

Director-General of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Rafael Grossi Israelis' Claim and Said That There Is No 90% Enrichment at the Moment in the Islamic Republic of Iran

# IRAN NEWS

The Joint Capacities of Iranian And Chinese Cinema Were Examined in a Specialized Meeting Attended by the President of the Iranian Academy of Arts and the Chinese Ambassador to Tehran

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1 DOMESTIC

We are the Safest Industry to Invest in Revenue of \$ 5.5 billion Over the Next 4 Years

> SEE PAGE 1



## Int'l Community Urged to Swiftly Send Humanitarian Aid To Afghanistan, Neighbors

TEHRAN (PressTV) - An Iranian diplomat says the international community must speed up the delivery of humanitarian aid not only to Afghanistan but also to its neighboring states hosting a large flux of Afghan refugees before the winter encroaches.

Mahdi Aliabadi, the deputy permanent representative of Iran in Geneva, made the remarks while addressing the 112th session of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) Council.

He said Iran had carried out broad measures over the past four decades to support the Afghan refugees, adding the country had "spared no effort to improve living conditions, health and medical services, including the provision of coronavirus vaccines, education of students and other issues related to this group of Afghan brothers and sisters."

He criticized the international community for failing to adopt appropriate measures to address the problems of the Afghan refugees living in Iran.

Over the past decades, the diplomat emphasized, Iran has paid enormous costs to reduce the sufferings of legal and illegal Afghan asylum seekers and migrants while international organizations and other relevant bodies have borne less than 5 percent of these costs.

See Page 7

## Europeans' Lack of Initiative Drags Down Vienna Talks



IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - The website of Iran's top security body says the Europeans' lack of initiative in the face of the Iranian team's "groundbreaking" proposals is dragging down negotiations in Vienna.

Lead negotiator Ali Baqeri-Kani announced Thursday that Iran has submitted two proposed drafts to the other parties concerning the removal of U.S. sanctions and Tehran's nuclear commitments and is about to put forward a third draft.

European and Iranian officials were quoted as saying that a formal meeting in a format known as the Joint Commission would be held on Friday to decide on the continuation of the negotiation process.

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2 DOMESTIC

President Orders Providing Medicine to SMA Patients

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## ViewPoint By: Hamid Reza Naghashian No Option But to Leave the Region

Recent developments both in the Middle East and even inside the U.S. bespeak of this fact that the U.S. has no option but to leave the region and the countries, or faces more humiliations like it experienced in the past in Vietnam and recently in Afghanistan.

The U.S. officials despite suffering a humiliating departure from Afghanistan still continue threatening the Islamic Republic of Iran with their imaginary options on the table but they have forgotten how they were dealt during attacks on Ain al-Asad airbase or some marine clashes with the IRGC Navy forces.

On Thursday, the commander of the Quds Force of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) said Americans must leave the region with humiliation or will be forced to flee under conditions worse than what they experienced in Afghanistan. See Page 7

The CEO of "Famli" said about the reasons for the capital increase:

## We are the Safest Industry to Invest in Revenue of \$ 5.5 Billion Over the Next 4 Years

Explaining the fundamental reasons for the capital increase, Dr. Ardeshir Saad Mohammadi said in the Extraordinary General Assembly: "This large industry has set a goal of achieving \$ 5.5 billion in revenue for the next 4 years, considering the ongoing development plans and the growth of mineral reserves." In this regard, on December 2, an extraordinary general assembly of the National Iranian Copper Industries Company was held with the aim of increasing the capital from 20,000 to 40,000 billion tomans and financing a large part of the copper mining development projects in the country. In this ceremony, Dr. Ardeshir Saad Mohammadi, CEO of the National Iranian Copper Industries Company, explained the fundamental factors and reasons for increasing capital and investing in development projects for shareholders. Finally, with the vote of the shareholders of the National Iranian Copper Industries Company, a 100% increase in the capital of "Famli" was approved as the largest capital increase in the history of the stock exchange from accumulated profits so that the family symbol becomes the owner of 40,000 billion Tomans.

### Decreasing the grade of mines and increasing the demand

The CEO of the National Iranian Copper Industries Company at the beginning of the meeting, referring to the global production conditions in the field of copper industry, said: We are witnessing a proper increase. The CEO of the copper company stated that one of the points asked by the shareholders is, "If you are going to increase your capital, what will be the future price of copper?" He added: the world's largest institutions for 2022 because 138 thousand tons of demand will be more than production; The price will increase to \$ 9913, to \$ 10,405 in 2023, and in 2024, as a number of projects around the world enter production; It will reach \$ 9686 and will reach \$ 10062 again in 2025.

### We are among the top 10 companies in the world in copper production

He stated: In the consumption of refined copper, Iran ranks 13th in Asia and 24th in the world. With the investments that have been made; Our position is changing. Our goal is to be among the top 10 companies in the world in copper production in these investments. Regarding copper mineral products, Saad Mohammadi said: "In copper, we are ranked 15th in the world and 4th in Asia." We are ranked 12th in the world and 5th in Asia in anode production, 19th in the world and 7th in Asia in refined copper products, and we hope for the investments that will be made; Inshaa ... these ratings should be reduced below 10 ..

### Do we have mineral potential for investment?

He added: "Almost a few years ago, Iran's reserves were about 30 million tons of pure copper, now in our table of pure copper has reached 42 million tons. In fact, 4.8% of the world's reserves belong to Iran and we are ranked seventh. World-class mineral "Seridon" The CEO of the Copper Company addressed the actions of 2019 to the first six months of 2021 regarding exploration and said: "I am happy to say that the discovery of the new Seridon mine by the colleagues of the Copper Company has reached more than 2 billion tons with an average grade of 47%. This reserve has been upgraded and is going to be much higher. Saad Mohammadi continued: "In Sungun copper, we had 263 million tons with a grade of 62 percent and in the new exploration west of Sungun mine, we had about one billion tons of new exploration with a grade of 6 tenths of a percent." West Midok has already explored more than 400 million



with a grade of 68 percent. The total of these cases, which we have confirmed, is more than 4 billion and 200 million tons of new reserves with a grade of 53 percent, ie 20 million tons of pure copper, and these discoveries continue.

### 4 times growth of mineral reserves of National Copper Company

Regarding the geological resources and reserves of active and newly discovered mines, he said: "In 2012, we had about 2 billion and 436 million tons of resources and reserves, and at the end of the 6 months of 2021, it has reached about 9 billion and 12 million tons."

### 90,000 meters of exploratory drilling in 8 months

Saad Mohammadi added: Drilling has grown significantly during the last two or three years. In 2019, it was about 70,000 meters, and in 2020 it reached 100,000 meters, and this year it will reach 150,000 meters, which we have now exceeded 90,000 meters, and this shows that we value exploration.

### Production of 191 thousand tons of cathodes in 8 months

He addressed the performance of 2021 and said: "In total, we have an 8% growth compared to the plan." We have 3% growth in sulfur ore and mineral extraction and 5% growth in copper concentrate with 819 thousand tons. In copper containing concentrate, we recorded a 4% growth with 191,563 tons. Saad Mohammadi added: "In the production anode, we have grown by 7% with 237 thousand tons and in copper containing 4%, and by the end of November, with 191,785 tons of cathodes, we have a 5% growth." Last year, at the same time, we had a production of 183,000 tons, which has increased to 191,000 tons this year, while it should not be forgotten that in July and August, there was a lot of pressure on the country's electricity network due to unprecedented temperatures. The CEO of the copper company said: "You can evaluate other places as well, despite this issue and electricity problems; But our production is about 5% ahead and we are really on a good path and I owe it to myself to thank each and every one of the staff and managers who are moving forward in this situation. The CEO of Mes Company, stating that he is happy to

say in sales that we are really following very good conditions this year, said: "Last year, considering that we had a very good record, we sold 42 thousand billion Tomans and the last number published in Kadal in the first eight months of this year." It was 47 thousand 900 billion tomans.

### 340 thousand tons of new concentrate entered the production cycle in the first quarter of 2022

Saad Mohammadi pointed to the developments of the Copper Company and said: "Currently, in the first phase, we planned more than 3 billion and 500 million Euros plus 45 thousand billion Tomans, which is approximately 150 thousand billion Tomans, so that we can shape our developments, but what At the Department of Development, we estimated that being able to increase growth in all areas is close to \$ 13 billion. Given its potential, the copper company hopes to be able to plan new and large development projects and to have favorable conditions for development. The CEO of the copper company added: in the first quarter of 2022, a mine and a factory in Aloo will be opened. Also, in the first half of 2022, a mine and a concentrate factory will be opened in Hazar. He said: "Sarcheshmeh flotation (production of concentrate from copper slag) is happening for the first time in the country and 50 years have passed since the life of copper and the slag has remained on the ground and nothing had happened. Now for the first time we want to turn slag into concentrate High due to lack of transportation costs and tailings and excavation. This project will be a great honor for the copper company. He added: "Azerbaijan's plans are as they have been; The final cathode project and its contract were signed and announced for Azerbaijan. The contract for Phase 3 of Sungun Concentrate with 150,000 tons was signed and it was announced that, God willing, it will start operating soon and will be completed and put into operation within three years. The concentrate of Phase Two Midook has been finalized and its contractor has been identified and will start operating soon. The CEO of the copper company continued: "But our big events are phase 3 of Sarcheshmeh, which will soon be finalized and announced." We have two 300,000-ton factories, that is, 600,000 tons of concentrate in Seridon, and we have to plan and be able to bring a new concentrate plant and new areas into orbit. We have 6 small mining projects that we want to build a factory in the form of SBB companies and public joint stock companies.

