

On the Occasion of Christmas,
IRAN NEWS Felicitates Its
Christian Readers and Wish Them
A Merry Christmas

IRAN NEWS



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Tehran, Baku
Prepared to Finalize
Joint Projects
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President Supports Iraq Stability, Security

TEHRAN (PressTV) - President Seyed Ebrahim Raisi says the Islamic Republic has always supported the establishment of a strong and powerful parliament and government in Iraq. In a meeting with visiting Iraqi Foreign Minister Fuad Hussein in Tehran on Thursday, Raisi hailed recent peaceful and secure parliamentary elections in Iraq. Iran's president added that the Islamic Republic regards any form of insecurity in Iraq as its own, stressing, "Fomenting insecurity and threatening stability in Iraq are not acceptable, and the principled policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran is to support the stability of Iraq and authority of its government." Pointing to the withdrawal of the US military forces from Iraq, the Iranian president stated, "This achievement is the outcome of resistance of the Iraqi nation and officials, because the Americans have never left any place where they have been militarily present, except in cases where they faced resistance of nations." Elsewhere in his remarks, Raisi commended efforts by the Iraqi government to help repatriate the late Iranian ambassador to Sana'a, Hassan Irloo, who passed away of COVID-19 complications after Saudi aggressors dragged their foot over allowing his medical evacuation for treatment. **See Page 7**

IRGC Hails Iran's Kamikaze, Reconnaissance Drones



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - The Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC)'s chief says the Ground Force under his watch put on display a combination of the "major elements of its power" during the latest

maneuvers, which featured kamikaze and reconnaissance drones as new components of the Force's offensive might.

Major General Hossein Salami made the remarks on Thursday on the sidelines of the IRGC's Great Prophet 17 joint military exercises in Iran's southern coast.

He praised the IRGC's Ground Force as a guarantor of the country's independence, territorial integrity and national security, saying it has developed new tactics to further its offensive power using all the capabilities it has acquired in fixed and mobile defense on the ground.

"What was demonstrated today in the drills was a combination of key elements of the IRGC Ground Force's offensive power, including strong defense in fixed positions and anti-helicopter operation, as well as the use of offensive drones, bounding mines and armored firepower," he added.

"The new points about this exercise comprise the effective use of offensive kamikaze and reconnaissance drones that are new components of our Ground Force's offensive power, the effective use of offensive power by helicopters, the firing of missiles and rockets at long distances from choppers, the effective use of bounding mines against the enemy's mobile targets, and the accurate firepower of artillery units."

Salami also said that modern and systematic command, control and management was the key feature of the war-games that created balanced coordination on the ground.

He also said combat and suicide drones are new components of the combat power of the Ground Force of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) as the aircraft have put on display a massive show of force during large-scale military drills in the south of the country.

"The drills featured massive artillery fire as well as operations by the Amphibious Operations Unit of the IRGC Ground Force," the commander added.

"The exercises involved divers as well as large numbers of vessels taking combat troops to the shore, which was among the most important achievements of the IRGC Ground Force. This has enabled the Force to couple its defense operations with combat tactics," the top general added.

He said the war games also involved the firing of missiles and rockets as well as artillery units hitting targets with pinpoint accuracy.

The maneuvers have been ongoing in the Persian Gulf region and the Strait of Hormuz, as well as on the coasts of Hormuzgan, Busheher and Khuzestan provinces.

The exercises code-named the Great Prophet 17, are part of military drills Iran holds regularly to improve its combat power. The five-day maneuvers ended on Friday.

The ground phase of the exercises ended early on Thursday with a large-scale night combat operation using combined tactics of ranger, armored, artillery, drone and combat helicopter units.

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ViewPoint By: Hamid Reza Naghashian

Is It the Final Round?

The Islamic Republic of Iran and the remaining signatories of the nuclear deal, so called the JCPOA, are reportedly to continue their talks on Monday and it is expected to be the last round whether both sides reach agreement or not.

On Thursday, the European Union's deputy foreign policy chief, Enrique Mora, said Iran and the five remaining signatories to the 2015 nuclear agreement will resume anti-Iran sanctions removal talks in the Austrian capital of Vienna on Monday to discuss and define the way ahead.

"Important to pick up the pace on key outstanding issues and move forward, working closely with the US. Welcome to the 8th round," he added.

Meanwhile, the European Union External Action Service (EEAS) also said in a statement that the 8th round of the JCPOA Joint Commission talks will be chaired by Mora on behalf of EU foreign policy chief, Josep Borrell.

It added that representatives of Iran and the P4+1 group of countries -- France, Germany, the United Kingdom, China and Russia -- will attend the new round of the Vienna negotiations.

"Participants will continue the discussions on the prospect of a possible return of the United States to the JCPOA and how to ensure the full and effective implementation of the agreement by all sides," the statement read.

Iran and the five remaining parties to the JCPOA resumed talks in Vienna on November 29 after a five-month hiatus, marking the first round of negotiations under President Ebrahim Raisi's administration and the seventh overall.

Iran and the P4+1 group of countries resumed the talks in the Austrian capital on December 9 after being paused on December 3, when the participants returned to their capitals for additional consultations on the two draft proposals that Tehran had put forward.

Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian also said on Thursday that the Islamic Republic would continue negotiations for the removal of sanctions imposed on the country in the Austrian capital with seriousness, emphasizing that Tehran will never give excessive concessions to the opposite side.

"We explicitly announce that we will pursue our serious negotiations in Vienna with goodwill and seriousness and with an eye on achieving a good agreement, and we hope that the other parties would also continue [the talks] with the same approach," Amir-Abdollahian added.

He recommended that the five remaining signatories to the JCPOA should have no doubt that "if they want to give one concession and get 10 concessions [in return], the Islamic Republic of Iran will never accept such an approach." **See Page 7**

Tehran, Baghdad Issue Statement on Probe Into Murder of Top Commanders

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - A senior Iranian Judiciary official says Iran and Iraq have issued a joint statement on an investigation into the "criminal and terrorist" assassination by the United States of top anti-terror commanders of the two countries in Baghdad early last year.

Kazem Gharibabadi, the Judiciary chief's deputy for international affairs and secretary of the country's High Council for Human Rights, said on Thursday that the statement was issued during the second session of a joint Iran-Iraq committee investigating the murder of Lt. Gen. Qassem Soleimani and Mahdi al-Muhandis.

General Soleimani, the then commander of the Quds Force of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC), and his Iraqi trenchmate Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, deputy head of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Units (PMU), were assassinated along with their companions in a US drone strike authorized by then-U.S. President Donald Trump near Baghdad International Airport on January 3, 2020. **See Page 7**

International Conference on Steelmaking & Continuous Casting 2nd ISCC(2022)

- Steel making metallurgy and processes(EAF)
- Optimization of raw materials and ferroalloys
- Secondary metallurgy and processes
- Refractories and their applications
- New developments and advanced technologies in steel continuous casting machines
- Casting and solidification of continuous casting products
- Fluid flow and solidification
- New developments in simulation and modelling
- Microstructure, and properties of continuous casting products
- Surface defects
- Mold fluxes and lubrication
- Plant enhancement technologies
- Energy management
- Artificial intelligence, big data and industry 4.0 solution
- Sustainability and environmental challenges
- Circular economy solutions

22 & 23. Feb. 2022
Hormozgan Steel Company
Bandar Abbas, Iran
For more information
visit the following site
<https://iscc.hosco.ir>
Email : iscc@hosco.ir
Mailing address:
6th floor, Hormoz Science and
Technology Park, Bandar Abbas, Iran

PGCC-UK Baseless Joint Statement Sowing Seed of Discord

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Foreign Ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh blasted the anti-Iran allegations in the joint statement of the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council (PGCC) and Britain, and said that the statement serves intentions of the infamous promoters of discord who intend to block regional interactions and cooperation.

Khatibzadeh argued that the repetitious and baseless accusation made at the final communique of the PGCC jointly with Britain is issued under such conditions that the Islamic Republic of Iran has always played a responsible role in the promotion of regional peace and

stability, and its call for regional interactions and cooperation that is in the same line.

“Unfortunately, some western countries, including Britain, by exporting a flood of modern armaments to some regional countries have become the source of regional tensions and the outbreak of human catastrophes,” the Iranian foreign ministry spokesman added.

He stressed that the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran, in accordance with its strategic viewpoints and fundamental policies, considers regional interactions and cooperation in a bid to resolve the regional problems, and accordingly, welcomes constructive initiatives in that line.

Tehran, Baku Prepared to Finalize Joint Projects

IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN – The foreign minister of Iran and the president of the Republic of Azerbaijan discussed plans to finalize joint projects and strike new agreements between the two neighbors.

In a meeting in Baku on Wednesday, Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian and Azeri President Ilham Aliyev discussed ways to expand ties between the two Muslim neighbors.

Highlighting the determination of the high-ranking officials of the two countries to develop ties, Amirabdollahian said a new chapter has opened in the Iran-Azerbaijan relations which will have positive results for both countries.

