

Health Ministry Announced on Wednesday That the Number of Deaths From the Coronavirus Pandemic in Iran Increased to 130,883 With 52 More Iranians Killed by the Virus Over the Past 24 Hours

IRAN NEWS

The Second exhibition of Scientific, Research and Technological Achievements of the Iranian Institute Of Nuclear Science and Technology Was Opened in Tehran of Head of Researchers of the AEOI

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Tehran Reached a Good Agreement With IAEA

IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Iranian Foreign Minister said Wednesday that Tehran reached a good agreement with the IAEA last night, saying that this could respond to some of the alleged concerns about Iran's peaceful nuclear program.

The last meeting of ambassadors of the Islamic Republic of Iran in neighboring countries was held on Wednesday in the presence of Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian. Addressing the meeting, Amir-Abdollahian spoke about the latest developments over the ongoing sanction removal talks between Iran and the five remaining parties to the JCPOA -- Germany, Britain, France, Russia, and China in the Austrian capital.

According to him, holding talks with might and based on preserving dignity has been on the agenda of the 13th government since taking office, and the Iranian negotiators have adopted the same approach with seriousness and hard work.

"Last night we reached a good agreement with the IAEA that could address some of the alleged concerns about Iran's peaceful nuclear program", the top diplomat said, adding that this will lead to more mutual cooperation with IAEA.

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Iraqi Delegation to Visit Iran to Negotiate More Gas Imports

TEHRAN (MNA) - A spokesman for Iraqi Ministry of Electricity said that Iraqi representatives will travel to Tehran to talk about increasing gas import from Iran, recently reduced from 50 million cubic meters to 8 million cubic meter.

Iraq's electricity ministry says the country still needs to import natural gas from Iran because its plan to locally provide fuel for its power plants has not been completed yet.

Spokesman for Iraqi Ministry of Electricity Ahmed Musa reiterated several Iraqi delegations will travel to Tehran to discuss increasing gas exports which have reportedly been cut to eight million cubic meters a day from 50 million cubic meters.

"Negotiations with the Iranian ambassador in Baghdad and the Iranian ministry of energy regarding the increase of gas imports from Iran are ongoing," Baghdad al-Youm news agency quoted him as saying Sunday.

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Iran to Continue Its Ballistic Missiles Program



IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Iran's Permanent Ambassador to the United Nations stressed that Iran will continue its activities in the field of ballistic missiles and satellites to preserve its security and socio-economic interests.

Majid Takht-Ravanchi made the remarks on Tuesday evening, following the UN Security Council meeting during which UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres gave a report on the implementation of UNSCR 2231.

Iranian negotiation team in the Vienna talks is serious and ready to interact meaningfully and constructively with the other parties to the JCPOA, Takht-Ravanchi said, expressing hope that the other parties adopt the same approach.

"As the Vienna talks move forward, we must all work together to reach an acceptable and good agreement in Vienna as soon as possible", he stressed.

He went on to say that Vienna talks can only succeed through genuine political will and negotiations based on good faith. Iran has fulfilled its obligations and it has made all efforts to preserve the JCPOA more than its fair share.

He said, "As we have reiterated many times, the only solution is the commitment of all parties to the full, effective and verifiable implementation of the JCPOA; No more, no less."

Today, the United States and the European Union must now live up to their responsibilities and return to the full implementation of their commitments under the JCPOA, he said, adding that it is time to make a decision.

"We hope they take this opportunity", he stressed.

Obviously, Iran must be guaranteed that all sanctions will be removed; The United States will not withdraw from JCPOA again and will not abuse the mechanisms of the deal, and Resolution 2231, Takht-Ravanchi added.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Iran's envoy to the UN also spoke about Iran's activities in the field of ballistic missiles and satellites carriers.

"We will continue to work on ballistic missiles and satellite carriers, both of which are essential to our security and socio-economic interests", Takht-Ravanchi stressed.

According to him, under international law, having a conventional missile program is the inherent right of the Iranian people and it is not in violation of Resolution 2231.

The launch of ballistic missiles and satellite carriers is not subject to Resolution 2231, he said, adding, "Any attempt against Iran's ballistic missile and satellite program via distorting interpretation of paragraph 3 of Resolution 2231 is completely rejected, he stressed."

Stressing that Washington's bans against Tehran amount to "economic terrorism", Takht Ravanchi said Iran continues its remedial measures under the JCPOA which are in "full conformity" with the Non-Proliferation Treaty obligations, and that Iran has paid a heavy price to preserve the 2015 landmark deal.

"More importantly, our steps are completely reversible. We are continuing our remedial measures concurrent with the Vienna talks because the non-performance of obligations by other parties still continues, sanctions are still in full force, maximum pressure policy is still being pursued, and the sufferings of our people still persist. Nevertheless, as soon as other parties implement all their obligations in a full, effective and verifiable manner, Iran will immediately reverse its measures in full," Iran's UN envoy continued.

"Conversely, the sufferings of our people due to the non-performance of other parties with their obligations particularly those resulting from the re-imposition of the U.S. illegal sanctions are almost absolutely irreversible," he noted.

"How can one reverse the precious lives lost because of the US inhumane sanctions? How can one bring back to life those lives lost due to the weaponization of humanitarian goods? How can one revive the lives of innocent children being perished because the United States has opted to prevent them from access to the most essential medicines?" he asked.

India Bans Kiwi Fruit Import From Iran

NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - Import of Iran's fresh Kiwi fruits has been banned with effect from December 7 by the nodal body National Plant Protection Organization (NPPO) under the Agriculture Ministry. The pest infested consignments of Kiwi fruits from Iran have increased despite repeated warnings to take action to comply with the quality norms set by India.

India bans Kiwi fruit import from Iran on rise in pest infested consignments

India has suspended import of fresh Kiwi fruits from Iran due to rise in pest infested consignments from the middle eastern nation despite repeated warnings, according to the Union Agriculture Ministry. Import of Iran's fresh Kiwi fruits has been banned with effect from December 7 by the nodal body National Plant Protection Organization (NPPO) under the Agriculture Ministry.

"The phytosanitary certificates issued by the NPPO, Iran from December 8, 2021, for fresh Kiwi fruits shall not be entertained from our end," the ministry said in a letter written to its Iranian counterpart in NPPO.

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West Urged to Prove Seriousness in Vienna by Removing Sanctions

TEHRAN (MNA) - The Iranian Ambassador to London has said that the Western parties to the JCPOA must prove their seriousness in Vienna talks by removing the sanctions.

The Islamic Republic of Iran does not trust the Western parties to the JCPOA and they must prove their seriousness by removing the sanctions, the Iranian Ambassador to London, Mohsen Baharvand told BBC.

His remarks came in reaction to European signatories to the JCPOA who accuse Iran of dragging feet on the table of Vienna talks.

If Westerners are worried about time, they must start removing sanctions, Baharvand said, adding that at least they must show that they are serious; because the Iranian side does not trust them.

Former U.S. President Donald Trump left the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in May 2018 and reimposed the anti-Iran sanctions that the deal had lifted.

The new round of talks on the removal of anti-Iran sanctions kicked off on November 29 in the Austrian capital city of Vienna.

UN Urges U.S. to Lift Anti-Iran Sanctions In Line With JCPOA

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - The United Nations has called on the United States to lift sanctions against Iran in line with the 2015 multilateral nuclear deal, which Washington has abandoned, and extend waivers regarding oil trade with the Islamic Republic, amid a diplomatic process in Vienna to revitalize the troubled agreement.

UN Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs Rosemary DiCarlo made the remarks on Tuesday as she briefed the Security Council on the implementation of Resolution 2231, which endorsed the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

"I appeal to the United States to lift or waive its sanctions as outlined in the plan and extend the waivers regarding the trade in oil with the Islamic Republic of Iran," she said.

"Also important is the extension of US waivers regarding certain civilian nuclear-related activities," she added, stressing that waiver extensions were also needed for exchanging enriched uranium out of Iran for natural uranium.

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Russia Surprised by E3's Illogical, Destructive Positions in Vienna

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russia has expressed surprise over the "illogical" positions adopted by the three European powers during the ongoing Vienna negotiations on the removal of US sanctions on Iran, saying Moscow does not understand the trio's "destructive" stances and cannot thus support them.

The stances of the trio, namely France, Britain and Germany, "are surprising. It is as if it is their first time sitting down at the negotiation table. They tend to adopt some illogical positions," Russia's Permanent Representative to International Organizations in Vienna Mikhail Ulyanov said in exclusive interview with the Russian service of Iran's Pars Today news agency published on Wednesday.

"At a meeting among Russian representatives, [US Special Envoy for Iran] Rob Malley and Chinese delegates, I made it clear that we do not practically understand what the Europeans say. Their stances are unconstructive and destructive. Our understanding of negotiations and diplomacy is different from theirs. We consider such standpoints as unconstructive," he added.

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Ulyanov Statements Over Iranian Centrifuges Misreported

TEHRAN (MNA) – The Russian embassy in Tehran announced that the statements recently made by Russia’s Permanent Representative to Vienna-based International Organizations about the Iranian centrifuges have been quoted wrongly.

The Russian embassy in Tehran said in a statement that the translated version of Mikhail Ulyanov’s modified statements on Iranian centrifuges published by Radio Farda has drawn the attention of the Russian embassy in Tehran.

In fact, the Russian diplomat had said, “What to do with these centrifuges? There is one choice of taking them out of Iran, and another choice is destroying them. There is also the choice of stockpiling them in a place in Iranian territories and placing them under the monitoring of the International Atomic Energy Agency, looking them, etc.. These choices agreed upon. “This is just one of dozens of issues that need to be addressed.”

Tehran, Yerevan Consistent With Development of Multilayered Interstate Ties

TEHRAN (IRNA) - President of Armenia Armen Sarkissian in a message to the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran Ebrahim Raisi, said that Armenia and Iran are consistent with the development of the multilayered interstate relations.

Sarkissian sent the congratulatory message to President of the Islamic Republic of Iran Ebrahim Raisi on the occasion of his birthday, as reported by news.am.

Congratulating Raisi’s birthday, Sarkissian wrote, “I am certain that our neighbor and friendly Islamic Republic of Iran will achieve significant successes in terms of economic advancement and ensuring of welfare thanks to your experience and skillful management.”