### Revenue of \$ 5.5 billion over the next 4 years

In the first phase, we want our revenue to reach more than \$ 5.5 billion in the first three to four years, and this will make us one of the top ten companies in the world in copper production," said the CEO of the copper company. It is a strategic event for the country, the national economy and the National Iranian Copper Industries Company to advance this path firmly, authoritatively and scientifically. The CEO of the copper company continued: "Next year, with the addition of at least 120,000 tons of concentrate, 150,000 tons of mines and 70,000 tons of slag flotation will be added to the company's products, with a concentrate price of \$ 2,200, at least \$ 650 million annually." The future will be added to the copper company's revenues. It can be easily assessed that copper is on a positive path and will definitely have a good future in the country. He said: "Next year in Aloo, we will launch the Sarcheshmeh concentrate in the 1000th phase." Phase 3 of Sungun has started and Phase 2 of Midook will start in two months.



# Raisi Felicitates Laos on Its 46th National Day

TEHRAN (MNA) –President Ayatollah Seyyed Ebrahim Raisi sent a message to the president of the Lao People's Democratic Republic Thongloun Sisoulith to congratulate him on the 46th National Day of his country.

In the message, Raisi expressed his hope that through the joint efforts of the high-ranking officials of the two countries, the two nations will witness increasing expansion of relations in all areas of mutual interest.

"I sincerely congratulate you and the people of your country on the occasion of the National Day of the Lao People's Democratic Republic," the Iranian president told his Lao counterpart Mr. Thongloun Sisoulith.

## President Orders Providing Medicine to SMA Patients

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN – President Seyed Ebrahim Raisi met with the families of SMA patients and promised to meet with them separately, an on Thursday morning on the sidelines of an extraordinary cabinet session to review the 1401 budget, he talked about their problems.

After hearing the concerns of the patients' families and the report of the Minister of Health and relevant officials on the methods of providing medicine for special patients, including SMA, the President ordered that the medicine needed by patients be provided as soon as possible for a medium and long-term period with an appropriate mechanism.

At the same time, the President instructed academic centers and knowledge-based centers to evaluate its effectiveness so that the necessary decisions can be made in this field after the end of this course.

Raisi described special patients as his children and said, "The government



considers it its duty to take care of and supply medicines to patients, especially special diseases, and everything necessary should be done to reduce the pain of families and treat their children".

Addressing the Minister of Health, the President said, "Now that we are preparing the 1401 budget, offer the necessary funds for special diseases to be included in the budget".

Raisi also called on the officials of the Ministry of Health to redouble their efforts to solve the problems and concerns of the patients' families and to note that the increase in the number of patients does not reduce their responsibilities.

## Tehran Determined to Expand Ties With African States



TEHRAN (IRNA) - Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian here met and conferred with Deputy Zimbabwe Foreign Minister David Musabayana, who is in Iran for talks with Iranian officials.

Amirabdollahian said in the meeting that the new the Iranian government is willing to expand comprehensive relations with African countries, including Zimbabwe, and particularly in political, economic and cultural fields.

He said that the economic ties can be in such innovative methods as extra-territorial agriculture, exporting of agricultural machines, sales of petrochemical products, technical and engineering services, and taking advantage of the existing potentials in both countries.

The Iranian Foreign Minister said that the bilateral parliamentary ties, too, is of great importance and expressed hope that the two countries parliamentary delegations will soon be exchanged.

He meanwhile considered the cooperation among countries under the unjust US and some other western countries' sanctions at international organizations aimed denouncing those illegal moves is important.

The Zimbabwean diplomat, too, presented a report on his meetings with Iranian officials during the past few days, announcing his country's readiness to participate at The 9th Joint Iran-Zimbabwe Economic Cooperation Commission in Tehran.

The Zimbabwean official said that his country's cooperation with Zimbabwe in agricultural, health and medical care, and exporting medicines to his country are of great importance.

## Israeli Regime Trying to Poison Vienna Talks

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Foreign Ministry spokesman warns that the Israeli regime is trying to come in the way of potential progress in ongoing talks in Vienna that seek removal of the United States' illegal and inhumane sanctions against the Islamic Republic.

"Israeli regime whose existence relies on tension is at it again, trumpeting lies to poison Vienna talks," Saeed Khatibzadeh tweeted.

Israeli regime whose existence relies on tension is at it again, trumpeting lies to poison Vienna talks.

Right on the eve of the negotiations, Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett alleged that the regime "is very worried about the readiness to remove the sanctions."

He claimed that potential removal of the bans would enable "a flow of billions (of dollars) to Iran in exchange for unsatisfactory restrictions in the nuclear realm."

On Tuesday, an anonymous Israeli official was quoted by the regime's Channel 12 as saying that "the killing of Fakhrazadeh a year ago did not brake Iran's progress as was hoped."

Khatibzadeh, however, urged the negotiating parties in Vienna not to allow their judgment to be clouded by the Israeli provocations and propaganda.

"All parties in the room now face a test of their independence & political will to carry out the job—irrespective of the fake news designed to destroy prospects for success," the spokesman said.

## Iranian, Austrian Deputy FMs Stress Expansion of Trade Ties

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Mehdi Safari, Deputy Foreign Minister for Economic Diplomacy held a meeting with Austrian diplomat Peter Launsky-Tieffentha in Vienna to stress the necessity of implementing bilateral trade agreements.

Mehdi Safari, Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister for Economic Diplomacy, who is accompanying the Iranian negotiating team in Vienna, held a meeting with Secretary-General for Foreign Affairs in Federal Ministry for European and International Affairs of Austria on Thursday.

Explaining his bilateral meetings in Vienna, Safari stressed the need for agreements to expand economic and trade relations between the two countries of Iran and Austria, noting Iran's seriousness in the Vienna



talks to reach a conclusion.

The Austrian diplomat, for his part, reviewed the agreements reached between the two countries in the field of economic cooperation and said, "Through joint actions, good agreements have been reached between the two countries in the field of economic cooperation."

The Iranian diplomat further held a meeting with a high-ranking official with the Austrian Ministry of Agriculture and Tourism to discuss ways to develop agricultural and tourism cooperation between the two countries.

Iranian, Austrian deputy FMs stress expansion of trade ties Safari also held meetings with the high-ranking Austrian economic officials yesterday in Vienna in continuation of his economic diplomacy.

## Tehran Not Optimistic About U.S., E3 Intention

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's foreign minister says the Islamic Republic is following a clear agenda during the ongoing talks in the Austrian capital, but is not optimistic about the true intention and determination of the United States and the three European signatories to the 2015 nuclear agreement.

Hossein Amir-Abdollahian made the remarks in a Thursday phone call with his Japanese counterpart, Yoshimasa Hayashi, during which the two sides discussed various issues of mutual interest as well as regional and international developments.

In their conversation, Amir-Abdollahian repeated once again that Iran welcomes a "good agreement" and is serious at the Vienna talks, saying that the other parties to the nuclear deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), need to show goodwill. Iran has sent its diplomats to Vienna "with a strong determination and a clear and logical agenda, but we are not optimistic about the will and intention of the U.S. and the three European countries [that are signatories to the JCPOA]," Amir-Abdollahian remarked.

During the phone call, Amir-Abdollahian referred to the latest round of US sanctions against Iran, imposed days before the resumption of the talks. "The Americans ask for negotiations and a return to the JCPOA, one the one side, while on the other they slap a new round of sanctions against Iranian individuals and institutions at the same time," Iran's foreign minister said.

What is important, according to the chief Iranian diplomat, is that the talks lead to an outcome and the Western parties show seriousness and goodwill at the negotiating table.

The Japanese foreign minister, for his part, welcomed the resumption of the talks and asked the participating countries to show flexibility in order to reach a mutually-beneficial agreement.

Meanwhile, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said he was not optimistic about the prospects of the talks.



## Bangladesh Calls for Boosting Cooperation With Iran



BUSHEHR (IP) - The ambassador of Bangladesh to Iran called for the expansion of cooperation between the two countries in various fields.

Bangladesh's ambassador to Iran, Gousal Azam Sarker, met with Bushehr Governor Ahmad Mohammadizadeh in southern Iran, referring to the friendly and cordial relations and cooperation between the two countries in recent years, adding: "Bushehr province can play an important role in this cooperation."

Mohammadizadeh also stated that the daily needs of Bangladesh in the energy sector are increasing and considering that Bushehr province is a transit point for pipelines, reservoirs, and oil exports, he suggested that the Bangladesh government, in cooperation with the Iranian Ministry of Oil, build an oil and gas refinery. Participate in Bushehr and meet the needs of his country for gas condensate and its products.

The governor of Bushehr added: "Considering the important economic, agricultural, aquaculture and petrochemical production capacities, this province is ready for economic and trade cooperation with Bangladesh investors."

## Good Deal Within Reach in Vienna If West Shows Goodwill

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian says a "good" agreement is at hand in the talks underway in Vienna, Austria, between Tehran and the five other parties to the 2015 nuclear deal "if the West shows good will."

In a post on his Twitter account on Thursday, Amir-Abdollahian said the removal of the sanctions imposed by the US on Iran after its exit from the nuclear deal was a "fundamental priority" in the ongoing talks between Tehran and the P4+1 group — France, Britain, Germany, Russia and China — aimed at securing Washington's return to the agreement. "#ViennaTalks proceeding with seriousness and sanctions removal as fundamental priority," he said. "Expert talks are continuing too."