The Iranian foreign minister said, “We are ready to finalize all previous projects and lay the groundwork for new agreements between the two nations.”

Amirabdollahian also referred to Iran’s presence in the 3+3 format, describing such cooperation as beneficial to the region’s peace and stability, the Iranian Foreign Ministry’s website reported.

He further underlined that the extra-regional forces have no right to intervene in the affairs of the region and that regional countries can resolve the problems by themselves.

For his part, Aliyev underscored the significance of relations between the two neighbors, saying, “We are willing to expand these relations in all political, economic and cultural areas”.

He also noted that the important joint projects must be finalized.

The Azeri leader stressed that regional issues must be resolved by the regional countries alone.

Baku is opposed to interference of foreign countries in the region and believes that regional connections are useful for all countries, he stated.



The Azeri president also referred to a recent meeting with his Iranian counterpart Ebrahim Raisi in Ashgabat on the sidelines of the ECO summit, describing it as fruitful.

Earlier in a joint press conference with his Azeri counterpart Jeyhun Bayramov, Amirabdollahian said Tehran has definite roadmap for developing Tehran-Baku relations.

Given the will of leaders of both countries, strong and effective steps will be taken in line with serving interests of the two nations, Amirabdollahian noted at the news conference.

Referring to meeting between Iranian and Azeri presidents within the framework of Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) summit in Ashgabat in late November, the foreign minister said the meeting was a turning point in bilateral relations.

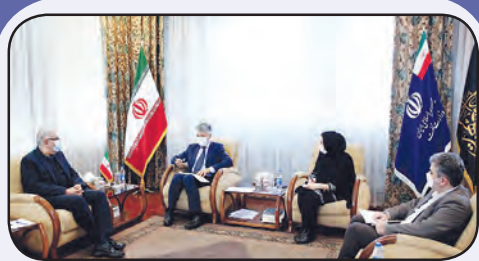
As he noted, Tehran and Baku enjoy international and regional cooperation in different fields, always extend necessary support for each other and will continue such support.

About the plans of the new Iranian government for developing cooperation with Azerbaijan, the foreign minister said the two agreed to enhance trade ties and have relations in energy and transit fields.

As he underlined, the Azeri president has stressed the importance of activating regional process.

The foreign minister went on to say that the message of a regional format [with participation of regional states] is that countries in the region can solve their problems without foreigners’ interference.

Serbian Ambassador Meets with Iran Petroleum Minister



TEHRAN (Shana) - The Serbian Ambassador to Iran met with Iranian Oil Minister Javad Owji to discuss areas for cooperation and dialogue on the development of Tehran-Belgrade relations.

Mr. Owji discussed the various aspects of Tehran-Belgrade economic relations during the meeting with Serbian Ambassador to Tehran Dragan Todorovic on Wednesday.

The two sides also stressed the need to expand and enhance cooperation in the energy sector.

Uzbekistan, Iran Intend to Expand the Agenda of Economic Cooperation

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - On Wednesday, Uzbekistan Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Investments and Foreign Trade of the Republic of Uzbekistan S. Umurzakov in the format of a video conference held talks with Vice President for Economic Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran M. Rezai.

During the talks, the sides discussed the current state and prospects for expanding bilateral economic cooperation. The parties noted that mutual contacts of the Heads of the two states during the recent summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the 15th summit of the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) served as an impetus for further intensification of Uzbek-Iranian relations, and also expressed their commitment to joint work to implement the achieved agreements.

Focusing on the field of investment cooperation, the parties emphasized the wide opportunities for the implementation of new projects in the production of building materials, construction, agriculture, fish farming, pharmaceuticals, electrical engineering, chemical and light industries. An agreement was reached on the study and search for partners for the implementation of new promising projects.

Special attention was paid to the area of mutual trade. The positive dynamics of the Uzbek-Iranian trade was noted with satisfaction: in January-November this year, the growth of mutual trade increased by 74.4 percent. An understanding was reached on the need to intensify interaction to strengthen trade relations between the two countries, in connection with which the parties agreed to intensify joint work on the draft Agreement on preferential trade between Uzbekistan and Iran.

They also touched upon the prospects for expanding cooperation in the transport and logistics sector.

They discussed the organization of a number of bilateral events in the near future, including the 14th meeting of the Intergovernmental Commission on Trade, Economic and Scientific and Technical Cooperation, as well as a business forum with the participation of representatives of the business communities of the two countries.

As a result of the negotiations, an agreement was reached on the development and approval of the “Road Map” to expand cooperation between Uzbekistan and Iran in the fields of investment, industry, trade and transport.

Iran Reaffirms ‘Red Line’ On Redrawing of Caucasus Borders

IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Iran remains strongly opposed to any redrawing of borders in the South Caucasus, an influential Iranian parliamentarian was reported to say during a visit to Armenia on Wednesday.

The conservative lawmaker, Mahmoud Ahmadi-Bighash, arrived in Yerevan earlier this week together with several other members of an Iranian parliamentary group promoting closer ties with Armenia.

They held a series of meetings with Armenian parliament deputies before being received by Armen Grigorian, the secretary of Armenia’s Security Council.

A statement released by the council cited Ahmadi-Bighash as saying that the region is very

important to the Islamic Republic.

“In particular, he stressed that regional peace and stability and inviolability of the borders are the red lines for Iran and Tehran will not tolerate any territorial change in the region,” the statement said.

Other Iranian lawmakers as well as Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian made similar statements in early October amid Iran’s mounting tensions with Azerbaijan that followed Baku’s decision to levy hefty fees from Iranian trucks transporting goods to and from Armenia.

The vehicles use a road mostly passing through Armenia’s southeastern Syunik province which is sandwiched between Azerbaijan and its Nakhichevan exclave and also borders Iran. Azerbaijani President

Ilham Aliyev has repeatedly threatened to forcibly open a “corridor” to Nakhichevan, drawing strong condemnation from Armenia.

Mojtaba Zonnouri, a senior Iranian lawmaker and cleric, accused Aliyev on October 3 of trying to “cut Iran’s access to Armenia” with the help of Turkey and Israel. Zonnouri was apparently among 165 members of Iran’s parliament who issued a joint statement warning against “any geopolitical change and alteration of the borders of neighbor countries.”

Armenia’s government regularly expresses readiness for conventional transport links with Azerbaijan. Grigorian told Ahmadi-Bighash and other visiting Iranian lawmakers that the Armenian government’s position “matches Iran’s foreign policy priorities.”

S. Korea’s Vice Minister Talks With Iranian Envoy

IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - South Korea’s Vice Foreign Minister Choi Jong-kun had discussions with Iran’s top envoy here on “pending” bilateral issues Friday, his ministry said.

Choi met with Ambassador Saeed Badamchi Shabestari and reaffirmed that Seoul will continue diplomatic efforts for progress in negotiations on Iran’s nuclear program, taking the importance of Seoul-Tehran ties into consideration, it added.

They also agreed to maintain close communication to resolve “pending” bilateral issues. The ministry stopped short of elaborating, while the matters are seen as including the problem of Iranian assets frozen in South Korea.

An estimated \$7 billion worth of Iranian assets remain in two South Korean banks under U.S. sanctions imposed following Washington’s 2018 withdrawal from the multilateral nuclear pact with Tehran.

Tehran, Caracas Consolidate Ties

IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - The governments of Venezuela and Iran ratified the commitment to consolidate relations based on the defense of multilateralism, Venezuelan Foreign Minister Félix Plasencia highlighted.

In a message published on the social network Twitter, the head of Venezuelan diplomacy reported on a work meeting held with the director general for the Americas of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic, Ambassador Nazar Aharai.

As part of a recent visit to Tehran, the Foreign Minister held a series of meetings with senior Iranian authorities, during which issues related to bilateral ties and the confrontation with the systematic persecution of the United States Government against both nations were discussed.

The parties also advanced the preparation of a strategic cooperation roadmap for the next 20 years, in addition to agreeing on the reactivation of the High Level Mixed Commission.

Venezuela and Iran have consolidated cooperation ties in recent years, with agreements signed in economic, social, cultural, energy and scientific matters, among others, to jointly confront the effects of the coercive measures implemented by Washington against both countries.

New Transport Corridor to Expand Ties of Azerbaijan, Iran, Georgia

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The new transport corridor linking the Persian Gulf with the Black Sea and vice versa (Iran-Azerbaijan-Georgia) will develop economic and trade relations of all three countries, said Consulate General of Azerbaijan in Tabriz Bunyad Huseynov.

He made the remark in an event dedicated to the pilot launch of the corridor in Tabriz city in the East Azerbaijan (north-western Iran).

Huseynov stressed that, Azerbaijan currently operates the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway line as an international transit route. At the same time, the activation of the new corridor will significantly contribute to strengthening the economic potential of Azerbaijan, Iran and Georgia.

He also added that the use of this corridor will allow to trade with Europe via the Black Sea, shorten the distance of cargo transportation and make it more profitable.