“I must state with satisfaction that Armenia and Iran are consistent with the development of the multilayered interstate relations. Our countries are linked by close friendship,



and I welcome the fact that the bilateral ties are being expanded in various sectors.”

The messages added, “Armenia attaches importance to bilateral and multilateral cooperation with Iran which is a major condition for ensuring prosperity of our countries and security and stability in the region.”

“I fully hope that in the near future we have the opportunity to meet and talk about various issues related to regional, international and bilateral partnership which will unquestionably contribute to the positive dynamics of the development of relations,” the message reads.

Iran, Germany Can Forge Beneficial Ties

TEHRAN (PressTV) - President Ebrahim Raisi has congratulated new German Chancellor Olaf Scholz on his election to the top post, saying Tehran and Berlin have the opportunity to benefit from their age-old interactions and forge “valuable” cooperation.

In a congratulatory message to Scholz on Tuesday, Raisi said historical relations between Iran and Germany, which date back 150 years and are based on a diversity of great capacities, offered a “valuable asset for the expansion of political, economic and cultural ties between the two civilized nations more than before.”

The Iranian president said the two countries can make use of such an opportunity to boost “beneficial” cooperation based on mutual respect and interests.

He drew attention to the major challenges facing the world today at regional and international levels and said, “The successful addressing of the challenges requires understanding the shared international responsibility and collective efforts in taking measures that can bring peace, stability and prosperity to the peoples of the world.”

Raisi reiterated the Islamic Republic’s determination to have “maximum interactions” with all world countries, particularly Germany, and expressed hope Tehran and Berlin would succeed in improving relations during the new chancellor’s tenure.

Scholz was sworn in as Germany’s new Chancellor on December 8, a development that put an end to Angela Merkel’s four terms at the helm of Europe’s largest economy.

Iranian Defense Power Not Affected by U.S. Sanctions

TEHRAN (MNA) – Iran’s defense power date back to the era before the sanctions so any restriction on Iran’s drone power will get nowhere, according to a high-ranking Iranian military official.

The Political Deputy of Political-Ideological Office of Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces Brigadier General Rasoul Sanaei-Rad made some remarks in reaction to the latest anti-Iranian move by the Americans in sanctioning the Iranian drone program.

Answering a question about the possibility of the influence of US anti-Iranian move on Iran’s drone power, Brigadier General Rasoul Sanaei-Rad said that Iran had already gained the defense power despite the imposed sanctions and any restriction on Iran’s drone power will not get anywhere.

According to the commander, Iran has stood on its own feet to achieve advanced defense equipment therefore no foreign power can affect that process.

Referring to the US lawmaker Gregory Meeks’ claims that Iranian UAVs endanger the U.S. and the region, he

said that Iran’s defense and military power brings security to the region and is a fulcrum of security of Iran and its neighbors.

It is the irrational presence of the Americans that causes tension and insecurity in the region, he said, adding that the Americans are making the same historical mistakes as the British, and surely they will end up leaving the area just as they did in the case of Afghanistan.

Elsewhere in his remarks, he called the Zionist regime’s regional actions a threat to the security of international shipping, stressing that although Zionists use their American military equipment to attack regional countries, the U.S. would not impose any sanctions on them.

Referring to the brutal killing of civilians in the war in Yemen with the use of American equipment, General Sanaei Rad added that most of the weapons used against civilians are US-made, but the US authorities prefer to ignore this blatant violation of human rights.

Iran, Georgia to Hold 6th Int’l Scientific Conference

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Sixth International Conference of Political, Economic and Cultural Relations will be held between Iran and Georgia on Dec. 17 virtually hosted by Tbilisi.

This prestigious international conference will be organized in cooperation with the Caucasus International University (CIU) and the cultural attaché of Iranian embassy to Tbilisi.

Chancellor of CIU and Cultural Attaché of Iranian Embassy to Tbilisi will deliver speeches at the Conference.

A number of 35 prominent university professors, authors, researchers and personalities from the Islamic Republic of Iran and Georgia will present their abstracts on various topics in three sections of “Politics and Security”, “Economy” and “Culture and History”.

Also, a number of 21 university professors and Georgian researchers as well as 14 university professors and scientific centers of Iran including University of Tehran, University of Isfahan, Islamic Azad University of Tehran Branch, Allameh Tabatabaei University, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, University of Mazandaran, University of Gilan, Islamic World Research Institute and Institute of Caucasus Studies of Iran will present their papers.

Security Model in West Asia Must Be Indigenous

TEHRAN (MNA) - Iran seeks a security model without the intervention of trans-regional actors, Iran’s deputy defense minister said, noting that this model is based on the presence of regional actors who have a common understanding of security.

Iranian deputy defense minister Brigadier General Seyed Mehdi Farahi met and held talks with Assistant Chief of Staff of the Sultanate of Oman’s Armed Forces for Operations and Planning Brigadier General Staff Abdulaziz bin Abdullah Al-Mandhari in Tehran on Wednesday.

“Oman is our friend and brother country in the region”, the Iranian deputy defense minister said on Wednesday’s meeting, adding that the country has a special and valuable place in the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Iran-Oman relations have entered their 50th anniversary and such historical relation, cooperation, and interaction can become a model for other countries in the region.

Farahi said that the policy of Iran is that security in West Asia should be provided only by the countries of the region.

Iran seeks a security model without the intervention of trans-regional actors, he

said, adding that this model is based on the presence of all regional actors who have a common understanding of security.

Referring to the 16th round of the joint military friendship commission of Iran and the Sultanate of Oman, he said, “This commission is a clear example of bilateral interaction, which shows the will and commitment of the Armed Forces of Iran and Oman for mutual cooperation and interaction.”

The Iranian Ministry of Defense is ready to expand bilateral cooperation with Oman in the form of a joint memorandum of understanding based on the common interests, he also stressed.

The senior Omani official also hailed the historical commonalities and deep relations between Oman and Iran, saying that these joint meetings will help deepen relations between the two countries.

Saying that Oman considers Iran as its friend, he added that his country is very interested in benefiting from Iran’s scientific capacities and progress.

Bilateral cooperation between Iran and Oman play an effective role in ensuring the security of the Oman Sea, he added.

Fake Regime of Zionists Root of All Troubles in Region



TEHRAN (MNA) - Addressing the Head of Palestinian Islamic Resistance Movement, Hamas, Political Bureau, Iranian Foreign Minister stressed that the fake regime of Zionists is the cause of troubles and the root of all problems in the region.

In a telephone conversation with Ismail Haniyeh Head of Palestinian Islamic Resistance Movement, Hamas, Political Bureau, Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian congratulated the 34th anniversary of the establishment of the movement and stressed Iran’s continued support for the Resistance of the Palestinian people.

In this telephone conversation, the Iranian Foreign Minister called the Hamas movement one of the pioneers of the Islamic Resistance in the liberation of Holy Al-Quds, “Today, the Resistance has a pivotal role in realizing the historical rights of the Palestinian people.”

Referring to the recent move of the British government in declaring Hamas a terrorist organization, Amir-Abdollahian said that it was a political move against the Palestinian people.

The fake Zionist regime is the cause of troubles and the root of the problems in the region, he said.

Some regional countries that move in the path of normalizing relations with this regime are acting against the security and interests of the region and the Islamic Ummah, he stressed.

Ismail Haniyeh also said, “We proudly remember Martyr General Qasem Soleimani and appreciate the support of the Islamic Republic of Iran for the Palestinian cause and Resistance since the victory of the Islamic Revolution.”

He also said that the Zionist regime’s influence in the region caused insecurity, instability, and a threat to the Palestinian cause and to the entire Islamic Ummah.

Majlis Passes Teachers’ Ranking Bill

TEHRAN (IP) - During the open session of Iran’s Parliament held on Wednesday, Iran’s lawmakers reviewed the indicators effective in the teachers’ ranking process.

During the session chaired by Iran’s Parliament Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf, the proponents and the opponents presented their views on the teachers’ ranking bill.

Reviewing the bill, the lawmakers agreed with Article 5 of the bill by 4 votes in favor, 3 against and 3 abstentions from the total of 4 parliamentarians present at the meeting.

Article 5 states that obtaining higher ranks requires five years of service and obtaining the necessary conditions.

Pursuant to Article 4 of this bill, the ranking of teachers based on the given academic years and managerial records will be implemented by the end of this year.

In recent months, Iran has witnessed challenging conditions created by teachers in different cities demanding better salaries and conditions. Hence, reviewing the draft and final approval of it on Wednesday can improve their living conditions.

Kermanshah Province Ups Cooperation With Malaysia

KERMANSHAH (IRNA) - Secretary-general of Kermanshah Commerce Chamber said that they had decided to increase interaction and cooperation with Malaysia on various business areas.

Kermanshah has a population of two million people and enjoys many mines and industries, Dariush Panahi said in a meeting attended by Kermanshah Province business agents and Malaysian Palm Oil Board (MPOB).

Panahi also said that the Province’s industry included steel, dairy, cement, tile, edible oils, and petrochemical products, as well as various agricultural products.

MPOB CEO Hisamuddin Mohamad Aspar said that Malaysia imports many agricultural and petrochemical products from Iran and the country’s refineries used to work based on Iran’s oil in the past.

Malaysia exports palm oil, rubber, and wood, Aspar said, adding the MPOB that has an office in Iran located in the Malaysian Embassy is obliged to offer required training and the formulation of products both to the importers and consumers.

Tehran to Stand Firmly In Vienna Talks

TEHRAN (IFP) - The spokesman for the Iranian Parliament’s National Security and Foreign Policy Committee has said the Vienna talks will definitely be successful and their results will be way bigger than the 2015 nuclear deal, JCPOA.

Mahmoud Abbaszadeh however warned that the West is trying to keep Iran waiting, which is detrimental to investment and economic stability, but Iran will not let others decide its fate.

Abbaszadeh added that the other sides have not shown any determination to lift the sanctions against Iran during the Vienna talks and that all their efforts are aimed at extracting concessions from the Islamic Republic.

The spokesman for the Iranian Parliament’s National Security and Foreign Policy Committee however expressed confidence that Iran’s stance is transparent and righteous and if the country sticks to its guns, the Western side will backtrack on its demands. Abbaszadeh said for over 40 years, they made efforts to insinuate that our problems stemmed from the U.S. and that the only solution was to engage in direct talks with Washington.

