (other) gods besides him? Say, "Bring your convincing proof: this is the Message of those with me and the Message of those before me."
 But most of them know not the Truth, and so turn away. Surah 21. The Prophets (23 - 24)

Sri Lanka Inks \$251m Tea for Oil Debt Deal With Iran

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Iran and Sri Lanka and Iran on Tuesday signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to settle \$251 million worth of credit outstanding with Ceylon Petroleum Corporation (CPC) with supply of tea of equivalent value.

The Plantation Ministry and Iran's Ministry of Industries, Mines and Trade were the signatories of the MoU. Under the scheme, \$ 251 million outstanding from CPC to Iran's National Iranian Oil Company will be settled via the export of Ceylon Tea to Iran.

The Ministry of Plantation of Sri Lanka and the Ministry of Industries, Mines and Trade of the Islamic Republic of Iran agreed to formulate a scheme for the settlement of a sum of US\$ 251 Million outstanding from the Ceylon Petroleum Corporation to the National Iranian Oil Company by means of utilizing the said sum to facilitate the export of Ceylon Tea to Iran by signing a memorandum of understanding.

The MoU was signed Dr. Ramesh Pathirana, Minister Plantation of Sri Lanka and Alireza Paymanpak, Deputy Minister of Industry, Mine and Trade of Islamic Republic of Iran.

Iran is among the top 10 importing countries of Ceylon Tea for the past several decades. Ceylon Tea which had a market share of around 47% in 2016 dropped to around 25% in 2020 due to the economic sanctions resulting in banking restrictions.

Due to U.S. sanctions imposed on Iran in November 2012 and with the absence of an accepted payment mechanism through the banking system, Sri Lanka tea exporters found it difficult to receive the export proceeds from Iranian buyers.

The proposed scheme is to seek the possibilities of operationalizing a mechanism to settle the long outstanding debt to the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) by Ceylon Petroleum Corporation (CPC) through increasing the export of Ceylon Tea.

Under this scheme, the Ministry of Finance is expected to release Sri Lanka Rupees of an equivalent amount of \$5m per month in settlement of the outstanding debt arising until the entirety is settled.

The Tea Board will then pay individual exporters in rupee at the central bank exchange rate.



"This scheme will not violate any UN or US sanctions since tea has been categorized as a food item under humanitarian grounds while none of the black listed Iranian Banks will be involved in the equation," Sri Lanka's Plantation Ministry said in a statement.

The deal will neither bring foreign exchange to the country and non will go out, the ministry said.

Sri Lanka had exported \$14.5m of tea to Iran up to November 2021, up 0.39 percent from a year earlier.

Sri Lanka's Plantation Ministry said Ceylon Tea export to Iran had dropped from a peak of 38.42 million kilograms in 2013.

After signing the MoU, Paymanpak said that unfortunately oil has been the major trade item between Iran and Sri Lanka and the non-oil exports to Sri Lanka are less than \$100m. He added that unfortunately Sri Lankan business activists are not aware of Iran's economic capacities or its non-oil exports and he has tried to prepare the grounds for boosting cooperation during his visit.

He noted that a joint economic committee is to be first launched and then the two countries will move for the launch of the joint chamber of commerce.

He noted that Sri Lanka can be a good market for Iranian companies in the fields of petrochemicals and dairy products, and in return Iran can import some raw material but talks should be held on the price for materializing the deal.

Paymanpak noted that Iran can take advantage of Sri Lanka in production of agro machineries or assembling final products in this country as Sri Lanka can be a good gateway for Iran's products to the East Asia.

He reiterated that direct relation between business activists of Iran and Sri Lanka is the best solution for expansion of trade ties between the two countries and called for the launch of the joint chamber of commerce.

He went on to say that there are huge agro and mining resources in Sri Lanka that can create good opportunity for direct or indirect exports of Iranian products.

HOSCO Voices Readiness for Indigenization of Marine Industries Needs



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – The CEO of Hormozgan Steel Company (HOSCO) Mr. Ataollah Maroofkhani in meeting with the commander of Iran's Navy Rear Admiral Shahram Irani hailed the navy for providing security in the region and said outcome of this security is the efforts of Iranian industrialists in the economic front.

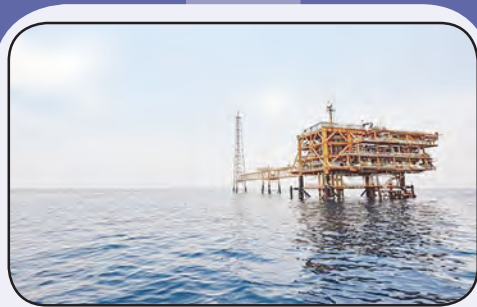
In the meeting, Maroofkhani said currently there is a good cooperation between national steel industries and marine industries, adding that HOSCO is able to produce steel with higher strength and it is currently providing the required grades of marine industries.

He also pointed to the high capability of domestic experts and the progress in the national steel industries. He added that the company has the most advanced slab production line and it produces high quality steel products and can meet the demands of other industries.

He also announced readiness of the company for more cooperation with defense industries and said the company is keen to indigenize the needs of the national defense industries especially by Navy industries with full studies and using domestic knowledge and to meet the demands.

Meanwhile Rear Admiral Irani, for his part, said it is an honor to them to see HOSCO in higher levels and said he is sure that this can happen by the company. He reiterated that the Navy has constant cooperation with steel companies and expressed hope that the Navy provides its marine industries needs from HOSCO.

South Pars Rich Gas Output Exceeds 700 mcm/d



TEHRAN (Shana) - Production and Operations Director of Pars Oil and Gas Company (POGC) said a daily production of 705 million cubic meters of rich gas has been realized at South Pars Gas Field.

According to Pars Oil and Gas Company, Alireza Ebadi stated that gas production from the 37 operational platforms of South Pars was going on favorably and according to the plans, adding: "Considering the role of natural gas in the macroeconomic management of the country and the commitment of Pars Oil and Gas Company in providing 70% of the increasing demand for gas, especially in the cold season, we were able to go beyond the approved plan of the National Iranian Oil Company in recent days, with more than 100% of the required gas recovery."

The official further noted that production of gas from the field stood at an average of 682 mcm in the month of Azar (the ninth month in the Iranian calendar which ends on December 21).

He said that the daily gas production capacity of the joint gas field is 700 million cubic meters, and added: "We hope that with the completion of some wells of developing platforms and reaching the production capacity ceiling, this figure will be proportionate to the increase in annual gas consumption of the country next year."

Iran, India Agree to Increase Freight Traffic Through Chabahar

TEHRAN (PressTV) - India has agreed to increase its freight transit through Iran to help more traffic pass through the strategic port of Chabahar, according to the Iranian transportation minister Rostam Ghasemi.

"We have had some good discussions on the issue and we agreed that freight transit through this path should increase," Ghasemi said in a briefing with reporters.

The comments come more than a week after Iran, India and Uzbekistan held a virtual meeting to discuss the situation on the Chabahar, Iran's only Ocean port located on the Sea of Oman where trade has plummeted after the takeover of the Taliban in Afghanistan.

Chabahar had been viewed as a major trade gateway between the Indian Ocean and Afghanistan and other landlocked countries in the Central Asia region.

Iran has invested heavily on construction of a railroad connecting Chabahar to the Afghan border while India has contributed financially to provision of port operation equipment in one of the terminals in Chabahar.

Ghasemi said that Chabahar has a capacity for processing 30 million tons of cargo per year, adding that Iran expects other parties involved in the project to increase their financial contribution to development work.