“The activation of the new corridor reflects the geostrategic position of the three countries and will have a positive impact on regional and extra-regional trade in the near future,” he noted. A new transport corridor linking the Persian Gulf with the Black Sea via Iran-Azerbaijan-Georgia route was launched in pilot mode on December 22, 2021 with the participation of Iranian, Azerbaijani and Georgian officials.

Later, he pointed to the Vienna talks the latest round of which ended last weekend and said in the recent round of

Vienna talks, we were able to reach a document and unified agenda after two rounds of talks. This was an important development.” Amir-Abdollahian said that Iran did not find the stances of some European countries, particularly that of France, as constructive.

The Iraqi foreign minister, for his part, said that “In today’s meeting with the Iranian Foreign Minister, we emphasized the expansion of relations, including in the economic field. This was a good opportunity for us to talk about regional issues, especially the security situation in Iraq and the region.”

Hussein added, “We talked about Iraq-US relations, and the strategic dialogue between the Iraqi government and the American side, and the agreement between the two sides to withdraw US troops from Iraq.”

“It is important for us to discuss Iran’s relations with Iraq’s neighbors. Iraq played an important role in supporting the talks between Saudi Arabia and Iran, and we hope that the fifth round of talks will take place.

TEHRAN (MNA) - In a joint press conference with his Iraqi counterpart, FM Amir-Abdollahian said that “We are determined that the Shalamcheh-Basra railway will become operational as soon as possible.”

Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian held a joint press conference with his Iraqi counterpart, Fuad Hussein, at the Foreign Ministry compound in Tehran on Thursday afternoon.

During the press conference, the top Iranian diplomat said that “We are determined that the Shalamcheh railway to Basra will become operational as soon as possible and that the [Iranian] Minister of Roads will leave for Iraq next week in that regard.”

Amir-Abdollahian said that in their meeting the two diplomats emphasized the cooperation with the Iran-Iraq Judicial Committee to speed up work on the prosecution of the perpetrators behind the martyrdom of anti-terror commander Martyr Qassem Soleimani and Iraqi Abu Mahdi Muhandis.

“I heard a piece of news from the Iraqi counterpart that confirms the withdrawal of US troops from Iraq,” he added.

The Iranian foreign minister also said that they had consulted on the general cancellation of visas for citizens of both sides.

Shalamcheh-Basra Railway Needs to Become Operational Soon



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	12:04
■ Evening (Maghreb)	17:17
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	05:42
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	07:12

25. Not an apostle did We send before thee without this inspiration sent by Us to him: that there is no god but I; therefore worship and serve Me.

26. And they say: "((Allah)) Most Gracious has begotten offspring."

Glory to Him! they are (but) servants raised to honour.

Surah 21, The Prophets (25 - 26)

MAPNA Awarded Development of Gas Storage Facilities in Shurijeh

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Iran Gas Engineering and Development Company (IGEDC) awarded the gas storage development project in Khangiran Field (Shurijeh D Reservoir) to MAPNA Group.

In a ceremony which was held on Wednesday in presence of senior officials of IGEDC and MAPMA Group, the award went to MAPNA Group.

Due to the need to supply gas in the north and northeast of the country in the cold seasons of the year and the estimated sharp decline in production in the Mozdouran reservoir by 2025, the Iranian oil minister instructed development of storage facilities Shurijeh Reservoir D, which is the main feedstock supplier of Khangiran Refinery in Sarakhs Region of Khorasan Razavi Province.

In the ceremony, the CEO of MAPNA Group Mr. Abbas Aliabadi pointed to the significance of energy and its effect on the economy and daily life and highlighted the problems in the field of productivity in production and consumption. He then referred to the significance of electricity and gas and called for resolving the issue of unbalance in supply and consumption and the necessity for reduction of ratio of energy consumption to GDP.

He then said that MAPNA Group will advance the project with using home-made equipment and capability of Iranian engineers and experts.

Accordingly, MAPNA Group has been entrusted to do the following in the region in a period of three years:

- Drilling 28 production/injection wells with electricity and access roads - Construction of wellhead facilities and pipelines from the location of wells to multi-lanes;



- Construction of three multi-lanes and a gas collection and distribution center and main lines of gas production and injection along with electricity and construction of access roads to them;

- Construction of gas injection facilities with a capacity of 20 million cubic meters per day;

- Construction of refinery facilities for gas processing with a capacity of 10 million cubic meters per day;

Meanwhile the CEO of Iran Gas Engineering and Development Company said that the capacity of Shurijeh Gas Storage Facility is planned to reach 40 million cubic meters per day.

Reza Noshadi said: "Gas production has increased from 7 million cubic meters per day to 870 million cubic meters per day since the beginning of the Revolution to the extent that some observers believe that we should not have supplied gas to some cities and villages, that is, the point of criticism has been the busy schedule of the National Iranian Gas Company and the Iran Gas Engineering and Development Company."

He added: "Today, 1,870 kilometers of large-sized pipes are on the agenda of Iran Gas Engineering and Development Company. The number of stations that are being built at the same time has doubled and this is a record, so today the country's gas industry is a respectable peak."

Noshadi continued: "Shurijeh field, whose current storage capacity is 20 million cubic meters per day, is to be increased to 40 million cubic meters per day and from 2.25 billion cubic meters of storage to 4.5 billion cubic meters."

Iran Launches First Solar Cell Plant

TEHRAN (PressTV) - A first solar cell factory has been launched in Iran amid government efforts to significantly increase the share of renewable in the country's power mix.

Iran's Energy Minister Ali Akbar Mehrabian opened the 150 megawatts (MW) factory in the central city of Khomein on Thursday as he pledged his full support for the solar industry in the country.

"We are committed in our support for the solar panels and the renewables and we are ready to offer all-out support to this industry," said Mehrabian.

An administrative government in Iran that came to office in August has vowed to launch around 10,000 MW of new renewables capacity in the country within the next four years. The figure will be a 10-fold increase on the current renewables capacity in Iran as the sector accounts for less than one percent of the total electricity generation capacity in the country. A spokesman of the Energy Ministry's department on renewables said that Mana Energy Pak (MEP Cell) will be able to supply cells for manufacturing 1,500 MW of solar panels per year once the factory reaches its full capacity in the next two years.

Mehrabian said that the expansion of solar sector would make a major progress in the upcoming years with the launch of solar cell factory in Khomein as he added that investment in panel manufacturing has increased in Iran in recent years.

He said Iranian startups have been contributing to the growth of solar sector in the country with provision of technology and know-how needed to manufacture solar cells.

The minister vowed that renewables capacity in Iran would increase by more than 50% until next summer to reach 1,400 MW.

Natural Gas Swap With Turkmenistan To Start Soon

TEHRAN (IFP) - The Iranian oil minister says the country's natural gas swap with Turkmenistan, to help it export to the Azerbaijan Republic through Iran, will begin from the turn of the year.

"The size of the swap contract is 1.5 to 2 billion cubic meters of natural gas annually, with which we can also use to help the stability of the natural gas network of the northern parts of the country in the cold season of the year," said Javad Owji.

He also touched on the oil ministry's new plan to increase the efficiency of oil production from low-yield oil wells, describing the approach as "a revolution in the oil industry" of Iran.

"We have defined a target to improve the production level at some 700 low-yield oil wells," Owji said.

He further explained that developing an untapped oil field to reach the production stage needs 10 to 12 million dollars in investment, while working on low-yield oil wells, using the potential of knowledge-based companies significantly reduces the costs and the required time to increase the national oil production.

The minister stressed that knowledge-based companies are paid by taking a share of the output of the upgraded wells for a duration of three to five years.

"With the implementation of this plan for some 700 oil wells, the national oil production rises by 80 million barrels a year, that is 200,000 barrels a day, and we are seriously pursuing the plan to make sure it becomes operational next year," he said.

Man of the Year of Iranian Steel was introduced

Amin Ebrahimi, CEO of Khuzestan Steel, was named the 10th Man of the Year by the Iranian Iron and Steel Association. He presented his statue to the people of Khuzestan

The closing ceremony of the Steel Symposium started on December 14 at the Kish Island International Conference Center. Amin Ebrahimi, CEO of Khuzestan Steel, was named the 10th Man of the Year by the Iranian Iron and Steel Association. He presented his statue to the people of Khuzestan. Abbas Najafzadeh, President of the Iranian Steel Association, said at the ceremony: "Thanks to the appreciation and support of influential people in the steel industry, for the past three years, we have introduced the Man of the Year of Steel through a vote of industry activists." One of the features of this period was the invitation of knowledge-based companies with the aim of presenting innovative designs

Following the ceremony, Amin Ebrahimi, CEO of Khuzestan Steel, was named the 8th Man of the Year by the Iranian Iron and Steel Association and with the votes of steel chain activists

Engineer Amin Ebrahimi, while presenting the statue of the Iranian Steel Man of the Year to the people of Khuzestan province, stated: The main owners of this statue are the honorable people of Khuzestan, a symbol of resistance and self-sacrifice. During the eight years of holy defense, these people defended the homeland. Certainly such a success is the result of the support of my colleagues. Colleagues on the board, senior managers, middle and operational managers, bosses, supervisors and technicians, and dear workers, all contribute to this success. During my years of responsibility, they used their efforts and expertise to achieve the goals and plans developed



Germany, France Urge All Sides To Respect Ukraine Ceasefire

BERLIN (Dispatches) - Germany and France called on both the Ukrainian government forces and Russia-backed separatists in eastern Ukraine to respect the restoration of a full ceasefire, their foreign ministries said in a joint statement on Thursday.

