

Intelligence minister Esmail Khatib Says Despite Pressure by The United States and Its Allies Tehran Currently Have Fewer Problems in Selling Oil

Health Ministry Announced on Saturday That the Number of Deaths From the Coronavirus Pandemic In Iran Increased to 131,348 With 42 More Iranians Killed by the Virus Over the Past 24 Hours

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Armed Forces To Give All-Out Response To Any Threats

TEHRAN (MNA) – In a message on Saturday, Iranian President Seyed Ebrahim Raisi praised the successful holding of the IRGC's Great Prophet 17 (PBUH) 17, which wrapped up on Friday.

"The Great Prophet (PBUH) 17 is an indicator of the will and ability of the Islamic Republic to defend the interests and security of the Iranian nation," the Iranian President said in his message on Saturday one day after the massive IRGC military drill dubbed Great Prophet 17 were held in the south of Iran in the Persian Gulf region attended by land, air and naval forces of the IRGC.

The president also praised the efforts of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps for their role in maintaining the security of the Iranian nation and the other nations of the region.

Raisi also warned the enemies against any hostile move and said, "Any hostile move by the enemies will face a fully-fledged and decisive response from the Armed Forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran and will change the strategic equations meaningfully."

IRGC Drills Real Warning to Zionists' Anti-Iran Threats

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) says the elite military force's large-scale military exercises in Iran's southern areas this week sent "very clear and obvious" messages to the Zionist regime, warning the Israeli authorities to watch their acts vis-à-vis the Islamic Republic.

"The message of this drills is a serious, real and field warning to the threats of the Zionist regime officials to be aware of their mistakes and blunders," Major General Hossein Salami said.

"We will cut off their hands if they make a wrong move," he added.

Salami emphasized that the distance between actual operations and the IRGC's missile maneuvers is "only a change in the angles of launching the missiles" and said, "Therefore, enemies must beware of their words."

The IRGC's five-day massive drills, dubbed Great Prophet 17, ended on Friday. The maneuvers were held in the Persian Gulf region, the Strait of Hormuz, as well as the coastal areas of the southern province of Hormuzgan, Bushehr, and Khuzestan. The exercises were part of major military drills Iran holds regularly to improve its combat readiness.

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Iran Not to Exceed 60% Nuclear Enrichment



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Iran's atomic chief says the Islamic Republic will not enrich uranium beyond the current 60% purity even if negotiations with the P4+1 group in Vienna fail to produce an agreement, and sanctions imposed by the United States remain in place.

Head of Iran's Atomic Energy Organization Mohammad Eslami made the remark in an interview with Russia's Sputnik News Agency.

Iran began the 60% enrichment for the first time in April 2021 after an Israeli sabotage attack on its Natanz nuclear facility.

The Iran Nuclear Deal known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action is in tatters largely because of the U.S unilateral withdrawal from it in May 2018 and its re-imposition of sanctions. In response to the U.S. pullout, Iran rolled back many of its commitments under the JCPOA.

Iran and the P4+1 group namely Russia, China, Britain, France and Germany have held seven rounds of talks this year to find a way to remove sanctions against Tehran and allow the U.S. to return to the agreement.

Negotiators will go back to the Austrian capital on December 27 for an eighth round.

During the interview, Eslami stressed that the Iranian nuclear program aims to meet industrial production needs, as well as the needs of Iranian consumers for certain goods.

"All our nuclear activities are carried out according to the agreements, statutes and regulations of the International Atomic Energy Agency", Eslami stated.

Eslami also said Iran can domestically produce nuclear fuel and will soon start using it at the Bushehr nuclear power plant in southern Iran.

"Iran can already produce nuclear fuel domestically. We had talks with Rosatom and we hope that as part of our cooperation, based on the plans and contracts we will sign with it, we will be able to do this and start using Iranian fuel in the reactor in Bushehr", Eslami added.

On the eve of talks on the Iranian nuclear deal, which will resume in Vienna on December 27, Iranian Vice President, and Head of the Atomic Energy Organization of the country Mohammad Eslami told RIA Novosti what progress Tehran has made in the development of nuclear energy, how useful the nuclear power plant built by Russia has become, and whether the debt for construction has been paid off, and also assured that Iran's nuclear facilities are under reliable protection.

On cooperation between Iran and Russia for more nuclear power plant, Eslami said, "The transition to clean energy is a necessity in the modern world since global warming has led to the fact that climate change has endangered human life. Therefore, we need to move towards renewable energy sources. However, what Iran has done with Russia (which has been operating in Iranian Bushehr since 2012), namely the country's first nuclear power plant, is a huge project. As a result, Iran, at the expense of this nuclear power plant, introduces about 1000 megawatts of electricity into the grid and has already generated about 52 billion kilowatts of electricity to date. The amount of electricity we have produced is equivalent to saving about 80 million barrels of oil."

He added, "The construction and launch of nuclear power plants is one of the main strategies of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Russian Federation, and we will continue to develop this area."

Yemeni Officials Condemn Saudi Airstrikes Killing Civilians

SANAA (Dispatches) - Yemeni officials have condemned Saudi airstrikes on hospitals and medical centers in the capital Sana'a as "war crimes", calling on international organizations to intervene and stop them.

Spokesman for the Supreme Council for the Administration and Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs Talat al-Sharjabi said that the Saudi aerial attacks, which deliberately target medical facilities, constitute war crimes and are meant to increase the suffering of the Yemeni nation."

"As the Saudi-led coalition intensifies its attacks on Sana'a, we have complained to international institutions about the decrease in delivery of humanitarian aid to poor people and Yemeni hospitals," he said.

Director General of the Public Health and Population Office in Sana'a Dr. Mutahar al-Marwani said the Saudi airstrikes on hospitals are a deliberate attempt to put pressure on the Yemeni health sector, which is currently suffering from the devastating Saudi war and brutal siege.

He said all medical diagnostic imaging centers are closed down in Sana'a, and thousands of patients have been adversely affected as a result.

Early on Friday, Saudi warplanes targeted an area close to al-Alia Medical Center in the Yemeni capital, severely damaging nearby buildings.

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Iran Exports to Iraq Exceed \$6.1b

TEHRAN (MNA) – A member of the Board of Directors of Iran-Iraq Joint Chamber of Commerce put the value of products exported from the country to Iraq in the first eight months of the current year (Mar. 21 - Nov. 22) at above \$6.1 billion.

Seyyed Hamid Hosseini broke the news in an interview with Fars News Agency on Saturday and stated, "Statistics indicate that Iran has exported \$750 million worth of non-oil goods to neighboring Iraq on a monthly basis on average."

Turning to the latest situation of Iran's exports to Iraq, Hosseini said that the global trade was severely affected by the spread of COVID-19 in 2020 and 2021 greatly.

Iran's export of products to Iraq also was affected by the global coronavirus pandemic in these two years i.e. 2020 and 2021, he said, adding, "Accordingly, Iran's export of products to Iraq decreased in 2020 due to the closure of borders between Iran and Iraq following spread of the pandemic."

Iran exported more than \$6.1 billion worth of products to Iraq from March 21 to Nov. 22, so that the country exported about \$750 million worth of non-oil goods to Iraq monthly, he noted.

In this period, Iran exported construction materials (tiles, stones, ceramics and glasses), foodstuff (fresh fruits and vegetables), oil and petrochemical products, home appliances, dairies, clothing, furniture and shoes to Iraq, Chairman of Iran-Iraq Joint Chamber of Commerce added.

Thousands in Baghdad Pay Homage to Gen. Soleimani And His Comrades

BAGHDAD (Dispatches) - Thousands of people have staged a mass rally in Iraq to pay tribute to top Iranian anti-terror commander General Qassem Soleimani and his Iraqi trenchmate Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, deputy head of the Popular Mobilization Units, who were assassinated in a U.S. drone strike near Baghdad airport last January.

The demonstrators took to the streets in the capital Baghdad on Friday, holding up pictures of the two legendary commanders and members of the anti-terror Popular Mobilization Units (PMU) or Hashd al-Sha'abi, who were killed in battles against the Daesh Takfiri terrorists.

"Having spent weeks of sorrow and hardship, peaceful demonstrators and marchers are gathering on the Friday of Insight to renew their allegiance with those who sacrificed their lives to obtain justice, and to confront those conspiring against our future. The demonstrators oppose any form of normalization of relations with Israel and capitulation to criminal American occupiers," the participants said in a final communiqué.

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China Urges U.S. to Lift Sanctions Against Iran

BEIJING (Dispatches) - As a new round of talks is slated to kick off between Iran and the five remaining parties to the landmark 2015 nuclear deal in the Austrian capital of Vienna, China urges the United States to "overhaul" its failed "maximum pressure" policy on Iran and remove all "illegal" sanctions it has imposed against Tehran after its unilateral withdrawal from the agreement.

"I'd like to reiterate that, as the culprit of the Iranian nuclear crisis, the U.S. should overhaul its erroneous policy of 'maximum pressure' on Iran, and lift all illegal sanctions on Iran and 'long-arm jurisdiction' on third parties," China's Foreign Ministry Spokesman Zhao Lijian said at a regular press conference in Beijing on Friday. "On this basis, Iran should resume full compliance," he added.

In a tweet on Thursday, European Union deputy foreign policy chief Enrique Mora said Iran and the five parties to the 2015 agreement, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), would resume anti-Iran sanctions removal talks in Vienna on Monday to "discuss and define the way ahead."