He said Iran will need to invest more on the transportation network supporting Chabahar, adding that railway connected to the port should reach northern Iranian areas bordering Central Asian countries.

The minister said that size of investment requires assurances from countries like India that freight traffic through Chabahar will increase.

He described previous agreements with India on Chabahar as imperfect, adding that Tehran and New Delhi should work to improve the deal.

Proper Transportation Eases Sanctions' Effects

TEHRAN (IP) - Iran's Executive Vice President says that transportation would help the country not be a single-product exporter and ease the impacts of the sanctions.

Speaking on the sidelines of the closing ceremony of the fifth edition of the Transportation, Logistics and Related Industries Exhibition, Solat Mortazavi said that transportation as a source of supply could meet part of the country's foreign exchange needs.

Mortazavi further said: "Transportation transit is one of the components in the development of revenue generation and has added value in any country."

"In our country, the appropriate geographical location along with the air, sea, and rail transportation can be a leading infrastructure and employment-generating, which is valuable," he added.

The Executive Vice President recalled that recent practical steps were taken in the maritime and air transit industry to connect some railway lines to neighboring countries.

Mortazavi further noted: "After the victory of the

Islamic Revolution, despite all the problems the transportation system was dealing with, we have taken good measures in various areas of the infrastructure, but it seems that our country's capacity is higher than this and we could not have taken effective steps in the rail transportation."

The Executive Vice President stressed the provision of the necessary incentives for the domestic and foreign investors and the support for technology ecosystems and knowledge-based companies in the field of transportation to achieve the 8% growth determined in the budget bill of the following year.

The fifth edition of the Transportation, Logistics, and Related Industries Exhibition was wrapped up in Tehran on Dec.21, 2021, with Iran's Road and Urban Development Minister Rostam Ghasemi, the Executive Vice President Solat Mortazavi, and the Vice President for Parliamentary Affairs Mohammad Hosseini.

A total of 223 companies are participating in this exhibition, of which 90% are private, in addition to 40 startups and 22 knowledge-based companies.

KBCs to be used to Boost Output of 700 Oil, Gas Wells

TEHRAN (Shana) – Oil Minister Javad Owji said the capabilities of Iranian knowledge-based companies (KBCs) would be used to enhance production of 700 oil and gas well in the country.

Owji, speaking at a ceremony commemorating the National Research Day, said: "One of the ways to create jobs is using the power of the country's elites, especially in low-income areas. Today, thank God, the oil industry is determined to use these elites."

"About 50% of our exports are raw or semi-raw products, which is a great weakness for the country, so the use of knowledge-based companies in this field in addition to generating value added, can create employment and favorable hard currency for the country," he went on to add.

He stated that the oil industry today needs KBCs and new technologies, adding: "More than 115 years have passed since the exploration of oil in Iran, but unfortunately today in many production areas in the upstream and downstream parts of the oil industry, methods are traditional."

Felicitation Message on the Occasion of 33rd Foundation Anniversary of POGC



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – On the occasion of the 33rd anniversary of the foundation of Pars Oil and Gas Company (POGC), the CEO of the company Mr. Mohammad Meshkinfam in a message felicitated the day.

In his message, Meshkinfam referred to the foundation of the company which happened on December 22, 1998, as one of the subsidiary bodies of National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) with an important responsibility for developing the biggest gas field of the world. It started work in the form of a young, capable and agile organization in the upstream fields of oil and gas industries.

In his message the company has maintained its production while it has started several new projects in the field of developing oil and gas fields. He said the outcome of the foundation of POGC in its 23 brilliant years of activities is that it has turned into a dynamic company with capable and experienced staff which enjoys capacity for presence in the international scenes.

In his message, Meshkinfam pointed to some achievements of the company in his 23 years of existence and congratulated the day to his hard-working and endeavoring colleagues in the company.

Pars Oil and Gas Company (POGC), a subsidiary of National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC), was established in 1998. POGC's mandate is the development of the South Pars gas field and North Pars gas field respectively. Decisiveness of the Oil Ministry to uphold and exploit the Islamic Republic of Iran rights in the South Pars gas field led onto the establishment of POGC.

Thailand Reimposes Quarantine for Travelers

BANGKOK (Dispatches) - Thailand reimposed mandatory coronavirus quarantine measures for foreign tourists on Tuesday, nixing a quarantine-free travel scheme as the kingdom seeks to stifle the spread of the Omicron variant.

The pandemic has clobbered the country's tourism-dominated economy, which last year experienced its worst performance since the 1997 Asian financial crisis.

In early November Thailand reopened to fully vaccinated travelers -- who had to isolate for a night until they received a negative PCR test -- from more than 60 countries.



Zuma Can Appeal Return to Jail

JOHANNESBURG (Dispatches) - South Africa's former president Jacob Zuma can appeal a court ruling last week that he should not enjoy medical parole and should return to jail.

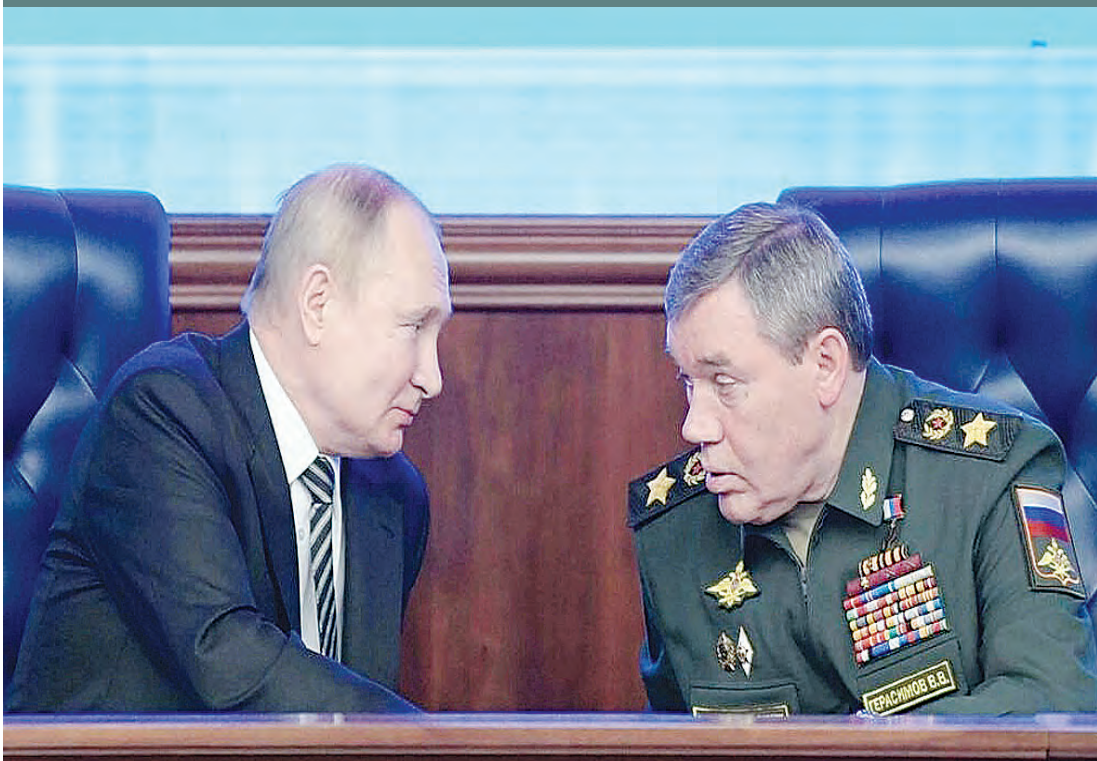
High Court Judge Elias Matojane ruled last Wednesday that the September decision to place the 79-year-old on medical parole was "unlawful".