“We urge the sides to respect the ceasefire and to continue discussions on further steps in the humanitarian field, e.g. the opening of crossing points and the exchange of detainees, along with the rest of the Conclusions of the 2019 Paris Summit,” the ministries said.



Palestinian Killed In West Bank

RAMALLAH (Dispatches) - Israeli forces shot dead a Palestinian in a car they were pursuing in the occupied West Bank on Wednesday, Palestinian paramedics said. The Israeli military said troops shot a Palestinian who had fired at them from a vehicle.

The incident followed several Palestinian attacks on Israelis in recent weeks. Palestinians also complain of attacks by Israeli settlers, whose residence in the West Bank the international community considers illegal.

In a statement, the military said the soldiers had come under fire from a passing vehicle while searching for Palestinians spotted approaching the Jewish settlement of Psagot.



Putin Sees Positive U.S. Reaction To Russia Security Proposals



MOSCOW (Dispatches) - President Vladimir Putin said today that Washington's willingness to discuss Russia's security proposals aimed at curbing NATO's eastward expansion was “positive”, as fears mount in the West over a major military escalation in Ukraine.

The Kremlin has grown increasingly insistent that the West and NATO are encroaching dangerously close to Russia's borders. Moscow presented the West with sweeping security demands last week, saying NATO must not admit new members and barring the United States from establishing new bases in former Soviet countries.

The United States responded that it is willing to discuss the security proposals, and Putin said Thursday Washington is ready for talks at the start of next year in Geneva. “The start of negotiations announced in January will allow us to move forward,” he said at his annual end-of-year press conference, adding that representatives from both sides have been appointed.

“I hope that this is the first positive reaction.”

The conciliatory tone came after tensions peaked this week when Putin vowed that Russia would take “appropriate retaliatory” military steps in response to what he called the West's “aggressive stance”.

He also announced a new arsenal of hypersonic missiles that he has previously described as “invincible” were nearing combat readiness.

Tensions have been building since mid-November when Washington sounded the alarm over a massive Russian troop build-up on Ukraine's border and claimed that Putin is planning an invasion.

The West has long accused the Kremlin of providing direct military support to pro-Russia separatists in eastern Ukraine, who seized two regions shortly after Moscow annexed Crimea in 2014.

Russia denies the claims and Putin has suggested that the conflict, which has claimed over 13,000 lives, is genocidal.

Putin today also addressed an unprecedented wave of arrests against voices critical of the Kremlin, saying the crackdown is aimed at curbing foreign influence.

“I remind you of what our adversaries have been saying for centuries: Russia cannot be defeated, it can only be destroyed from within,” he said.

He added that it was domestic dissent that brought about the collapse of the Soviet Union 30 years ago this month.

The presser coincided with a high-profile court case in Moscow where the country's most prominent rights group, Memorial, is on trial for violations of “foreign agent” legislation.

The case follows other key trials, including the jailing of Russia's most prominent opposition figure Alexei Navalny and the closure of his anti-corruption and political organisations on extremism convictions. “There have always been, are and will be comen,” Putin said of his main domestic opponent. “There is no need to commit crimes.”

U.S. Concerned Over Turkey's Drone Sales to Conflict-Hit Ethiopia

ISTANBUL (Dispatches) - U.S. authorities have taken issue with Turkey over its sales of armed drones to Ethiopia, where two sources familiar with the matter said there was mounting evidence the government had used the weapons against rebel fighters.

Washington has “profound humanitarian concerns” over the sales, which could contravene U.S. restrictions on arms to Addis Ababa, a senior Western official said.

The year-long war between Ethiopia's government and the leadership of the northern Tigray region, among Africa's bloodiest conflicts, has killed thousands of civilians and displaced millions.

A State Department spokesman said U.S. Horn of Africa envoy Jeffrey Feltman “raised reports of armed drone use in Ethiopia and the attendant risk of civilian harm” during a visit to Turkey last week.

A senior Turkish official said Washington conveyed its discomfort at a few meetings, while Ethiopia's military and government did not respond to detailed requests for comment.

Turkey, which is selling drones to several countries in Europe, Africa and Asia, has dismissed criticism that it plays a destabilising role in Africa and has said it is in touch with all sides in Ethiopia to urge negotiations.

Last week the United Nations agreed to set up an

independent investigation into rights abuses in Ethiopia, a move strongly opposed by its government.

Tigrayan rebel forces said on Monday they were withdrawing from some northern regions after government advances and, in a letter to the UN, called for a no-fly zone for drones and other hostile aircraft over Tigray.

The U.S. State Department clamped down in May on exports of defense products for Ethiopia's armed forces.

In September, the White House authorized sanctions on those engaged, even indirectly, in policies that threaten stability, expand the crisis or disrupt humanitarian assistance there, though there has been no indication of any such imminent action against Turkey.

The U.S. Treasury, which has broad economic sanctions authority under that executive order, declined to comment on whether sanctions could apply to Turkey.

The senior Turkish official said the foreign ministry examined how the drone sales might impact U.S. foreign policy as part of 2022 budget planning.

“The United States has conveyed its discomfort with Turkey's drone sales ...but Turkey will continue to follow the policies it set in this area,” the person told Reuters.

A second senior Turkish official, from the defense ministry, said Ankara had no intention of meddling in any country's domestic affairs.



S. Korea Holds Talks With China

SEOUL (Dispatches) - Senior South Korean diplomats held talks with Chinese counterparts after a diplomatic spat with Taiwan over Seoul's cancellation of an invitation to a senior Taipei official to take part in a business forum last week.

Vice Foreign Minister Choi Jong-kun and aides conducted an online meeting on Thursday with a team led by Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Le Yucheng, the first such talks since June 2017.

The sides discussed efforts to reopen stalled denuclearisation talks with North Korea, as well as Beijing's preparations to host the 2022 Winter Olympics in February, Yonhap news agency reported, citing South Korea's foreign ministry.

Choi reiterated that Seoul hopes the Olympics will be successful, the ministry said, without elaborating on any discussions of attendance by South Korean officials. South Korea's presidential Blue House has said it is not considering participating in a U.S.-led diplomatic boycott of the Beijing Olympics, but that discussions had yet to be held with China on sending a delegation.

N.Korea's Leader Praises Fresh Heyday in China Relations

SEOUL (Dispatches) - North Korean leader Kim Jong Un praised outgoing Chinese Ambassador Li Jinjun for helping to improve relations between Pyongyang and Beijing, state media reported on Thursday, as the envoy left office after seven years in the post.

Kim's comments were conveyed to Li by Choe Ryong Hae, a top official in the ruling Workers' Party of Korea, state news agency KCNA said. Li also met with North Korean premier Kim Tok Hun, KCNA reported.

“Kim Jong Un highly praised the ambassador for successfully assisting several DPRK-China summit meetings over the past seven years, making much effort to develop the friendly relations between the two parties and the two countries and sharing bitters and sweets with the Korean people,” Choe told Li, using the initials of North Korea's official name.

Kim is very satisfied that the North Korea-China relationship has entered a “fresh heyday” under the leadership of the ruling parties in each country, Choe said.

Li asked Choe to express his gratitude to Kim and congratulated the North Korean people on “making progress in all fields of socialist construction,” KCNA said.

China has been North Korea's only major ally since the two signed a treaty in 1961, and international sanctions imposed over Pyongyang's nuclear weapons and ballistic missile programs have made it more dependent than ever on Beijing for trade and other support.

Since Li was appointed in 2015, relations between the two countries have seen major ups and downs.

Kim sent China-North Korea relations to a historical low by prioritizing nuclear weapons and missiles development, then harshly criticizing Beijing when it supported international sanctions

Starting in 2018, however, Kim managed to quickly repair ties and made his first known international trip as leader to meet with Chinese President Xi Jinping in Beijing. Xi later visited Pyongyang, the first by a Chinese leader in 14 years.



UN to Cut Food Aid to Yemen Amid Funding Shortfall

GENEVA (Dispatches) - The World Food Programme has said it has been “forced” to cut aid to Yemen due to a lack of funds and warned there will be a surge in hunger in the war-torn country in the coming months.

Nearly eight years of fighting between Saudi-backed government forces and Houthi rebels in Yemen has created what the United Nations has called the world's worst humanitarian crisis.