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Tehran, Baku Agree on Opening New Chapter of Cooperation

TEHRAN (IRNA) – Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian in a message referred to his recent meeting with Azeri President Ilham Aliyev, saying that Tehran and Baku drew a good roadmap on bilateral relations and on opening a new chapter in cooperation. “During official visit to Baku, we agreed to open a new chapter,” Amirabdollahian wrote in his Twitter account on Friday. “In cordial meeting w @presidentaz, & my discussions w FM Bayramov & Parl. Speaker we charted a roadmap to further enhance ties,” he said.

Islam, Christianity Alike In Essence

TEHRAN (Tasnim) – There is no difference between the true core of Islam and Christianity, Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi said, hoping that all Christians would grasp the opportunity to follow the teachings of Jesus Christ (PBUH).

“The truth of the religion of Jesus Christ is not different from the truth of the religion of Islam, and the Qur’an mentions excellent attributes for Saint Mary and Jesus Christ,” the Iranian president said in a meeting with the family of Iranian Christian martyr, Vartan Aqakhanian, held in Tehran.

Congratulating the family of the martyr and all the followers of Jesus Christ on the New Year, President Raisi said, “Anyone who is ready to sacrifice his life for the homeland, the people and the security of society is dear and respected to the Iranian nation, that is why the martyrs are a source of pride for Iran and Iranians.”

“The message of the martyrs to the ill-wishers of this country is that the Iranian people are always ready to defend their homeland with self-sacrifice,” he added, according to the president’s official website.

“We owe a lot to martyrs and we should not hesitate defending and protecting the martyrs’ achievements for a moment,” Raisi stated.

In a message earlier on Friday, Raisi expressed “cordial congratulations” to the head of the Roman Catholic Church and all the Christians across the world on the jubilant birth anniversary of Jesus Christ, the Prophet of peace and kindness and the beginning of New Year.



He said the Jesus Christ’s birth is the “manifestation of God’s will and power” and added that the spiritual status of Saint Mary, the Prophet’s mother, shows the lofty position of women in divine religions.

Raisi added that the Prophet’s birth is an opportunity to pay tribute to Saint Mary (PBUH) and a reminder of the moral characteristics of Jesus Christ, who is a role model of altruism and the herald of salvation for the oppressed, in standing against the arrogant powers’ oppression and signaling a bright future for humanity.

The Iranian president also thanked Pope Francis for his efforts to bring closer the hearts and views of followers of the Abrahamic religions.

He also prayed that God bestow “health and success” to Pope Francis and “happiness and blessing” to all human beings, Press TV reported.

Iran Condemns U.S. for Voting Against UNGA Resolutions

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Secretary-general of Iran’s Human Rights Office has criticized the United States for voting against two human rights resolutions at the United Nations General Assembly.

According to humanrights.eadl.ir, Secretary-general of Iran’s Human Rights Office and the Iranian Judiciary’s deputy for international affairs Kazem Gharibabadi reacted to the United States’ attempt to hamper two human rights resolutions in a Tweet on Friday.

He wrote on his Twitter account: “Bad News For Human Rights: the U.S. has voted against 2 important UNGA resolutions: Resolution on condemning all forms of racism. The U.S. and Ukraine voted against, 49 abstained and 130 in favor. This resolution is proposed since 2015 and the U.S. has voted against it every time.”

Gharibabadi continued: “Second, resolution on “The right to food” reaffirming that hunger constitutes an outrage and a violation of human dignity, requiring the adoption of urgent measures at different levels for its elimination, with a vote of 186 in favor, 2 against (Israel, U.S.), with no abstentions.”

The United States has a long history of showing all-out support to the Zionist regime even when the Zionists commit crimes against humanity in dealing with the oppressed Palestinian people.

Educational Evolution Needs National Determination

TEHRAN (IP) - Evolution in the education system needs national determination to improve, Iran’s Minister of Education said in his first presser since Parliament gave him a vote of confidence.

Yusef Nouri said on Saturday that the education system is always evaluated so that its relationship with Islamic values is direct and inverted with anomalies.

He addressed the role of the education system in society and said: “This system is effective in increasing the level of public health, environment and employment. For example, if we observe health, we will become self-sufficient in the consumption of imported drugs.”

The Minister of Education noted: If the student is not well educated, they can hardly be effective at different levels in the following courses.

Nouri said that the six areas of the Education Transformation Document should be realized so that the students can be trained for a social role in the future, stressing that if the vocational courses were well chosen, besides those who go to university, other trained ones will be attracted to the labor market.

Referring to the coronavirus pandemic, he stressed that Iranian teachers have worked wonders and played a significant role in the online training of students.

Nouri noted that enough and proper educational materials must be provided for students aboard, and we try to attract them to the country.



Loading, Unloading of Goods in Ports Up

TEHRAN (MNA) - Loading and unloading of goods in the ports of Iran rose 15.2 percent during the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21-December 21), as compared to the same period in the previous year.

As announced in a report by Ports and Maritime Organization (PMO), loading and unloading of goods in the country’s ports reached 109.09 million tons in the mentioned period, while the figure stood at 94.72 million tons in the past year’s same time span.

During the said seven months, unloading and loading operations in the container sector reached 17.19 million tons, for dry bulk the figure stood at 35.01 million tons, in liquid bulk the figure was 3.05 million tons, while for general cargo (general and miscellaneous goods) it was 15.25 million tons, and for the petroleum products loading and unloading volume amounted to 38.59 million tons, the PMO report said.

The report noted that the loading and unloading operations in the container sector rose by 11.5 percent in the mentioned period compared to the last year’s same time span, while in the dry bulk sector the figure grew by 16 percent, in the liquid bulk sector increased by 21 percent, in the general cargo sector the growth was 10.7 percent, and the petroleum sector also experienced a growth of 17.1 percent compared to the same period last year.

While Iran is combating the U.S. unilateral sanctions on its economy, the country’s ports as the major gates of exports and imports play some significant role in this battle. This role makes all-out support to ports and more development of them serious and vital.

Such necessity has led the government to define projects for more development of the ports and also take some measures to encourage investment making in ports, in addition, to facilitate loading and unloading of goods, especially basic commodities, there.

Iranian, Italian Universities to Enhance Scientific Cooperation

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Agriculture and National Resources colleges affiliated to Tehran University and Italy’s University of Turin have signed an agreement on cooperation in scientific field.

The signing ceremony was held by dean of the Iranian College Hossein Goldansaz and rector of Turin University Stefano Geuna, according to the Saturday report of public relations office of Tehran University.

In a related development, an official has said that doing research, exchanging students, and holding webinars are parts of the mutual agreement.

Valiollah Mohammadi has said that the two Iranian colleges have signed 19 agreements on scientific cooperation with different European and Asian universities, as well as universities of neighboring countries in recent two years.

Relations With Neighbor At All-Time High

TEHRAN (IRNA) - A member of Iranian Parliament’s National Security and Foreign Policy Commission praised President Ebrahim Raisi’s neighborliness policy and said that Iran’s ties with neighboring countries were at an all-time high.

Javad Karimi Qodduzi hoped that the Raisi administration’s provisioned eight-percent economic growth in the next fiscal year would be realized, as 3.5 percent would be fulfilled via efficiency improvement, and 4.5 percent via new investments.

The lawmaker said that Iran’s relationship with neighboring countries was at an all-time high due to Raisi’s neighborliness policy.

The reports from Foreign Ministry indicate that all issues with neighbors have been solved, including issues with Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, Armenia, Azerbaijan Republic, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and the UAE, Karimi Qodduzi noted.

He also mentioned the capabilities of the Eurasian region with some hundreds of millions of people living in the region and said that the ground roads in this region are all open and secure despite minor problems which would be solved.

The Raisi administration has fulfilled its promise not to link Iran’s economy with the negotiations to removal of U.S. sanctions, he went on to say.

Iran Produces Over 10m Doses of Pastokovac Vaccine in Fall

TEHRAN (IFP) - Iran has, so far, produced more than 10 million doses of the anti-Covid Pastokovac vaccine, of which 6.3 million doses have been handed over to the health ministry and injected to citizens at medical centers.

Another 13 million doses of the vaccine will be delivered to the ministry this winter, say officials at the Pasteur Institute of Iran.

“After months of efforts, the Pastokovac vaccine was produced, and people’s trust in the vaccine and their welcoming, it was the reward for our attempts and hardships,” said Alireza Rahimi, the head of the Recombinant Pharmaceuticals Formulation Department of the institute.

“Our colleagues made every effort in order for this product to be made available to our fellow countrymen, i.e., to be offered on the market and injected to the people in the shortest possible time,” he added.

He also stressed that sanctions imposed on Iran have not deterred local researchers from doing their job and developing vaccines.

Tehran Slams UK’s Meddlesome Statement on Iran Defensive Capabilities



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iranian Foreign Ministry has lambasted the United Kingdom for a “meddlesome statement” issued by the Foreign Office on Iran’s defensive capabilities, stressing that Tehran acts within international laws and regulations and in accordance with the Islamic Republic’s defense needs.

“The nuclear program of the Islamic Republic of Iran is completely peaceful, as evidenced by thousands of hours of inspections and numerous reports by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), and Iran has not designed its missiles for nuclear purposes since it did not have and does not have any plans to use nuclear energy militarily,” Saeed Khatibzadeh said in a statement.

“The British know better than anyone else that Iran’s missile program has nothing to do with UN Security Council Resolution 2231 and its provisions,” he added, stressing that it is the UK that practically violates the provisions of the said resolution through “arbitrary interpretation.”

The Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC)’s five-day massive drills, dubbed Great Prophet 17, ended on Friday. The maneuvers were held in the Persian Gulf region, the Strait of Hormuz, as well as the coastal areas of the southern province of Hormuzgan, Bushehr, and Khuzestan. The exercises were part of major military drills Iran holds regularly to improve its combat readiness.