He added that in 2015 the Islamic Republic held face-to-face negotiations with the US at the level of foreign ministers but the White House went back on its commitments.

Commander Praises Role of Universities in Military Advances

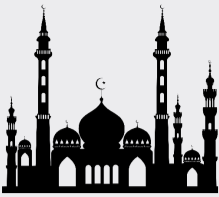
IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - The deputy commander of Iran’s Revolutionary Guard Corps has said that Iranian universities and academics have been useful in advancing military development projects.

Ali Fadavi told IRNA that in the IRGC navy “A lot of cooperation and activities have taken place with universities,” that have not been mentioned due to their secret nature.

He added that 14 universities helped boost Iran’s naval capabilities and played an important role in many other areas.

“We in the Islamic Revolution Guard Corps have used the capabilities of students, researchers and academics at different times and for a variety of problems, especially in the most difficult tasks, meaning in the military field,” Fadavi was quoted as saying.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)

■ Evening (Maghreb)

■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)

■ Tomorrow's Sunrise

12:00

17:12

05:38

07:08

11. How many were the populations We utterly destroyed because of their iniquities, setting up in their places other peoples?

12. Yet, when they felt Our Punishment (coming), behold, they (tried to) flee from it.

Surah 21. The Prophets (11 - 12)

Uzbekistan to Join Chabahar MoU

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN Director General of Ports and Maritime Organization (PMO) Ali Akbar Safaei has said that Iran welcomes the Uzbek government’s approach to using the capacity of the Chabahar port.

Ali Akbar Safaei, Director General of Ports and Maritime Organization (PMO), made the remarks in the 2nd trilateral meeting of the Islamic Republic of Iran, India and Uzbekistan, which was held via video-conferencing on Tuesday.

Tashkent has already shown its interest to join India and Iran to promote connectivity through the Chabahar port in the southwest of Iran, as part of the country’s efforts to improve and diversify access to sea routes for trade.

“The Islamic Republic of Iran welcomes the approach of the Government of Uzbekistan to use the capacity of the Chabahar port and its plan to develop trade and investment in the port of Shahid Beheshti [in Chbahar],” Safaei said during the online meeting.

“After Uzbekistan joins the Chabahar Memorandum of Understanding, we will see the facilitation of transit between India, Iran and Uzbekistan in the near future,” he further said.

“Over the past few years, with the implementation of the Chabahar Memorandum, the activities at Shahid Beheshti Port has increased significantly, and we hope that with the full cooperation of India, Iran, Afghanistan, Uzbekistan and other Central Asian countries, the activity at Chabahar Port will further increase,” the PMO director-general also said.

The Deputy Minister of Ports, Shipping and Waterways of India, in turn, said that the

Chabahar Agreement between Iran, India and Afghanistan gave Afghanistan access to the sea and laid the ground for the development of the Chabahar port in Iran.

The Chabahar port has become a regional transit hub in recent years, providing a more economical and stable route to connect India to Central Asian countries, the Indian official added.


The Indian side further called for creating a mechanism that allows Uzbekistan to connect to Chabahar for the transit of goods, thus giving other Central Asian countries access to the Iranian port.

Uzbekistan’s representative in the virtual meeting pointed out that India, Iran and Uzbekistan have a lot in common in terms of history and culture, adding that trade between the three countries has always been going on for a long time.

He stressed that the volume of trade between Uzbekistan and India has increased significantly over the past year, adding that the Chabahar port can play an important role in facilitating transportation and logistics between countries in the region.

The Uzbek official further announced that an Uzbek delegation would visit the Chabahar port in the near future.

16th Festival of Majlisi Recitation Underway in Ghaemshahr



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN – The final stage of the 16th national and international festival of Majlisi Recitation of Holy Quran began on Tuesday at Islamic Azad University of Ghaemshahe, Mazandaran Province, in the presence of top and distinguished reciters of Holy Quran.

According to the schedule, the festival will continue in four stages in the cities of Ghaemshahr, Sari and Gorgan. Some 60 top Iranian reciters and 10 international regfereeing maestros are present in the festival which kicked off on Tuesday afternoon and the festival will wrap up today (Thursday) with naming the top reciters of the festival.

Reciters from 30 provinces in six groups are to compete and the top reciter of each group will qualify for the next round where the top six group leaders will vie.


The executive manager of provincial competition of the festival Mr. Safa Ranjbar speaking to reporters, said that Mazandaran Province has four representatives in the 16th festival as reciters of Ghaemshahr city of the province have won the top award for three consecutive years. He added that 60 top national and international reciters of the country will compete for the top awards.

He noted that in the past years the festival was held in Tehran where reciters used to come together for competition and the top six reciters were qualified for the national stage which was held at Milad Tower during the Ten-Day Dawn festivities but the format of the final stage was changed this year and the secretariat of the festival received 132,000 Quranic words and 51 works are picked for the international section.

He added that in the international section, Iran has 6 representatives.

Ranjbar added that the top reciters will be chosen by the popular votes as well as the Jury of the festival.

Iran Expanding Use of Drones In Agriculture



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran’s agriculture ministry says it is encouraging the use of drones on farms across the country through offering cheap loans to farmers and launching information campaigns to boost the application of the technology.

Head of the ministry’s Agriculture Mechanization Expansion Center said on Tuesday that demand and use of drones in the Iranian farms had risen three-fold since the start of the current calendar year in late March compared to the previous year.

Kambiz Abbasi said that 12 domestic companies have supplied 65 models and brands of drones for use in the Iranian agriculture sector, adding that the number of drones used in the farms has increased to reach nearly 460 units.

Abbasi said drones are mostly used for spraying pesticide in the Iranian farms, adding that they have also been used to apply fertilizers, for pollination and for sowing seed in farms in remote regions.

Iran’s agriculture sector has reported consecutive periods of growth over the past years amid increased government support for the sector which is aimed at boosting exports and creating more jobs for the country’s youth.

Experts say growth in agriculture output and exports has played a major role in Iran’s efforts to offset the impacts of American sanctions on the country’s economy.

Abbasi said the agriculture ministry has launched information campaigns to encourage the use of drones by farmers across Iran while cooperating with various authorities in the country to ensure the drones would not pose any security risks in areas they are used.

The official said the government currently offers cheap 7-year loans to farmers to help them pay for nearly 80% of the costs of owning a drone.

He said that the agriculture ministry expects the number of drones in Iranian farms to increase by 200-250 units per year as a result of its support program.

Iran Steel Exports at Nearly 5m Tons in 8 Months

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iranian steelmakers have managed to sell more shipments to foreign customers this year despite increased American pressure on the country’s trade and banking relations with other countries.

A Tuesday report by Iran’s official IRNA news agency showed that steel exports from the country had risen by 22% in the eight months to November 21 compared to the similar period last year to reach over 4.937 million tons.

The best performer in steel exports over the March-November period was Khuzestan Steel Company (KSC) with more than 1.11 million tons of overseas shipments, said the report, adding that KSC’s exports had increased by 18% year on year.

Exports by Mobarakeh Steel Company (MSC), Iran’s largest steelmaker, totaled 0.815 million tons over the same period while shipments by Esfahan Steel Company reached nearly 0.767 million tons, showed figures in the report.

Iran’s state-run metals sector has experienced a considerable growth in recent years as it has become a main source of earning hard currency revenues for the government in the face of American sanctions targeting Iran’s oil exports.

Washington has imposed similar sanctions on Iran’s trade of metals but the bans have largely failed to affect the continuous growth in overseas shipments from the sector.

Iran sits on some of the world’s largest mineral reserves with current estimates suggesting that they can amount to around 60 billion tons. However, Iron ore reserves in the country are believed to be around 2.7 billion tons or 0.8% of the global reserves.

Recent figures by the Iran’s customs administration show that exports from the iron sector accounted for \$4.5 billion or 14% of the total value of non-oil exports from the country in the March-November period.

East Azarbaijan Exports to Syria Hits \$6m

TEHRAN (MNA) - Head of East Azarbaijan Industry, Mine and Trade Organization said that \$6 m worth of goods were exported to Syria from the northwestern Iranian province in the first 8 months of the Iranian year 1400.

Gholamali Rasti, Head of East Azarbaijan Industry, Mine and Trade Organization, said on Tuesday that during the first 8 months of the Iranian calendar year 1400 (March 21 to Nov 21, 2021) this province exported about \$121,000,000 worth of goods to Syria.

He also stressed the need to enhance the trade relations between Syria and East Azarbaijan province.

“Investing in Syria as well as exports of the province’s products to the country provides an appropriate market for artisans and manufacturers in the province,” Rasti noted, adding that exported goods were majorly in the fields of manufacturing, agriculture, food, mining and mineral industries.

Head of East Azarbaijan Industry, Mine and Trade Organization considered the joint meeting of economic activists, traders and businessmen of Syria and East Azarbaijan as an opportunity to identify the industrial, mining and commercial potentials of East Azarbaijan province.

Rasti also stressed the need for the presence of Iranian commercial attaché in Syria to support businesspeople and economic activists in that country.

Iranians Set Record in Buying Properties in Turkey

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Iranians bought 1,406 houses in Turkey during November, breaking the historic record for Iranian citizens buying housing in Turkey.

The monthly record for selling housing to foreign citizens in Turkey was broken in October 2018 with the sale of 1,439 housing to Iraqi citizens, and with the exception of this, Iranians last month also set a record for buying housing in Turkey among foreign citizens.

Iranians have bought 8,594 housing units in Turkey in the 11 months of this year, a 36 percent increase from the same period last year, and foreigners have been leading the way in buying housing in Turkey, according to the Turkish Statistical Center published on Tuesday.

By comparison, the purchase of housing by Iranians in Turkey last month alone was twice the total annual purchase of housing by Iranian citizens in the period before U.S. sanctions.

It is not only Iranians who have increased their purchase of housing in Turkey.

Official data show a more than 48 percent jump in home sales to foreigners in Turkey during November compared to October. Property sales to foreigners in Turkey have boomed greatly this year, increasing by 39.4% in the 11 months of this year.

According to the report, 7,363 properties sold to foreigners were the highest monthly level of sales since this type of official data began in turkey in 2013. So far, most foreign home buyers in Turkey have been Iranian citizens, followed by Iraqis and Russians.