"Good deal within reach if the West shows good will. We seek rational, sober & result-oriented dialogue," the chief diplomat added. Amir-Abdollahian said he was in close contact with Iran's top negotiator Ali Baqeri-Kani in Vienna regarding the discussions on the nuclear deal, officially called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

First Announcement شناسه آگهی: ۱۲۲۸۹۱۷

**TENDER NO.: 01-31-9150038/02**

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

Items	Material Description	Quantity
11	PARTS FOR" AIR PACK " AIR COMPRESSOR TYPE HA-550-LT SERIAL NO.,T-1995-00449-1 TO 00449/3	165 NO

Vendors who intend to participate in aforesaid tenders 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. 1, available at: [www.nisoc.ir](http://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 **3,440 EURO** or 921,100,000 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](http://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**

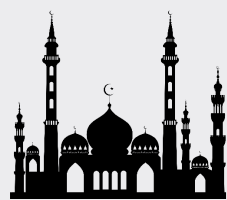
**NO ADVANCE PAYMENT WILL BE PAID**

**FOREIGN PURCHASING DEPARTMENT**

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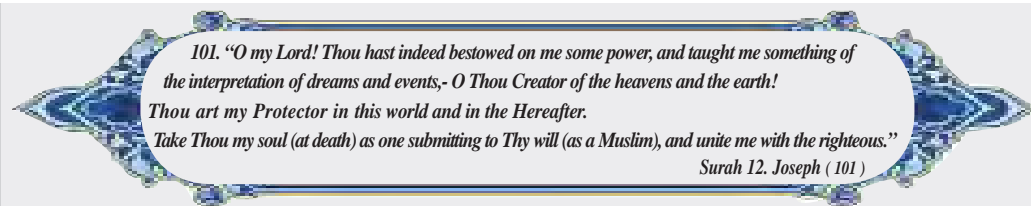
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## PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	11:54
■ Evening (Maghreb)	17:10
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	05:30
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	06:59



# Iran, Syria Seek to Launch Joint Bank

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

**TEHRAN – Iran and Syria are pondering to launch a joint bank to overcome their banking problems in their bilateral trade.**

Head of Trade Promotion Organization Alireza Paymanpak highlighted the achievements of recent visit of Iran's Minister of Trade to Damascus and said the launch of the joint bank was one of the issues which was discussed during the visit and it was decided the hurdles to be removed for the launch of the joint bank.

He added that 50 million dollars have been allocated to Iranian companies that seek to export their products to Syria.

The organization's director said Iran has forged good political and military ties with Syria but trade relations have been lagging behind, stressing that Tehran is now after getting the private sector enter Syria.

"[Despite war] the Syrian private sector is rich financially and there are good opportunities for investment in the country. We seek the greater portion of the investment by our private sector to take place in Syria's free trade zones," Paymanpak told Tonight's Headlines program on the national broadcaster.

"For expansion of our country's private sector trade with the regional and neighboring countries, establishment of chambers for trade of goods, not only in Damascus, but with all neighboring countries are on our agenda, but Syria has no



good to be traded with ours."

He stressed that Syria exports only 800 million dollars of products a year and due to the current situation in the country it only produces cotton. He said Iran needs cotton, but that requires a safe transport route with Syria, which is now lacking.

Paymanpak added that the Iranian shipping lines can consider subsidies for transport to and from Syria to enable regular maritime transport with the country. This, he said, will remove part of the problem and enable Iranian investors to enter cotton trade with the country.

Heads of several parliamentary commissions, which were also present at the program, called for facilitation of the Iranian private sector's presence in Syria.

## ICC Elected as Member of Board of Directors of ICA-AP

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Iran Chamber of Cooperatives (ICC) was elected as a member of board of directors of the International Cooperative Alliance Asia-Pacific (ICA-AP) during its meeting in Seoul, South Korea.



According to reports, the ICC as the representatives of Iran's cooperatives sector attended the ICA-AP meeting and during the election process for the board of directors, the ICC won 201 votes out of the total 234 votes to become a member of the boards. The ICC could defeat for the seat some of its strong rivals in the Asia-Pacific region like Japan and Australia.

The meeting for electing the board of directors was held on Tuesday in Seoul.

The rise in the number of votes for the ICC during the ICA-AP election can be seen as the outcome of activities and close interactions of the ICC as the representative of Iran's cooperatives sector with the global and regional movements of cooperatives and it can be seen as a move forward.

The International Cooperative Alliance Asia-Pacific is the regional organization uniting, promoting and developing cooperative enterprises across all business sectors in Asia and the Pacific.

## Mobile Phone Tops Iran's Import List

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Mobile phone shipments have accounted for a major part of Iran's imports this year as it came top on the list of the country's imports in March-November.

The IRIB News said in a report on Wednesday that mobile phone imports had topped \$2.5 billion in value terms in the eight months to November 21, accounting for 8% of the total imports into Iran over the same period.

It said the figure was an increase of 111% compared to the similar period in 2020, adding that mobile phone shipments had increased by 47% in volume terms year on year in March-November.

Mobile phone remained far ahead of other major goods on Iran's import list over the period, said the report, adding that the second item on the list was corn for which Iran had spent \$2 billion between late March and late November.

Figures by the Iranian customs office IRICA showed that mobile phone shipments had accounted for 4.5% of the value of all imports recorded by the office over the calendar month to November 21 \$375 million.

That comes as total wheat imports into Iran over the same period had reached \$261 million while corn imports had topped \$187 million, according to IRICA figures.

Increasing imports of cellphones into Iran comes at a time the country has problems financing and paying for purchases of basic goods and staples mainly because of a series of American bans that have hampered the country's ability to access international banking services.

## Secrets of Italian Cuisine Unveiled in Tehran

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - The Espinas Palace Hotel in Tehran hosted the kick-off event of the sixth edition of the Week of Italian Cuisine in the World, organized by the Italian Embassy in Tehran in collaboration with the Italian Trade Agency's (ITA) Office.

The initiative, organized by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation with the support of Italian Embassies and Consulates around the world, aims at promoting the uniqueness of the Italian culinary tradition and the use of original Italian ingredients and products.

The event was attended by a selected public of entrepreneurs, artists, influencers, and celebrities to try the Italian cuisine's simple and, at the same time, sophisticated taste in a culinary experience with Roman chef Maurizio La Masa.

The show featured Italian made products still available on the Iranian market, and a seminar on the benefits of the Mediterranean diet and the importance of fresh produce coming from the territory.



In his introductory speech, the Italian Ambassador in Tehran, Giuseppe Perrone, explained the special meaning of food in Italian culture as well as its being an integral part of the Italian identity and lifestyle.

He also underlined how the Mediterranean diet represents a typical feature of Italian cuisine, which makes it not only of a high quality in terms of taste but also extremely healthy, as proven by the figure reached by Italians in life expectancy, one of the highest in the world.

The event, held in full compliance with COVID19 prevention protocols, has also brought to light the commonalities between the Italian and the Iranian culinary traditions, as part of their respective cultural backgrounds.

In addition to the event hosted at the Espinas Palace Hotel, the Italian School in Tehran "Pietro Della Valle" has also celebrated the Week of Italian Cuisine in Iran by organizing a cooking day with the School's students.

## CEO of KSC Meets Governor General of Khuzestan

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – The CEO of Khuzestan Steel Company (KSC) Mr. Amin Ebrahimi met with governor general of Khuzestan Province Mr. Sadeq Khalilian on Tuesday.



Ebrahimi, accompanied by his deputy on the administrative affairs and social responsibilities Mr. Alireza Mokhber Dezfouli and head of the CEO office of the company Mr. Mohammad Jamei, attended Mr. Khalilian's office and conferred with him.

In this sincere meeting, Ebrahimi briefed the governor general of the current condition of KSC and the challenges ahead of the company as well as the actions of the company regarding its social responsibilities and invited the governor general to pay a visit to the company.

Governor General Khalilian, for his part, promised to visit Khuzestan Steel Company and to cooperate with the company for resolving the problems and existing challenges ahead of the company and ordered the related bodies to cooperate with the company.

**First Announcement** شناسه آگهی: ۱۲۲۸۹۱۸

**TENDER NO.: 08-38-9440027**

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

Items	Material Description	Quantity
01	ACCESSORIES FOR COILED TUBING LOGGING REEL REF.CAMESA	1 RL

Vendors who intend to participate in aforesaid tenders 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. 1, available at: [www.nisoc.ir](http://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 **3,739 EURO** or **990,000,000 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](http://www.nisoc.ir-material-procurement-management-tab)

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**PAYMENT TERM IS C.O.D., SUBSEQUENT TO NISOC'S MATERIAL APPROVAL**

**NO ADVANCE PAYMENT WILL BE PAID**

**FOREIGN PURCHASING DEPARTMENT**

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## Developed Management, Effective on Improvement of Macro Indexes

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Following the holding of a workshop on program for individual development which was held for deputies and managers of Hormozgan Steel Company (HOSCO), the CEO of the company Mr. Ataollah Maroofkhani visited the workshop and said developed management and up-to-date management has had positive effects in the achievements and macro indexes of the company.

He said investment on the different levels of the managers and leadership of Hormozgan Steel Company is one of the missions of the company and the education and human resources development department of the company is tasked to pursue it.