The same judge on Tuesday decided to allow an appeal.

"In my view, this matter merits the Supreme Court of Appeal's attention," he said at the end of a virtual hearing. He said another court may find that Zuma should be treated with "compassion, empathy and humanity" because of his ill health and advanced age.



Putin Warns West of Military Measures Over Ukraine Threats



MOSCOW (AFP) - President Vladimir Putin warned that Russia was prepared to take military steps in response to "unfriendly" Western actions over the Ukraine conflict, in a sharp escalation of rhetoric.

The Russian president has for weeks accused the United States and the Washington-led NATO military alliance of stoking tensions near Moscow's borders, but these were his first comments hinting at potential conflict.

Putin told defense ministry officials that if the West continued its "obviously aggressive stance" Russia would take "appropriate retaliatory military-technical measures". Russia "will react toughly to unfriendly steps", he said, adding that he wanted to underscore that, "we have every right to do so".

The United States has been sounding the alarm since mid-November that Moscow could be planning a large-scale attack on its ex-Soviet neighbor Ukraine and has warned Putin of unprecedented sanctions.

Western governments have accused Moscow of amassing some 100,000 troops near its border with eastern Ukraine, where Kiev has been fighting pro-Russia separatists since 2014. Russia denies plotting an invasion and has demanded legal guarantees over its security from the United States and NATO, demanding the alliance stop an eastward expansion.

Last week Moscow presented demands to the United States and NATO saying the alliance must not admit new members or establish military bases in ex-Soviet countries.

Putin said Tuesday that Russia was "extremely concerned" over what he said was US missile deployments in Poland and Romania, which he said would soon be capable of launching Tomahawk cruise missiles. "If this infrastructure moves further -- if US and NATO missile systems appear in Ukraine -- then their approach time to Moscow will be reduced to seven or 10 minutes," he said, adding that the time would be cut even shorter with hypersonic weapons.

Despite hinting at conflict, Putin said that Russia wants to avoid "bloodshed".

"We want to resolve issues by political and diplomatic means," he said.

But the Russian leader repeated grievances over Washington's support for Ukraine, which includes training Kiev's forces and committing to them more than \$2.5 billion.

Those actions, Putin said, are taking place "at the doorstep of our house".

Even if Moscow receives U.S. security guarantees, Putin said he would be wary of them because "the United States easily withdraws from all international treaties that for one reason or another become uninteresting to them".

The West has warned that Putin could use the pretext of provocations in Ukraine to launch a full-scale attack.

Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu accused Washington of plotting "provocations" in eastern Ukraine. He said US mercenaries had brought "reserves of an unknown chemical component" to two Ukrainian towns on the frontline of the war with separatists.

Chile's New President Pledges an Orderly Economy

SANTIAGO (Dispatches) - Chilean leftist Gabriel Boric pledged to maintain an "orderly economy" and to move swiftly on naming a Cabinet, a day after a sweeping electoral victory propelled him to become Chile's youngest-ever democratically elected president.

Boric, a former student protest leader who leads a leftist coalition and has pledged to overhaul Chile's economic model, firmly beat out far-right rival Jose Antonio Kast, who quickly conceded defeat, helping give certainty to the result.

The win marked another advance for Latin America's left, and bolstered talk of a new "pink tide" in the region, as raging poverty fanned by the coronavirus pandemic sways voters toward those who promise bigger government and higher social spending.

His rise - and the wider polarization of the vote - had rattled Chile's markets and spooked mining firms concerned about his rhetoric to "bury" the country's market-orientated economic model, push higher taxes and tighten environmental regulation.

Boric, the 35-year-old former law student, had previously pledged to bury Chile's "neoliberal" economic model but in recent weeks softened his tone in an apparent nod to more centrist voters.



Romanian Crowd Tries to Storm Parliament in Protest at COVID-19 Pass

BUCHAREST (Dispatches) - Romanian protesters tried to force their way into parliament on Tuesday, blocking traffic and vandalizing some cars in the capital Bucharest in an attempt to prevent lawmakers from making a COVID-19 health pass mandatory for workers.

Riot police were caught off guard when hundreds of protesters poured in through a yard gate, spray painting cars and forcing security staff to block the building's entryways. The protesters later left. Police did not use force.

While the ruling coalition of centrists and leftists is currently negotiating the terms of a health pass mandate, no such bill is on parliament's legislative agenda at the moment.

An estimated 2,000-2,500 people from across the country gathered outside parliament in the morning waving Romanian flags and chanting "Freedom," in a protest organised by the opposition ultra-nationalist Alliance for Uniting Romanians (AUR).

In October, Romanian senators narrowly rejected a bill requiring medical staff, public sector workers and those of large privately-owned firms to carry a COVID-19 health pass which was aimed at boosting vaccine uptake.

The coalition government is negotiating a new bill which would require most workers to show they are either vaccinated, have recovered from the virus or have a recent negative test, but have yet to agree on who pays for testing and for how long.

Romania is the European Union's second-least vaccinated state, with roughly 40% of the population inoculated amid distrust in state institutions and poor vaccine education. At the height of the fourth wave in late October, Romania topped global lists of new coronavirus deaths per million.

Georgians Vow Mass Hunger-Strike

TBILISI (AFP) - Several thousand supporters of Georgia's jailed opposition leader and ex-president Mikheil Saakashvili rallied Tuesday vowing a "mass hunger-strike" to secure his release after doctors said he was tortured in custody.

Waving Georgia's five-cross flag and holding banners that read "Free Saakashvili!" protesters marched through the capital Tbilisi before gathering outside parliament for the rally timed to coincide with the politician's 54th birthday.

Saakashvili's arrest exacerbated a political crisis stemming from parliamentary polls last year that the opposition denounced as fraudulent.

It also spurred the largest anti-government protests in a decade. "Today, we are launching a mass hunger-strike that will not end until Mikheil Saakashvili is released from captivity," Nika Melia, the chairman of Saakashvili's United National Movement (UNM), said to applause.

It was not immediately clear how many people intended to participate in the hunger-strike outside the UNM headquarters.

"This is a non-violent protest, a tough move, we have no other choice but to put pressure on the regime so that it loosens its grip on the Georgian state which

it has captured," Melia, the leader of the country's main opposition group, said.

In a message to supporters that was read out at the rally by Saakashvili's mother, Giuli Alasania, the former leader called for national unity and peaceful mass protests to pressure authorities to hold snap parliamentary polls.

He said Georgia's "long-time dream and historic aspiration of European integration is under threat".

"We are in vital need of free media, impartial judiciary, fair elections. We need freedom here and now, and for good."

"Changing the current regime is an essential pre-condition for the fulfilment of our Western aspirations," he added referring to the ruling Georgian Dream party founded by the powerful oligarch Bidzina Ivanishvili.

Georgia's richest man who made his fortune in Russia, Ivanishvili is widely believed to be the top decision-maker in the country, despite having no official political role.

One of the demonstrators, 47-year-old architect Giorgi Darsavelidze, told AFP that "Ivanishvili's regime will crumble under popular pressure".

"We will not stop until Saakashvili is free, until Georgia is back to its European path," Darsavelidze added.



Belarus, Poland Block UN Team From Accessing Border



NEW YORK (Dispatches) - The UN said Tuesday that its investigators had not been granted access to the Belarus-Poland border but their probe had uncovered "dire conditions" for migrants camped there.