In the past few years, there have been repeated reports of Iranian citizens setting record purchases in Turkey. This happened when the lira fell to its lowest level of 14.99 against the dollar on Monday. With this level of fall, the lira’s value fell by half this year and is now more than 40 percent weaker than at the beginning of September.

The most popular city for buying houses by foreigners was Istanbul with 2,922 items, followed by Antalya and Ankara.

Iran’s Biggest Capital Market Support Center Launched

TEHRAN (MNA) - Mofid Securities, one of Iran’s top brokerage firms, has established the country’s biggest support center to provide various services to people active in the capital market, Mehr News Agency reported.

As reported, the center was launched on Tuesday in a ceremony attended by the Deputy Head of Securities and Exchange Organization (SEO) Alireza Naserpour.

Mofid Brokerage support center is aimed at educating, supporting, and solving technical issues faced by stock exchange shareholders. Using advanced technologies, the center provides its services through all communication channels, including calls, emails, comments on social networks, and message boards of online trading systems.

As reported, four trillion rials (about \$13.4 million) has been invested in this center which has created direct jobs for over 600 people.

Solomon Opposition Figure Faces Charges Over Riots

HONIARA (Dispatches) - Police in the restive Solomon Islands on Tuesday pursued charges against a leading member of the opposition over deadly riots that rocked the country last month.

United Party president John Kwaita was arrested by armed police at his home late Monday and is being charged with breaking Covid-19 rules on public gatherings.

"Police have released the suspect on bail," a police spokesperson told AFP, adding the suspect "will appear before Honiara Central Magistrate (in) February of 2022." Late last month anti-government protests sparked widespread looting and arson in the capital Honiara, causing US\$67 million worth of damage and leaving the city's Chinatown district in ruins.



Uganda Opposition Leader Under House Arrest

KAMPALA (AFP) - Ugandan opposition leader Bobi Wine said Tuesday that police had surrounded his residence and put him under house arrest ahead of a planned campaign rally for a local by-election.

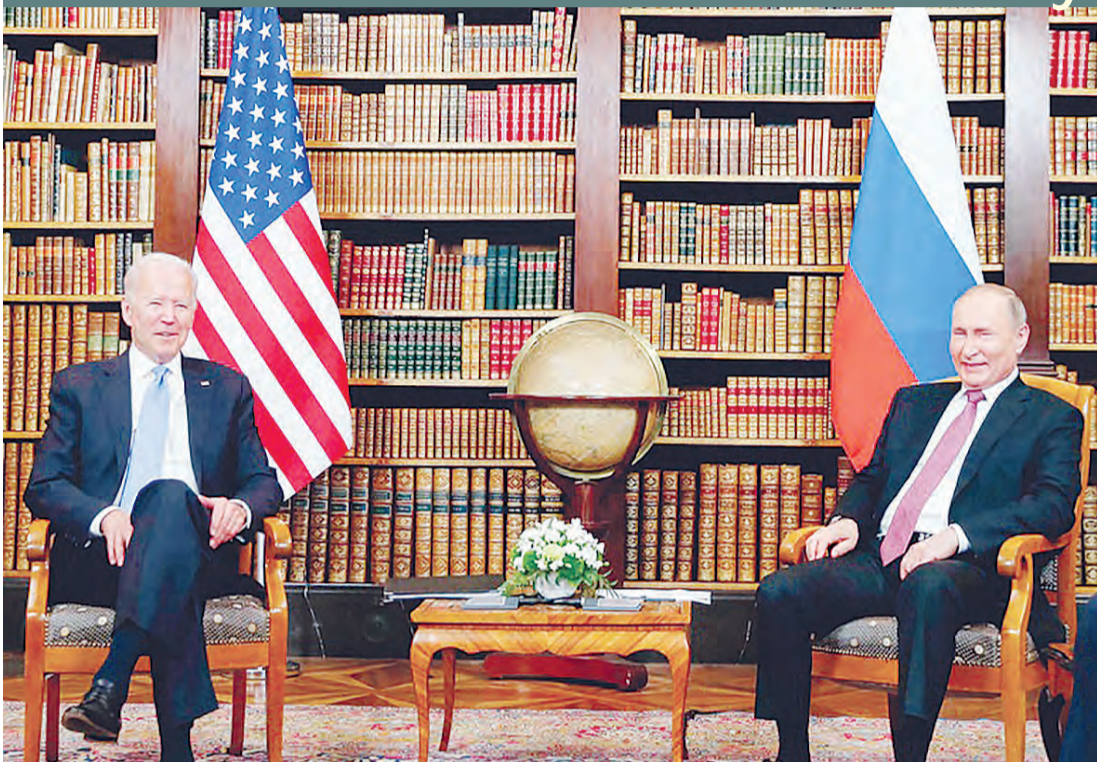
Wine, whose real name is Robert Kyagulanyi, said police and military officers, deployed overnight, had barred him from leaving his home in Magere, north of the capital Kampala.

"The military has increased deployment around my home. No one is allowed to leave or enter," Wine said on Twitter, accusing President Yoweri Museveni of placing him "under house arrest".

The popstar-turned-politician came second in a tense January election that returned Museveni to power for a sixth term.



Putin Wants Immediate Talks With NATO on Russia's Security



MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russian President Vladimir Putin said Tuesday that he wants "immediate" talks with the United States and NATO over security guarantees, as tensions soar between Moscow and the West over Ukraine.

The U.S. and its allies have for weeks accused Russia of planning an invasion of its neighbor, warning of a massive coordinated sanctions response should Putin launch an attack.

Tens of thousands of Russian troops are stationed near the borders of ex-Soviet Ukraine, where the West has accused the Kremlin of backing pro-Moscow separatists since 2014.

In a phone call with the Finnish president -- whose country has traditionally served as middle ground between Russia and the West -- Putin said he wanted security talks to begin without delay.

He told President Sauli Niinisto that Moscow wants "to immediately launch negotiations with the United States and NATO in order to develop international legal guarantees for the security of our country," the Kremlin said in a statement.

Russia's demands, it said, included stopping NATO from expanding east and the deployment of weapons in neighboring states, including Ukraine.

Putin reiterated the same demands in a phone call with French President Emmanuel Macron later.

In his call with the Finnish president, Putin also accused the Ukrainian leadership of increasingly using "heavy weapons and attack drones" against pro-Russia rebels in its separatist east.

The Russian leader denies planning an invasion, blaming the Western security alliance for the rise in tensions and demanding "legal guarantees" the alliance won't expand eastwards.

U.S. President Joe Biden last week warned Putin of "sanctions like he's never seen" should Russian troops massed on the Ukrainian border launch an attack.

The EU and the G7 met in recent days to coordinate what they warn would be an unprecedented economic sanctions regime if Russia attacks.

Putin's comments come a day after Russia's deputy foreign minister Sergei Ryabkov warned Moscow could act militarily if the talks it demands do not materialize.

"The lack of progress towards a political-diplomatic solution to this problem will lead to the fact that we will respond militarily," Ryabkov told the RIA Novosti state news agency.

Tensions continued to soar Tuesday, with Russia saying it was monitoring a French warship near its borders in the Black Sea. The Russian army last week said it scrambled three of its jets to escort five French and US military aircraft over the sea.

Putin has accused the West of provoking tensions in the Black Sea, decrying US-led military exercises there.

The Black Sea is a sensitive region for Russia, which controls the Crimean peninsula after annexing it from Ukraine in 2014.

Moldovan President Says Joining EU Is Their Choice

BRUSSELS, (Dispatches) - Moldova aspires to join the European Union and the former Soviet republic has told Russia that this is its choice, Moldovan President Maia Sandu said on Tuesday.

Her comments in an interview with Reuters were her clearest public remarks on Moldova's pro-Western course. Since Moldova won independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, pro-Russian and pro-EU politicians have vied for control.

Sandu, whose reformist party won a landslide victory in parliament in July, is seen in Moldova as a symbol of change who offers Brussels a foreign policy success in a country almost bankrupted by endemic corruption six years ago.

But on the eve of a summit with leaders of the EU and other eastern European countries including Ukraine, Sandu said that Russia was making Moldova's life difficult with higher natural gas prices. She said it was also up to the West to help catch criminals who had stolen Moldova's money and were at large in Europe.

"Moldova wants to become a member of the EU one day," said Sandu, who has avoided clear-cut references on the country's orientation since winning power in late 2020, given Moldova's dependency on Russian gas.

"We'd like to get there sooner than later," she said in the interview at a Brussels hotel. Asked if Russia would allow Moldova - which lies between Ukraine and EU member state Romania - to join the European Union, Sandu said she had told Russian officials that the 27-country bloc's model was the one for her country.

Ukraine accuses Russia of seeking to check its own Western ambitions. Moscow denies this.

"We will insist that it is our choice (to join the EU) and we would like other countries to respect that choice," she said.



Israel Police Used Excessive Force During May Unrest

TEL AVIV (Dispatches) - Human Rights Watch accused Israeli police on Tuesday of using "excessive force" against Arab protesters in the mixed city of Lod during May unrest, while treating Jewish rioters more favourably.

The violence in Lod, in central Israel, came as tensions surged in Israeli-annexed east Jerusalem, where Palestinian protesters facing eviction clashed with security forces, and fighting flared between Israel troops and Gaza-based Palestinian militants.

The rioting in Lod between May 10 and May 14 was carried out by both Arab and Jewish residents, according to multiple officials and witnesses, with both Jewish and Muslim places of worship vandalised.

But HRW said: "The police appeared to act half-heartedly and unevenly to violence against Palestinian citizens of Israel committed by Jewish ultra-nationalists."

The group's report cited instances where police "failed to act in a timely manner to protect Palestinian residents of Lod" from violent Jewish groups.

It also cited instances in which "Israeli law enforcement agencies used excessive force to disperse peaceful protests by Palestinians."

Israeli police rejected allegations of unfair treatment, telling AFP that officers "worked day and night during the riots that took place in Lod last May to restore peace and security for the inhabitants of the city".

Investigations and arrests linked to the unrest were carried out "regardless of the religion or identity of the perpetrators," a police spokesperson said.