Then manager of the education and human resources development department of the company highlighted the goals, results and significance of this workshop. He said the program for individual development in different levels of management in Hormozgan Steel Company is for the deputies and managers of the company and the goal behind is to develop the self-awareness, self-knowledge, self-study and self-developing skills of its addressees.

He then continued to elaborate the properties of the workshop and said the company after doing some studies drew this conclusion that those companies and especially big companies which have invested on developing its management and leadership have experienced sustainable economic development in their businesses.



Trade Resumes at Border Gate With Afghanistan

TEHRAN (MNA) – Seyyed Rouhollah Latifi Spokesman for Iranian customs administration (IRICA) said that trade at the Milak border crossing between Iran and Afghanistan resumed on Thursday after yesterday's incident. Latifi said that as normalcy returned to the area where skirmishes between Iranian border guards and the Afghani side took place yesterday, the border trade at the Milak border crossing on the shared border between Iran and Afghanistan resumed on Thursday.



## Austria's Ex-Chancellor Kurz Quits Politics



VIENNA (AFP) - Austria's ex-chancellor Sebastian Kurz said he was quitting politics, just two months after resigning as national leader following his implication in a corruption scandal.

The announcement caps a spectacular career, which at age 31 saw him become the world's youngest democratically elected head of government in 2017.

"A new chapter begins in my life that I can open today," the 35-year-old conservative told reporters.

"Above all, I look forward to spending time with my family and my (new-born) child before I dedicate myself to new professional challenges in the new year," he said.

## EU Imposes New Sanctions on Belarus



BRUSSELS (Dispatches) - The European Union imposed sanctions on state-owned Belarusian airline Belavia on Thursday, accusing the company of flying in migrants as a tactic to destabilize European states, in a new round of punitive measures coordinated with the United States.

Reuters reported the planned sanctions on Nov. 10 and they were approved last month. They came into effect on Thursday after publication in the EU's official journal. Britain and Canada also imposed new sanctions on Belarus on Thursday.

EU governments blacklisted 17 individuals and 11 entities, targeting judges and top Belarusian officials.

Those sanctions are in the form of asset freezes and travel bans. The sanctions on Belavia mean EU companies can no longer lease planes to the Belarusian airline, EU officials have said.

It was not immediately clear if Belavia would have to return the 17 aircraft leased through aircraft companies in Ireland. The decision takes the total number of Belarusian individuals under EU sanctions to 183, along with 26 entities. The European Union accuses Belarus of flying in migrants, mainly from the Middle East, and pushing them to illegally cross the border with Poland in a "hybrid attack" on the bloc.

Belarus denies fuelling the crisis. Belavia has denied any wrongdoing.

The EU also targeted hotels and travel agents such as Oskartour which have been accused of using their contacts with airlines to help lure in migrants to Belarus. In the official journal, the EU said President Alexander Lukashenko had agreed with his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin "on planning the opening of new airline routes for Belavia" to bring in migrants.

Moscow denies any involvement.

"Belavia has been involved in bringing migrants from the Middle East to Belarus," the official journal said. "Migrants wishing to cross the Union's external border have been flying to Minsk on board flights operated by Belavia from a number of Middle Eastern countries."

Belavia, which was already barred from flying over the European Union after the grounding of a plane earlier this year, flies to destinations such as Egypt, Jordan, UAE, Armenia, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan.

### Myanmar Forces Purposely Killed Anti-Military Protesters

YANGOON (Dispatches) - The killing of at least 65 protesters on March 14 in Yangon, Myanmar, was planned and premeditated, a rights watchdog has found.

Human Rights Watch (HRW) on Thursday released a report accusing security forces of deliberately encircling and using lethal force against crowds calling for the reinstatement of the democratically elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi following a military coup on February 1.

## Republicans Threaten Bid To Avert U.S. Gov't Shutdown



WASHINGTON (AFP) - U.S. lawmakers scrambled Thursday to avert a weekend government shutdown as Republicans stalled a bill to fund federal agencies in a bid to derail President Joe Biden's Covid-19 vaccine mandate.

With the clock ticking down to the Friday-Saturday midnight deadline, the House was expected to send a stopgap measure to the Senate that would keep the government open until February 18, with cross-party backing.

But hardline Senate Republicans have threatened to hold up the legislation over their opposition to Biden's unrelated order that large companies mandate Covid-19 vaccinations or frequent testing for workers.

## U.S., S.Korea Eye Broader Asia Role



SEOUL (Dispatches) - The defense chiefs of the United States and South Korea said on Thursday they would review and update ways to deter North Korea, even as they emphasized a growing regional role for Seoul.

North Korea's missile and weapons developments are increasingly destabilizing for regional security, U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said after talks with his South Korean counterpart, Suh Wook, but the two sides also discussed issues beyond the Korean peninsula.

For the first time, their joint statement affirmed "the importance of preserving peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait."

It mirrored language used for the first time by South Korean President Moon Jae-in in May when he met with U.S. President Joe Biden in Washington. It's a sensitive issue for South Korea, which has tried to balance its economic relationship with China with Washington's push for allies to counter Beijing's growing power.

The statement came the same day that South Korea's national security adviser travelled to China to meet its top diplomat. It also followed remarks on Wednesday by Japan's former prime minister, Shinzo Abe, suggesting that a Chinese invasion of Taiwan would be a danger for Japan.

Austin and senior U.S. military commanders were in Seoul for the first such annual military talks with South Korean officials since Biden took office in January, and the last before Moon leaves office in May.

North Korea has continued to rebuff U.S. entreaties for diplomacy since Biden took over from Donald Trump, who had three summits with leader Kim Jong Un.

The United States calls on the North to engage in dialogue, Austin told a news conference, saying diplomacy is the best approach to pursue with North Korea, backed up by a credible deterrent.

## Russia Needs Security Guarantees on Borders

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov told U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken today that Moscow needed "long-term security guarantees" that would halt NATO's eastward expansion, Moscow said.

Lavrov and Blinken were in Stockholm for a meeting of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), one of the few international dialogue forums to which both the United States and Russia belong.

During a bilateral meeting with Blinken, Lavrov told the US diplomatic chief Moscow wanted a legally binding promise that Ukraine would not be allowed to join Nato and that the bloc would stop its eastward expansion, Moscow said.

The top Russian diplomat warned Washington against "drawing Ukraine into the geopolitical games of the United States," which he said "will force us to take retaliatory measures to straighten out the military-strategic balance," the Russian foreign ministry said in a statement.

Lavrov added that Russia needed "long-term security guarantees on our western borders, which should be viewed as an imperative requirement."

Speaking earlier in the day at the OSCE session, Lavrov said: "The time has come to transform the right words into long-term, legally binding security guarantees."

Russia plans to present concrete proposals in the near future and expects the West to take them seriously, he added.

In recent days, Russian President Vladimir Putin has repeatedly said he wanted a concrete agreement that NATO would not expand eastwards.

Kiev and its Western allies have been sounding the alarm since last month over a fresh Russian troop buildup around Ukraine's borders and a possible winter invasion.

Russia, which seized Crimea from Ukraine in 2014 and backs separatists fighting Kiev, has strongly denied it is plotting an attack and blames NATO for fuelling tensions.

## Erdogan Replaces Finance Minister Amid Economic Turmoil

ANKARA (Dispatches) - Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has replaced the country's finance minister after weeks of economic turmoil in which inflation soared as the lira plummeted to record lows.

The currency has lost more than 40 percent of its value against the US dollar this year, making it the worst-performing of all emerging market currencies.

According to a presidential decree issued near midnight on Wednesday, Erdogan accepted the resignation of Lutfi Elvan and appointed his deputy, Nureddin Nebati, as the new finance minister.

Nebati, 57, has a bachelor's degree in public administration and a master's degree in social sciences from Istanbul University. He also holds a doctoral degree in political science and public administration from Turkey's Kocaeli University.

His predecessor had only been in the role since November 2020, when he was appointed after the resignation of Erdogan's son-in-law, Berat Albayrak.

Elvan's year-long tenure was marked by numerous crises. Earlier on Wednesday, the Turkish Central Bank intervened in markets to prop up the nosediving lira, which has lost nearly 30 percent in value against the dollar in just a month.

Under pressure from Erdogan, Turkey's officially independent central bank lowered its key interest rate

in November for the third time in less than two months. It did so despite inflation approaching 20 percent - four times the government's target.

Erdogan believes that high interest rates cause high inflation - the exact opposite of conventional economic thinking - and has insisted he would keep rates low.

Turkey's currency hit yet another record low of more than 14 to the dollar before recouping some losses on Wednesday after a central bank move to sell reserves. One dollar bought 13.22 lira as of Wednesday afternoon.

The recovery, however, was short-lived after Erdogan appeared again to defend his "new economic model" against the "malice of interest".

Since 2019, Erdogan has sacked three central bank governors who opposed his desire for lower interest rates. The president, who has blamed the lira's troubles on foreigners sabotaging Turkey's economy and on their supporters in the country, believes lower rates will fight inflation, boost economic growth, power exports and create jobs.

On Tuesday, figures showed Turkey's economy had grown by 7.4 percent in the third quarter, compared with a year earlier, but some analysts believe the surge could be short-lived due to the high inflation and currency meltdown.



## French Conservatives Pick Finalists For Presidency



PARIS (Dispatches) - France's conservative party on Thursday chose its finalists for the nomination to challenge Emmanuel Macron in the 2022 presidential election, narrowing down contenders to a hard-right MP and the Paris region chief but excluding ex-Brexit negotiator Michel Barnier.