A UN rights office team had travelled to Poland from November 29 to December 3, but "was not granted access to the restricted border area," spokeswoman Liz Throssell told reporters.

And "Belarus regrettably did not accept our request to visit," she said.

"We urge the authorities of both countries to allow access to the border areas ... and to stop practices that put refugees and other migrants at risk."

Thousands of migrants -- mostly from the Middle East -- have camped in Belarus for weeks, often in bitter conditions, hoping to cross the Polish border and enter the European Union.

A number of people are reported to have died in the harsh conditions.

Western countries accuse Belarus of having engineered the migrant influx to pressure the bloc, which has imposed sanctions over the regime's crackdown on the opposition and independent media.

Belarus denies this and has urged the EU to take in the migrants.

Throssell called Tuesday on "both countries to urgently address this appalling situation in line with their obligations under international human rights law and refugee law."

Without access to the border, she said the UN team had interviewed 31 people who had arrived in Poland through Belarus between August and November this year.

"They described dire conditions on both sides of the border, with no or limited access to food, clean water and shelter, often amid freezing temperatures," Throssell said.

Throssell said most of those interviewed by the UN team described being "beaten or threatened by security forces" on the Belarusian side.

They also said "Belarusian security forces forced them to cross the border, instructing them when and where to cross, and prevented people from leaving the border area to return to Minsk."



Mahmodieh (\$3700)
400sq.m, 4bdrs
S/pool, S, J
L.balcony
Nice view
Fully Furn

Shanon (adviser)

Shariati Villa (\$3500)
1000sq.m
5bdrs, S/p, S
J, balcony
pkg, & yard

Parsian

(\$1800)
Darrous Apt
160sq.m, 3bdrs
balcony, & F.F

Niavaran Apts
(\$1700) 2bdrs, S/p, F.F
(\$2300) 3bdrs, S/p, F.F
(\$3000) 4bdrs, S/p, F.F

(\$8000)
Velenjak bldg
5storey, 20bdrs
S/p, yard, & pkgs

Vanak (\$1500)
130sq.m, 2bdrs
balcony, & Nicely Furn

Jordan office
250sq.m, 4bdrs
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Spain Extends Energy Tax Cuts to May 2022

MADRID (Dispatches) - Spain will extend a series of tax cuts brought in to provide relief to consumers hit by sky-high energy bills until May 2022, government spokesperson Isabel Rodriguez said on Tuesday.

Extending the package of cuts, which were introduced in June and were due to expire at the end of the year, will have an impact of some 2 billion euros (\$2.26 billion) over the first months of next year, Rodriguez told reporters after the weekly cabinet meeting.

Strong demand for power as economies emerge from the pandemic, plus infrastructure outages and low stocks have driven gas and power prices to record highs across Europe and they are unlikely to fall before the end of winter.



Lebanon Needs \$12-15b To Kickstart Recovery

BEIRUT (Dispatches) - Lebanon needs to receive 12 to 15 billion dollars from its partners to kickstart its economic recovery and shore up fast-diminishing foreign currency reserves, Central Bank Governor Riad Salameh said Tuesday.

Lebanon is grappling with an unprecedented economic crisis branded by the World Bank as one of the planet's worst in modern times. More than 80 percent of the population lives in poverty and the currency has lost more than 90 percent of its black market value amid political squabbling that has delayed an agreement with the International Monetary Fund.

"Our quota in the International Monetary Fund is 4 billion," Salameh said in an AFP interview.

"If countries add to it, we could reach 12 to 15 billion, an amount that could help start Lebanon's recovery and restore confidence," he said.

Lebanon defaulted on its debt for the first time last year but political leaders have continued to resist key reforms demanded by donors to unlock necessary funds.

Meanwhile, the central bank's mandatory dollar reserves have been slashed by more than half, according to Salameh, who is widely viewed as a key culprit behind an economic crash many blame on central bank policies.

"The mandatory reserves are around 12.5 billion dollars," that the central bank can't spend, Salameh said, explaining that an additional \$1.5 billion in reserves had been freed up for central bank spending. The mandatory reserves stood at \$32 billion before the start of the economic crisis in 2019.

Salameh dismissed criticism blaming him for the crisis, saying that "had it not been for the central bank and its reserves, Lebanon would not have been able to carry on".

"The central bank deals with the outcome of the crisis, it is not the side causing it."

The fast-diminishing reserves are threatening a subsidy program that had initially covered fuel, medicine, flour and other key imports before it petered out.

The central bank can afford to finance partial subsidies on a few remaining key imports for "around six to nine months," if no additional measures are taken to combat the depreciation of the Lebanese pound, Salameh said.

Officially pegged at 1,507 to the greenback since 1997, the Lebanese pound sold for nearly 30,000 to the dollar on the black market earlier this month, a record low.

The official fixed rate is "no longer realistic", Salameh said, while explaining that a unified exchange rate

Lebanon last year started IMF talks that were derailed due to differences between officials over the size of financial sector losses.

But IMF talks have relaunched in recent weeks during which Lebanese officials have agreed that financial sector losses amount to around \$69 billion.

"Lebanon is still in the stage of crushing numbers," said Salameh who is part of Lebanon's IMF negotiating team.

"The Lebanese side hasn't yet presented a plan to the IMF for discussion."

Salameh, one of the world's longest-serving central bank governors, is facing judicial investigations in France, Switzerland and other European countries on suspicion of money laundering and illicit enrichment among other charges.

World Bank Sees Malaysia's Economy Growing 5.8%

KUALA LUMPUR (Dispatches) - Economic recovery in Malaysia is expected to gain momentum in 2022, with the World Bank projecting the economy to grow by 5.8 per cent, mainly driven by an acceleration in private consumption.

The Washington, DC-based institution said exports are projected to continue to expand, albeit at a slower pace, in line with the expected moderation in global trade growth and anticipation that it is to be broad-based, with recovery across all economic sectors.

According to the latest World Bank Malaysia Economic Monitor report titled "Staying Afloat" launched today, the forecast for the year ahead follows growth estimates of 3.3 per cent in 2021, which remains clouded by several downside risks, including new Covid-19 outbreaks and weaker-than-expected global and regional growth.

The World Bank noted that limited fiscal space remains a key challenge whereby the Federal Government revenue, which has been declining since 2013, is projected to reach 14.3 per cent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2022.

The report also said that rigid operating expenditures, namely emoluments, retirement charges, and debt service payments, have grown markedly over time and are expected to take up two-thirds of Federal Government revenue next year, increasing fiscal rigidity and crowding out discretionary spending.

"The pandemic has further constrained Malaysia's already limited fiscal space. Government revenue is expected to decline while rigid expenditures remain high.

Bangladesh, S. Korea Sign \$100m Loan Agreement

DHAKA (Dispatches) - A agreement on "Program Loan for Sustainable Economic Recovery Program (Subprogram)" has been signed between Bangladesh and Korea to provide budget support to mitigate the adverse impact of Covid-19.

Under the agreement, the Korea Eximbank will provide \$100.00 million to Bangladesh government to implement the project.

The loan will bear simple interest rate of 0.05% per annum while maturity period will be 40 years, including a grace period of 15 years.

The loan is aimed at recovering the economy by implementing various reforms in revenue collection system and design schemes to support entrepreneurs who have been adversely affected by Covid-19.

Md Shahriar Kader Siddiky, wing chief and additional secretary of the Economic Relations Division and Kim Tae-soo, Executive director of Korea Eximbank signed the agreement on behalf of respective governments.