Human Rights Watch has accused Israel of committing crimes of apartheid against Palestinians in Gaza, the occupied West Bank and inside Israel. Israel firmly rejects those allegations and accuses the group of having a bias against the Jewish state.

HRW's Israel and Palestine director, Omar Shakir, was expelled by Israel in 2019 over allegations that he previously supported the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement, which seeks to isolate Israel over what it calls the mistreatment of Palestinians.

No U.S. Troops to Be Punished Over Deadly Kabul Drone Strike

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - The Pentagon said that no U.S. troops or officials would face disciplinary action for a drone strike in Kabul in August that killed 10 Afghan civilians, including seven children.

Spokesman John Kirby said Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin had received a high-level review of the strike that made no recommendation of accountability.

"There was not a strong enough case to be made for personal accountability," Kirby said.

Aimal Ahmadi, 32, who lost his three-year-old daughter, his brother and six nephews and nieces in the strike, expressed anger at the decision on Tuesday.

"God will take revenge," Ahmadi said, adding "what if the US had lost a child? What would the reaction have been?"

The Taliban urged Washington to reverse the decision, with a spokesman saying the U.S. should punish the culprits and compensate the victims.

The August 29 drone strike took place in the final days of the US-led evacuation of Kabul after the Taliban seized control of the country.

U.S. officials said they had intelligence of a possible

Islamic State attack on the evacuation operations at Kabul airport, and launched a missile from a drone at a target that was thought to be a car laden with munitions.

In fact, they struck a family that included an Afghan man who worked for a U.S. aid group and seven children.

In early November, an initial report carried out by the U.S. Air Force inspector general, Lieutenant General Sami Said, called the strike tragic, but "an honest mistake."

The review by Central Command head General Kenneth McKenzie Jr. and Special Operations Command chief General Richard Clarke made use of Said's report and detailed recommendations on procedures for future drone strikes. But it made no call for anyone to be punished for the mistake.

"What we saw here was a breakdown in process, in execution and procedural events, not the result of negligence, not the result of misconduct, not the result of poor leadership," said Kirby.

If Austin "believed... that accountability was warranted, he would certainly support those kinds of efforts," Kirby added.



Duterte Withdraws From 2022 Senate Race

MANILA (Dispatches) - Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte on Tuesday withdrew his candidacy for the 2022 Senate race, the government

elections monitor said, a month after he made a last-minute entry into the contest.

Duterte, 76, is constitutionally barred from seeking re-election, and his decision to run for the Senate had been seen as a way of staying in politics while facing an international probe into his deadly drug war.

"The President has filed his withdrawal from the Senatorial elections," James Jimenez, spokesman for the Commission on Elections office, said on Twitter.

No official reason was immediately provided for Duterte's sudden withdrawal from the elections in May, which will see thousands of candidates contest more than 18,000 posts from president to town councilor.

Duterte said previously he would run for the country's second-highest office, before changing his mind and announcing plans to retire from politics -- which was met with deep scepticism among analysts.

His latest withdrawal does not necessarily mean he is planning to quit politics. Under election rules, he could potentially substitute another candidate sharing his surname if they were disqualified or died.

Duterte's daughter Sara is running for vice president while his son Sebastian is contesting the mayoral race in the family's southern stronghold of Davao City. "It's very dizzying," said Antonio Contreras, a political science professor at De La Salle University in Manila.

Contreras said Duterte may have "made a deal" to ensure the next president would protect him from criminal charges in the Philippines, or the International Criminal Court.

"They've probably already made sure that somebody is going to act on their behalf to protect their interests," he said.

Duterte's exit from the race came hours after his close aide and chosen successor Senator Christopher Go formally withdrew his candidacy for president.

The current leader in the presidential race is the son and namesake of former dictator Ferdinand Marcos, according to a recent survey by respected polling outfit Social Weather Stations.



Mahmoodieh (\$4000)
 400sq.m, 4bdrs
 S/p, Sauna
 J, balcony
 marble fl
 fireplace
 pkg, & F.F

Kamranieh Villa (\$8000)
 2000sq.m
 6bdrs, S/p
 Sauna, J
 green yard
 Terrace, S/q
 elegantly Furn

Darrous Apts
 140sq.m, 2bdrs (\$1600)
 200sq.m, 3bdrs (\$2200)
 300sq.m, 4bdrs (\$3200)
 All with S/p, S, J, & F.F

Farmenieh (\$2000)
 220sq.m, 3bdrs
 S/p, S, J, pkg
 L.balcony
 pkg, F.F

Velenjak bldg (\$10000)
 5storey, 20bdrs
 S/p, S, J, pkgs
 brand new
 F.F

Sa`adat abad (\$1400)
 2bdrs, S/p, S, J, & F.F

Vanak office (\$3500)
 300sq.m, 4bdrs, & pkgs

Cell: +989121907875
Shanon_tari@yahoo.com
Tel : 88510081
Fax : 88506474

A hand holding a black pen points to the phone number 44253401, which is displayed in large green digits. The background is a dense word cloud of digital marketing terms in various colors and orientations, including 'ADVERTISING', 'TRAFFIC', 'ENGINE', 'MARKETING', 'RISK', 'OPTIMIZATION', 'BUSINESS', 'WEBSITE', 'RISK', 'TECHNOLOGY', 'ONLINE', 'SOLUTION', 'PROMOTION', 'COMMUNICATION', 'RANK', 'KEYWORD', 'MODE', 'ELECTR', 'MARKETING', 'RISK', 'OPTIMIZATION', 'BUSINESS', 'WEBSITE', 'RISK', 'TECHNOLOGY', 'ONLINE', 'SOLUTION', 'PROMOTION', 'COMMUNICATION', 'RANK', 'KEYWORD', 'MODE', 'ELECTR'. The word 'ADVERTISING' is the largest and most prominent, written in white on a red diagonal band. The phone number 44253401 is written in large green digits. A hand holding a black pen points to the number.

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A large billboard for IRAN NEWS PUBLISHER OF NEWSPAPERS ADVERTISING. The billboard is white with black and red text. The word "IRAN" is in large, bold, red letters with a green outline. Below it, "NEWS" is in large, bold, black letters. Underneath "NEWS" is the text "PUBLISHER OF NEWSPAPERS" in smaller black letters. At the bottom, "ADVERTISING" is written in large, bold, black letters, with each letter containing a small, colorful image. To the right of the main text, there is contact information: "TEL: 44253448-50", "FAX: 44253234", and "ADIRANNEWS@GMAIL.COM". The billboard is set against a backdrop of a city skyline, including the Empire State Building, under a blue sky with scattered clouds. The billboard is supported by a tall, dark metal pole.

Boeing Delivers 34 Aircraft in November

SEATTLE (Dispatches) - Boeing Co said on Tuesday that it handed over 34 airplanes to carriers in November, while adding 109 jets to its 737 MAX order tally.

The delivery tally - closely scrutinized by investors as deliveries generate much-needed cash during the coronavirus crisis - compares with 27 planes in October, and seven in the year ago period when Boeing was in the throes of the 737 MAX safety crises.

Again in November, Boeing failed to deliver its advanced carbon-composite 787 Dreamliner, which remains mired in inspections and retrofits likely to keep the jets sidelined until April 2022.



Moody's Lowers Global GDP Forecast

KUALALUMPUR (Dispatches) - Global gross domestic product (GDP) is expected to grow by 5.5 per cent this year and 4.1 per cent in 2022 as the Omicron variant's arrival increases uncertainty and downside risk about the near-term trajectory, according to Moody's Analytics.

"GDP growth will steadily decelerate over the next year as policy support fades, pent-up demand cools, and supply-chain stress lingers," it said in a statement today.

The research firm, however, said that the emergence of Omicron is not expected to derail recovery momentum.

"Most of the globe is in an improved position compared with mid-2021, with most economies in recovery or expansion mode. But divergence of performance will proceed through 2022, influenced by vaccination coverage, effectiveness managing outbreaks and policy support," it said.

In August, Moody's Analytics had forecast global GDP to rebound 5.7 per cent this year following a 3.6 per cent contraction in 2020.

In the latest statement, it said the Omicron variant has driven business sentiment lower, as have supply-chain disruptions eating into inventories and hurting capacity to meet increased demand.

"While the economic recovery has yielded improved sales and employment intentions, caution has increased. Expectations into next year are mixed as uncertainty remains high," it stressed.

It also said that monetary policy normalization would be an important fixture of the economic landscape in 2022.

"The Federal Reserve is leading the charge with more aggressive asset tapering on the back of inflation being less transitory than initially thought. The first hike in the federal funds rate is expected by September 2022," it said.

According to Moody's, the United States (U.S.) and China will continue driving global growth.

The U.S. GDP growth is forecast at 5.6 per cent in 2021 and 4.4 per cent in 2022 fuelled by fiscal stimulus while China's growth is forecast at 7.9 per cent in 2021 and 4.7 per cent in 2022.

"China's economy faces challenges on a number of fronts, including power shortages, a cooling property market, and a buildup of risks in the financial sector," it added.

On Asia, Moody's said economic recoveries are largely back on track and vaccination coverage has increased substantially across most of the region, but there are exceptions.

"Indonesia and the Philippines stand out due to their low vaccine coverage, increasing vulnerability to another infection wave that necessitates the reintroduction of movement controls," it said.

On the global supply chains, Moody's said it is currently under stress but thanks to production disruption from Covid-19 as well as a surge in goods demand, there has been a lift in transport costs, shipping times and commodity prices.

Global supply chains are lean when it comes to inventory build-up and carry strong interdependencies, so one issue along the chain can have broader ripple effects, it cautioned.

Danish Firms Fined for Embargo-Busting Russia Fuel Sales

ODENSE (Dispatches) - A Danish court on Tuesday fined two companies more than \$5 million for breaking an EU embargo by selling jet fuel to Russian companies that was eventually used in fighter planes in Syria.

After a two-month trial, the court in Odense ruled that "the deliveries objectively were violations of EU sanctions" targeting the Bashar al-Assad regime.

The director, the company Dan-Bunkering and its parent company were found guilty of selling a total of around 172,000 tons of jet fuel to two Russian companies on 33 occasions between 2015 and 2017.

The fuel, worth nearly 90 million euros, was then delivered to Syria, where it was used to power Russian fighter jets.