The large-scale military exercises intended to showcase the maneuverability of solid-fuel missiles to cross enemy shields and to improve the combat readiness of the IRGC forces.

Earlier on Friday, the British Foreign Office criticized the drills and firing ballistic missiles in a statement, saying “These actions are a threat to regional and international security and we call on Iran to immediately cease its activities.”

Khatibzadeh condemned the Foreign Office statement as interference in Iran’s domestic affairs, stressing that it is a vivid example of the continuation of London’s double-standard policy.

He said the UK expresses concern about Iran’s usual military drills amid an endless race among Britain and European countries for selling the most destructive weapons to West Asia and other crisis-hit regions, and while London signs military pacts such as AUKUS without paying heed to the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

Khatibzadeh also denounced the British officials’ efforts to accuse Iran of being a threat to the region, stressing that what has fueled instability and insecurity in the region, including the humanitarian catastrophe in Yemen, is the “insatiable appetite” of Britain and other European countries to sell large quantities of advanced weapons to some specific countries in the region, while knowing very well that using such armaments is in violation of international law, particularly humanitarian law.

“Therefore, it is them who must be held accountable before the oppressed people of the region and the international community for the upsurge in instability and insecurity in the region,” the spokesman for Iran’s Foreign Ministry further said.

In conclusion, Khatibzadeh stressed that the Islamic Republic of Iran’s defense program is non-negotiable and the country does not require others’ permission to develop its defensive capabilities.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	12:05
■ Evening (Maghreb)	17:17
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	05:43
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	07:12

27. They speak not before He speaks, and they act (in all things) by His Command.
28. He knows what is before them, and what is behind them, and they offer no intercession except for those who are acceptable, and they stand in awe and reverence of His (Glory).

Surah 21, The Prophets (27 - 28)

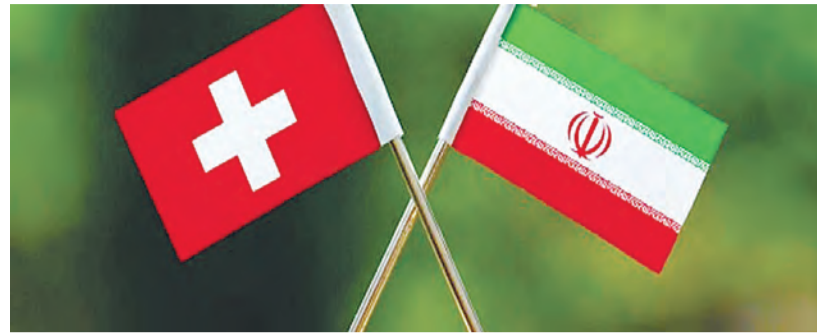
Swiss Companies May Leave Iran If JCPOA Talks Fail

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Chairman of Iran-Switzerland Joint Chamber of Commerce Sharif Nezam-Mafi expressed his disappointment over the barter of tea for oil and said through this kind of barter trade Iran will be unable to import technologies, reiterating that if the JCPOA talks in Vienna fail, remaining Swiss companies in Iran may leave the country.

Speaking to ILNA and touching upon Iran's barter trade policy, Nezam-Mafi said this policy is good for a short time and it cannot resolve the problems of the industry sector and especially production in the long term. He went on to say that in the history of mankind, barter has been a mechanism for trade before money surfaces and there has been definitely a reason that bartering is not in use any longer and if Iran has a plan for the progress of industry, occupation and exports, this mechanism cannot solve its problems with this mechanism.

He then pointed to the barter of oil with tea with Sri Lanka and said it is disappointing that the country uses its national reserves for consumables like tea which is not a vital commodity for our life as the country could at least have barter of oil with medicines for cancer patients or other items which can boost the economy.



He noted that tea and other commodities are consumed based on the daily habit and it is not a necessary commodity in the lives and one can say the country uses its national reserves just for a habit.

Nezam-Mafi went on to say that it is unlikely the advanced countries to be ready to use mechanisms like barter in their trade and therefore, to meet our production and exports demands, the advanced countries in terms of economy will not be ready to use barter mechanism, and they prefer money or credit.

He said Iran can advance this policy of barter ultimately with the third world countries, for example, Sri Lanka which has recently gotten rid of a civil war and has weak economy and it is run based on agriculture.

He went on to say that after the U.S. pullout of the JCPOA, some of Swiss companies still continued their works in Iran but most of them are facing with capital accumulation and they are unable to return their profits or pay the money of their shareholders or they are even unable to pay for import of raw material and parts, and it will not surprising the number of Swiss companies declines next year if the JCPOA does not end to an agreement.

Nezam-Mafi added that several Swiss companies have investments in Iran which are mostly involved in the fields of pharmaceutical, food industry and construction materials but they have problems. He noted that banking problems have made those companies be unable to work easily and when they problems are accumulated, they reach the fragile point and currently some of those big companies in Iran are reaching this point.

Iran Closes Land Borders For Passengers

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Spokesman to Iranian Customs Administration announced the closure of the land borders for passengers for two weeks, adding that the transit of goods and trucks will continue.

Speaking to ILNA, Ruhollah Lotfi said according to the approval of the National Headquarters for Coronavirus Control and in order to contain the Omicron in the country, the land borders with neighboring countries will be close for two weeks.

He added that currently the restriction for traverse of passengers through land borders with Turkey, Iraq, Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Pakistan and Armenia is definite and this restriction is for passengers and only passengers with having certain documents can travel via land borders.

Lotfi went on to say that but the trade through the land borders will continue and the restriction is only for passengers.

New Record, Indicator of Skill And High Motivation in HOSCO

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The CEO of Hormozgan Steel Company (HOSCO) Mr. Ataollah Maroofkhani announced a new record set by the company in monthly production which was set last month with production of 147,591 tons and felicitated those who benefit from the company and termed the success the result of strong spirit of staff and proper technical support and new ideas in resolving the products in the production line.

Maroofkhani called energy provision in the field of industry as a clear example of support from production and said that he understands the hurdles in way of the government for energy supply for the industries in the winter and summer but as everybody knows the outage or reduction in energy supply in steel industry will lead to slump in production, adding that steel industry is a mother and strategic industry whose product is used as the raw material in factories and plants and reduction in its production will have irrecoverable blows to the small industries and hundreds of thousands of jobs and ultimately to the final consumers which is the very society.

He expressed hope that in case the current trend of energy supply continues, Hormozgan Steel Company can materialize its planned targets.



Chabahar, Karachi Universities Sign MoU For Cooperation

ISLAMABAD (IRNA) - A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between Chabahar International University and Karachi University of Pakistan for cooperation in the field of science and exchange of professors and students.

Hassan Nourian, the consul general of Iran in Karachi, the capital of Sindh Province, announced the development on his Twitter account, adding that scientific and cultural cooperation between Chabahar and Karachi universities is being developed.

He added that in order to develop scientific and academic cooperation between Iran and Pakistan and with the efforts of the consulate general in Karachi, a memorandum of understanding for cooperation between professors and students, holding seminars and scientific workshops, especially Persian and Urdu language teaching between Chabahar International University and University Karachi was signed.

It is worth mentioning that the signing ceremony was held after separate meetings of the Iranian consul general in Karachi with the deans of Chabahar and Karachi universities and a virtual meeting was held last October between the deans of the mentioned universities, after which the text of the memorandum was exchanged and signed.

Iran, Turkmenistan Review Mutual Cooperation In Electricity Field

TEHRAN (MNA) - Energy Minister Ali Akbar Mehrabian in a phone talk with Turkmen Deputy Prime Minister for Construction, Energy, Water Management, Electricity Affairs discussed mutual cooperation in the electricity field.

During the phone talk on Friday, the two officials underlined the need for developing fruitful exchanges in the field of electricity, reviewing the ways to enhance electricity exchanges, export of technical services and engineering as well as Iran-made electrical products to Turkmenistan.

They also called for the development of linking power generation networks of both countries.

Iranian and Turkmen officials attached importance to finding new ways to boost cooperation as a result of determination and moves adopted by new administration in Tehran, emphasizing that agreements made by presidents of both countries should become operational.

Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi and his Turkmen counterpart Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedow held talks



on the sidelines of the 21st Meeting of SCO Council of Heads of State in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, on September 17, 2021 as well as the 15th summit of the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan on November 28.

The Iranian energy minister and the Turkmen deputy prime minister expressed hope that they would be able to hold face-to-face meeting in the near future in order to finalize the mentioned fields of cooperation and pave the ground for the implementation of the decisions.

Weekly Trade on IME Exceeds 1.72 Tons

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Iran Mercantile Exchange (IME) last week posted trade of 1,720,000 tons of commodities with a total trading value of more than \$425m on its physical market.

According to a report by the IME's international affairs and PR, the exchange traded on its metals and minerals trading floor 1,428,000 tons of commodities valued at almost \$252m.



On this floor, the IME's customers purchased 1,063,000 tons of cement, 220,828 tons of steel, 70,000 tons of I-beam, 35,000 tons of sponge iron, 26,000 tons of zinc dust, 10,650 tons of aluminum, 6,460 tons of copper, 880 tons of zinc, 400 tons of coke and 120 tons of molybdenum concentrate. Furthermore, the IME saw trade 284,194 tons of commodities on both domestic and export pits of its oil and petrochemical trading floor valued almost \$169m.

Commodities sold on this floor included 82,407 tons of polymeric products, 69,079 tons of bitumen, 55,000 tons of vacuum bottom, 29,638 tons of chemicals, 25,000 tons of lube cut, 17,600 tons of sulfur, 3,690 tons of base oil, 1,300 tons of slops wax and 150 tons of argon.