Since 1993, the Korea Eximbank has been providing soft loans to various priority development sector projects in Bangladesh.

U.S. Current Account Deficit Jumps to 15-Year High in Q3

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - The U.S. current account deficit surged to a 15-year high in the third quarter amid a record increase in imports as businesses rushed to replenish depleted inventories to meet strong demand.

The Commerce Department said on Tuesday that the current account deficit, which measures the flow of goods, services and investments into and out of the country, accelerated 8.3% to \$214.8 billion last quarter. That was the largest shortfall since the third quarter of 2006.

Data for the second quarter was revised to show a \$198.3 billion deficit, instead of \$190.3 billion as previously reported. Economists polled by Reuters had forecast a \$205.0 billion deficit last quarter.

The current account gap represented 3.7% of gross domestic product. That was the largest share since the fourth quarter of 2008 and was up from 3.5% in the April-June quarter.

Still, the deficit remains below a peak of 6.3% of GDP in the fourth quarter of 2005 as the United States is now a net exporter of crude oil and fuel.

The wider deficit is not a problem for the United States given the dollar's status as the world's reserve currency. The third quarter likely marked a peak for the current account gap, though much would depend on the severity of the COVID-19 Omicron variant. The trade deficit narrowed sharply in October.

"Robust export growth in the fourth quarter suggests the balance has likely reached a cyclical trough and the latest trade data signals a narrower deficit in the fourth quarter," said Mahir Rasheed, a U.S. economist at Oxford Economics in New York. "Assuming a moderate impact from the Omicron variant in the first quarter, we look for stronger foreign consumption and moderating U.S. demand to drive the current account deficit lower next year."

Imports of goods increased \$10.0 billion to a record \$716.4 billion, boosted by petroleum products and chemicals. Services imports rose \$12.6 billion to \$141.0 billion, mostly reflecting personal travel as well as sea freight and air passenger transport.

Exports of goods advanced \$4.8 billion to \$441.6 billion, also a record high, driven by natural gas and petroleum products. There were also increases in exports of medicinal, dental, and pharmaceutical products. But exports of corn and soybeans fell.

Services exports fell \$0.1 billion to \$190.8 billion, pulled down by decreases in charges for licenses for the use of patents and trade secrets. There were also declines in exports of telecommunications, computer and information services. But professional and management consulting services increased.

European Gas Prices Hit Record as Russian Flows Via Yamal Reverse



LONDON (Dispatches) - European gas prices hit a new record high on Tuesday after a pipeline that brings Russian gas to Germany switched to flow east, a move the Kremlin said had no political backdrop, while two big German customers said Gazprom was meeting supply obligations.

Westward gas flows through the Yamal-Europe pipeline, one of the major routes for Russian gas to Europe, had been falling since Saturday and, after stopping early on Tuesday, reversed direction, data from network operator Gascade showed.

Some western politicians and industry experts have accused Russia of withholding gas deliveries to Europe amid political tensions over Ukraine, as well as delays in the certification of another pipeline, Nord Stream 2.

Russia denies any connection.

"There is absolutely no connection (to Nord Stream 2), this is a purely commercial situation", Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told a conference call on Tuesday, asked on possible links between Yamal flows and Nord Stream 2.

Traders said the reverse flows added to bullish factors for the gas market, such as strong power station demand, with many French nuclear plants closed, and colder weather.

The front-month wholesale Dutch gas price, the European benchmark, rose more than 16% to a record high of 171.40 euros (\$193.46) per megawatt hour on Tuesday, and the equivalent British gas contract also hit a new peak at 4.29 pounds (\$5.68) per therm.

"Europe has very little storage buffer this winter and Europe's balance is therefore a lot more dependent on imports than in previous years," James Waddell, head of European gas at Energy Aspects, said.

"Additionally, Gazprom has traditionally shipped around 20% of its supply to Europe through Poland, but these flows have been inconsistent this year and driving up uncertainty about how much gas Europe will actually receive from Russia."

Japan Upgrades Economic View for First Time in 17 Months

TOKYO (Dispatches) - Japan raised its overall economic assessment for the first time in 17 months in December, as consumers and companies have turned more optimistic about the outlook due to falling COVID-19 cases at home even amid risks from the omicron variant of the coronavirus.

Authorities raised their views on private consumption and business conditions, with the services sector underpinned by easing coronavirus restrictions, but flagged ongoing risks from supply constraints and raw material prices.

The world's third-largest economy shrank slightly faster than initially reported in the third quarter. But economists expect a rebound in the final quarter of 2021 after pandemic curbs were lifted by the end of September.

"The economy is picking up as severe conditions due to the coronavirus are gradually easing," the government said in its December economic report on Tuesday.

The report underscores how Japan has so far managed to avoid the fast spread of

omicron seen in the U.S. and the U.K. In the U.S., the variant accounted for 73% of new cases last week, while Japan had confirmed fewer than 70 omicron cases in total as of last weekend.

The Cabinet Office said attention should be given to the new variant, but still sees the economy picking up in the short term. Supportive government policies and progress in the country's return to a semblance of normal life should help, it said.

Authorities raised their view on private consumption for the second month running.

"We upgraded our consumption assessment given the further recovery in services ranging from restaurants to entertainment and other sectors, as well as the rebound in car (sales) amid eased supply constraints," a government official told reporters before the Cabinet approved the report.

The government also upgraded its view on business conditions after the Bank of Japan's quarterly tankan survey showed Japan's service-sector mood improved to a two-year high. Authorities also raised their employment assessment for the first time in 15 months due to increased job postings.

The government downgraded its view on capital expenditure for the first time in 13 months. Firms' capital spending, especially on software investments, slowed in the third quarter, partly because a COVID-19 resurgence over the summer hampered business meeting opportunities, the official said.

Authorities also downgraded their views on housing construction for the first time in 27 months on weak housing starts.

The December report kept assessments on other economic elements such as production and prices unchanged. It also flagged downside risks from supply constraints and fluctuations in raw material prices, maintaining references seen in the November report.

To support the recovery further, parliament approved a record ¥36 trillion extra budget on Monday including payouts to households and companies.



'A Hero' to Compete With 14 Films at 2022 Oscars

TEHRAN (MNA) – The Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences has announced the shortlists in 10 categories for the upcoming 94th Oscars ceremony. The shortlist voting concluded on Dec. 15, and the remaining ones will move on to the official phase one voting. Nomination voting begins on Thursday, Jan. 27, and ends on Tuesday, Feb. 1. The official credits and nominees for all the films will be announced, with the rest of the

Oscar nominations on Tuesday, Feb. 8, Variety reported. Directed by Asghar Farhadi, “A Hero” will compete with “14 other selected films for the best foreign language award. Farhadi is a two-time Oscar winner for ‘A Separation’ and ‘The Salesman’. This is the fifth time he has represented Iran in the race, making him the joint-most submitted director from the country with Majid Majidi.