The two companies were fined a total of 34 million kroner (\$5.2 million, 4.6 million euros) and Bunker Holding boss Keld Demant was given a four-month suspended sentence.

Demant made no comment as he left the court, said an AFP correspondent at the scene.

The company and its director had pleaded not guilty, arguing that their Russian clients were not affected by the sanctions and they could not control what their customers did with the fuel.

However, the court found that the Demant should have realized that it was "highly likely that the jet fuel would be used by the Russian military in Syria".

The Danish company made the sales through its office in Kaliningrad, a Russian exclave surrounded by Germany.

EU, UK Fail to Agree Post-Brexit Fishing Quotas

BRUSSELS (Dispatches) - The EU and Britain failed to reach agreement on how to divvy up post-Brexit fish quotas in shared waters from next year, officials said today, meaning provisional quotas will apply.

"Unfortunately, and despite our best efforts to conclude in a timely manner, consultations with the UK on fishing opportunities for 2022 are still ongoing," EU fishing commissioner Virginijus Sinkevicius told a news conference.

European Union fishing ministers had approved quotas from January 1, 2022 in EU waters

extending into the Mediterranean, the Atlantic, the North Sea and the Black Sea, he announced.

But Brussels and London still remain apart on how to share fish stocks in areas plied by both EU and British trawlers, reflecting broader EU-UK tensions that have festered since Britain left the bloc nearly two years ago.

"We haven't reached an agreement with the UK. We're remaining optimistic and we do hope it will be possible to reach it by the 20th of December," Slovenian Fishing Minister Joze Podgorsek said.

He said that "provisional quotas" with the UK on shared fishing stocks would remain in force until a new agreement was hammered out.

Sinkevicius said the "contingency proposal" being applied would last for three months on the pro-rata basis of 2021 catch limits, with allowances for seasonal catches.

Podgorsek was speaking on behalf of Slovenia's role as outgoing holder of the EU presidency—a rotating status that from January 1 will be held by France, which has taken a robust position against Britain over fishing and other post-Brexit disputes.

Britain, under pressure from the EU and threats from French fishermen to block British imports, has been progressively issuing dozens of licences for French fishing boats to work in its waters and those of its Jersey and Guernsey dependencies in the Channel.

That issue, along with the separate one of quotas, was addressed but not fully resolved in a Trade and Cooperation Agreement signed by Brussels and London that was meant to outline post-Brexit relations.

France's Europe minister, Clement Beaune, said as he arrived for another Brussels meeting with EU counterparts that "we have now obtained 1,000 licences out of a little more than 1,100 that were applied for in total".

That, he said, was thanks to "the pressure we exerted—we, France, and collectively with the European Union".

He added there remained 80 licence applications outstanding.

IMF Warns UK May Have to Bring Back Furlough Scheme

LONDON (Dispatches) - The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has said the UK may need to bring back some of the programs it introduced to help see the economy through the pandemic, including the furlough scheme.

This comes as the country announced its first death from the new Omicron COVID variant and has decided to ramp up its vaccine program by turning football stadiums into vaccine sites.

"In the event of a virulent COVID-19 wave requiring widespread mandated closures, the authorities should be ready to redeploy a subset of the most successful previous exceptional programs (such as a furlough scheme and targeted support to the most vulnerable households and small businesses), but with due attention to lessons learned about their design (including tapering and timely sunset)," the IMF said in its report. It said that the UK's recovery has been faster than expected amid strong continued policy support and thanks to a rapid vaccination campaign.

But it also said capacity constraints and rising price pressures have emerged while new COVID-19 variants pose downside risks to the UK's outlook. It expects inflation to peak at about 5.5% in the spring of 2022, before gradually returning to target of 2% by early 2024.

The IMF has also urged the Bank of England to avoid "inaction bias" as it gears up for a key vote on Thursday on when to hike interest rates in the face of high inflation.

The report said growth will likely remain strong in the near-term, but so too will price pressures.

"Our forecast sees elevated growth of about 6.8% in 2021 and 5% in 2022, with a mild slowdown in the first quarter of 2022 due to newly introduced restrictions, and supply bottlenecks still prevalent in the first half of next year." This comes a fourth national lockdown could be on the cards for millions of people in England. Ministers are working on plans for a further tightening of social restrictions if the Omicron outbreak worsens over the holiday period.

In a speech at the IMF, UK chancellor Rishi Sunak said: "The most important thing we can do to safeguard the economic recovery and protect the British people's lives and livelihoods, is for everyone to get boosted now."

He said the government's £400bn (\$530bn) COVID support package will continue to help businesses well into spring next year.

He acknowledged the IMF had rightly pointed out that the UK faces real challenges in the months to come, but highlighted the fact that it said the economy is "resilient".

"Our economic plan goes further in three crucial areas: to help working people with the cost of living; to stabilize our public finances; and to invest in our future growth," said the chancellor. He reiterated some of his government's initiatives such as increasing the national living wage to £9.50 from April and the fuel duty freeze and said that as a result of some difficult decisions "our deficit is expected to stabilize and our national debt to fall".

Australia Chooses South Korea to Ink Largest-Ever Defense Deal in Asia



SEOUL (Dispatches) - In a move that can irk China, Australia on Monday chose South Korea for the largest-ever defence deal with the Asian country.

Australia and South Korea took their strategic relations to new heights by agreeing to a new defense deal worth USD 717 million (NTD 19,861 billion), reported Taiwan News.

The deal's announcement marked the climax of a four-day visit to Canberra by South Korean President Moon Jae-in -- the first foreign leader to visit Australia since the coronavirus pandemic began in 2020, according to an AI Jazeera report.

Hanwha, a South Korean defense company, has signed on to supply the Australian army with cutting-edge artillery weapons, supply vehicles, and radars.

It represents the largest defense contract between Australia and an Asian nation in history, and it comes just months after Canberra joined the AUKUS pact with the UK and US, much to the chagrin of China.

Indeed, experts believe Moon's visit shows Seoul is prepared to go out of its way to deepen its friendship with Australia, despite knowing it will potentially take heat from China as a consequence, reported Taiwan News.

"At the end of his single five-year term and in the midst of the pandemic, it has to be quite important to signal a degree of support and comfort with Australia's membership of the Quad and the AUKUS agreement," said Bill Paterson, Australia's former ambassador to Seoul.

The outcomes of recent meetings between South Korean leaders and their Chinese and Australian counterparts show that, despite the importance of the country's trade relations with China, Seoul places greater trust in American allies like Australia when it comes to security, reported Taiwan News.

IEA Sees More Comfortable Year for Oil Market in 2022

PARIS (Dispatches) - The Omicron coronavirus variant will slow the recovery in global demand for oil but the market will be "more comfortable" in 2022, the International Energy Agency said.

The oil market "appears to stand on a better footing than it has for some time," the IEA wrote in its latest monthly report.

The emergence of Omicron at the end of November "sparked a steep sell-off in oil, but initial pessimism has now given way to a more measured response," it said.

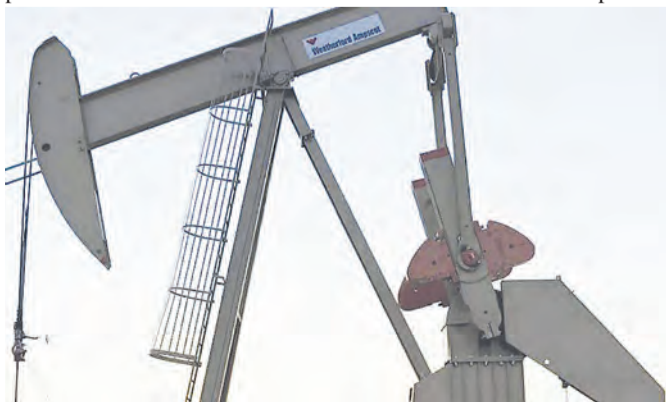
"The surge in new Covid-19 cases is expected to temporarily slow, but not upend, the recovery in oil demand," the IEA wrote.

It said "new containment measures put in place to halt the spread of the virus are likely to have a more muted impact on the economy versus previous Covid waves, not least because of widespread vaccination campaigns."

The IEA, which unites oil-consuming countries and advises governments on energy policy, said it had revised downwards its forecast for global oil demand by an average 100,000 barrels per day for both this year and next year due to new restrictions on international travel.

The agency said it is now pencilling in an increase in global oil demand of 5.4 million barrels per day in 2021 and by 3.3 million in 2022, when it will return to pre-pandemic levels at 99.5 million bpd.

On the output side, global oil production was poised to outpace demand from December, the IEA predicted, driven by higher production in the United States and the countries that make up the so-called OPEC+ group of oil producers.



Earlier this month, the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and their allies agreed to stick to planned increases in output in January, despite the economic uncertainties linked to Omicron.

"As the upward supply trend extends into 2022, the U.S., Canada and Brazil are set to pump at their highest-ever annual levels," IEA said.

"Saudi Arabia and Russia could also set records, if remaining OPEC+ cuts are fully unwound."

This could lead to surplus supply of 1.7 million bpd in the first quarter of 2022 and 2.0 million bpd in the second quarter.

"If that were to happen, 2022 could indeed shape up to be more comfortable," the IEA said.

Int'l Premiere of Iranian Film Begins in France

PARIS (IP) - Memento Pictures, as the international distributor of Asghar Farhadi's new film, is set to start the global screening of "A Hero" with French cinemas on Wednesday.

"A Hero," is the representative of Iranian cinema at the 2022 Oscars, will be screened in American cinemas on January 7, 2022.

France is the first foreign country to screen "A Hero," and Italy, Turkey, Spain, Singapore, Portugal, Sweden, the Netherlands, and Russia are among the countries that will screen the film next year.



Covid, Conflict and Climate Worsening Hunger in Africa

NAIROBI (Dispatches) - Hunger in Africa has worsened significantly with an almost 50 percent rise in those considered undernourished compared to 2014, the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and other agencies said on Tuesday.

A new report says the number going hungry across Africa reached nearly 282 million in 2020 -- more than one-fifth of the population -- an increase of 89 million compared to just six years earlier.

Most of that deterioration occurred between 2019 and 2020, with economic downturns caused by the coronavirus pandemic blamed for exacerbating the chief causes of hunger.