Last but not least was the IME's side market with 6,091 tons of commodities traded on it.

Iran Foreign Trade Record Broken in 13th Gov't

TEHRAN (MNA) - Spokesman for Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA) said that foreign trade record including import of basic goods, exports and transit in a short time span of activity of 13th government has been broken.

Speaking in an interview with Iranian media on Friday, Seyyed Rouhollah Latifi Spokesman for IRICA stated that 5.3 million tons of non-oil goods were discharged at customs offices of the country in Iranian month of Shahrivar (August 21 - Sept. 22) in the current year while 2.7 million tons of goods were discharged in the first five months of the current year (from March 21 to August 22).

Chadormalu Co. Sets a Golden Leaf In Resistance Economy

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Head of Resistance Economy Expansion Center (REEC) of Iran Hojjatoleslam Nekoui during his visit to Chadormalu Mining and Industrial Company and getting acquainted with the activities of the company hailed the broad performance of the company in production and occupation as well as empowering innovation, creativity and production and noted the company has set a golden leaf in the national resistance economy.

During his one-day visit, Hojjatoleslam Nekoui was informed of the activities and performance of the company especially in the field of the resistance economy.

After visiting the activities and in meeting with officials of the company, Nekoui said today one of the most important issues in the country is lack of skill of human resources and educational measures can lead to job creation and expressed his satisfaction over the actions of the company.

He added that today Chadormalu Company in the scene of mining and industry as well as provision of steel chain with a brilliant record is a leading company and due to the technical knowhow and efforts of its experts, it has set a golden leaf in the national resistance economy, and emphasized the role of applied researches and special attention to developing entrepreneurship in the information technology.



First Announcement

شناسه آگهی: ۱۲۴۶۲۹۳

TENDER NO.: 08-38-9940001



National Iranian South Oilfields Company (NISOC) intends to purchase the following goods

Items	Material Description	Quantity
01	PARTS FOR "HYDRIL" ANUULAR TYPE BLOWOUT PREVENTER MODL/TYPE "GK" 7 1/16 IN & 11 IN	60 NO

Vendors who intend to participate in aforesaid tender are requested to send their "Intention To Participate" letter via fax to the following number along with their resume according to Qualitative Assessment Form no.2, available at: www.nisoc.ir, not later than 14 days after the second announcement, otherwise, their requests for participation in the tender will be disregarded. The applicants should have relevant background in supplying the required goods and capability to provide and submit a bid bond of 7,883 EURO or 2,115,200,000 RIAL, in favor of NISOC.

Tender documents including the materials thorough technical specifications and Qualitative Assessment Forms can be accessed via: www.nisoc.ir-material-procurement-management-tab.

ONLY ACCEPTABLE DELIVERY TERM IS D.D.P. NISOC'S WAREHOUSE, AGHAJARI, IRAN
PAYMENT TERM IS C.O.D., SUBSEQUENT TO NISOC'S MATERIAL APPROVAL
NO ADVANCE PAYMENT WILL BE PAID

FOREIGN PURCHASING DEPARTMENT
Bldg. No. 104, Material Procurement Management Complex,
Kouy-e-Fadaeian Islam (New Site), Ahvaz, Iran
Tel. No.: 061 341 23455 Fax No.: 061 34 45 74 37

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UN Seeks \$6.5m in Aid After Philippine Typhoon

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - The United Nations will kick off a campaign Friday to raise \$6.5 million in aid for victims of Typhoon Rai, which ravaged the Philippines last week, the organization's in-country coordinator said.

"Tomorrow, we'll be launching at the local level with the international community represented in Manila... a presentation of the humanitarian needs and priority plan," Gustavo Gonzalez told a virtual press conference Thursday.

"The financial ask is \$6.5 millions dollars," he said.



Israeli Settlers Attack Village In Occupied West Bank

BURQA (Dispatches) - Israeli settlers have attacked the northern village of Burqa in the occupied West Bank, according to Palestinian authorities.

The attack under the cover of night came after a settler rally had turned violent, with Israeli forces using tear gas and rubber-coated steel bullets against Palestinians.

Dozens of Palestinians were wounded, medics said. Reporting from West Jerusalem, Al Jazeera's Harry Fawcett said the events were "extremely serious" and further raised tensions in the area.



U.S. Became Arrogant After Fall of Soviet Union



MOSCOW (Dispatches) - The United States grew "arrogant and self-confident" after the collapse of the Soviet Union, leading to the expansion of the NATO military alliance, former leader Mikhail Gorbachev said.

In recent years President Vladimir Putin has grown increasingly insistent that NATO is encroaching close to Russia's borders, and Moscow last week demanded "legal guarantees" that the US-led alliance halt its eastward expansion.

Gorbachev resigned as president of the Soviet Union on December 25, 1991, days after the leaders of Belarus, Russia and Ukraine said the USSR no longer existed.

"How can one count on equal relations with the United States and the West in such a position," Gorbachev told state news agency RIA Novosti on the eve of the anniversary of his resignation as the leader of the USSR.

He said there was a "triumphant mood in the West, especially in the United States" after the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. "They grew arrogant and self-confident. They declared victory in the Cold War," said the 90-year-old.

He insisted Moscow and Washington were "together" in pulling the world out of confrontation and the nuclear race.

"No, the 'winners' decided to build a new empire. Hence the idea of NATO expansion," Gorbachev added.

However, he welcomed forthcoming security talks between Moscow and Washington.

"I hope there will be a result," he said.

Last week Moscow presented the West with sweeping security demands, saying NATO must not admit new members and seeking to bar the U.S. from establishing new bases in former Soviet countries.

Putin said Thursday that Washington had been willing to discuss the proposals and talks could happen at the start of next year in Geneva.

A senior U.S. official said Washington was ready for talks "as soon as early January".

Putin, a former KGB agent and loyal servant of the Soviet Union, was dismayed when it fell apart, once calling the collapse "the greatest geopolitical disaster of the 20th century".

Many Russians remember the end of the Soviet era for the economic and political crisis that followed and credit Putin with returning the country to the international arena.

Valentina Shmeleva labelled the leaders immediately preceding Putin as "traitors", particularly Russia's first president Boris Yeltsin.

"Gorbachev destroyed the Soviet Union and the drunkard Yeltsin helped," said the 84-year-old.

Evgeny Dotsenko, 46, said it was a "pity" that the USSR fell apart.

"I was born and grew up in the Soviet Union and I liked living then. Everything was free: education, medicine, everything," Dotsenko, who works as a metro electrician, told AFP.

Satellite Images Show Russia Still Building Up Forces Near Ukraine

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - New satellite images captured by a private U.S. company show that Russia has continued to build up its forces in annexed Crimea and near Ukraine in recent weeks while pressing the United States for talks over security guarantees it is seeking.

Reuters could not independently verify the latest images from U.S.-based Maxar Technologies. The Kremlin reiterated on Friday that it reserves the right to move its own forces on Russian territory as it sees fit and that Western countries were carrying out provocative military manoeuvres near its borders.

U.S., European and Ukrainian leaders have accused Russia of building up troops again near Ukraine's border since October after an earlier brief buildup in April, when Maxar also released images. U.S. President Joe Biden and other leaders say Moscow appears to be weighing an attack on Ukraine as soon as next month, something Moscow has repeatedly denied.

The images released late on Thursday showed a base in Crimea, which Russia annexed from Ukraine in 2014, packed with hundreds of armored vehicles and tanks as of Dec. 13.

A Maxar satellite image of the same base in October showed the base was half empty.

Maxar said a new brigade-level unit, comprised of several hundred armored vehicles that include BMP-series infantry fighting vehicles, tanks, self-propelled artillery and air defense equipment, had arrived at the Russian garrison.

"Over the past month, our high-resolution satellite imagery has observed a number of new Russian deployments in Crimea as well as in several training areas in western Russia along the periphery of the Ukraine border," Maxar said in a statement.

It cited increased activity at three sites in Crimea and at five sites in western Russia.

President Vladimir Putin said on Thursday that Russia wanted to avoid conflict, but needed an "immediate" response from the United States and its allies to its demands for security guarantees. Moscow has said it expects talks with U.S. officials on the subject to start in January in Geneva.



Hindu Event Calling for Genocide of Muslims Sparks Outrage

NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - Videos showing Hindu religious leaders in India calling for genocide against Muslims have sparked outrage and prompted demands for action.

Indian police said they had launched a hate-speech investigation into last week's event in Haridwar, in northern Uttarakhand state, in which participants called for the mass killings and use of weapons against Muslims.

A speaker at the gathering told the crowd that people should not worry about going to jail for killing Muslims, according to a video that went viral.

"Even if just a hundred of us become soldiers and kill two million of them, we will be victorious... If you stand with this attitude only then will you be able to protect 'sanatana dharma' [an absolute form of Hinduism]," the woman said.

The meeting was attended by at least one member of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The party stands accused of encouraging the persecution of Muslims and other minorities by headline Hindu nationalists since coming to power in 2014, allegations it denies.

Prominent Muslim MP Asaduddin Owaisi tweeted that the inflammatory comments in the video were a "clear case of incitement to genocide".

Modi's government has not commented on the event.

The woman in the video reportedly added that Indians should "pray to Nathuram Godse", the Hindu hardliner who assassinated Indian independence icon Mahatma Gandhi in 1948.

Another delegate, Prabodhanand Giri - the head of a hardline Hindu group who is often photographed with senior BJP members - called for a "cleansing" and for those present to be "ready to die or kill".