Foreign Shoppers Swarm Turkey After Lira Crash

EDIRNE (Dispatches) - The sea of Bulgarian buses parked outside a market in Turkey’s historic city of Edirne betrays the scale of the currency crisis impeding President Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s path to a third decade of rule. The mosque-filled city on Turkey’s western edge was an early capital of the Ottoman Empire when it was expanding across the Middle East and Europe in the 14th and 15th centuries. It is now the place where shoppers from Bulgaria and the Balkans -- themselves some of Europe’s poorest countries -- go to stock up on everything from underwear to walnuts at a fraction of their cost back home. “For us, the crisis is good, but it is very bad for the Turkish people,” said tour guide Daniela Mircheva before boarding a bus back to her Bulgarian hometown of Yambol. “We were in a similar situation maybe 10, 11, 12 years ago,” the 49-year-old said, in reference to the 2008 global financial crisis. “It is very difficult.” Turkey’s beleaguered lira has crashed under the weight of an unusual economic experiment Erdogan is conducting in a bid to boost support before elections due by mid-2023. Erdogan has pushed the central bank to slash interest rates in fervently-held belief that this will finally cure Turkey’s chronic inflation problem. It has -- as economists had universally predicted -- done the exact opposite. Consumer prices are climbing at an annual rate of more than 20 percent. Some economists think this pace could accelerate in the coming months. The lira has shed a third of its value since the start of November alone. It was beginning to lose five percent a day until Erdogan announced new currency support measures Monday that managed to suspend the slide. This means Mircheva can afford to pile a few extra jugs of sunflower oil on her bus packed with Bulgarian shoppers. “It is half the price it is in Bulgaria. It is much cheaper for us, much cheaper,” she said. But the mood among the market’s Turkish traders is grim. “It is humiliating,” said Gulsen Kaya from behind her counter filled with sweaters and winter clothes. “Look at what he has done to Turkey!” Erdogan is betting that a cheap lira will create exports-driven growth that puts Turkey on a path followed by China during an economic transformation that pulled millions out of poverty and created a new middle class. He championed the poor when bringing his Islamic-rooted party to power against all odds in 2002. Erdogan then surprised many by opening Turkey up to foreign investment and marshalling nearly a decade of vigorous growth. Economists and diplomats -- as well as some Bulgarians -- struggle to understand why Erdogan has decided to reverse course so dramatically in the past few years. “I think that the people who rule Turkey, if they do the things that I think they should do, then the lira will come back to the levels it was in the summer very, very quickly,” Bulgarian shopper Tinko Garev said.



“I am very unhappy for the Turkish people because I realise what these cheaper prices mean for them.” One senior Western official said the drop in Erdogan’s approval ratings in most polls to as low as 30 percent had put the veteran Turkish leader “in political survival mode”. “You can choose not to believe (individual polls) but the trajectory is clear,” the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said. “He is down to the very bottom of his base of support.” Bulent Reisoglu has been running the Edirne market since it opened after moving from its original location in Istanbul 15 years ago. He said the number of weekly shoppers filling his hangar-like trading center has ballooned from 50,000 to nearly 150,000 since the full effects of the crisis set in. “The number of foreign shoppers have gone up four- or five-fold,” he said. Yet the merchants are making less money because the extra sales are more than offset by the depth of the lira’s collapse. “Our suppliers are sending us new price lists every week,” market trader Utku Bitmez complained. “All the raw materials come from abroad, from Europe, China and Italy,” he said. “The price of these products has doubled since last year.” Reisoglu said he watches merchants nervously eyeing the latest lira exchange rates on their phones. “We are in shock,” the market manager said. “No one expected this big of a devaluation.” The Bulgarian shoppers also seemed to have mixed feelings about getting such great deals. “Local people cannot buy all these things,” said Ilyana Todorova while shopping for clothes with her teenage daughter. “For ordinary people, it is no good.”

Big Ben dials In for 2022



LONDON (AFP) - All four of Big Ben’s dials will be on display for the first time in four years as London rings in 2022, UK parliamentary authorities said on Tuesday. The Great Clock and the Elizabeth Tower have been shrouded in scaffolding since 2017 for extensive renovation work which has also largely silenced the trademark bongos and chimes of the famous bell inside it. But the restoration is nearly complete, and Big Ben will strike 12 for the last time using a temporary mechanism before the original is back in place early in the new year. The 11.5-tonne Victorian-era mechanism was removed from the tower overlooking the River Thames at one end of the UK parliament to protect it from the dust and debris created by works on the 96-metre-high tower. It was transported to a specialist company in northwest England, where all of its more than 1,000 working pieces were cleaned and repaired. Keith Scobie-Youngs, director and co-founder of the Cumbria Clock Company, said it was a “once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to work on the best-known clock in the world” and “the heart of the UK”. “We were able to assemble the time side, the heart-beat, and put that on test in our workshop, so for two years we had that heartbeat ticking away in our test room, which was incredibly satisfying,” he said. “We’re working on the installation of the mechanism in the Tower at the moment, so it’s a very exciting time.” The Great Clock was designed by Edmund Beckett Denison and installed by Edward John Dent in 1859, with the aim of creating the most accurate public clock in the world. Ian Westworth, one of parliament’s team of clock mechanics, said it had been a “duty and privilege” for his team to work on it. “I think Edward John Dent would be pleased as punch that the clock that he made will still be doing the job that he designed it to do, over 160 years later,” he added.

U.S. to Be World’s Biggest LNG Exporter in 2022

LONDON (Dispatches) - The United States is set to become the world’s biggest liquefied natural gas (LNG) exporter in 2022, surpassing Qatar and Australia, and may hold that title for years to come.

In a year when China and other large economies in Europe and Asia scrambled to source enough supply for heating and power generation, the United States was sitting on a bevy of supply - one that will grow in coming years.

Global LNG demand has hit record highs each year since 2015, due mostly to surging demand in China and the rest of Asia. Much of that global appetite has been met by steadily rising U.S. LNG exports, which have reached new records every year since 2016 and is poised to continue in 2022.

The U.S. Energy Information Administration projects U.S. LNG exports will reach 11.5 billion cubic feet per day (bcfd) in 2022. That would account for roughly 22% of expected world LNG demand of 53.3 bcfd next year, according to analysts at Goldman Sachs and would outpace both Australia and Qatar, the two largest exporters at present.

One billion cubic feet is enough gas for about 5 million U.S. homes for a day.

The United States should remain the biggest LNG exporter by capacity until around 2025, when Qatar could regain the lead as its North Field expansion starts to enter service. But if some U.S. developers start building new LNG export plants, the United States may not give up the crown.

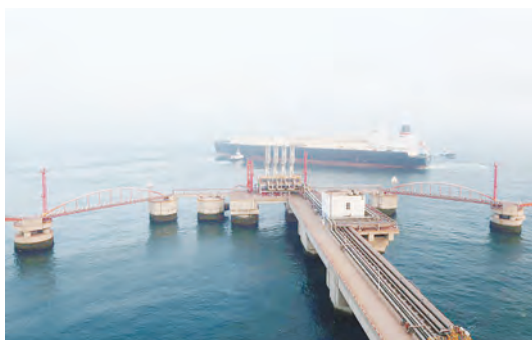
Major U.S. developers like Cheniere Energy, the largest U.S. exporter, have signed numerous long-term deals to sell LNG in recent months that should enable them to secure the financing needed to go forward with additional multibillion-dollar projects.

The United States is expected to become the largest exporter of liquefied natural gas (LNG) by 2022, surpassing Australia and Qatar.

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Many of those long-term contracts came from Chinese buyers.

“After years of avoiding a commitment to buy U.S. LNG, Chinese companies have finally made their move,” said Nikos Tsafos at the Center for Strategic and



International Studies (CSIS).

So far in 2021, most U.S. LNG exports went to Asia with about 13% going to South Korea, 13% to China and 10% to Japan, according to U.S. energy data. Those were the same top three destinations in 2020 when 13% of U.S. LNG went to South Korea, 12% to Japan and 9% to China.

The growth of U.S. LNG exports helps people worldwide “get greater access to an abundant and reasonably-priced product that helps ease the world’s current supply crunch,” said Charlie Riedl, executive director for the Center for Liquefied Natural Gas (CLNG).