Valerie Pécresse, a moderate who heads the greater Paris region, and Eric Ciotti from the southern city of Nice, won the first round of the Republicans primary and will now face off in a second vote whose results will be announced Saturday.

If chosen on Saturday, Pécresse would be the first female candidate for the presidency for the Republicans (LR). Ciotti, meanwhile, has views far closer to the far-right which have sometimes echoed those of Eric Zemmour, the controversial pundit who declared his candidacy on Tuesday. The result defied poll predictions and spelt disappointment for Barnier, at 70 by far the oldest of the hopefuls, and ex-health minister Xavier Bertrand, who were seen by many as the front-runners. Analysts view the primary outcome as crucial to the shape of the election, which polls show Macron is currently a clear favorite to win, though the centrist former investment banker has not yet confirmed a re-election bid.

The April 2022 vote looks set to be dominated by concerns about immigration and security, and with Macron hoping to benefit from his handling of the pandemic with vaccination rates higher and fewer restrictions than in some other European countries.

The Republicans party, which traces its lineage to rightwing presidents Jacques Chirac and Nicolas Sarkozy, saw party membership soar in recent weeks to around 140,000, with 81 percent casting ballots in the first round of voting.

The results were close for the four leading candidates, with Ciotti garnering 25.6 percent and Pécresse 25.0 percent, followed by Barnier (23.9 percent), Bertrand (22.4 percent) and the outsider Philippe Juvin, a mayor and doctor who rose to prominence during the Covid pandemic (3.1 percent).

Bertrand, who like Pécresse abandoned the Republicans in 2017 after accusing the party of adopting far-right tropes, said on Twitter that he would vote for Pécresse.





**Shanon**  
(adviser)

**Niavaran Apt (\$2800)**  
250sq.m, 3bdrs  
S/p, Sauna  
J, balcony  
marble fl  
fireplace  
pkg, & F.F

**Farmanieh Villa (\$7000)**  
2000sq.m  
5bdrs, S/p  
Sauna, J, pkg  
green yard  
balcony, & F.F

**Parsian**

**Elahieh Apt (\$2400)**  
230sq.m, 3bdrs, S/p, F.F

**Apt (\$2000)**  
Mahmoodieh  
160sq.m, 2bdrs  
S/p, S, J, pkg, & F.F

**Darrous Villa (\$2500)**  
700sq.m, 5bdrs, S/p, & yard

**Jordan Apt (\$1400)**  
130sq.m, 2bdrs, F.F

**Zaferanieh bldg (\$8000)**  
5storey, 15bdrs, & pkgs

**Gheitarieh (\$1800)**  
170sq.m, 3bdrs, & F.F

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## Russian Stocks to Recover in 2022

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russia's stock market will recover in 2022 from the November sell-off driven by fears of more sanctions and COVID-19 concerns but expected stimulus withdrawal in the United States could cap gains, a Reuters poll of 12 market experts showed.

Russian stocks have repeatedly hit all-time highs in 2021 with the help of a surging number of retail investors amid the recovery in oil prices and the economy.

The MOEX reached a record peak of 4,292.68 on Oct. 14, up more than 30% year-to-date, before falling sharply in November on concerns related to Russia's military build-up on the border with Ukraine and the new Omicron coronavirus variant.



PARIS (Dispatches) - The OECD lowered the world's economic growth outlook for 2021 today and called for a swifter rollout of Covid vaccines, fearing the emergence of "breeding grounds" for deadlier strains.

The global economy is now expected to expand by 5.6 per cent this year, down from an earlier forecast of 5.7 per cent, the OECD said in its updated economic outlook released as the Omicron variant has sparked concerns about its impact on the recovery.

"The global recovery continues to progress, but has lost momentum and is becoming increasingly imbalanced," said the Paris-based Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development.

While the OECD said it was "cautiously optimistic" about the recovery, it warned that health, high inflation, supply chain bottlenecks, and potential policy missteps are "all key concerns".

"The top policy priority remains the need to ensure that vaccines are produced and deployed as quickly as possible throughout the world, including booster doses," the OECD said.

"The recovery will remain precarious and uncertain in all countries until this is achieved," it said.

In the "more benign scenarios", outbreaks could continue to prompt restrictions on people's movements, which could have long-lasting consequences on labor markets, production capacity and prices.

"The harshest scenario is that pockets of low vaccination end up as breeding grounds for deadlier strains of the virus, which go on to damage lives and livelihoods," OECD chief economist Laurence Boone warned in the report.

While the outlook was lower this year, the OECD's growth forecast for 2022 remains unchanged at 4.5 per cent.

The report does not take into account the possible impact of the Omicron variant.

Analysts at Oxford Economics say the new strain could shave 0.25 percentage points off global growth next year if it causes mild effects, but it would cost two percentage points if it is more dangerous and a large part of the global population was forced into lockdowns.

The strain has been spotted around the world since South African experts discovered its existence, prompting new travel restrictions.

The World Health Organization believes the variant's high number of mutations might make it more transmissible or resistant to vaccines.

Addressing other key concerns for the world economy, the OECD said it expected inflation to peak at the turn of the year before receding gradually in the 38-nation OECD, which includes leading developed and emerging countries.

Soaring inflation has caused commotion in the markets as investors fear that central banks will raise interest rates sooner than expected to tame runaway prices.

The OECD urged monetary policymakers to "communicate clearly" about how far they will tolerate inflation exceeding their targets.

Supply-side constraints and shortages, meanwhile, "should wane gradually through 2022-23" as demand normalizes, production capacity grows and more people return to the labour force.

The OECD also highlighted "marked differences" in the recovery of countries around the world.

## U.S. Could Tweak Timing of Oil Stockpile Release If Prices Fall

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - The Biden administration could adjust the timing of its planned release of strategic crude oil stockpiles if global energy prices drop substantially, U.S. Deputy Energy Secretary David Turk told Reuters.

Turk, speaking in a video interview for the Reuters Next conference to be broadcast later on Wednesday, added that other consumer nations that had agreed to release strategic reserves in concert with the United States to tame prices could also adjust their timing if needed.

"I think each country will make decisions based on what's useful and good for their consumers and based on where the price is," he said.

The administration of President Joe Biden had announced last month that it would release 50 million barrels from the U.S. Strategic Petroleum Reserve, alongside smaller releases from China, India, Japan, South Korea and Britain, to help lower consumer energy costs.

The unusual agreement was designed to tame soaring energy prices after the OPEC producer group and its allies rebuffed repeated requests from Washington and other consumer nations to pump more quickly to match rising demand as the world began to exit the pandemic.

Oil prices have since declined, however, amid worries that the new Omicron variant of the coronavirus will spread and trigger extensive lockdowns, reducing global energy demand.

After Turk's comments, U.S. oil prices were trading at \$67.51 a barrel, up \$1.33, but paring gains that had been made on concerns the OPEC+ production group would not step up output any further.

"The president gave us flexibility," Turk, one of several administration officials who meet regularly to discuss energy security, said about the U.S. planned release of strategic stockpiles.

"So if the price of oil goes down significantly, if the pain at the pump that is currently being experienced by consumers around our country, and around the world as well, dissipates for whatever reason, then we use the tools differently," he said.

## Italy May Shift 2b Euros From Tax Cuts to Energy Price Curbs

ROME (Dispatches) - Italy is considering increasing by some 2 billion euros (\$2.27 billion) funds set aside to curb energy prices next year, using resources previously planned to cut income and business taxes, three government sources said.

With international energy prices soaring, Mario Draghi's government has already spent more than 4 billion euros this year to try to rein in utility bills by compensating companies that agree to cap their tariffs.

Draghi set aside a further 2 billion euros for next year in the 2022 budget approved by cabinet in October, but with energy cost pressures continuing to drive consumer price inflation, the government is now considering doubling that sum.

The money can be found because the government will use less than the 8 billion euros earmarked in the budget to cut income and business taxes, the sources said, asking not to be named because of the sensitivity of the matter.

With the Treasury aiming to trim the budget deficit to 5.6% of gross domestic product in 2022 from the 9.4% targeted this year, resources are limited.

The cabinet is likely to discuss the matter on Friday, one of the sources said.

The tax cut will focus mainly on income tax (IRPEF), reducing the number of tax rates to four from five, with the largest benefit going to middle-income tax-payers earning between 28,000 and 55,000 euros per year.

According to a preliminary deal reached among the ruling parties, the first tax band on annual income between 8,000 and 15,000 euros will be left at 23%. The second band, between 15,000 and 28,000 euros, will be lowered to 25% from 27%.

The third band, on income from 28,000 to 55,000 euros will get a more substantial cut to 35% from 38%.

The fourth band, on income from 55,000 to 75,000 euros will rise from 41% to 43%. This is the rate that is currently applied on income above 75,000 euros, effectively cancelling the fifth income tax band.

## Reforming Global Trade Rules Is Tough But Doable

GENEVA (Dispatches) - The head of the World Trade Organization stressed the importance of reforming the global trade body to prevent further trade wars but warned it would be "very tough" amid high geopolitical tensions.

The 27-year-old global trade body, under pressure to prove its relevance, was due to have held a major ministerial meeting this week and a plan to update the global trade rule book was among the key topics.

However, it was postponed due to travel curbs linked to the Covid variant Omicron, further dampening already dim hopes for progress.

Asked if the WTO was capable of reform, Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala said in an interview at the Reuters Next conference: "Absolutely. Whether it will be easy to do is another thing."

"I think it will be very tough because of the lack of trust among members."