The violence is projected to kill 377,000 people by the end of the year, according to the UN Development Programme. Meanwhile, four million people have been internally displaced during the fighting, with WFP targeting 11.1 million for food assistance in November of 2021. In September, the agency warned that 16 million Yemenis were “marching towards starvation”.

“From January, eight million will receive a reduced food ration, while five million at immediate risk of slipping into famine conditions will remain on a full ration,” the UN agency said in a statement on Wednesday.

According to the UN children's fund (UNICEF), about 2.3 million children under the age of five currently suffer from acute malnutrition in Yemen, with 400,000 expected to suffer from life-threatening severe malnutrition in the coming months.

“WFP food stocks in Yemen are running dangerously low,” WFP Regional Director Corinne Fleischer said in a statement.

“Every time we reduce the amount of food, we know that more people who are already hungry and food insecure will join the ranks of the millions who are starving. But desperate times call for desperate measures.” WFP said that it needs \$813m to continue to help the most vulnerable in Yemen through May and \$1.97bn during 2022 to continue to deliver food assistance to families on the brink of famine.

Houthi rebels took control of the capital of Sanaa in 2014 as the government fled, prompting a Saudi Arabia-led coalition to intervene in 2015 in support of the government. Both sides have been accused of committing abuses in the fighting. In recent months, the violence has centered around Marib, the government's last major stronghold in the Houthi controlled north, which has displaced tens of thousands more residents.





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Jacuzzi, pkg
L. balcony
Fully Furn

Shanon (adviser)

Niavaran Villa (\$5000)
1000sq.m
5bdrs, S/p
S, Jacuzzi
green yard
Fully Furn

Parsian

Farmanieh (\$2500) 200sq.m, 3bdrs, S/p, S, J, & F.F
Mahmoodieh (\$3000) 260sq.m, 4bdrs, S/p, S, J, & F.F

Vanak Apt (\$1800) 200sq.m, 3bdrs, & F.F
Velenjak (\$2200) 3bdrs, S/p, & F.F
Elahieh Villa (\$4000) 1000sq.m, 5bdrs, yard

Gheitarieh (\$1500) 140sq.m, 2bdrs, & F.F
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Turkey's Lira Support Plan Comes With Potential Costs

LONDON (Dispatches) - Turkey's radical new plan to support the lira and discourage dollarization comes with obvious potential costs, one of Fitch's top sovereign analysts said, adding time would be needed to see if it worked or not. Fitch put Turkey's BB- rating on a downgrade warning earlier this month as a slump in the lira threatened to run out of control. "Ultimately, it is about confidence in the currency," Fitch's Head of Emerging Europe Sovereign Ratings, Paul Gamble, told Reuters, referring to Turkey's plan to guard local currency savings against major FX market falls. "Clearly there is a new potential liability for the sovereign balance sheet," he added. But if this approach works... there could no liability."



U.S. Q3 Economic Growth Revised Slightly Higher

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) – U.S. economic growth slowed sharply in the third quarter amid a flare-up in Covid-19 infections, the government confirmed today, but activity has since picked up, putting the economy on track to record its best performance this year since 1984.

Gross domestic product increased at a 2.3 per cent annualized rate, the Commerce Department said in its third reading of GDP growth for the July-September quarter. That was up from the 2.1 per cent pace estimated last month but was still the slowest since the second quarter of 2020, when the economy suffered a historic contraction in the wake of tough mandatory measures to contain the first wave of coronavirus cases.

Economists polled by Reuters had forecast third-quarter GDP growth unrevised at a 2.1 per cent pace. The economy grew at a 6.7 per cent rate in the second quarter.

Last quarter's slower growth pace also reflected shortages of motor vehicles amid strained global supply chains as well as a decline in pandemic relief money from the government to businesses, households and state and local governments.

Growth was also hampered by Hurricane Ida, which devastated U.S. offshore energy production at the end of August.

The economy has, however, regained speed. Consumer spending increased solidly in October and manufacturing has been buoyant. The trade deficit narrowed sharply in October as exports surged to a record high and businesses have been steadily rebuilding inventories. The unemployment rate is at a 21-month low of 4.2 per cent.

According to a Reuters survey of economists, growth this year could come in at 5.6 per cent, which would be the fastest since 1984. The economy contracted 3.4 per cent in 2020.

But the emerging winter wave of coronavirus infections, driven by the Delta and highly the contagious Omicron variants, could significantly restrain growth starting in the first quarter. Growth prospects also took a hit from moderate Democrat Senator Joe Manchin's declaration on Sunday that he would not support President Joe Biden's signature US\$1.75 trillion domestic investment bill known as Build Back Better (BBB).

Goldman Sachs on Sunday cut its GDP growth forecast for the first quarter to a 2 per cent rate from a 3 per cent pace. Other economists have followed suit, with a failure to pass the BBB legislation seen among others hurting consumer spending and slowing the labor market recovery.

"The surge in Covid cases is dampening momentum heading into 2022," said Kathy Bostjancic, chief U.S. financial economist at Oxford Economics in New York. "There is some chance that BBB can be overhauled to satisfy Manchin's concerns, but at this stage the chances of passage have dropped considerably."

Qatar Targets \$10b of Investments in U.S. Ports

DOHA (Dispatches) - Qatar plans to invest at least \$10 billion in U.S. ports and has approached international banks for financing help, three finance sources say, in an infrastructure spree that reflects the Persian Gulf country's deepening ties with Washington.

The Middle East and Western sources familiar with the matter said Doha was targeting investments in ports around the U.S. East Coast which were expected to be developed in phases, adding that the plan was at a preliminary stage.

The country's sovereign wealth fund Qatar Investment Authority and the Qatar Government Communication Office both declined to comment.

"The Qataris have been preparing for almost a year to test the waters with U.S. port investments," said Michael Frodl, a U.S.-based adviser on projects including maritime security, commerce and infrastructure, who is familiar with Qatar's strategy.

"We think that a shrewd investor with the \$10 billion the Qataris desire to put into American port infrastructure would likely look at the underserved East Coast first and foremost. The West Coast is getting all the U.S. government and private investment attention, while the East Coast is long overdue for improvements."

Frodl said ports with easy access to highways and rail lines would be a priority.

"We'd be looking at aging medium-sized ports south of Boston and north of Jacksonville," he added.

A Middle East-based source said the investments would be backed by debt, which would be linked to the port assets, adding that Qatar was in early discussions with banks to look for a structuring adviser.



Pakistan, ADB Sign Agreements Worth \$1.5b for Various Projects

ISLAMABAD (Dispatches) - The federal government and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) signed six agreements amounting to \$1.543 billion to finance projects related to the energy sector, urban infrastructure, social protection, roads and water resources, the Ministry of Economic Affairs in a statement.

The agreements were signed by Economic Affairs Division Secretary Mian Asad Hayaud Din and ADB's Country Director Yong Ye in Islamabad. Minister for Economic Affairs Omar Ayub Khan witnessed the signing.

Giving a breakdown of the agreements, the statement said they included a \$300m policy-based loan to support financial, technical and governance reforms to strengthen the country's energy sector, \$385m to improve urban infrastructure in five cities of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, \$235m to dualise a 222-km Shikarpur-Rajanpur section of the Indus Highway and \$603m to strengthen and expand the Ehsaas program.

In addition, agreements were also signed for two project-readiness facilities — a \$5m loan for Kurram Tangi Integrated Water Resources Development Project and a \$15m loan for phase two of the KP Cities Improvement Investment Project.

The economic affairs minister "expressed deep appreciation" for the ADB and thanked its president, senior management and board of directors for their "continued and enhanced financial support towards reforming energy sector, improving road networks, enhancing social protection and developing sustainable cities in Pakistan".

China Will Be Able to Keep Economic Growth Stable

BEIJING (Dispatches) - China has the confidence, condition, and ability to keep economic growth at a reasonable level, a senior state planning official told the Xinhua News Agency.

The world's second-largest economy faces multiple challenges heading into 2022, amid a property downturn and with



strict COVID-19 curbs in some areas hurting consumer spending.

China should evaluate the likely impact of policies on growth before implementation, and "be prudent" in rolling out those with

contractionary effects, Ning Jizhe, deputy head of the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC), said in the interview that was published.

The country will make preparations for next year's economic work in advance and "strive to stabilize economic operations in the first quarter, the first half and even the whole year".

China issued 1.46 trillion yuan (\$229.21 billion) in the 2022 advance quota for local government special bonds to help spur investment and support the economy, the finance ministry said last week.

China will step up government spending, strengthen support to manufacturers and small companies, and ensure price stability, Ning added.

China will also work to stabilize industry supply chains, focus on solving chip shortage issues, and step up monitoring of commodity prices, said Ning, who is also the head of the National Bureau of Statistics.

To aid economic growth, China will continue to implement proactive fiscal policies, step up efforts to build an integral domestic market, while further shortening the foreign investment "negative list", Xinhua quoted Ning as saying.

China uses a so-called negative list to ban or limit foreign investment in some industries, such as telecoms or resources.