Gas prices around the world repeatedly reached record highs in 2021 as utilities tried to lock in LNG cargoes to rebuild low stockpiles in Europe and meet heavy demand in Asia. U.S. gas futures also rose, hitting a 12-year closing high in October. But after mild weather in early December, U.S. natgas stocks were replenished, and prices overseas are now 11 times higher.

The oil and gas industry touts natural gas as a less polluting fossil fuel than coal or oil. Gas burns more cleanly, so switching from coal lowers emissions, although unburned gas or methane released to the atmosphere contributes heavily to global warming.

Utilities around the world have been using gas to keep power prices relatively low and maintain reliable electric grids as they meet rising energy demand while transitioning from coal to cleaner renewables. However, some countries, including China, have boosted coal production due to the lack of available LNG.

Kurdish Companies...

FROM PAGE 1

Masjedi later told Rudaw that he has asked his country’s departments of exportation, transit and investment “to have joint work [with Kurdish companies] and export their products to the Kurdistan Region. I hope the Region’s businessmen will cooperate. This will be a good step towards progress.” Kamal Muslim, Kurdistan Regional Government’s (KRG) Trade and Industry Minister, who accompanied Masjedi to the fair, told Rudaw that such fairs are good means to bolster bilateral ties.

Arash Hesari, who represents an Iranian company at the fair, told Rudaw that his company produces fabric for medical purposes and disposable goods. “We used to import products from China and India but now we produce them in Iran.”

Kamaram Hatem Khani, who represents another Iranian company, said his company makes robots used in petrochemical and food industries. “We decided to bring these robots to Kurdistan because they purchase them from Turkey and Europe.”

A number of local companies attended the fair as well. Mohammed Surchi is the owner of one of these companies. He complained that there are not enough similar fairs in the Kurdistan Region.

Tehran was a key ally of the Region in the war against the Islamic State (ISIS). Iran was the first country to offer assistance in 2014 to the Peshmerga who faced a battle against the terror group with outdated equipment.

Masjedi met with Kurdistan Region President Nechirvan Barzani and other Kurdish leaders on Tuesday.

Barzani and Masjedi discussed “the relations between Iraq, the Kurdistan Region and the Islamic Republic of Iran as well as the latest developments in joint cooperation,” a statement from the presidency read following the meeting.

Iran is a major trading partner. Since the overthrow of the regime of Saddam Hussein in 2003, Iraq and the Kurdistan Region have become two important destinations for Iranian goods. Iraq was the second-biggest customer for Iran’s increased exports from February to October of this year.

Iran Trade...

FROM PAGE 1

Iranian government officials have been in talks with the bloc to reach an agreement on free trade, a move that analysts say will significantly boost Iranian exports to the bloc.

IRICA figures published on Tuesday showed that trade with Russia had been responsible for a bulk of exchanges with EAEU over the March-November period as imports from the country topped \$2.56 billion while exports to Russia reached \$375 million.

Iran maintained a positive balance of trade with other EAEU members, namely Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Belarus, over the eight months to late November, said Latifi, adding that Iranian exports to the four countries had amounted to over \$388 million over the period.

EU’s Top Court...

FROM PAGE 1

As per their obligations under the nuclear deal, the Europeans issued the statute in order to keep Iran in the agreement, but companies in the bloc quickly severed ties rather than risk running afoul of U.S.

Under the blocking statute, European firms must seek a legal exemption for withdrawing from Iran due to U.S. sanctions and those failing to do so could be penalized by their governments. Firms, however, can twist the law if they claim that their withdrawal is a business decision.

The court on Tuesday paid lip service to the EU blocking statute in its ruling, saying “the prohibition imposed by EU law on complying with secondary sanctions laid down by the United States against Iran may be relied on in civil proceedings”.

But the judges also said the rules of the blocking statute “cannot infringe the freedom to conduct a business by leading to disproportionate economic loss”.

The Higher Regional Court in Hamburg will have to decide whether upholding the contract with Bank Melli would expose Deutsche Telekom to such a disproportionate economic loss.

Iraqi Delegation...

FROM PAGE 1

“The situation will continue unless the flood waters come from the Iranian side,” Mr Hamid said. Iraq needs Iran to “co-operate to open the flows of water from its Tayeb and Dureij rivers,” Mr Hamid added. Earlier this month the ministry of water resources completed procedures to file a lawsuit with the International Court of Justice against Iran’s water policy.

But action in court will depend on decision-makers in Baghdad. The ministry also issued a warning that Iraq’s Tigris and Euphrates rivers could dry up by 2040 because of declining water levels and climate change. “The rate of decline in water imports to Iraq has begun gradually and will decrease to 30 per cent by 2035,” the Ministry of Water Resources said.

The country’s water inflows during the summer are estimated to be about 40 billion cubic meters. A decrease in supply to 30 per cent of normal levels will result in Iraq receiving 11 billion cubic meters annually, the report said.

NHL to Pause Season Over Covid-19 Issues

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - The National Hockey League and its players union announced early Tuesday that the season will pause, two days before a previously scheduled Christmas break, due to Covid-19 concerns.

Five remaining games scheduled for Thursday were postponed, raising the total number of delayed contests to 49 as nine clubs had already decided to shut down until for the holiday. Two remaining scheduled games will be played on Tuesday with Washington at Philadelphia and reigning Stanley Cup champion Tampa Bay at the Vegas Golden Knights.

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Napoli Captain Insigne Tests Positive for Covid-19

ROME (Dispatches) - Napoli captain Lorenzo Insigne has tested positive for Covid-19, the Serie A club said.

"The player will undergo a period of isolation at home. The team, following indications from the local health authority, has carried out a round of swab tests and the results will be announced in late afternoon," read a club statement. The Italy international has played a central role in Napoli's Serie A title challenge this season, scoring four goals in 15 league appearances and helping Luciano Spalletti's side climb to second place, four points behind leaders Inter Milan.

8 IRAN NEWS

SPORTS

THURSDAY DECEMBER 23, 2021

Embiid's Late Surge Leads Sixers Past Celtics

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Joel Embiid scored nine straight points in the final 1:22 and finished with 41 points and 10 rebounds as the Philadelphia 76ers rallied past the host Boston Celtics for a 108-103 win.

Seth Curry added 26 points and seven assists and Tobias Harris had 25 points with seven boards for the 76ers, who snapped their three-game skid.

Jaylen Brown had a team-high 30 points for Boston, which has lost five of its past seven games. Jayson Tatum totaled 17 points, nine boards and six assists, and Enes Freedom added 15 points and 11 rebounds for the Celtics.

Warriors 113, Kings 98

Stephen Curry saved 15 of his game-high 30 points for the fourth quarter and Draymond Green recorded 16 points, 11 rebounds and 10 assists as short-handed Golden State outlasted even more short-handed Sacramento in San Francisco.

With Andrew Wiggins and Jordan Poole in health and safety protocols and the Warriors still without Klay Thompson and James Wiseman, Golden State used a 29-19 fourth quarter to pull out a win in a game they trailed late in the third period. Tyrese Haliburton had a team-high 24 points for the Kings, who were without six players -- including De'Aaron Fox and Davion Mitchell -- for COVID reasons and Richaun Holmes due to an eye injury.

Jazz 112, Hornets 102

Rudy Gobert scored 23 points and grabbed 21 rebounds, Bojan Bogdanovic also scored 23 points and Donovan Mitchell dropped in 21 to help Utah fend off a furious rally by Charlotte for a tense victory in Salt Lake City.