"Like Myanmar, the police, politicians, the army and every Hindu in India must pick up weapons and do this cleansing. There is no other option left," he is heard to say.

A military crackdown in Myanmar on the heavily persecuted Muslim Rohingya minority has killed thousands and forced hundreds of thousands to flee to neighbouring Bangladesh.

Ethiopia Gov't Says No Further Advance Into Tigray

NAIROBI (Dispatches) - Ethiopia's government said on Friday that its troops would not advance further into the war-torn region of Tigray but warned that the decision could be overturned if "territorial sovereignty" was threatened.

The announcement comes days after the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) rebel group declared a retreat to their Tigray stronghold, and signals a pause in fighting following a series of battlefield victories claimed by the government.

Although unconfirmed, the TPLF pullout from the Amhara and Afar regions had raised hopes there would be talks to end a 13-month conflict that has killed thousands and left parts of the country on the brink of famine.

On Friday, the government communication service released a statement saying federal forces had secured eastern Amhara and Afar and been ordered to "vigilantly remain in areas under our control".

"The Ethiopian government has decided not to command its forces to further advance into the Tigray region," it said in the statement shared on Twitter.

The temporary halt to fighting may help lower the temperature after months of battles that have seen both sides claim major territorial gains.

At one point the rebels claimed to be only 200 kilometers (125 miles) by road from the capital Addis Ababa, sparking

alarm among foreign governments who urged their citizens to leave the country as soon as possible.

But since Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed -- the 2019 Nobel Peace Prize winner -- headed to the front last month, according to state media, the government has claimed to have retaken a string of key towns.

The government has dismissed Monday's withdrawal announcement by the TPLF as a cover-up for military setbacks.

Communications have been cut in the conflict zone and access for journalists is restricted, making it difficult to verify battlefield claims.

The fighting in Africa's second most populous nation has displaced more than two million people and more than nine million are in need of food aid, according to UN estimates.

There have been reports of massacres, mass rapes and other atrocities by all sides, and the UN Human Rights Council last week ordered a probe into a wide range of alleged abuses, a move condemned by Addis Ababa.

The war broke out in November last year when Abiy sent troops into Tigray to topple the TPLF, accusing its fighters of attacking army camps.

He vowed a swift victory, but the TPLF mounted a shock comeback, recapturing most of Tigray by June and then advancing into Afar and Amhara.



China Calls U.S. Law On Xinjiang Imports Economic Bullying

BEIJING (Dispatches) - China's Ministry of Commerce has expressed "strong dissatisfaction and firm opposition" to a United States ban on imports from Xinjiang region.

The ministry described the US action as "economic bullying", state news agency Xinhua reported on Friday.

U.S. President Joe Biden on Thursday signed into law legislation that bans imports from China's Xinjiang region over concerns about forced labor.

China dismisses accusations of abuses against mostly Muslim Uighur minorities in the northwestern Xinjiang region as lies.

The U.S. law came amid mounting tensions, including appeals by activists for a boycott of February's Winter Olympics in Beijing.

The law prohibits U.S. businesses from importing goods from Xinjiang unless they can be proven not to have been made by forced labor.

The measure "maliciously denigrates the human rights situation in China's Xinjiang in disregard of facts and truth", said a Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesman, Zhao Lijian.

"It seriously violates international law and basic norms governing international relations and grossly interferes in China's internal affairs," Zhao said. "China deplores and firmly rejects this."

Foreign governments and researchers say more than a million Uighurs and other minorities have been confined in camps in Xinjiang, where Chinese officials are accused of using forced abortions, forced labor and mass indoctrination.

The officials reject the accusations, saying the camps are meant for job training and to combat "radicalism".

The accusations are "vicious lies concocted by anti-China forces", said Zhao, the spokesman. "Residents of all ethnic groups there enjoy happy and fulfilling lives." Chinese state media have criticized foreign footwear, clothing and other brands that express concern about Xinjiang and publicized calls for boycotts of their goods.



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S/p, Sauna
J, balcony
fireplace
marble fl
Fully Furn

Shanon (adviser)

Zaferanieh Villa (\$6000)
1000sq.m
600sq.m b/up
5bdrs, S/p
Sauna, J, S/q
green yard

Parsian

Mahmoodieh Apt (\$3800)
350sq.m, 4bdrs, S/p
S, J, L.balcony
Nicely Furn

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Turkey Freezes Assets of 770 Individuals, a U.S.-Based Foundation

ANKARA (Dispatches) - Turkey has frozen the assets of a total of 770 people and a U.S.-based foundation on the grounds of terrorism financing, a ruling published in its official gazette showed on Friday.

Chicago-based Niagara Foundation's assets were frozen because of links with the U.S. based cleric Fethullah Gulen, accused by Turkey of staging a coup attempt in 2016.

The assets of more than 400 people were frozen for links to Gulen, the gazette said.



Global Oil's Comeback Year Presages More Strength in 2022

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Global oil demand roared back in 2021 as the world began to recover from the coronavirus pandemic, and overall world consumption potentially could hit a new record in 2022 - despite efforts to bring down fossil fuel consumption to mitigate climate change.

Gasoline and diesel use surged this year as consumers resumed travel and business activity picked up. For 2022, crude consumption is expected to reach 99.53 million barrels per day (bpd), up from 96.2 million bpd this year, according to the International Energy Agency. That would be a hair short of 2019's daily consumption of 99.55 million barrels.

That will put pressure on both OPEC and the U.S. shale industry to meet demand - after a year when major producers were surprised by the rebound in activity that overwhelmed supply and led to tight inventories worldwide. Numerous OPEC nations have struggled to add to output, while the U.S. shale industry has to deal with investor demands to hold the line on spending.

After beginning the year at \$52 a barrel, Brent crude rose as high as about \$86 per barrel before tailing off at the end of the year. Forecasters say prices could resume their upward path in 2022 unless supply increases by more than expected. Bank of America researchers estimate Brent will average \$85 a barrel in 2022, due to low inventories and a lack of spare capacity.

The unknown is the Omicron coronavirus variant, as numerous countries have reimposed travel curbs which will hurt the aviation industry and consumption.

"If this is another wave like the ones we've seen before then it is a negative hit to economic growth in the first quarter of 2022," said Damien Courvalin, head of energy research at Goldman Sachs. "But if there is a subsequent recovery, oil demand, which briefly touched pre-COVID levels in early November, would then be at new record highs for most of 2022."

The 2021 rebound took suppliers by surprise, raising tensions between large producing countries and the world's biggest consumers like the United States, China and India. With gasoline prices up sharply earlier this year, U.S. President Joe Biden called for the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and its allies, known as OPEC+, to boost overall output after restraining supply for months.

However, OPEC nations have struggled to raise output due to underinvestment, as Reuters data showed the group was over-complying with its production targets in November.

The U.S. shale industry, similarly, has not responded to higher prices as they had done previously, bowing to investor pressure to restrain spending. Overall U.S. production averaged 11.2 million bpd in 2021, compared with a record of nearly 13 million bpd in late 2019, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration.

Canada, Norway, Guyana and Brazil should add supply in the coming year, said Rystad Energy's senior vice-president of analysis, Claudio Galimberti. U.S. oil production is expected to average 11.9 million bpd for 2022, according to EIA.

Macron, Draghi Call for Reform of EU Fiscal Rules

PARIS (Dispatches) - French President Emmanuel Macron and Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi called today on the EU to reform its fiscal rules in order to allow greater investment spending while acknowledging the necessity to reduce debts.

"Just as the rules could not be allowed to stand in the way of our response to the pandemic, so they should not prevent us from making all necessary investments," the two leaders wrote in a joint column published on the Financial Times website.

Macron had already said on December 9 that he intended to make a reform of the so-called Maastricht criteria one of his priorities when France takes over the rotating EU presidency next month.

He argued that the rule that a member country's public deficit should not exceed 3.0 per cent of its gross domestic product was outdated.

Now with the backing of his Italian counterpart, he reiterated his stance on Thursday, addressing EU members who had expressed reservations about adopting an exceptional post-pandemic recovery budget.

Germany's new chancellor, Olaf Scholz, for one, is more reserved about a possible reform of the fiscal rules.

"There is no doubt that we must bring down our levels of indebtedness. But we cannot expect to do this through higher taxes or unsustainable cuts in social spending, nor can we choke off growth through unviable fiscal adjustment," Macron and Draghi wrote.

"We need to have more room for maneuver and enough key spending for the future and to ensure our sovereignty," they continued.

"Debt raised to finance such investments, which undeniably benefit the welfare of future generations and long-term growth, should be favored by the fiscal rules, given that public spending of this sort actually contributes to debt sustainability over the long run."

According to Macron's office, the French leader is hoping that an informal summit of EU heads of state and government will be able to draw up "a quantified estimate of investment needs."

The rules "will have to evolve accordingly, including competition and trade rules, but also European budgetary rules... which must be adapted to the challenges of the time," it said.



U.S. Weekly Jobless Claims Unchanged

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - A separate report from the Commerce Department on Thursday showed consumer spending, which accounts for more than two-thirds of U.S. economic activity, rose 0.6% last month. Consumer spending shot up 1.4% in October.

Inflation accelerated in November. The personal consumption expenditures (PCE) price index, excluding the volatile food and energy components, rose 0.5% after a similar gain in October.

The number of Americans filing new claims for unemployment benefits held below pre-pandemic levels last week, while consumer spending increased solidly, putting the economy on track for a strong finish to 2021.

But price pressures continued to build up, with a measure of underlying inflation recording its largest annual increase since 1989 in November. The reports on Thursday came as the nation was struggling with a resurgence in COVID-19 infections, driven by the Delta and highly transmissible Omicron variant, which could crimp economic growth in the first quarter.