China will also combine cross-cyclical and counter-cyclical measures to prevent wild economic volatility, Ning said.

UK Economy Grows More Slowly Than Thought



LONDON (Dispatches) - Britain's economy grew more slowly than previously thought in the July-September period, before the Omicron variant of the coronavirus posed a further threat to the recovery later in the year, official data showed.

Gross domestic product in the world's fifth-biggest economy increased by 1.1% in the third quarter, weaker than a preliminary estimate of growth of 1.3% as global supply chain problems weighed on manufacturers and building firms.

That was slower than the economy's 5.4% bounce-back in the second quarter when many coronavirus restrictions were lifted, the Office for National Statistics said.

Investors are braced for a further slowdown in the fourth quarter of 2021 and a weak start to 2022 due to a rise in COVID-19-cases caused by Omicron which has hurt Britain's hospitality and leisure sector and hit retailers.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson has ruled out new COVID restrictions in England before Christmas but said he might have to act afterwards. Scotland and Wales have tightened controls.

"Although the economy has got better at coping with restrictions with each new wave, the possibility of tighter restrictions in January is further darkening the outlook for GDP," Bethany Beckett, an economist with consultancy Capital Economics, said.

The ONS said households dipped into their lockdown savings to finance their spending. The savings ratio fell to 8.6% of disposable income, down from almost 11% in the second quarter.

Weakness in the health sector, where test and trace work and vaccinations tailed off, and among hairdressers were partly behind the cut to the third-quarter growth estimate. A fall in energy output, after a surge in demand during a cold spring in the second quarter, also weighed.

"However, stronger data for 2020 means the economy was closer to pre-pandemic levels in the third quarter," ONS Director of Economic Statistics Darren Morgan said.

The slump in Britain's economy last year was now estimated at 9.4%, revised from a 9.7% crash, and the ONS believed GDP in September was 1.5% below where it was at the end of 2019, revised up from the previous estimate of 2.1%.

However, Britain's progress towards regaining its pre-pandemic economic size, in inflation-adjusted terms, remained behind that of most other big rich economies such as France, Germany and the United States, the ONS said.

Business investment fell by 2.5% in the third quarter from the previous three months and was nearly 12% below its pre-pandemic level.

EU Takes Legal Action Against Poland Over Rule-of-Law Row



BRUSSELS (Dispatches) - The EU said it was launching legal action against Poland for ignoring European Union law and undermining judicial independence, prompting a sharp rebuke from Warsaw.

Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki said the EU's decision reflected a trend towards "bureaucratic centralism" in Brussels that "has to be stopped".

The step escalates a long-running feud between Warsaw and Brussels over Poland's perceived backsliding on EU democratic norms.

Brussels is already withholding approval of coronavirus recovery funds for Poland over the row.

EU economy commissioner Paolo Gentiloni said the infringement proceedings targeted Poland for breaching the primacy of EU law and for deciding that certain articles of EU treaties were incompatible with Polish laws.

Poland's Deputy Justice Minister Sebastian Kaleta hit back by calling the EU announcement "an attack on the Polish constitution and our sovereignty".

Former prime minister Beata Szydlo, an MEP for Poland's ruling Law and Justice (PiS) party, said: "This is no longer a legal dispute, it is an attack on the Polish constitution and the foundations of Polish statehood".

Morawiecki said he "deeply" disagreed with the European Commission's move, adding that it showed a lack of understanding of the distinction between EU and national competences.

Morawiecki said the legal action showed that "a trend for... bureaucratic centralism is unfortunately progressing in Brussels but it has to be stopped".

"More and more EU member states are seeing that there should be a limit to competences -- what the European Union can decide on and what the Polish state can decide on," he said. Legal action from Brussels was expected given persistent defiance from Poland's Constitutional Court to the European Court of Justice (ECJ).

The ECJ has already ruled against Poland for implementing a mechanism to lift the immunity of judges in the Constitutional Court and to sack any not deemed acceptable by the parliament dominated by the Law and Justice party.

Gov't Plans to Set Up Refugees Organization

TEHRAN (IRNA) - resident Ebrahim Raisi said on Thursday that forming refugees' organization is on the agenda of the government.

The president made the remarks in a meeting with a number of Iranian lawmakers who represent the provinces of Fars, Kohkiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad and Bushehr in Majlis (the Iranian Parliament).

Referring to the large number of Afghan refugees living in different parts of Iran, the Fars Province in particular, Raisi said that in an earlier visit to Yazd Province, he had stressed the need to devise a mechanism to address the issues of millions of Afghan refugees residing in Iran and the nationals from other countries.



UNSC Adopts Resolution to Ease Afghan Aid

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - The UN Security Council unanimously adopted a U.S.-proposed resolution that facilitates humanitarian aid to Afghanistan, which is on the verge of economic collapse, while keeping funds out of Taliban hands.

The resolution is a first step by the UN after months of wrangling over how to avert a humanitarian catastrophe amid economic meltdown in Afghanistan since the Taliban swept back to power in mid-August.

Since then, billions of dollars in aid and assets have been frozen by the West in what the UN has described as an "unprecedented fiscal shock" to the aid-dependent Afghan economy, and the nation is in the middle of a bitter winter.

For months now, observers have been warning that millions face a choice between starvation or migration during a combined food, fuel and cash crisis.

The Security Council resolution states that "payment of funds, other financial assets or economic resources, and the provision of goods and services necessary to ensure the timely delivery of such assistance or to support such activities are permitted."

Such assistance is "not a violation" of sanctions imposed on entities linked to the Taliban, whose regime is not yet recognized by the international community, it adds.

An earlier U.S. resolution had sought to authorize case-by-case exemptions to sanctions, but that was blocked by veto-wielding permanent Security Council members China and Russia.

"Humanitarian aid and life-saving assistance must be able to reach the Afghan people without any hindrance," China's UN Ambassador, Zhang Jun, said in a tweet Monday.

The decision to limit the scope of the resolution to one year, which was not part of the first draft, aims to satisfy Washington's European allies, who, like India, had criticized the absence of any deadline and called for strict control over the destination of aid.

"If there is evidence that the exemption is being abused or that money is reaching sanctioned individuals, it is possible to reverse it," a diplomat told AFP on condition of anonymity earlier this week.

In Afghanistan, aid workers may be involved in financial transactions with ministries headed by sanctioned individuals. The resolution ensures that the aid



workers are not violating sanctions.

The text also includes monitoring of the destination of aid, as well as a UN report on the functioning of the assistance every six months.

UN undersecretary for humanitarian affairs, Martin Griffiths, emphasized the urgent "need for liquidity and stabilization of the banking system" on Sunday at a ministerial meeting in neighboring Pakistan.

He argued it was "not only to save the lives of the Afghan people but also to enable humanitarian organizations to respond."

After the Taliban returned to power, the US froze nearly \$9.5 billion from the Afghan central bank and the World Bank also suspended aid to Kabul.

Russia called for the West to unfreeze such assets.

The World Bank announced on December 10 that it would provide \$280 million in humanitarian aid to UNICEF and the World Food Program by the end of December, to be distributed in Afghanistan.

Iran Overcomes COVID Despite Sanctions

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Despite the sanctions, Iranian scientists developed the corona vaccine and made the Iranian nation overcome the notorious pandemic under the enemies' pressures, said Iran's Minister of Health.

In a meeting held with the participation of the Barekat Pharmaceutical Complex on Thursday, Bahram Einollahi said efforts by Iranian scientists to develop the corona vaccine made Iran a power capable of fighting the coronavirus.

"Domestic vaccines, especially CovIran Barakat, have had the least side effects, and this very successful work has led to a boom in vaccine imports," Einollahi added.

The minister recalled that the medical personnel of the company the very Defenders of Health submitted 205 martyrs to the country in the fight against the coronavirus and did not leave any patient unrecovered.

He also said that the homemade CovIran Barekat vaccine will surrender the Omicron variant of the coronavirus.

"The Barakat vaccine formula has been developed in such a way that if the Omicron variant is injected in it, it will produce a corona vaccine capable of fighting the omicron variant," Bahram Einollahi said in response to question over the new variant and the efficiency of the homemade vaccines.

On the sidelines of his visit to Barekat Pharmaceutical Town on Thursday, Einollahi said that the process would work for different variants of the coronavirus, even those that would emerge in the future.

The health minister called on the people to take the booster shot dose of the corona vaccine and observe the health protocols including the social distancing.

Earlier in July, a faculty member of Tehran University of Medical Sciences Mohammad-Reza Salehi said the results of studies showed the effectiveness of the 'CovIran Barekat' vaccine on the Delta variant of the coronavirus.

The omicron variant is showing that it could overtake delta as the dominant version of the novel coronavirus in some places.

No Country Can Boost Its Way out of Pandemic

GENEVA (Dispatches) - The World Health Organization chief warned that the rush in wealthy countries to roll out additional Covid vaccine doses was deepening the inequity in access to jabs that is prolonging the pandemic.

WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus insisted that the priority must remain to get vaccines to vulnerable people everywhere rather than giving additional doses to the already vaccinated.

"No country can boost its way out of the pandemic," he told reporters.

The UN health agency has long decried the glaring inequity in access to Covid vaccines.

Allowing Covid to spread unabated in some places dramatically increases the chance of new, more dangerous variants emerging, it argues.

EU, UK Agree post-Brexit fish quotas

BRUSSELS (Dispatches) - The EU and Britain have agreed post-Brexit quotas for shared fish stocks, overcoming disagreement that simmered against a separate UK-France feud over fishing boat licenses.

"We have an agreement with Britain on fishing opportunities for 2022," EU fishing commissioner Virginijus Sinkevicius tweeted.

The deal, struck on Tuesday, "covers all shared and jointly managed fisheries in EU-British waters and is based on (the) best available scientific advice," he said.

Just last week, Sinkevicius had said that no agreement had been reached with Britain "despite our best efforts" and therefore the EU was forced to provisionally apply catch limits based on 2021 hauls in shared waters.

It was Britain's first post-Brexit fishing deal with the EU since most of the bloc's rules ceased to apply to it in January this year.

Under a trade and cooperation accord setting out post-Brexit relations, Brussels and London have to negotiate annual fish quotas, with an eye to ensuring sustainability of stocks.

The EU-British agreement was reached the same day Britain signed a separate fish-quota deal with Norway, a non-EU country that also negotiates with Brussels on shared stocks.

The European Council, which represents the 27 EU member states, said the deal was being reviewed by legal experts and prepared for translation into all the bloc's languages and would apply from January 1, 2022.

NGOs slammed the agreement by both sides as unsustainable.

"Just like in pre-Brexit times, they have continued to prioritise short-term commercial interests over long-term sustainability for both fish and fishers — perpetuating the dire state of these depleted stocks," one, ClientEarth, said in a statement.

While the quota issue has been settled, the UK-French row over post-Brexit licences for fishing boats plying waters of Britain and its Channel dependencies rumbles on.

Britain has been begrudgingly giving many of the boat licences demanded by France and the European Commission. But French fishermen say that dozens are still outstanding and Paris has asked Brussels to begin litigation against London.

Tokyo 2020 Trims Cost Estimate for Pandemic Olympics

TOKYO (Dispatches) - Tokyo Olympics organizers revised the estimated cost of the Covid-postponed Games downwards, but the figure was still around double the budget proposed in the city's original 2013 bid.

Despite losing out on ticket sales due to a near-total ban on spectators, organizers said they had saved cash by simplifying events and avoiding the cost of hosting millions of fans. The event went ahead this summer under strict coronavirus countermeasures after a historic pandemic delay of one year.

Tokyo 2020's final pre-Games budget, released in December last year, stood at 1.64 trillion yen

(\$14.3 billion at today's rates) as costs ballooned because of the postponement.

But on Wednesday, the organizers trimmed this figure to 1.45 trillion yen (\$12.7 billion), saying no extra bills would be sent to either the national or Tokyo city governments.

It was still around twice the 734 billion yen the Japanese committee said the Games would cost when it presented its bid to the International Olympic Committee in 2013.

Tokyo experienced its worst-yet Covid-19 surge in the summer as the Olympics approached, fuelling fears the event could worsen outbreaks in Japan and possibly the world.

Official Highlights Secrets Behind New Achievement of HOSCO

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Following a new record set by Hormozgan Steel Company (HOSCO) and producing 147,591 tons of slab last month, Head of Exploitation of the company in an interview revealed the technical reasons behind this achievement which was attained by his colleagues.

Mr. Seyed Asghar Madani that the increase in the rate charge of the furnaces as well as the creativity of the experts in the company, their incentive and good quality input raw material have reduced its time of power and preparation period in the melting unit.

He termed all those factors as the main reasons for the increase of the production capacity and pace.

Madani also pointed to the decrease in the period of repair and in the number of halts as the other factors behind this record. He noted that setting such records indicates the strong determination and planning of HOSCO for compensating the production lapse in the summer which happened due to the electricity outage.

He reiterated that in case of support in energy supply, the company can compensate its production deficit and it will hit the pre-set targets.

The previous record of monthly slab production of the company had been set in October which was 146,106 tons and this is the second record of the company for monthly slab production in the past three months.



Is It the Final Round?

FROM PAGE 1

At the same time, Russia's Permanent Representative to International Organizations in Vienna Mikhail Ulyanov pointed to the resumption of the talks between Iran and the P4+1 group of countries on December 27, saying that usually it is not popular to engage in serious business during the New Year, but the participants [in Vienna talks] do not want to waste time.

"In this particular case this is an indication that all negotiators don't want to waste time and aim at speediest restoration of #JCPOA," Russia's lead negotiator to the Vienna talks tweeted.

In response to a claim that the U.S. and other world powers have determined a deadline behind closed doors for the Vienna talks, which will end "within weeks", Ulyanov said the establishment of "artificial" deadlines would not be helpful.

He said in a tweet that representatives of Iran and the five remaining signatories to the JCPOA should aim at swift and successful conclusion of the Vienna talks.

While Iran is not eager to prolong the talks and it wants to finish the talks, the Western parties are also determined to end the talks very soon but Iran and Western parties have their own reasons to end the talks with good results. Tehran does not want prolongation of the talks because some people inside the country have tied the economy to the fate of the talks and end of the talks can save Iranians from this indecisiveness of tying their future to the outcome of the talks. By the way, the Western parties are in rush to end the talks with their favorable result because they are concerned that Iran may advance its enrichment to a point that it can produce A-bomb while the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic has repeatedly called A-bomb haram (forbidden) and it does not want to make bomb and the Westerners are trying to create an Iranophobia to dictate its own wills. So for this reason the Westerners have resorted to any claims and media hype to pressure Iran to accept what they want.

So it seems this will be the last round of talks unless both sides get closer to agreement and decide to continue the talks for reaching a fair agreement on details. The sooner the talks end the better the condition will be for Iranians as they can continue their path of progress and put an end to this indecisiveness in the country.

President Supports...

FROM PAGE 1

"Relations between the Islamic Republic of Iran and Iraq are based on friendship as well as deep and broad religious, cultural and historical commonalities, and there exist a special relationship [between Tehran and Baghdad] in various bilateral, regional and international fields," the Iranian president said.

He emphasized that the promotion of Tehran-Baghdad relations is in the interest of both countries and the region. The Iraqi foreign minister, for his part, praised Iran's firm support for his country's stability and security. The Iraqi government and nation have always hailed Iran's support for their country's sovereignty and political stability, he said.

Tehran, Baghdad...

FROM PAGE 1

Both commanders were admired by Muslim nations for eliminating the U.S.-sponsored Daesh Takfiri terrorist group in the region, particularly in Iraq and Syria.

In the statement, Gharibabadi said, Iran and Iraq stressed that the assassinations were a "violation of the rules of international law, including relevant international conventions on the fight against terrorism."

"In addition, the two countries reaffirmed their serious and firm determination to identify, prosecute and punish all those involved in deciding, planning and implementing this criminal act," he emphasized.

He noted that the two countries have exchanged documents and reports about the case. "Documents and information related to the role and interference of the American defendants were presented by the Iranian delegation to the Iraqi side, and it was decided that complementary investigations would be carried out by the judiciaries of the two countries in this regard," the senior Iranian human rights official said.

He added that Iran and Iraq also agreed to continue the exchange of documents and information in the investigation process. "In the joint statement, the two sides also emphasized that they would use legal and judicial capacities at national and international levels to deliver justice and prevent the occurrence of such criminal acts," Gharibabadi pointed out.

They also agreed to continue bilateral cooperation to gather information about all defendants and ways to hold them accountable. The third round of the joint committee will be held in Baghdad within the next 45 days.

Ivory Coast Recall Zaha For Africa Cup of Nations

LONDON (Dispatches) - Crystal Palace striker Wilfried Zaha was recalled Thursday to the Ivory Coast squad for next month's Africa Cup of Nations.

The 29-year-old refused to join the team at their last gathering in November but coach Patrice Beaumelle has included him in the squad for the tournament which gets underway on January 9 in Cameroon. The experienced line-up also includes Ajax centre-forward Sebastien Halle, and six members of the team that lifted the trophy for the second time in 2015, notably defenders Serge Aurier and Eric Bailly as well as striker Max Gradel.

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Everton Request to Postpone Burnley Clash Rejected

LONDON (Dispatches) - Everton manager Rafael Benitez said that his club had a request to postpone Sunday's match at Burnley rejected by the Premier League.

"We have six injuries and five players with COVID," he told a news conference on Thursday, "I think it is not fair." Liverpool's match against Leeds United and Watford's trip to Wolverhampton Wanderers were postponed earlier on Thursday.

Premier League managers are due to have a call later on Thursday to discuss the COVID-19 protocols and their concerns.