The Jazz led by 17 points with about 8 1/2 minutes remaining -- and by as many as 22 points in the second quarter -- before the Hornets went on a tear and eventually took the lead with 3:30 left. Utah, however, closed out strong to avoid a third home loss in four nights.

Terry Rozier sparked the Hornets' comeback, scoring 14 of his 20 points in the final 8:10. Charlotte's LaMelo Ball and Miles Bridges each scored 21 points, with Bridges pulling down 11 rebounds and Ball dishing out 11 assists.

PGA Tour Will Allow Players to Compete at Saudi Int'l

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - The PGA Tour has granted permission to its members to miss one of its own events and instead compete at February's Saudi International, Golfweek reported, citing a memo to players.

Thirty players including Phil Mickelson, Dustin Johnson and Bryson DeChambeau were granted waivers to miss the PGA Tour's AT&T Pebble Beach Pro-Am, which is taking place over the same Feb. 3-6 weekend.

Players that compete at the Saudi International had to commit to playing the event in the future as a condition of the waiver.

The PGA Tour confirmed the accuracy of Golfweek's reporting and in an email added a statement from Andy Pazder, PGA Tour chief tournaments and competitions officer:

"While we certainly have grounds under Tour regulations created by and for the players to deny conflicting event releases, we have decided in this instance to allow a group of Tour players the opportunity to play in a single sanctioned tournament outside North America on a recognized Tour, with conditions attached that will contribute to the success of AT&T Pebble Beach Pro-Am in future years."

The Saudi International, which will be on the Asian Tour schedule in 2022, has invited controversy since its inception in 2019 due to allegations of human rights abuses against the Saudi government.

Bencic, Jabeur Test Positive For COVID-19

LONDON (Dispatches) - Olympic tennis champion Belinda Bencic and Tunisian Ons Jabeur have tested positive for COVID-19 following their trip to Abu Dhabi, both said on Tuesday, a day after Rafa Nadal announced he had also tested positive.

Bencic, Jabeur and Nadal had travelled to Abu Dhabi to play in the Mubadala World Tennis Championship exhibition event last week.



Bulls 133, Rockets 118

DeMar DeRozan scored a game-high 26 points and Coby White followed with 24 to lead six players in double figures as host Chicago cruised past Houston for its second victory in as many nights.

Severely short-handed amid a team-wide COVID-19 outbreak, the Bulls lost another player when Alex Caruso left the game in the first half with a sprained left foot. Lonzo Ball contributed 19 points for Chicago, which benefited from a season-high 66 bench points.

Christian Wood posted 23 points and 11 rebounds to lead Houston, giving him six games with at least 20 points and 10 boards in the past 11 contests.

Spurs 116, Clippers 92

Dejounte Murray compiled 24 points, 12 rebounds and 13 assists as visiting San Antonio spoiled the return of Los Angeles' Paul George from an elbow sprain.

Jakob Poeltl scored 17 points and grabbed 11 rebounds for the Spurs, and Keldon Johnson finished with 12 points and 12 rebounds. Murray had his third triple-double in five games.

George scored 25 points on 8-of-18 shooting after missing the previous five contests. Ivica Zubac scored 12 points and pulled down 12 rebounds for the Clippers.

Thunder 102, Grizzlies 99

Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 23 points to fuel visiting Oklahoma City to a win over Memphis. Rookie Josh Giddey collected a career-high-tying 19 points and a career-best 11 assists and Kenrich Williams added 13 points off the bench for the Thunder, who avenged a 152-79 shellacking in Memphis on Dec. 2. The 73-point margin in the earlier contest was the largest in NBA history.

Memphis' Desmond Bane drained five 3-pointers and finished with 25 points. Dillon Brooks scored 19 points, and Ja Morant had 16 points and eight assists in his return from a 12-game absence caused by a left knee injury.



Guardiola Watching Off-Field Behavior Closely

LONDON (Dispatches) - Manchester City manager Pep Guardiola said he keeps a close eye on players during the festive season and those who do not behave properly off the field will be dropped. Jack Grealish and Phil Foden played in City's 7-0 thrashing of Leeds United in midweek but both were unused substitutes in the 4-0 victory at Newcastle United, with Guardiola saying the decision to drop them

was not to keep the squad fresh.

The Telegraph newspaper published a picture of the England duo on a night out after the Leeds game. "No, not rotation," Guardiola said. "I decided on this team because they deserved to play ... and not the other ones."

"At Christmas time I pay a lot of attention to behavior on and off the pitch. And when off the pitch isn't proper, they're not going to play."

"We have to be focused all the time because of distractions at Christmas time and everything that happens -- you have to still be focused," Guardiola added.

The Premier League leaders next play Leicester City on Dec. 26.

Tottenham to Appeal Incredible Expulsion From Europe

LONDON (Dispatches) - Tottenham manager Antonio Conte described UEFA's decision throw his side out of the Europa Conference League as "incredible" and suggested Spurs will launch an appeal through the courts.

Spurs were handed a 3-0 defeat for their final group stage match against Rennes after the match was postponed due to a wave of positive coronavirus cases among Tottenham players and staff.

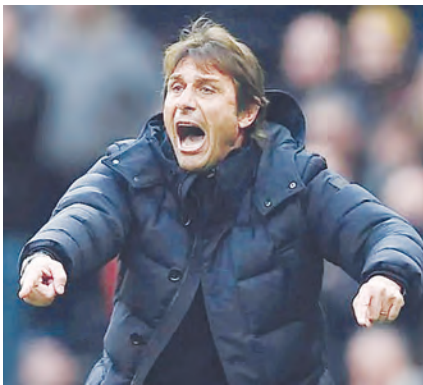
A new date before the deadline of December 31 could then not be agreed between the clubs. Tottenham had needed to win their final game against the French side, who had already secured top spot in the group, to progress ahead of Vitesse Arnhem.

"It is not definitive, but there is another step to confirm or not this incredible decision," Conte said on Tuesday. "We are very, very confident for the next step and I repeat we deserve to play the qualification on the pitch, not in the court."

"I can't accept this. We are very, very disappointed with UEFA for this decision."

Should Spurs fail to overturn that decision, one chance for Conte to end the club's trophy drought stretching back to 2008 will have gone.

But the Italian has another opportunity in the League Cup with Wednesday's quarter-final against West Ham to go ahead despite rising Covid case numbers across London that have forced mayor Sadiq Khan to declare a "major incident" in the English capital.



Shiffrin Secures 72nd World Cup

LONDON (Dispatches) - American Mikaela Shiffrin crushed the opposition in Tuesday's giant slalom in Courchevel in France to claim her 72nd alpine skiing World Cup victory.

The 26-year-old was in a league of her own in the opening run in the French resort and kept things under control in the second to clinch her third World Cup win this season and second in a giant slalom.

Shiffrin clocked a combined best time of two minutes 15.35 seconds to beat Sweden's Sara Hector by 0.86 and Swiss Michelle Gisin by 1.08.

The result took her to the top of the overall World Cup standings on 670 points, 35 ahead of Italian Sofia Goggia, who had taken the lead after a super G-downhill double in Val d'Isere last weekend.

"Today was quite a difficult one after the last weeks, pushing the schedule hard. It's been a lot just to get here," said Shiffrin, who also raced in the super-G in Val d'Isere.

"I'm not full tank right now. But tough, very good day."

Switzerland's Lara Gut-Behrami, the giant slalom world champion, and Austrian Katharina Liensberger, the slalom world champion as well as New Zealand's Alice Robinson had to sit the race out after testing positive for COVID-19.