The WTO's top appeals chamber, the Appellate Body, has been disabled since 2019 when the administration of former US President Donald Trump blocked judge appointments.

Okonjo-Iweala told Reuters the WTO's dispute settlement system had to be saved to prevent future trade wars, adding that Washington's "legitimate concerns" about overreach needed to be addressed.

Describing the current atmosphere as "fraught with geopolitical tensions", she warned of the risk of the rules-based trade system being replaced by a power-based system and said smaller countries would lose out the most from this.

"It's absolutely important that we support multilateral trade and we don't take it for granted," she said.

Okonjo-Iweala, director-general since March, said she saw many opportunities for the Geneva-based trade body, including in the area of climate change such as through the development of a global carbon price.

From laying down the law on fossil fuel subsidies to promoting low-carbon supply chains, there is no shortage of ways in which the World Trade Organization could be at the forefront of the global fight against climate change.

## UN Chief Calls for Implementing the Convention On the Rights of Persons With Disabilities



TEHRAN (UNIC) - United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres in his message on International Day of Persons with Disabilities, 3 December 2021, urged all countries to fully implement the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, increase accessibility, and dismantle legal, social, economic and other barriers with the active involvement of persons with disabilities and their representative organizations.

### The full text of his message reads:

Realizing the rights, agency, and leadership of persons with disabilities will advance our common future.

We need everyone, including persons with disabilities, on board to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. Around the world, persons with disabilities and their representative organizations are taking action to realize the call: 'Nothing about us, without us'.

COVID-19 has laid bare the persistent barriers and inequalities faced by the world's 1 billion persons with disabilities, who have been among the hardest hit by the pandemic.

A disability-inclusive pandemic response and recovery should be guided by persons with disabilities themselves, forge partnerships, tackle injustice and discrimination, expand access to technology and strengthen institutions to create a more inclusive, accessible, and sustainable post-COVID-19 world.

I urge all countries to fully implement the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, increase accessibility, and dismantle legal, social, economic and other barriers with the active involvement of persons with disabilities and their representative organizations.

On this International Day of Persons with Disabilities, let us commit to build a sustainable, inclusive and just future for everyone, leaving no one behind.

## U.S. Accuses China of Economic Warfare Against Australia

SYDNEY (Dispatches) - U.S. President Joe Biden's top Pacific envoy accused China of trying to "drive Australia to its knees" through a barrage of sanctions that amounted to "economic warfare".

In remarks to the Sydney-based Lowy Institute, veteran diplomat Kurt Campbell lampooned Beijing for strong-arm tactics. Painting China as increasingly bellicose and determined to impose its will overseas, Campbell said Beijing had engaged in "really dramatic economic warfare -- directed against Australia".

Over the last two years, China has introduced a raft of punitive sanctions on Australian goods in a fierce political dispute that has frozen ministerial contacts and plunged relations into the most serious crisis since the Tiananmen Square crackdown in 1989.

"China's preference would have been to break Australia. To drive Australia to its knees," said Campbell, who currently serves as the White House Indo-Pacific coordinator.

China has been angered at Australia's willingness to legislate against overseas influence operations, to bar Huawei from 5G contracts and to call for an independent investigation into the origins of the coronavirus pandemic.

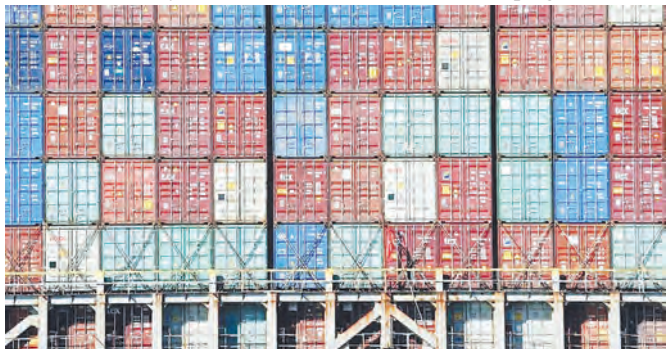
Australian barley, coal, copper ores, cotton, hay, logs, rock lobsters, sugar, wine, beef, citrus fruit, grains, table grapes, dairy products and infant formula have all been subject to Chinese sanctions.

The U.S. envoy said that under President Xi Jinping, China has become "more risk acceptant, more assertive, more determined to basically take steps that other countries would view as coercive".

The Biden administration has embraced a policy of "strategic competition" with China -- acknowledging rivalry between the two powers but maintaining ties so conflicts do not spiral out of hand.

Beijing repudiated the comments on Wednesday, claiming Australian politicians had "played up the China threat theory, accused and attacked China for no reason, provoked tension and created confrontation".

"We hope the relevant people on the U.S. side will not confuse right and wrong," foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin said at a regular press conference.





## Iranian Film Wins NBR Award

TEHRAN (IP) - The American National Board of Review awarded two prizes to the Iranian film 'A Hero' by Asghar Farhadi for Best Foreign Language Film and Best Original Screenplay.

The National Board of Review of Motion Pictures is an organization in the United States, established to discuss and select

what its members regard as the best film works of each year.

Since 1909, the National Board of Review has dedicated its efforts to the support of film, domestic and foreign, as both art and entertainment.

'A Hero' directed by famous Iranian director Asghar Farhadi won the Best Film Award at the 31st Films from the South in Oslo, Norway.



## WHO Warns World Creating Toxic Recipe for New Variants

GENEVA (Dispatches) - The WHO warned that the world was creating toxic conditions for new Covid-19 variants like Omicron to emerge and then spread around the globe.

The World Health Organization said the combination of low vaccination coverage across the planet, mixed with very low testing to track the virus, was a fertile breeding ground.

The UN health agency stressed that measures to stop the globally-dominant Delta variant would also hinder Omicron.

The new variant of concern has rattled countries around the world.

"We need to use the tools we already have to prevent transmission and save lives from Delta. And if we do that, we will also prevent transmission and save lives from Omicron," WHO director general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus told a press conference.

"But if countries and individuals don't do what they need to do to stop transmission of Delta, they won't stop Omicron either.

"Globally, we have a toxic mix of low vaccine coverage, and very low testing -- a recipe for breeding and amplifying variants.

"That's why we continue to urge countries to... ensure equitable access to vaccines, tests and therapeutics all over the world."

Omicron was first reported to the WHO from South Africa on November 24, while the first known laboratory-confirmed case was identified from a specimen collected on November 9.

The Netherlands said Tuesday it had found the variant in two samples taken on November 19 and 23, one having recently been to southern Africa and the other having no travel history.

Maria Van Kerkhove, the WHO's Covid-19 technical lead, said timelines around first detections of Omicron may change as there was a backlog of sequencing of cases that occurred in November.

Tedros said the WHO was taking the emergence of Omicron "extremely seriously", but added that the mutation "should not surprise us. This is what viruses do.

"And it's what this virus will continue to do, as we long as we allow it to continue spreading."

Tedros said Omicron was in at least 23 countries -- with that number expected to grow.



Van Kerkhove said the WHO was not yet aware of any deaths associated with Omicron.

The WHO said it could take several weeks to complete studies of Omicron to see if there are any changes in transmissibility, severity or implications for Covid vaccines, tests and treatments.

"We expect to have more information on transmission within days: not necessarily weeks, but in days," said Van Kerkhove.

Several countries have imposed travel bans on flights from South Africa, which Van Kerkhove said was making it difficult to send samples from the country, even though they were willing to share them.

Van Kerkhove said: "We will get out of this pandemic but every day decisions need to be made on whether or not we're getting closer to the end of this pandemic or we're actually taking steps to prolong it."

Michael Ryan, the WHO's emergencies director, said it was not the time for governments to be passing responsibility for management of the pandemic over to their citizens.

"Certainly we are dealing with a crisis now: that crisis is in Europe, and it's being driven by the Delta variant," he said.

## Fair Outcome Possible If Europeans Meet Commitments

TEHRAN (IFP) – Majlis Speaker says a "fair" agreement is within the reach in the ongoing Vienna talks with the remaining signatories to the nuclear deal, if the Europeans fulfill their commitments.

"If Europe meets its obligations, we are sure to obtain an honorable agreement through honorable negotiations," Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf said in a live interview with the national broadcaster IRIB.

The speaker also said sanctions are the main reason for the current situation in the livelihood of the people in Iran.

Qalibaf added that some commitments Iran undertook under the 2015 nuclear deal, including the implementation of the Additional Protocol, were to be in return for removal of certain sanctions, but the U.S. and Europeans "took no step" to remove the bans.

Since the US withdrawal from the nuclear deal in 2018, Iran has repeatedly called on the European signatories to the nuclear deal to live up to their words and act independently from the U.S. on the issue of sanctions amid their foot-dragging on their pledges to compensate for the U.S. pullout.

## Iran, Belarus 6th Joint Consular Meeting Held in Minsk

MINSK (IP) - The sixth joint consular meeting of the Islamic Republic of Iran and Belarus was held in Minsk, the capital of Belarus.

Mahmoud Adib, Consular Director-General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and head of the Iranian delegation, met on Wednesday with Alexander Khainovsky, Consular Director General of the Belarusian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Minsk to discuss the latest issues of consular cooperation between the two countries.

Expressing satisfaction with the deep relations between Tehran and Minsk, Alexander Khainovsky, Consular Director-General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Belarus, also announced his country's readiness for extensive cooperation in expanding bilateral cooperation.