"Rising virus cases are a near term risk but overall, we expect growth to pick up in the fourth quarter from a subdued pace in the third quarter," said Rubeela Farooqi, chief U.S. economist at High Frequency Economics in White Plains, New York.

Initial claims for state unemployment benefits were unchanged at a seasonally adjusted 205,000 for the week ended Dec. 18, the Labor Department said. Early this month, claims dropped to a level last seen in 1969.

Economists polled by Reuters had forecast 205,000 applications for the latest week. Claims have declined from a record high of 6.149 million in early April of 2020.

Applications typically increase during the cold weather months, but an acute shortage of workers has disrupted that seasonal pattern, resulting in lower seasonally adjusted claims numbers in recent weeks.



Cuba Announces 2021 Inflation Over 70%

HAVANA (Dispatches) - Cuba's inflation will end 2021 at over 70 per cent — one of the highest in the world — economy minister Alejandro Gil said, insisting it was due to deliberate monetary policy.

The government increased prices by 44 per cent earlier this year as part of a new monetary system aimed at eventually increasing salaries by 450 percent.

"We will obviously end with an inflation rate over 70 per cent," Gil told the national assembly parliament.

"That 44 percent from January is not comparable with any other country because it is by design," said Gil.

"What inflation is this? Astronomical, but salaries also increased," he added.

The minimum wage in January was 2,100 pesos (RM366) a month, and by the end of the year it was almost double that at 3,934 pesos.

Gil said the inflation also was due to external factors linked to the coronavirus pandemic, and the US economic embargo against the island nation.

Gil said GDP would increase by four per cent in 2022 with an economic recovery led by the reopening of the tourism industry. In 2021, the economy grew two per cent, a third of that expected by authorities at the beginning of the year, which Gil also blamed on U.S. sanctions.



Canada Economy Grows in October and November

OTTAWA (Dispatches) - Canada's economy likely expanded for the sixth consecutive month in November, after matching expectations in October, official data showed, implying the Bank of Canada will stay the course on interest rate hikes despite the rise of the Omicron variant.

Real gross domestic product rose 0.8% in October from September, in line with analyst estimates, while November GDP was most likely up 0.3%, Statistics Canada said. It also

revised up September's GDP gain to 0.2% from 0.1%.

With November's rise, which is a preliminary estimate, Canada's economy is just 0.1% below pre-pandemic levels, Statscan said. The gains also imply fourth-quarter GDP will be stronger than Bank of Canada forecasts, analysts said.

That "means the Bank may not be too concerned about the renewed disruption from the deteriorating coronavirus situation," Stephen Brown, senior Canada economist with Capital Economics, said in a note.

Several provinces have imposed fresh restrictions and temporarily shut some businesses amid soaring cases of COVID-19.

Brown said the impact of those measures would be temporary, and "may not delay" Bank of Canada tightening plans.

The bank this month said slack in the economy had substantially diminished, setting the stage for it to begin hiking rates from historic lows.

Money markets see a first hike in March 2022, though bets are increasing on an earlier move. The October GDP gain was broad-based and included a rebound in manufacturing activity, which had been hit by supply chain bottlenecks and semiconductor chip shortages.

The November gain was driven by growth in hard-hit service sectors. There was no mention in the release of the impact of November floods in British Columbia, which crippled road and rail access to Canada's largest port.

"The advance estimate for November ... while a little disappointing relative to industry data received in the past week, is still a solid result given the flooding seen in B.C.," Andrew Grantham, senior economist at CIBC Capital Markets, said in a note.

The Canadian dollar was trading nearly unchanged at 1.2827 to the greenback, or 77.96 U.S. cents.

Malaysia's Leading Index Rises 0.3% in Oct.



KUALA LUMPUR (Dispatches) - The annual Leading Index (LI) rose 0.3 per cent to attain 109.5 points in October 2021 after registering 0.6 per cent in September 2021.

Chief statistician Datuk Seri Mohd Uzir Mahidin said real imports of semiconductors remained the major contributor to the increase in the LI with positive demand for electronic integrated circuits.

In the meantime, the LI contracted by 0.9 per cent in the reference month against the previous month.

"Real money supply, M1, followed by real imports of other basic precious and other non-ferrous metals and number of housing units approved attributed primarily to the decline of the LI with each component recorded a negative 0.3 per cent," he said in a statement, today.

The LI is a predictive tool used to anticipate economic upturns and downturns in an average of four to six months ahead.

Mohd Uzir said the performance of the LI in October 2021 remained positive with the smoothed LI continued above the long-term trend and moving upwards.

"Based on the scenario, a more promising outlook is anticipated in the near term if gradual normalcy of economic activities persists.

"In addition, the progressive lift of the restrictions in mitigating the economic impact, together with the resumption of inter-state travel brought positive vibes to the economy in regaining its growth momentum," he said.

He said throughout October 2021, the economy continued to improve as more states moved into the next phases of the National Recovery Plan (NRP).

“A Poetess” Awarded Best Foreign Film in CWFF

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iranian short film “A Poetess” received the Best Foreign Film award from the jury in the California Women’s Film Festival.

Directed by Sahra Fathi and Saeed Dashti, the short film was placed in the Jury Category Winners and won the best foreign film award from the Californian festival.

The festival is dedicated to the films having a woman in the main creating team and being focused on a woman as the main character.



Global Shipping in Crosshairs as Environmental Scrutiny Deepens

LONDON (Dispatches) - Ocean freight costs are likely to remain high in 2022 as investors and regulators scramble to accelerate decarbonisation of the shipping industry and companies grapple with green financing, sources say.

Shipping, which transports about 90 per cent of world trade and accounts for nearly 3 per cent of the world’s CO2 emissions, is under growing pressure from environmentalists to deliver more concrete action including a carbon levy.

The International Maritime Organization (IMO), the UN’s specialist shipping agency, has said it has made progress on short-term greenhouse gas (GHG) reduction measures.

But that timeline is not seen as fast enough by environmentalists and a number of the IMO’s 175 member countries.

“At the MEPC (IMO committee) meeting in June next year there will be a lot of heat and pressure on regulators to ensure that they come prepared to negotiate a solution rather than kicking the can down the road because of misalignment or negotiation tactics. It is really not acceptable,” said Christian Michael Ingerslev, chief executive of Maersk Tankers.

Last month, countries including the United States at the COP 26 climate summit pushed for the IMO to adopt a zero emissions target by 2050. So far, its goal is to reduce overall GHG emissions from ships by 50 per cent from 2008 levels by 2050.

“As far as the IMO is concerned, the negotiations process in 2022 will likely be very slow and onerous,” said Faig Abbasov with green group Transport & Environment.

“The problem is in the very belief that a UN organization with 175 members can come together and take tough decisions to decarbonise an entire economic sector.”

The IMO said concrete progress was made in 2021 on combating climate change including new regulations to improve the energy efficiency of the world fleet, adding that it would “work very hard” next year on the development of a revised GHG strategy, which will be finalised in 2023.

“Where this is willingness to act, then processes can move faster,” said Roel Hoenders, head, air pollution and energy efficiency with the IMO.

A proposal submitted at the IMO to create a US\$5 billion (RM21 billion) research and development fund to find the right technology to meet the targets is still under discussion with further talks kicked forward to next year.

Underscoring the challenges ahead will be the impact on poorer countries such as Pakistan. While the country was a small carbon emitter, climate change had “directly impacted us hard”, Pakistan’s Federal Minister of Maritime Affairs Ali Haider Zaidi said.

“Developing countries cannot afford to spend on the type of infrastructure needed and therefore, developed countries must support the process at the IMO,” he told Reuters referring to the R&D fund.



Financing the path ahead is another hurdle. Shipping will need US\$2.4 trillion to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050, with around US\$500 billion required by 2030, according to analyst estimates.

“Certainly, the European banks at least and not far behind the American banks will have to meet criteria that satisfy sustainable finance,” said Tony Foster, chief executive of specialist asset manager Marine Capital.

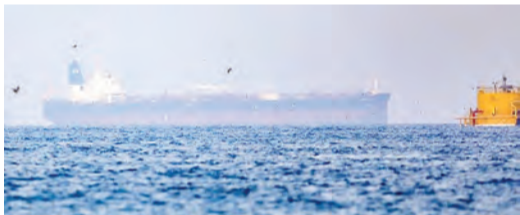
“When it comes to new assets it is going to be increasingly difficult to fund anything that does not quite qualify and the same will be true, perhaps even more so, with existing assets.”

Darren Maupin, founder of leading fund manager Pilgrim Global, said companies in the shipping sector were grappling with how to secure finance with more ESG pressure.

“Capital is afraid — how do you invest in a 25-year asset when you have no idea what the IMO is going to do in five years,” Maupin said.

“The industry has a far reduced ability to build ships and limited capital available to do so. Simple supply-demand suggests rates are going to be higher and the industry is going to have to generate more capital to fund itself.”

S. Korea to Release 3m Barrels Of Oil Reserves in Early 2022



SEOUL (Dispatches) - South Korea will release 3.17 million barrels of its oil reserves in the first quarter of 2022 as part of the U.S.-led global effort by major oil-consuming nations to lower prices.

The volume to be released between January and March accounts for 3.3 percent of South Korea’s state oil reserves of 97 million barrels, according to the ministry of trade, industry and energy (Motie) cited by Argus.

Just over 2 million barrels of the release will be crude and will go to local refiners via loan agreements, and the other 1.09 million barrels will be petroleum products released via a bidding process to the highest bidder, South Korea said.