"After a long period of improvement between 2000 and 2013, hunger has worsened substantially" across the continent, said a new report on food security and nutrition released by the FAO, the African Union and the UN Economic Commission for Africa.

The report looked at trends between 2014 to 2020 but the picture was expected to prove bleaker in 2021 "with no easing of hunger's main drivers".

The prevalence of undernourishment -- defined as when somebody cannot get enough food to meet their needs and maintain a normal and healthy life -- was worst in eastern, western and central parts of the continent.

Africa accounted for 55 percent of the global rise in the number of undernourished people over the reporting period, with the world set to miss the UN's target of eradicating hunger by 2030.

Conflict and climate change were identified as the other two major drivers for the increase in hunger, with the unaffordability of healthy diets and underlying problems



such as poverty and inequality also playing a part.

But the onset of economic hardship from the Covid-19 pandemic "added to the already existing challenges, further undermining efforts to reduce hunger and malnutrition in the region".

The report urged the international community to provide aid in the short term to countries in need, but also invest in agriculture and other related sectors to build resilience against climate extremes in the future.

Turkey's Economy To Recover Fast With Low Rates



ANKARA (Dispatches) -- Turkey's Treasury and Finance Minister Nureddin Nebati has said he will reveal the details of Turkey's new economic model based on production and exports to the high ranks of the ruling party and the wider public.

His meeting with the business world at the presidential office in the Dolmabahçe Palace complex in Istanbul on Dec. 11 was "very fruitful," he told news portal Habertürk.

"The economy will recover at a very fast pace," he said, adding that the government will abstain from raising interest rates. "You'll see that we can deal with it without raising interest rates. Just trust us."

Turkey's macroeconomic indicators are all positive, the minister underlined and said: "There are some problems but we have a very strong infrastructure to overcome them. All we need is to make people believe in that and acknowledge that we will not step back. They should understand our determination and trust in our sincerity."

Nebati said that he is making his preparations to brief the cabinet members and the central executive board of the Justice and Development Party on the new economic policies. "Then I will appear before the public and talk," he said.

New economy policies should not be branded as "the Chinese model nor the South Korean Model," the minister stressed.

"This is the Turkish model. Turkey is a very strong country with its circumstances, geopolitics, good relations, its strength coming from its past," he said. "This model is unique to us. That's what I told the businesspeople at the meeting. That's why they left very happy."

More than 60 businesspeople, including representatives of companies, chambers, banks and regulatory bodies attended the meeting.

"The minister briefed us on the current outlook and the new economic program. A lot of issues including the raw material price hikes, payments to medical firms, claims of public contract holders and value-added tax returns were discussed," Rifat Hisarciklioğlu, the head of the Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey, told reporters after the meeting.

Touching on the Central Bank's interventions in the exchange rate markets, "There are some manipulative and speculative domestic transactions. The Central Bank makes moves against them," said Nebati.

The Central Bank intervened in currency markets for the fourth time this month.

"The Central Bank of the Republic of Turkey directly intervenes in the market via selling transactions due to unhealthy price formations in exchange rates," the bank said in a statement.

The move came after the Turkish Lira hit a new all-time low against the U.S. dollar, falling from 13.87 to around 14.60. In the afternoon, the lira gained against the greenback to reach 13.78. The Central Bank announces foreign exchange interventions to the public on the same day, while the exact figures are usually published in 15 days.

Pfizer Says Covid Pill Drastically Reduces Severe Disease

WASHINGTON (Dispatches)

- Pfizer said that clinical trials confirmed its Covid pill, a new type of antiviral treatment that should withstand the mutations seen with Omicron, drastically reduced hospitalizations and deaths among at-risk people by almost 90 percent.

The announcement came as a real-world study from South Africa showed two doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine was 70 percent effective in stopping severe illness from the new variant, a result called encouraging by researchers, though it represents a drop compared to earlier strains.

Data for the new pill, which hasn't yet been authorized anywhere in the world, came from more than 2,200 volunteers, and backed up findings announced last month in an interim analysis.

The American drugmaker said its treatment, called Paxlovid, withstood the Omicron variant in lab-testing.

"This news provides further corroboration that our oral antiviral candidate, if authorized or approved, could have a meaningful impact on the lives of many," Pfizer CEO Albert Bourla said in a statement, saying the new drug could "save lives."

The trial showed that the pill reduced the need for hospitalization in high-risk adults with Covid-19 by 89 percent if the treatment was given within three days of symptom onset and by 88 percent if given within 5 days, according to the company.

Overall, there were 12 deaths in the placebo group who did not receive the drug and none in the drug group.

Side-effects were found at comparable rates between the treatment and placebo groups (23 percent and 24 percent, respectively), and were mostly mild.

There were also encouraging results from a trial among people at standard risk of developing severe Covid, the company reported, but that study is ongoing.

Paxlovid is a combination of two drugs -- nirmatrelvir, a new experimental medicine, and ritonavir, an existing antiviral used against HIV. In total, 30 pills are taken over a period of five days.

Nirmatrelvir is known as a "protease inhibitor" and works by blocking the action of an enzyme the coronavirus needs to replicate. Ritonavir is administered to slow down the breakdown of nirmatrelvir inside the body, increasing its efficacy.



Because Paxlovid does not target the fast-mutating spike proteins that stud the surface of the coronavirus, scientists have hypothesized it should be more variant-proof than other treatments, such as synthetic antibodies infusions and antibodies triggered by most types of Covid vaccine.

Another Covid pill, Merck's molnupiravir, has already been authorized in Britain and is pending authorization in the United States.

But final study results showed molnupiravir only reduced hospitalizations and deaths by a relatively disappointing 30 percent, and there are concerns over its safety. The company has recommended against molnupiravir's use in pregnant women after animal studies raised concerns for fetuses.

Pfizer said it had shared its pill data with the US Food and Drug Administration as part of its submission for an emergency use authorization.

The news comes as the heavily-mutated Omicron variant continues spreading fast around the world, raising alarms about surges in severe cases and deaths.

Even if early data suggesting that the variant is milder in most people is confirmed, its increased transmissibility and ability to overcome prior immunity may negate this advantage, by virtue of infecting higher numbers of people.

Many high-income countries have stepped up their campaigns to get people booster shots in order to restore vaccine efficacy.

The latest research out of South Africa found that two doses of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine still offered high protection against serious illness.

"The double dose of Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine (shows) 70 percent effectiveness in reducing risk of hospitalization," said Ryan Noach, the head of South Africa's leading private health insurance company Discovery, which co-led the study.

Two doses of the vaccine offered 93 percent protection against earlier variants, according to the companies.

The study was based on the results of 78,000 PCR tests taken in South Africa between November 15 and December 7 and was conducted by Discovery along with the South African Medical Research Council (SAMRC).

It also found two doses were 33 percent effective against infection -- a result that lines up with early data from the UK Health Security Agency, which experts say underscores the case for a third dose.

India Bans...

FROM PAGE 1

Since October 2021, India has intercepted quarantine pest 'Aspidiotus netil' in 22 consignments and 'Pseudococcu Calceolariae' pest in two Kiwi fruit consignments, it said. The pest infested consignments of Kiwi fruits from Iran have increased despite repeated warnings to take action to comply with the quality norms set by India, it said.

Earlier in 2019 too, India had intercepted a quarantine pest called 'Aspidiotus netil' from 13 consignments and a non-quarantine pest 'Aonidiella aurantii' from two consignments of Kiwi fruits from Iran, it added.

The ministry further said, "The non-compliance report has been sent on a regular basis to Iran for these consignments but so far no action has been taken nor the interception has decreased." It said the introduction of any quarantine pests through infested import consignments is a threat to Indian biosecurity and is dealt under the provisions of Indian regulation. The Indian government has suspended the import of fresh kiwi fruits from India as each country has sovereignty and authority to protect itself, it said.

Iran government has also been requested to investigate the cases of non-compliance and submit an action taken report at the earliest with respect to remedial measures taken to avoid future interceptions. Currently, India imports 4,000 ton of Kiwis from various countries, while the domestic production is about 13,000 ton, as per the government data.

Tehran Reached...

FROM PAGE 1

Amir-Abdollahian also said that the other side has agreed to discuss two drafts submitted by Iran recently to the P4+1, one on the removal of sanctions and other on the nuclear issues.

Earlier on Tuesday, Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman told Press TV that ongoing discussions between the head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI), and the IAEA chief have led to progress and that gaps on several issues of mutual interest have narrowed.

Khatibzadeh said, "I don't want to go into details but I can anticipate that the two sides reach an understanding soon."

Also in this regard, the Nournews has said that according to the agreement, the IAEA will install the CCTV cameras at TESA facility in Karaj but the Iranian atomic agency (AEOI) will keep the recordings of the cameras and will not hand them over to the IAEA.

Iraqi Delegation to...

FROM PAGE 1

Despite its position as a major oil producer, Iraq relies on Iran for natural gas that generates as much as 45 percent of its 14,000 megawatts of electricity consumed daily. Iran transmits another 1,000 megawatts directly, making itself an indispensable energy source for its Arab neighbor.

Earlier this month, the United States granted Iraq a 120-day extension to a sanctions waiver allowing Baghdad to continue energy imports.

UN...

FROM PAGE 1

Elsewhere in her comments, DiCarlo said that given the status of the Vienna talks, full restoration of the JCPOA and Resolution 2231 would require "additional effort and patience."

"In recent days, both Iran and the United States have again affirmed their seriousness in seeking to return to full implementation of the JCPOA. The Secretary-General is encouraged by these pledges and calls on both countries to expeditiously translate these commitments into a mutually acceptable agreement," she added.

"The Secretary-General hopes that in their current negotiations, the United States and the Islamic Republic of Iran will mobilize the same spirit and commitment that resulted in the JCPOA. There is simply no viable alternative to the full and effective implementation of the Plan and the resolution."

Russia Surprised by...

FROM PAGE 1

Ulyanov said, "Our Iranian colleagues have presented their demands rather transparently and put forward their proposals in a written form. From Russia's point of view, this is a step forward because neither a written agreement nor an official consensus was reached at the end of the previous six rounds of negotiations."

The Russian envoy to the Vienna talks also highlighted that U.S. officials are not allowed to the consultations in which Iran is present, and the reason is crystal clear.