Exchange of views on visa facilitation for business people and drivers, the possibility of examining the issue of visa waiver for citizens of the two countries in the form of tourism groups, providing facilities and consular and accommodation services for Iranians living in Belarus, assigning extradition agreements, transfer of the convict's agreements between the two countries and the memorandum of understanding on consular and immigration talks has been announced as one of the essential points of consultation between the consular officials of Iran and Belarus.

## Gov't Offers New Loans to Workers Left Jobless by Pandemic

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's finance minister says the government will provide new round of loans to workers left jobless by the coronavirus pandemic.

Ehsan Khandouzi said on Thursday that cheap loans will be on offer to workers who have lost their jobs and remain in hospital because of the coronavirus.

Khandouzi said two interest free banks will earmark the loans worth 100 million rial (\$2,380 on official exchange rate) to household heads left jobless by the pandemic.

He said the finance ministry will fund the program which will start over the weekend.

A deputy head of the Iranian finance ministry also said on Thursday that the new loans will have a three-year repayment period and workers will have to submit easy collaterals to the banks in order to be able to receive the loans.

The new relief measure comes as the Iranian government has managed to significantly reduce the rate of coronavirus infections in the country through rolling out a massive vaccination program.

Daily number of deaths from the disease had dropped to nearly 70 from records of over 700 seen at the height of a fifth wave of the disease in mid-summer.

That has allowed the government to gradually reopen an economy that has suffered both because of the pandemic and also because of a series of unlawful sanctions imposed by the United States since 2018.

Official estimates published in early 2020 had suggested that more than 1.25 million workers had lost their jobs in Iran because of the pandemic. The government had been paying jobless benefits to 1.17 million people in March.

However, job market analysts believe the number of people left jobless by coronavirus in Iran could have amounted to nearly six millions at the height of the pandemic in mid 2020.

### Int'l Community...

FROM PAGE 1

Around 300,000 Afghan refugees have entered Iran following the collapse of the Kabul government and the Taliban's takeover, at a time when the Iranian nation is facing unilateral sanctions and the international humanitarian bodies are keeping silent on such "inhumane" bans.

Afghanistan is facing what UN agencies have described as "one of the world's worst humanitarian disasters" since the collapse of Kabul in mid-August.

The U.S. military withdrew its forces from Afghanistan 20 years after they invaded the country to topple the Taliban, in a war that killed, according to one estimate, between 897,000 and 929,000 people.

Since the Taliban regained power in Afghanistan, the U.S. and its allies have imposed sanctions on the Central Asian country and deprived Afghans of any aid and assistance on the pretext of pressuring the Taliban.

However, human rights activists maintain that economic sanctions generally do not punish the rulers, but rather, hurt the population, lead to mass starvation, and fuel extremism in the targeted country.

### Europeans' Lack of...

FROM PAGE 1

"In the third document to be presented to the other parties, Iran will state its views and proposals with regard to the verification period of removing sanctions," Nour News, which is affiliated to Iran's Supreme National Security Council (SNSC), cited Baqeri-Kani as saying.

"The presentation of two documents on the removal of sanctions and nuclear activities by the Iranian delegation and the plan to put forward a third document is a clear and firm proof that Iran has not only entered the Vienna negotiation process by sending a full team of experts, but it has also foreseen all the necessary arrangements for pursuing constructive and result-oriented negotiations by presenting groundbreaking initiatives," it wrote.

"This is important because the Western side of the P4+1 group, which is following Washington's will, has concentrated on a blame game launched even before the start of this round of talks and by relying on heavy psychological operations, it has made every effort to blame Iran for a possible disagreement because it lacks the willpower to reach an agreement," it added.

According to Nour News, the Western countries which were adamantly pressing for initial drafts in the previous six rounds of negotiations have not put any initiative on the negotiating table and practically slowed down the negotiation process.

"It should be noted that although Iran has stated from the beginning that achieving a good agreement will not be sacrificed for speed in the negotiations, the unpreparedness of the European parties has practically slowed down the negotiation

process for no reason and paralyzed the way forward," it said.

The stalled talks resumed on Monday after a months-long hiatus, during which a new government took over in Tehran.

Iran has maintained that the revival of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), as the Iran nuclear deal is called, would require the U.S. to remove its sanctions on Tehran.

Besides Iran, the remaining parties to the deal – Russia, China, France, Britain, and Germany – have sent their representatives to Vienna for the talks.

On Friday, reports said the Europeans wanted to return to their capitals for consultations after four days of negotiations.

"Given the unwillingness of the Western parties to advance professional, groundbreaking and outcome-oriented negotiations, it seems that we must, as in the past, anticipate an escalation in their blame game against Iran," Nour News said.

Meanwhile Bagheri Kani said on Thursday that a third draft had not been submitted yet in addition to the two drafts presented to the opposing parties in JCPOA on Wednesday night.

In response to the question that in the two drafts presented by Iran to the other parties, whether sanctions will be lifted step by step or they are going to be removed altogether, he clarified, the process is not a step by step one.

Bagheri also mentioned the duration of the verification of lifting the sanctions: "Iran has prepared three drafts; the third one has not been delivered to the other side yet."

### No Option But...

FROM PAGE 1

"As already said, we once again tell the Americans that you should leave the geographical region around us ... taking with you the humiliation you are facing; otherwise, you will be expelled in a way much worse than [what you experienced in] Afghanistan and you will be forced to flee," Brigadier General Esmail Qa'ani said during a commemoration ceremony in the southern Iranian city of Shiraz.

"This is your inevitable fate," Qa'ani noted. "You should know that gone is the time when you did whatsoever you wished; the time of hit-and-run strikes is over and if you hit, you will have to wait and receive the response in the harshest way possible."

The IRGC commander said after 20 years of fighting in Afghanistan, the Americans had no choice, but to concede to negotiations and even then, they committed crimes and acts of treachery during the negotiations, and created problems for the Afghan people.

"The Americans established a government in Afghanistan in a matter of 20 years, [and created] a government that could not resist for 20 days [against the onslaught of the Taliban] and they even failed to fly their own people out of the Kabul airport," Qa'ani said.

Stressing that the U.S. defeat in Afghanistan was the "biggest defeat" for the Americans in the last century, the senior Iranian commander said, "After the Americans... suffered defeat in Afghanistan last year, they raised many marginal and secondary issues so that the world would not realize what disgrace they experienced there."

The U.S. invaded Afghanistan in October 2001 following the September 11, 2001 attacks. American forces occupied the country for about two decades under the pretext of fighting against the Taliban. But as the US forces left Afghanistan, the Taliban stormed into Kabul, weakened by continued foreign occupation.

If the Americans suffered the biggest defeat in Afghanistan in clash with Iran may suffer its most humiliating defeat of its history as Qa'ani has said. The condition in the U.S. either socially or economically is deteriorating and this may stop the Americans continuing their presence and atrocities in the Middle East or other countries but if they want to continue, they will have to pay its price.

The U.S. is losing its hegemonic stance in the world because nations worldwide are awakening and they are not ready to accept the U.S.'s bullying or domination on them. After Afghanistan, it is time for the U.S. departure from Iraq and even from some African states. The Islamic Republic of Iran has been one of the first countries which openly resisted against the U.S.'s bully or domination by becoming independent in 1979 and making its own decision rather than depending on the Americans or aliens.

Although this independence has been a dear decision but it has helped the country to progress well in several fields and severing the dependence on the aliens and this progress will continue either with or without the U.S. threats and bullies.

Brave men in the country are defending well the territories against any vicious acts from aliens so that enemies do not dare to have any attack, and the country only needs a strong unity and solidarity to help the statesmen to steer the country from the current economic condition towards a favorable situation.

The business activists in the country can continue their positive and constructive measures to foil the enemies' threats while men like Qa'ani are defending the territories, and people should be patient because it takes time to overcome the problems created by the previous policies and decisions by the former governments in the countries.





## Eriksen Back in Training After Euro Heart-Attack

LONDON (Dispatches) - Christian Eriksen took part in his first training session since an on-pitch heart-attack while playing for Denmark at the Euros, Danish media reported on Thursday. Eriksen's plight shook the football world in June when the 29-year-old had a brush with death after collapsing during a game televised live around the world. Eriksen remains under contract with Inter Milan but, because he has been fitted with a pacemaker, is not permitted to play in Serie A.

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## Sydney to Host 2023 Women's World Cup Final

MELBOURNE (Dispatches) - Sydney will host the 2023 Women's World Cup final at Stadium Australia on Aug. 20, while co-hosts New Zealand kick off the tournament at Auckland's Eden Park on July 20, world governing body FIFA said. Both Stadium Australia and Eden Park will stage a semi-final, a quarter-final and a round of 16 match each, according to the FIFA schedule. Brisbane's Lang Park and Wellington Regional Stadium, known locally as the 'Cake Tin', will host the other quarter-finals.

# Liverpool Thrash Everton As Chelsea, Man City Grind out Wins

LONDON (Dispatches) - Liverpool thrashed local rivals Everton 4-1 to pile the pressure on former Reds boss Rafael Benitez on Wednesday, while victories for Chelsea and Manchester City ensured the Premier League top three remain separated by just two points.

Leaders Chelsea were made to work hard for a 2-1 win at Watford in one of two games held up by lengthy delays to allow treatment for an ill supporter in the crowd.

Former Liverpool captain Steven Gerrard could not do his old club a favour as his 100 percent start as Aston Villa manager was ended by a 2-1 defeat to City.

Liverpool had won only once in their last nine visits to Goodison Park, but the gulf in class between the sides currently was obvious as Mohamed Salah produced two more stunning finishes to take his tally for the season to 19 goals in 19 games.