U.S. President Joe Biden said at the end of November that the Department of Energy would release 50 million barrels of oil from the SPR in a bid to lower high gasoline prices in a coordinated effort with other major oil-consuming nations. The SPR release from the United States will be carried out in parallel with other major energy-consuming nations, including China, India, Japan, South Korea, and the UK.

Despite the seemingly big number, 50 million barrels, the U.S. release actually equals around two and a half days of American petroleum consumption, which was at 20.5 million barrels per day (bpd) in the pre-pandemic 2019.

The other countries are going for much smaller releases, and the message seems to be that major oil consumers are coordinating efforts to try to lower high prices, while OPEC+ sticks to its guns over its oil production plan.

The oil market had already largely priced in SPR releases, with prices sliding before the official announcement. Analysts have also pointed out that one-off sales from strategic reserves cannot do much to move oil prices significantly lower.

What did move oil prices lower was the emergence of the Omicron COVID variant, which spooked the markets just after Thanksgiving, leading to a 10-percent price collapse on the following day. Crude oil led the plunge in all markets as countries started to announce bans on flights from African countries. The low liquidity on the oil market in the festive period in the U.S. also contributed to the collapse in prices, which was the largest one-day crash since April 2020.

Pakistan Seeks Pathway for Unfreezing Afghan Assets

ISLAMABAD (Dispatches) - Pakistan has welcomed the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolution allowing humanitarian and other assistance for the people of Afghanistan, saying a pathway should be found to revive the war-torn country’s economy and unfreeze its assets.

“Pakistan welcomes the adoption, by consensus, of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2615, that has reaffirmed that the provision of humanitarian and other assistance to the people of Afghanistan is not a violation of the Security Council Sanctions regime,” the Foreign Office said in a statement a day after the UNSC unanimously passed a resolution moved by the United States.

The resolution passed on Wednesday stated: “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 supports “basic human needs in Afghanistan” and is “not a violation” of sanctions imposed on entities linked to the Taliban, it added.

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

The Afghan Taliban also welcomed the resolution on Wednesday.

Pakistan said the resolution came at a critical time and reflected the sense of urgency felt by the international community to help the Afghan people, who have suffered immensely due to decades of conflict.

“This sentiment was also reflected in the resolution



adopted unanimously by the 17th Extraordinary Session of the OIC Council of Foreign Ministers hosted by Pakistan last week. The OIC CFM, chaired by Pakistan, unequivocally calls for swift roll-out of all possible humanitarian, recovery, reconstruction, development, technical and material assistance to Afghanistan,” the communiqué added.

It said the resolution passed by the UN Security Council was a step in the right direction towards helping the Afghan people in dire need. “As called for by the OIC, pathways should now be found towards revitalising of the Afghan economy and unfreezing of the assets that rightfully belong to the Afghan people,” it stressed.

Meanwhile, Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi on Thursday said the UNSC resolution to provide aid to Afghan people and the US exemption to allow business with the Taliban were major developments, made after the recently-held OIC foreign ministers’ moot.

“Surely, this is a major breakthrough. I want to congratulate the Afghan people. Alhamdulillah, OIC’s session of the foreign ministers starts coming to fruition,” the foreign minister told media.

He also mentioned US Secretary of State Antony J Blinken’s tweet, wherein he appreciated Pakistan’s stance and also Saudi Arabia for convening the extraordinary meeting which would have positive outcomes.

“Following OIC session in Pakistan, welcome two important developments in support of Afghan people: UNSC resolution to provide aid to Afghanistan, supporting basic needs and the US exemption on US/UN officials doing permitted business with Taliban from US sanctions, to help ease aid flow,” the foreign minister said on Twitter.

Boosting Technology-Based Cooperation Between Iran, Russia Possible

TEHRAN (MNA) - Chairman of Supreme Trade Council of Russia said that identifying capabilities and opportunities to expand technology-based communication is a prerequisite of bilateral cooperation.

Head of Russia’s Center for Contemporary Iranian Studies Rajab Safarov on Friday made the remarks in Tehran 2021 TELECOM Exhibition.

Safarov said that identifying capabilities and synergistic opportunities between the two countries of Iran and Russia to expand technology-based communication is a prerequisite for the expansion of bilateral cooperation.

Given the proximity of Iran’s policies to Russia and tough US and European sanctions imposed against Russia and Iran, taking advantage of the opportunity of possible cooperation is one of the important measures that should be taken into consideration by the two countries, he emphasized.

Presenting and introducing a comprehensive report on the facilities and competency of Iranian companies in Russia and international exhibitions is a way for more communication between the two countries, Safarov continued.

In this regard, many Russian companies can carry out their projects using Iranian expert manpower in the field of information technology (IT). Chairman of Supreme Trade Council of Russia added.

The 22nd International Exhibition of Telecommunications, Information Technology & Innovative CIT Solution entitled IRAN TELECOM Innovations 2021 was held at Tehran Permanent International Fairgrounds on Thursday, Dec. 23.

IRGC...

FROM PAGE 1

They intended to showcase the maneuverability of solid-fuel missiles to cross enemy shields and to improve the combat readiness of the IRGC forces.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Salami said testing accurate and up-to-date missile systems of the IRGC Aerospace and simultaneous launch of missiles from multiple points towards a single simulated target were among other objectives of the exercise.

“This exercise was a combination of combat drones and pinpoint ballistic missiles,” the IRGC commander said.

On the final day of the Great Prophet 17 maneuver, the IRGC Aerospace Force simultaneously launched 16 ballistic missiles of different classes, saying the drills carried a stark warning to Israel.

The ballistic missiles used in the exercise were Emad, Ghadr, Sejil, Zelzal, and Zolfoqar, which hit and destroyed the intended targets with an accuracy of one hundred percent.

Thousands in Baghdad...

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It added, “On the occasion of the martyrdom anniversary of the two top anti-terror commanders and a number of Kata’ib Hezbollah fighters, we appeal to the Iraqi Judiciary not to give in to pressure, and stand up firmly against fraudsters and aggressors.”

Iraqis also staged a rally at Firdos Square in central Baghdad to strongly oppose planned removal of a monument commemorating the distinguished Iraqi anti-terror commander Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis. An unnamed Iraqi security source told Arabic-language al-Mawazin news agency that the protesters chanted slogans and declared they would fiercely oppose the removal.

The sources added that the participants, most of whom were supporters of the anti-terror Hashd al-Sha’abi, sent a letter to Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi and urged him to order rejection of the plan.

According to Baghdad al-Yaum website, the demonstrators also demanded a mass gathering near Baghdad airport on Saturday.

They called on people from all walks of life to press Municipality of Baghdad and Baghdad International Airport for the installation of monuments commemorating Muhandis, General Soleimani, and their companions.

Anti-U.S. sentiment has been growing in Iraq since last year’s assassination of Muhandis along with the region’s legendary anti-terror commander General Soleimani in Baghdad.

They were targeted along with their companions on January 3, 2020, in a terrorist drone strike authorized by former U.S. president Donald Trump near Baghdad International Airport.

China Urges U.S...

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Asked about China’s stance on the beginning of the 8th round of the Vienna talks, Zhao said Beijing welcomes the upcoming negotiations on resuming compliance with the JCPOA in Vienna.

“We hope all parties will adopt a serious attitude, focus on outstanding issues, and continue to advance the negotiations to achieve early results,” the spokesman added.

He said China would continue to play an “active and constructive role” and to work with all parties to “bring the JCPOA back onto the right track at an early date.”

He, however, emphasized that Beijing would firmly safeguard its legitimate rights and interests.

The JCPOA was inked by Iran and six world powers in 2015. Under the deal, Tehran agreed to put limits on certain aspects of its nuclear activities in exchange for the removal of international sanctions imposed against the country.

Yemeni Officials Condemn...

FROM PAGE 1

A medical source, who preferred not to be named, told Yemen’s Arabic-language al-Masirah television network that the strikes had caused panic and fear among patients and medical staff.

The Saudi strikes, the source added, had put the medical center out of service.

On Saturday, Saudi warplanes carried out a fresh wave of airstrikes against various areas across Yemen, killing at least three civilians.

They struck a facility belonging to the Public Telecommunications Corporation in the western province of Mahwit Saturday, leaving six others injured, al-Masirah TV reported.

Saudi military aircraft also targeted Mahazer area in the Sahar district of Yemen’s northwestern province of Sa’ada, but there were no immediate reports about possible casualties and the extent of damage.

Saudi Arabia, backed by the United States and regional allies, launched the war on Yemen in March 2015, with the goal of bringing the government of former Yemeni president Abd Rabbuh Mansour Hadi back to power and crushing the popular Ansarullah resistance movement.

The war has left hundreds of thousands of Yemenis dead, and displaced millions more. It has also destroyed Yemen’s infrastructure and spread famine and infectious diseases there.

Despite Saudi Arabia’s incessant bombardment of the impoverished country, Yemeni armed forces have grown steadily in strength and left Riyadh and its allies bogged down in the country.

Switchboard:
(+98) (21) 44253448
Public Relations Tel:
(+98)(21) 44253450
Editorial Board: 44253449
Public Relations Fax:
(+98)(21) 44253395
Advertising Department:
Tel/Fax:(+98) (21) 44253335-9/44253234
Website:
http://www.irannewsdaily.com

E-Mail Address:
info@irannewsdaily.com
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Pele Discharged From Hospital

SAO PAULO (Dispatches) - Brazilian football great Pele was discharged from hospital Thursday after two weeks of chemotherapy for a colon tumor, announced the Sao Paulo hospital that treated him. The 81-year-old ex-player known as "O Rei" (The King) "is stable and will continue the treatment of the colon tumor that was identified in September of this year," the Albert Einstein Hospital said in a statement. Pele underwent surgery for the tumor on September 4, spending a month in the hospital before being discharged to continue chemotherapy.