Liverpool, Chelsea, Tottenham Reach League Cup Semis

LONDON (Dispatches) - A much-changed Chelsea side featuring three teenaged debutants beat Brentford 2-0 to reach the League Cup semi-finals where they will face London rivals Tottenham Hotspur.

An own goal 10 minutes from time by Pontus Jansson broke the deadlock at Brentford before a Jorginho penalty sealed victory for Thomas Tuchel's Covid-hit side.

In a thriller at Anfield, a weakened Liverpool side came back from the brink to beat Leicester City on penalties after a 3-3 draw, setting up a semi-final against Arsenal.

Jamie Vardy's early double gave Leicester a 2-0 lead and James Maddison's rocket shot made it 3-1 after Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain had pulled a goal back.

But Diogo Jota struck in the 68th minute before Takumi Minamino levelled in the sixth minute of stoppage time.

Minamino then spurned a chance to send Liverpool through in the ensuing penalty shoot-out as he blazed his effort over the bar. But Liverpool keeper Caoimhin Kelleher then saved Ryan Bertrand's effort, his second save of the shoot-out, before Jota converted to win it for Liverpool. Antonio Conte's Tottenham, runners-up to Manchester City last season, made it through to the semis with a 2-1 home win against West Ham United — all the goals arriving in a five-minute spell in the first half.

Steven Bergwijn slotted in from Pierre-Emile Hojbjerg's cut back for his first goal of the season but West Ham levelled through Jarrod Bowen's well-taken goal.

Bergwijn then set up Lucas Moura for the winner. Arsenal beat third-tier Sunderland on Tuesday. "It's good for Tottenham to reach the semi-finals of this competition," Conte, who has changed the mood at Tottenham since taking over, said.



"You can see the names of these teams that have reached the semi-finals — Liverpool, Chelsea and Arsenal with us — so every side wants to try to lift this trophy. Now I'm seeing in England to win a trophy is very difficult."

Considering the strain on their respective squads, the night's ties offered full value for the fans.

Chelsea made eight changes to the side that drew 0-0 with Wolverhampton Wanderers at the weekend with manager Tuchel handing debuts to academy players Harvey Vale, Jude Soonsup-Bell and Xavier Simons.

Tuchel did later introduce regulars Jorginho, Reece James, Christian Pulisic, Mason Mount and N'Golo Kante off the bench and it proved decisive as Chelsea claimed the win.

It was a cross from the right from James that Jansson sliced into his own goal and Jorginho then tucked away his spot kick in trademark fashion.

Liverpool made 10 changes to the side that started the 2-2 draw with Tottenham on Sunday with only Tyler Morton remaining.

And when Vardy scored twice inside the opening 13 minutes it seemed Juergen Klopp's side were on the way out.

But Minamino sent the tie to penalties with a superbly-taken goal and stand-in keeper Kelleher proved the hero with two saves to break Leicester's hearts.

Guardiola Reiterates

Call for Five Substitutions

LONDON (Dispatches) - The Premier League's unique tradition of playing on Boxing Day and New Year's Day should not change but they must allow five substitutions to protect players amid a gruelling schedule, Manchester City manager Pep Guardiola said on Thursday.

Top flight leagues in Europe adopted the rule to increase the number of substitutions per game to five to ease the workload on players amid the COVID-19 pandemic but Premier League clubs voted against the motion.

While most leagues head for a winter break, English teams are also set to play three times from Dec. 26-Jan. 2. But with more games postponed due to COVID-19 outbreaks, Guardiola said it was time the league adapted to changing circumstances.

"The tradition from Boxing Day is massively important. It's a characteristic of this league. It won't change... Boxing Day is so nice for families to all go together to the stadium," Guardiola said ahead of Leicester City's visit on Sunday.

"The problem is the fixtures, the calendar, 365 days a year, the international teams with huge competitions and a lot of games... The players have two-three weeks holiday in the summer, then the season (starts) again, it's too much."

"Today managers talked with the Premier League and broadcasters and decide what is the best for everyone. The welfare of players should be the most important... This is the only country to not accept five substitutions, just three. Why?"

"We want to protect the players, so bring five substitutions. It's much better for the amount of games, but the Premier League and clubs decided 'no'."

Players and managers have said player welfare is not being taken seriously enough while COVID-19 exacerbates the situation and Guardiola said they should probably come together and go on a strike, although he did not want it to come to that.

"Just words won't solve anything. (For) UEFA, FIFA, the Premier League, the broadcasters, the business is more important than the welfare," Guardiola added.



Barcelona, Man City Agree Fee for Torres

LONDON (Dispatches) - Barcelona have agreed a fee worth an initial 55 million euros (\$62 million, £47 million) for Manchester City forward Ferran Torres, according to reports in Spain and England.

The Spanish international, 22, joined City from Valencia for a fee of just over £20 million in August 2020.

Torres has scored 16 goals in 43 appearances for the English champions as City won the Premier League, League Cup and reached the final of the Champions League during his only full season in Manchester.

But his second season at City has been disrupted by a fractured foot that has kept him out since October.

Barca are looking to bolster their forward line after City's all-time record goalscorer Sergio Aguero was forced to retire earlier this month due to a heart condition, just months into his spell with the Catalan giants.

Already eliminated from the Champions League at the group stage for the first time in 20 years, Barca face a fight just to qualify for next season's competition as they sit seventh in La Liga ahead of the winter break.

However, they could even still have trouble registering Torres within the salary cap imposed by La Liga.

Lionel Messi's departure to Paris Saint-Germain was caused by the club being unable to retain the Argentine due to spiralling debts.

Barca recorded losses of 481 million euros last season, with a gross debt of 1.35 billion euros.

Hector Holds Off Shiffrin for Second World Cup Win

PARIS (Dispatches) - Sara Hector held off a second-run charge by Mikaela Shiffrin to win the women's giant slalom in Courchevel.

It was only the Swede's second career World Cup victory and her first in seven years. Hector, who was fastest after the first run, finished in a combined time of 2 minutes 13.03 seconds, 0.35sec ahead of Shiffrin.

That reversed Tuesday's result when Shiffrin skied last and won despite a strong second run that lifted Hector to second.

Italian Marta Bassino finished third at 0.60sec on Wednesday with Frenchwoman Tessa Worley another 0.08sec back in fourth.

The 29-year-old Hector's only previous World Cup victory came in a giant slalom in Kuehtai in Austria in 2014.

"It's amazing. It's incredible," the giddy Hector said at the finish.

"I'm so surprised too. It was such a big fight and I didn't think I was so fast. It feels so awesome."

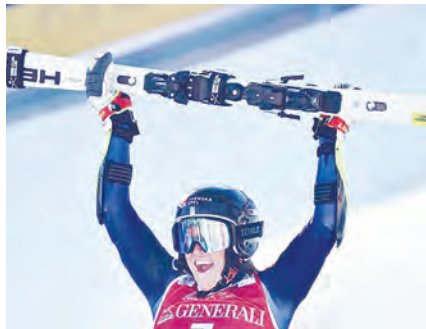
"It's crazy. I'm so proud."

Shiffrin increased her lead in the giant slalom standings to 78 points over Hector.

The American also built on her lead in the overall, to 115 points over Italian Sofia Goggia who, for the second straight day, failed to finish.

The top seven skiers were separated by less than a second after the first run on a course that grew increasingly bumpy during the second giant slalom down the slope in two days.

The race replaced a giant slalom in Killington in the United States called off due to bad weather at the end of November. Austrian Katharina Liensberger and Swiss Lara Gut-Behrami, both in the top 10 in the giant slalom standings, missed the race due to testing positive for Covid-19.



Henderson Voices Player Welfare Concern

LONDON (AFP) - Liverpool captain Jordan Henderson fears player welfare is too low down the list of football's priorities as the English game continues to grapple with the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Premier League announced its intention to continue with the scheduled matches over the traditionally busy Christmas and New Year period, despite more than 90 confirmed coronavirus cases among players and staff in the last week. Last weekend, six of 10 scheduled games in England's top flight were called because of coronavirus outbreaks, with Henderson telling the BBC: "I don't think people can appreciate how intense it is until you actually see it first hand."

"Football to us is everything and we want to be able to perform at the highest level every time we set foot on the pitch. And unfortunately, in this period it is difficult to do that."

The 31-year-old England midfielder added: "That has been like this for a few years now and it has been difficult but then, on top of that, you chuck in Covid and it becomes even harder and even worse."

"I am concerned that nobody really takes player welfare seriously."

Liverpool were without a number of key players for their 2-2 draw at Tottenham Hotspur last weekend, including Virgil van Dijk, Fabinho and Thiago Alcantara.

"I think decisions get made -- of course we want to play as footballers, we want to get out there and play -- but I am worried about player welfare and I don't think anybody does take that seriously enough, especially in this period, when Covid is here," Henderson said.

"We will try to have conversations in the background and try to have some sort of influence going forward, but at the minute I don't feel the players get the respect they deserve in terms of having somebody being able to speak for them independently and having the power to say actually this isn't right for player welfare."