Jordan Henderson opened the scoring before Salah curled the first of his double into the top corner. Demarai Gray's strike briefly gave Everton hope heading into half-time, but further strikes from Salah and Diogo Jota gave the scoreline the reflection it deserved from a one-sided contest.

"It was for sure the best performance at Goodison since I have been at Liverpool," said Reds' boss Jurgen Klopp. "We had some good games here but never as good or convincing as tonight."

Chelsea needed Hakim Ziyech to come off the bench and score the winner 18 minutes from time at Vicarage Road to hold off City and Liverpool at the top of the table.

After a half an hour hold up early in the match as a fan was attended to by emergency services, Mason Mount gave the European champions the lead.

Emmanuel Dennis hit back for Watford on the stroke of half-time and for a while it looked like Chelsea could drop points for the third time in four league games.

But Ziyech's powerful finish from Mount's cross maintained their slender one-point advantage over City.

"The two situations we had, we scored," said Chelsea boss Thomas Tuchel. "We were very lucky to escape with the win."



Gerrard had got off to a flying start as Villa boss with back-to-back wins over Brighton and Crystal Palace to ease fears of being dragged into a relegation battle, but admitted before the game that the champions posed a very different test and so it proved.

An injury-hit City dominated the first half and went in 2-0 up at the break thanks to brilliant finishes from Portuguese international duo Ruben Dias and Bernardo Silva.

Ollie Watkins pulled a goal back two minutes into the second half but City held out for a vital three points as Jack Grealish celebrated a victorious return to Villa Park.

West Ham's hopes of a top-four finish suffered another blow as Brighton struck late to snatch a 1-1 draw at the London Stadium.

Tomas Soucek opened the scoring for the Hammers after just five minutes, but after a second for David Moyes's men was controversially ruled out by a VAR review, Neal Maupay earned a point for Brighton a minute from time.

In the other match affected by a lengthy delay to attend to an ill fan in the crowd, Leicester twice came from behind to salvage a 2-2 draw at Southampton.

Jan Bednarek and Che Adams put the home side in front in the first half, but Jonny Evans and James Maddison levelled to keep Leicester just five points off the top four.

Burnley edged a point closer to survival but have still only won once this season after a 0-0 draw at Wolves.

## Ibrahimovic Reveals He Was Close to Joining Napoli

ROME (Dispatches) - Zlatan Ibrahimovic says he almost joined Napoli before returning to AC Milan in 2019, as he wanted to emulate the feat of Argentina great Diego Maradona by winning Serie A with the Naples club.

The 40-year-old Swedish striker joined Milan for a second time in December 2019 after leaving LA Galaxy. However, the Swede was initially tempted by the prospect of guiding Napoli to their first Scudetto since the Maradona-inspired wins of 1987 and 1990.

"Watching a documentary about him, I decided to join Napoli and do what Diego did: win the league," Ibrahimovic told Corriere della Sera.

"I was tired of America and thinking of retiring. But (my agent) Mino (Raiola) said: 'You're crazy, you should go back to Italy.'"

"It was all done with Napoli, but then (Napoli owner Aurelio) De Laurentiis fired (coach Carlo) Ancelotti. I asked Mino: 'Which team is in the worst shape, that I can change?'"

"He replied: 'Yesterday Milan lost 5-0 to Atalanta'. So I decided."

Ibrahimovic also said his famous overhead kick for Sweden against England in 2012 was the goal that made him happiest as "the English have always undervalued me".

## WTA Suspends Tournaments in China Over Peng Shuai Situation

TORONTO (Dispatches) - The Women's Tennis Association (WTA) said it will suspend lucrative tournaments in China immediately due to concerns over the treatment of former doubles world number one Peng Shuai and the safety of other players.

The decision to pull tournaments that could cost the US-headquartered WTA hundreds of millions of dollars in broadcasting and sponsorship comes as Beijing is preparing to host the Winter Olympics next February.

Peng's whereabouts became a matter of international concern following a nearly three-week public absence after she posted a message on social media in early November alleging that China's former Vice-Premier Zhang Gaoli had sexually assaulted her. Neither Zhang nor the Chinese government have commented on her allegation.

"I don't see how I can ask our athletes to compete there when Peng Shuai is not allowed to communicate freely and has seemingly been pressured to contradict her allegation of sexual assault," WTA Chief Executive Steve Simon said in a statement.

"Given the current state of affairs, I am also greatly concerned about the risks that all of our players and staff could face if we were to hold events in China in 2022."

Peng did appear in mid-November at a dinner with friends and a children's tennis tournament in Beijing, photographs and videos published by Chinese state media journalists and by the tournament's organizers show.

On Nov. 21, IOC President Thomas Bach had a 30-minute video call with Peng — a three-times Olympian — during which she told him she was safe and with family and friends.

But Simon, who said the decision to suspend tournaments in China, including Hong Kong, had the full support of the WTA Board of Directors, said they were not convinced all was well with Peng.

"While we now know where Peng is, I have serious doubts that she is free, safe, and not subject to censorship, coercion, and intimidation," said Simon.



# Arsenal Defender Fends Off Robbers

LONDON (Dispatches) - Arsenal defender Gabriel fought off a baseball bat-wielding thief who attempted to steal his car in video footage released by the Metropolitan Police.

The Brazilian had just returned to his home in Barnet, north London, when he was approached by three men as he got out of his car on August 20.

One of the men, Abdi Muse, 26, was armed with a baseball bat.

The men ordered Gabriel to give them his car keys, but the 23-year-old refused to do so. Footage of the incident shows the ensuing struggle between Gabriel and the men as he fended them off.

The men fled with his keys but left the car behind in the garage.

Muse was later arrested, and he was jailed at Harrow Crown Court earlier this month for five years after admitting robbery and possession of an offensive weapon.

"It's not a nice thing to go through, when you have family involved and they're trying to access your house," said Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta.

"Gabby showed a lot of character, you see the reaction that he had straight away. Credit to the boy. After that he was fine."

"He was shocked and obviously he wanted to change a few things in his life to make sure that didn't happen again."

Arteta added that Arsenal supported Gabriel in the wake of the robbery.

"The club gave him all the support that was needed to try and help him forget about the situation, learn about it and move on", he said.

Gabriel joined the Gunners from Lille for £27million (\$36 million) last year.

## Antetokounmpo Fuels Bucks, Doncic Dazzles for Dallas

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - Giannis Antetokounmpo drove for the game-winning layup with two seconds left, lifting the NBA champion Milwaukee Bucks to a 127-125 victory over the Charlotte Hornets.

Antetokounmpo, a two-time NBA Most Valuable Player and MVP of the 2021 Finals, scored 40 points with 12 rebounds and nine assists as the Bucks rallied for an eighth straight win.

The Hornets were on fire early at FiServ Forum in Milwaukee, making 10 of 17 three-pointers in the first quarter.

They led by as many as 18 points in the first half, but couldn't maintain the torrid pace, Milwaukee closing the deficit to 68-60 at halftime.

The Bucks took the lead for the first time with 2:26 remaining in the third quarter, when George Hill's three-point play put them up 91-90.

They led by two going into a fourth quarter that developed into a back-and-forth battle that featured 10 lead changes.

Khris Middleton, who scored 21 points for the Bucks, drained a three-pointers with 52 seconds remaining for a 123-121 lead.

LaMelo Ball, who led the Hornets with 36 points, drained a three with 5.9 seconds left — enough time for Antetokounmpo to get the ball out of a timeout and drive for the winner.

There was little suspense in New Orleans, where the Dallas Mavericks led virtually all the way in a 139-107 rout of the Pelicans.

Luka Doncic scored 28 points and handed out 14 assists and Kristaps Porzingis added 20 points and 10 rebounds for the Mavs, who were coming off a 114-96 loss to Cleveland.



## Djokovic Powers Serbia Into Semis

MADRID (Dispatches) - Imperious Novak Djokovic sent Serbia into a Davis Cup semi-final against Croatia as the world number one inspired a comeback victory over Kazakhstan in Madrid.

Serbia had their backs to the wall when Kazakh veteran Mikhail Kukushkin beat debutant Miomir Kecmanovic in a three-hour epic in the first singles rubber.

But Djokovic calmly levelled the tie with a straight-sets defeat of Alexander Bublik before returning to court to team up with Nikola Cacic and beat Kazakh pair Andrey Golubev and Aleksandr Nedovyesov 6-2 2-6 6-3.

Djokovic has played five out of a possible six rubbers at the Davis Cup Finals so far and looks in the mood to take the team to the title they won memorably in Belgrade in 2010.

When Cacic, who had struggled during the second set, drilled a low return to enable Serbia to clinch victory on their third match point, Djokovic and his team mates celebrated loudly.

Kazakhstan, who were cheered throughout by a noisy band of followers in the Madrid Arena, have now lost all six Davis Cup quarter-finals they have contested.

"I'm proud of the fighting spirit; we dropped off in the second set but we bounced back and held our nerves, I'm proud of Nikola and proud of this team," Djokovic said on court.

Serbia will take on Croatia in Madrid with the other semi-final between Germany and either the Russian Federation or Sweden.

Kazakhstan moved tantalisingly close to the semi-finals when the 33-year-old Kukushkin came through a three-hour-18-minute battle against the 22-year-old Kecmanovic.

He came back from 2-5 down in the deciding set and saved four match points before converting his fifth match point in a nerve-jangling tiebreak to win 7-6(5) 4-6 7-6(11).