"The Iranian side believes that Americans made a mistake by withdrawing from the JCPOA. Therefore, direct talks and consultations with the US delegation are not on the agenda at all," he said, referring to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, the official name of the nuclear accord.

"The best solution would be for the final agreement to be passed in the parliaments of participating countries. This is, however, unlikely to be an easy job with the United States since neither the House nor the Senate would vote in favor of approving such an agreement," the Russian official said.

"We can, therefore, think of political agreements as before. The US administration can only speak for itself, not the entire political establishment in the country. It cannot predict what would happen in the future. This is a very unfortunate fact for us," the Russian diplomat said.

Ulyanov also slammed Washington's so-called campaign of "maximum pressure" against Iran, stating that the approach has turned out to be completely unconstructive, has increased the sufferings of the Iranian nation and resulted in problems and humanitarian crises, but it has yielded no positive results even for the United States.

Since the beginning of the Vienna talks in April, France, Britain and Germany, also known as E3, have pressed Iran to return to full compliance with its nuclear obligations under the JCPOA, ignoring the fact that the talks are aimed at bringing the US -- the only party that left the deal -- back into the deal by removing its anti-Iran sanctions.

Benfica Defender Victim of Robbery at Home

LISBON (Dispatches) - Benfica defender Nicolas Otamendi has been the victim of a robbery in his own home, the Portuguese club said in a statement.

The Argentina international played in Benfica's 4-1 win at Famalicao on Sunday before returning home, when the incident took place. "Sport Lisboa e Benfica confirms that their player Nico Otamendi was the victim of a robbery at his home during the early hours of this Monday," the statement read.

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Las Vegas to Host Super Bowl in 2024

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Las Vegas will host the Super Bowl in 2024 pending final approval from team owners this week, the Las Vegas Review-Journal reported.

The NFL championship decider had originally been slated for New Orleans but with the league adding a 17th regular season game from this year the Super Bowl would have conflicted with the city's annual Mardi Gras celebration in 2024. The report, citing sources familiar with the process, said New Orleans would instead host the 2025 Super Bowl, which will not conflict with Mardi Gras.

Jokic Gets Tossed, But Nuggets Top Wizards

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Nikola Jokic had 28 points, 19 rebounds and nine assists before being ejected, Monte Morris scored 22 points and the host Denver Nuggets beat the Washington Wizards 113-107.

Aaron Gordon had 16 points and Jeff Green scored 13 for the Nuggets, who held a 33-point lead in the third quarter but had to hold on. Jokic was tossed midway through the fourth period after arguing calls with two different referees after the same passage of play.

Davis Bertans scored 21 points, Bradley Beal had 19 points and 10 assists and Aaron Holiday added 18 for Washington. The Wizards were without Kyle Kuzma due to health and safety protocols. The Nuggets were missing JaMychal Green (ankle) and Will Barton (non-COVID illness).

Warriors 102, Pacers 100

Kevon Looney grabbed a loose ball after Stephen Curry missed a potential record-tying 3-point attempt and flipped in a tiebreaking layup with 13.4 seconds remaining, giving Golden State a victory over Indiana in Indianapolis.

After hitting just two 3-pointers while the Warriors were falling behind 55-47 at halftime, Curry finished 5-for-15, giving him 2,972 for his career. He will need just one to tie Ray Allen on Tuesday in New York. Curry finished with 26 points for the Warriors.

Domantas Sabonis led all scorers with 30 for the Pacers, who saw a three-game winning streak end with an eighth loss in nine games decided by three or fewer points this season. Sabonis completed a double-double with a game-high 11 rebounds.

Grizzlies 126, 76ers 91

Dillon Brooks scored 23 points, Jaren Jackson Jr. added 22 and host Memphis easily defeated Philadelphia.

De'Anthony Melton contributed 15 points and Tyus Jones had 13 for the Grizzlies, who have won eight of nine. Memphis continues to thrive without Ja Morant, who sprained his left knee on Nov. 26.

Tyrese Maxey led the 76ers with 23 points, while Charles Bassey added a career-high 13 points, 10 rebounds and four blocked shots for his first double-double.

Mavericks 120, Hornets 96

Kristaps Porzingis racked up 24 points, 13 rebounds and five blocked shots as Dallas romped past visiting Charlotte. It was the second lopsided victory in as many nights for the Mavericks, who played both games without Luka Doncic (ankle).



Mavericks reserves Trey Burke and Tim Hardaway Jr. provided 22 and 19 points, respectively, while accounting for nine 3-point baskets. Dorian Finney-Smith notched 15 points.

Cavaliers 105, Heat 94

Reserve Kevin Love scored a team-high 23 points -- all in the second half -- to lead Cleveland past visiting Miami for its fourth straight win.

Love took just two shots in the first half. In the second half, he made 6 of 8 attempts from the floor, including 5 of 7 from 3-point range. Love also led Cleveland in rebounding, pulling down nine boards in 23 minutes.

Celtics 117, Bucks 103

Jayson Tatum had 42 points on 16-of-25 shooting and Boston beat visiting Milwaukee to snap a three-game skid.

Tatum connected on 7 of 13 shots from behind the arc and he also tallied five rebounds, four assists and three steals. The Celtics' Jaylen Brown scored 19 points in his return from injury.

Giannis Antetokounmpo totaled 20 points and eight rebounds and Jrue Holiday scored 20 with eight assists for the Bucks, who had won two straight and 12 of 14 overall coming in.

Rockets 132, Hawks 126

Eric Gordon scored a season-high 32 points and D.J. Augustin came off the bench to score 16 of his season-high 22 points in the fourth quarter as visiting Houston came from behind to defeat Atlanta.

The Rockets trailed by as many as 19 points and entered the fourth quarter trailing 101-88, but they scored a season-high 44 points in the final quarter to improve to 2-12 on the road this season. The Hawks lost their fifth straight homecourt game and have dropped four of their past five contests overall.

Inoue Defends Title Against Dipaen

TOKYO (Dispatches) - Japan's unbeaten "Monster" Naoya Inoue defended his WBA and IBF bantamweight titles with an eighth-round technical knockout win over unheralded Thai challenger Aran Dipaen in Tokyo.

Fighting at Ryogoku Kokugikan -- the home of sumo -- Inoue wore Dipaen down with a series of punishing shots before dispatching him with a vicious left hand.

The bout, Inoue's first in Japan for around two years, was widely seen as a stepping-stone towards an attempt at unifying all four bantamweight belts next year.

But the 28-year-old was made to work hard for his win over Dipaen, who absorbed a series of heavy body blows with little visible impact.

"He used to be a Muay Thai fighter and he brought that toughness," Inoue said of Dipaen, who went into the fight with a 12-2 record.

"I started to wonder whether my punches were having an effect -- that's how tough he was."

Inoue took his unbeaten record to 22-0, with 19 wins by knockout.

After hammering away on Dipaen's body, Inoue finally put the challenger away with a big left that sent him down to the canvas.

"The fight didn't go as everyone was expecting, but it was good to fight in Japan again after two years," Inoue said.

Inoue has set his sights on unifying the bantamweight belts next year, with WBA champion Nonito Donaire and WBO title-holder John Riel Casimero standing in his way.

But he warned that he could turn his attentions elsewhere if no agreement could be reached with either fighter next year.

"I've been placing a lot of importance on unifying the four belts, but if the individual fights don't happen, I'll start thinking about the super-bantamweight title," Inoue said.

Inoue beat Donaire in the final of the World Boxing Super Series in 2019, claiming a unanimous points win over the veteran Filipino after an epic contest.



Lindelof Breathing Difficulties Not Covid Related

MANCHESTER (AFP) - Manchester United defender Victor Lindelof is underdoing investigations into the cause of the breathing difficulties he suffered during Saturday's 1-0 win at Norwich, but it is not believed to be related to the coronavirus outbreak at the club.

Lindelof, 27, was substituted in the 74th minute at Carrow Road after struggling to catch his breath.

United interim manager Ralf Rangnick said after the match the Sweden defender also had a higher heart rate than normal, prompting the decision to replace him.

In a statement on Tuesday, United said: "Victor is currently undergoing a series of precautionary investigations. He has recovered well from the episode he experienced in the match against Norwich."

"All indications are that this is not linked to any Covid outbreak within the club."

United's Premier League match away to Brentford, scheduled for Tuesday night, was postponed after a number of positive Covid-19 tests among players and staff led to the closure of their Carrington training complex on Monday.

Aguero Poised To Retire With Heart Condition

BARCELONA (Dispatches) - Barcelona forward Sergio Aguero will make an announcement on his future following cardiac and respiratory difficulties suffered while playing in La Liga in October.

Aguero will be accompanied at a press conference by club president Joan Laporta, where local media say he will announce his retirement.

The 33-year-old joined Barca from Manchester City in July after helping Argentina to win the Copa America.

Just prior to his switch he suffered a bout of Covid-19, and on October 30 was rushed to hospital after breathing problems while playing in the Liga draw against Alaves.

"It looks clear the Argentine striker will announce his retirement after suffering cardiac arrhythmia," Mundo Deportivo wrote on Tuesday.

The club said after he underwent heart tests in November that Aguero would be unavailable for the next three months while the effectiveness of treatment was evaluated.

At the time Aguero said he remained positive. "There are rumors going around but I'm following the club doctor's opinion and we'll see how I am in 90 days," he wrote on Twitter.



Verstappen Was Always a Winner

GENK (Dispatches) - Formula One world champion Max Verstappen stood out even in infancy as a serial winner, the owner of the Belgian kart track where the Dutch driver first honed his racing skills said.

Paul Lemmens, whose Karting Genk circuit is known as the 'Home of Champions', recalled first meeting the four-year-old Verstappen when father and former F1 racer Jos brought him along to test a baby kart.

"It was amazing to see because his helmet was bigger than himself," he told Reuters television a day after Red Bull's 24-year-old Verstappen won the title in Abu Dhabi.

"The father Jos was racing also in my team and for that he started here. He lived also in Belgium about 15km from here so each weekend or each day they had off they were on track with Max."

Lemmens said Max's talents were soon apparent.

"He did many, many races here, and most of them he won easily," Lemmens added.

"He did his first race and he won immediately ... from then on you can see he had an extreme talent. Then the next race he won also. I don't think he lost one race -- only when his engine was broken or something like that."