McCollum Recovered From Collapsed Lung

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - The Portland Trail Blazers said Thursday that CJ McCollum's collapsed lung is "fully healed" and the star guard will step up his training with a view to making his NBA return. McCollum had been sidelined since December 4, but Portland said medical evaluation, including a CT scan on Wednesday, showed he had recovered. "McCollum has been cleared for non-contact drills, increased conditioning, and shooting," the team said in a statement. "He will continue his recovery protocol and will be reevaluated next week."

Curry Goes for 46 In Warriors' Win

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - Juan Toscano-Anderson and Gary Payton II hit key hoops down the stretch and Stephen Curry exploded for 46 points as the Golden State Warriors finally got the better of the Memphis Grizzlies in a 113-104 victory in San Francisco.

Curry's 46 points were the product of 13-for-22 shooting overall, including 8-for-14 from 3-point range, and 12-for-12 success at the foul line.

It was his second-highest point total of the season behind only a 50-point night against the Atlanta Hawks in November.

In just his second game since returning from a knee injury, Ja Morant paced the Grizzlies with 21 points to go with a team-high six assists. Jaren Jackson Jr. and Melton had 20 points apiece.

Wizards 124, Knicks 117

Spencer Dinwiddie collected 21 points and 12 assists as Washington overcame a 44-point performance by Kemba Walker to defeat host New York.

Rookie Corey Kispert scored a season-high 20 points in his first career NBA start for the Wizards, who played without leading scorer Bradley Beal. Prior to the game, Beal joined fellow starter Kentavious Caldwell-Pope in the NBA's health and safety protocols.

Kyle Kuzma recorded 18 points and 10 rebounds, and Aaron Holiday added 16 points as Washington won its second straight game. Walker made seven 3-pointers to continue his recent torrid surge. The New York native has scored 94 points in three contests since returning from a nine-game benching.

Spurs 138, Lakers 110

Keita Bates-Diop scored a career-high 30 points on a perfect 11-of-11 shooting as visiting San Antonio used a balanced attack to roll past Los Angeles.

Derrick White added 23 points and Lonnie Walker IV had 21 for the Spurs, who finished a 3-1 road trip. Keldon Johnson scored 16 points and grabbed 10 rebounds, while Doug McDermott and Jock Landale added 13 points each.

Suns 113, Thunder 101

Devin Booker scored 30 points to lead host Phoenix to its fifth straight win while ending Oklahoma City's winning streak at three.

Booker took control in the third, with 15 points and four assists in the frame to help the Suns jump ahead for good. Cameron Johnson finished with 21 points and nine rebounds for the Suns, Deandre Ayton had 19 points and 12 rebounds, and Chris Paul had 16 points, seven assists and five rebounds.

Shai Gilgeous-Alexander led the Thunder with 29 points, while Josh Giddey had 17. And Jeremiah Robinson-Earl had 10.

Bucks 102, Mavericks 95

Khris Middleton scored a game-high 26 points, DeMarcus Cousins capped his season-high 22-point performance with a fourth-quarter flourish, and Milwaukee held on to beat host Dallas.

Cousins surpassed his season scoring high of 18 points that he set on Wednesday when he scored six of Milwaukee's 10 points during a stretch spanning a little more than two minutes in the fourth quarter.

Jrue Holiday added 24 points for Milwaukee, who were without Giannis Antetokounmpo (health and safety protocols). Jalen Brunson led six Dallas players in double-figures scoring with 19 points to go with eight assists. The Mavericks were without their star, Luka Doncic, due to COVID-related protocols as well.



Juventus Lost Their DNA After Ronaldo's Arrival

TURIN (Dispatches) - Juventus great Gianluigi Buffon said Cristiano Ronaldo's arrival at the club in 2018 ultimately led to them losing their "DNA of being a team".

Ronaldo, now back at Manchester United for a second spell, scored 101 goals in 135 appearances for Juventus and won Serie A twice but the club did not progress beyond the Champions League quarter-final stage during his three years there.

Buffon returned to his first club Parma in June after nearly two decades at Juventus — he spent the 2018-19 season at Paris St Germain — where he won 10 Serie A titles.

"Juventus had the chance to win the Champions League the first year he arrived, which was the year I was at Paris St Germain, and I couldn't figure out what happened," Buffon told American broadcast network TUDN.

"When I returned, I worked with Ronaldo for two years and we did well together, but I think Juventus lost that DNA of being a team.

"We reached the Champions League final in 2017 because we were a side full of experience, but above all we were a single unit and there was this competition for places within the group that was very strong. We lost that with Ronaldo."

Juventus are fifth in Serie A, 12 points adrift of leaders Inter Milan, and host third-placed Napoli on Jan. 6.

Mick Schumacher To Take on Ferrari F1 Reserve Role

LONDON (Dispatches) - Mick Schumacher, the son of seven-times Formula One world champion Michael, will double up as a Ferrari reserve driver next season while also having a regular race seat at U.S.-owned Haas.

Team boss Mattia Binotto told reporters that the 22-year-old German would be available to stand in at 11 of the record 23 scheduled races should Charles Leclerc or Carlos Sainz be unavailable.

Italian Antonio Giovinazzi, who lost his place at Swiss-based Alfa Romeo this year but has secured a drive in Formula E, will be reserve for the 12 races that do not clash with the electric series.

"Whenever he (Giovinazzi) will be at the race track he will be our reserve driver. And as well he will be available to our customer teams, so both Haas and Alfa Romeo," said Binotto.

"For the remaining 11 races... Mick Schumacher will be reserve driver for Ferrari."

Haas have their own official reserve in Brazilian Pietro Fittipaldi, who stepped in twice in 2020 after Romain Grosjean's fiery accident. Alfa Romeo also have Poland's Robert Kubica in the role.

Ferrari-backed Schumacher made his Formula One debut this season, outperforming fellow-rookie Nikita Mazepin but neither scoring a point for a tail-end team devoting all their resources to the 2022 car.

Binotto said Mick had improved through the season, in consistency and speed, and Ferrari's support would continue with the simulator available at Maranello and Ferrari engineers working with him.

"If I look at the last races he was a lot closer to the cars ahead while Haas didn't really develop the car at all," said the Ferrari boss.

Binotto said Giovinazzi would have a full programme of simulator work and suggested the Italian had a chance of returning to the starting grid full time in 2023.

Former India Spinner Harbhajan Calls Time on Career



three formats and winning the 2011 ODI World Cup and the 2007 T20I World Cup.

NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - Former India off-spinner Harbhajan Singh announced his retirement from all forms of cricket on Friday, bringing down the curtain on a 23-year career in the sport.

The feisty 41-year-old made his international debut in 1998 and played 103 tests, 236 one-day internationals and 28 Twenty20 internationals, taking 711 wickets across the

He last played for India in a T20I in 2016, but has continued to play in the Indian Premier League, turning out for the Kolkata Knight Riders in three matches in the 2021 season.

He finishes his career as the country's fourth-highest wicket-taker in test cricket, after Anil Kumble, Kapil Dev and R Ashwin.

"There comes a time in your life when you must take some tough decisions and move ahead," Harbhajan said in a video message posted on YouTube.

"I have been meaning to make this announcement for the last few years, but I was waiting for the right moment to share it with all of you. Today, I am retiring from all formats of cricket."

Titans Rally to Win Over 49ers



LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - The Tennessee Titans rallied from a 10-0 halftime deficit to beat the San Francisco 49ers 20-17, a victory that put the Dallas Cowboys into the NFL playoffs.

Randy Bullock booted the game-winning 44-yard field goal with four seconds left to cap the Titans' second-half comeback and keep them on track for a post-season berth.

Tennessee receiver A.J. Brown, in his first game back from injury, caught 11 passes for 145 yards and a touchdown, his strong second half sparking a Titans offense that had managed just 55 yards and three first downs in the first half.

Brown's 18-yard TD put Tennessee up 17-10 early in the fourth quarter.

San Francisco knotted the score at 17-17 with 2:20 left, but Bullock sealed the win after a 23-yard scramble by Titans quarterback Ryan Tannehill put them in scoring position.

Tannehill completed 22 of 29 passes for 209 yards and a touchdown as the AFC South-leading Titans improved to 10-5.

The Titans can clinch the division on Saturday if the Indianapolis Colts lose to the Cardinals in Arizona.

Brown said the Titans weren't discouraged after their sluggish first half. "We were still in this game, it was 10-0," he said.

Japan Not to Send Gov't Delegation to Beijing Olympics

TOKYO (Dispatches) - Japan will not send a government delegation to next year's Winter Olympics in Beijing, it said on Friday, a move that stops short of joining a US-led diplomatic boycott of the Games, but one nonetheless likely to deepen tension with China.

The boycott, driven by Washington and including some of its allies, has become another delicate issue for Japan, a close partner of the United States that also has strong economic ties to China.

Tokyo will not send a government delegation to the Games set to start in February, Chief Cabinet Secretary Hirokazu Matsuno told a news briefing.

Instead, it will send some officials with direct ties to the Games, including politician Seiko Hashimoto, head of the Tokyo 2020 organising committee, as well as the heads of the domestic Olympic and Paralympic committees.

The diplomatic boycott by the United States and other countries stems from concerns about human rights in China, but Japan has taken a softer tone on the issue.

Prime Minister Fumio Kishida has faced rising pressure within his ruling Liberal Democratic Party to take a tougher stance on China, public broadcaster NHK said.

