

**Iranians Are Going to Celebrate Yalda Night Festivity (the Longest Night and Beginning of Winter) tonight in an Atmosphere of Assisting Other Fellow Countrymen Amid Pandemic**

# IRAN NEWS

**Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian Will Pay a Visit To Azerbaijan This Weekend as The Minister Is to Talk With Azeri Officials on the Development of Bilateral and Trade Relations**

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## Europeans Urged To Pay Cost of Iran Hosting Illegal Migrants'

TEHRAN (IFP)- Iran's interior ministry says European countries should pay their share of the costs inflicted on the Islamic Republic by illegal migrants, using its territory to travel to Europe.

The ministry's deputy for security Hossein Zolfaghari said after a meeting with the UN High Commissioner for Refugee Filippo Grandi in Tehran that Iran can no longer pay the heavy cost of hosting such migrants.

"We have 2,000 kilometers of borders only with Afghanistan and Iran also pays a hefty price to prevent narcotics, terrorist groups, etc., from entering its territory. But the Europeans has paid no compensation for all of these even as they are the beneficiaries here," he said.

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## Commander Warns Israel of Crushing Response If It Is Attacked



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) warned Israel of a 'crushing' response to any attack on its nuclear and military sites, emphasizing that the country will target the source of any aggression against its sensitive sites.

"If such threats are carried out, the Islamic Republic's Armed Forces will immediately and decisively attack all centers, bases, routes, and spaces used to carry out the aggression," Major General Gholam Ali Rashid, commander of Khatam al-Anbiya Central Headquarters, said at a meeting with commanders of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Ground Force on Monday, Nour News reported.

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## Tehran May Revive Deals With Airbus, Boeing

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The head of Iran's Civil Aviation Organization says a likely revival of the 2015 nuclear deal will resurrect the country's contracts to buy passenger jets from the likes of Airbus and Boeing.

Talks between Iran and the remaining signatories of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in Vienna to remove unilateral US sanctions on the Islamic Republic are in the homestretch, with different sides citing "relative progress".

"The program to modernize the aviation industry is the desire of the president [Ebrahim Raisi], and with the possibility of reviving the JCPOA and removing restrictions, the aircraft purchase contracts will also be revived," Mohammad Mohammadi-Bakhsh said on Monday.

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## MAHAB GHODSS CO. Top Exporter of Year and Constructor of Biggest Project in East Asia

The CEO of Mahab Ghodss Consulting Engineering Company announced the construction of a 1000 MW power plant in East Asia. This power plant is located 600 meters deep in the ground. This project is the largest project in the East. That's why Germany, Canada and Switzerland have invited the company to contact them exclusively to increase their chances of winning the tenders in the world.

Mahab Ghodss Engineering and Consulting Company was established with the aim of implementing national and development projects. Due to the growing needs of the complicated water industry and hydropower plants and on the whole, for the country's self-reliance in implementing development projects, the company was established in 1984 which is a large consulting engineering company on a global scale to materialize the lofty and long-term goals of the country which seemed to be impractical. Mahab Ghodss Consulting Engineering Company is on the way to achieving its vision and strategic goals. The company has established capable organizational nuclei and reputable agencies in the target markets, not only domestically, but also internationally. By exporting engineering services, this company has been able to become the tenth company in the world with the name of engineering services consulting and to achieve growth and promotion of financial and economic security. Engineer Nasser Tarkeshdouz, the CEO of Mahab Ghodss Consulting Engineering Company, has been named as a top exporter of the year since 2016 (for 6 consecutive years). "Our company has not exported goods," he said about the secret of the company for its achievements, adding, "I did not buy goods from here to sell to another country. I did not take out the capital of the country either. This company has exported Iranian intelligence and talent. In fact, we have issued design and construction supervision. In my opinion, it is a very important point that you do not take capital out of the country. Even if we consider the brain as capital, this brain did not go where it stayed, but it brought into the country. So we exported Iranian intelligence and talent. We proved that Iranian intelligence and talent, if it finds an organization and works with good planning, can have something to say in the world." "We participated in international tenders held by global banks and very large organizations that are very precise," he said. We were among the first



companies selected in more than 100 tenders. One hundred global brands put us in the top five. Even sometimes American and European companies were eliminated in the tenders, but we were upgraded. We were the final winners in thirty projects around the world from east to west. American and European companies were lower than ours, which I think is a national honor," he noted. The CEO of Mahab Ghodss Consulting Engineering Company also says about the reasons for the company's success: "I must say that several factors played effective role in this situation that made our company successful: 1- Belief: In fact, the main reason for the company's success is belief. You need to believe that you can. This is the slogan that has already been given and we have come to the fore. 2 - Organizing: We organized the programs seriously. A good and successful organization requires special order. 3 - Compliance: If you want to compete with the world in a specialty, you must strengthen yourself in that specialty, or at least raise yourself to the level of competitors or higher. So organizing and planning was actually the secret to our success. 4 - Effort: Tireless effort has improved our collection. "We have become more experienced since last year," he said, emphasizing the work that has been done to improve the company since last year. "We used the experience of five years as a sample exporter and increased the organization. For example, twenty to thirty percent of our engineering staff used to have reputable language skills certificates. We have increased this amount to 100% this

year and provided incentives for employees. We increased the number of staff working in the marketing department and improved the quality. That is, we gathered our smartest and best," he stated. "Today, the maximum depth in the world that the power plants have been constructed deep inside the ground has been 400 meters," said Tarkeshdouz, referring to the best project that Mahab Ghodss Consulting Engineering Company has had in the field of exports. "The deeper these power plants go, the higher the water level they charge for getting more electricity. For this reason, power plants are dug deep into the ground. Today we have a record above four hundred meters," he said. "No one in the world has designed a power plant at a depth of 500 meters. We now have two 600-meter projects, one of which has been completed. All our projects were very good," he said, adding, "For example, Oman is a country that is supported by all Westerners and is the second home of the Americans and the British. In Oman, we won five dam tenders and finalized the designs. Now two have reached the construction stage and the other three will reach the construction stage soon. I think this is an honor. Oman is a country under American influence, and there we won the tenders, which is very important. Omani people who believe in Westerners a lot and when they announce you as the final winner, it means that you must be very good." "The next project is in East Asia," added the CEO of Mahab Ghodss Consulting Engineering Company, noting, "We built a 200-meter-high dam and a 1,000-megawatt power plant six hundred meters deep. This project is the largest project in the East. That's why Germany, Canada and Switzerland invite us to contact them exclusively to increase their chances of winning the tenders in the world. This is another great honor for the engineering community because we represent the Iranian engineering community." "If we organize and plan for anything, we can do the hardest things," Tarkeshdouz says, concluding, "We must appreciate and preserve the capable elites and engineers of our country, because they are all blessings that we have in this country. We must pay more attention to the future elites of our country. Certainly the officials want to have the air of their technical and elite people, but they have to work harder."

## ECO-Iran Trade Exchanges Stand at \$10.5b

TEHRAN (IP) - Trade exchanges between Iran and other member states of the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) show 34 and 44 percent increases in terms of weight and value respectively within the past eight months of the Iranian current year (March 21, 2021 to November 21, 2021).

Spokesman of the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA) Rouhollah Latifi said on Monday that the trade has been estimated at 21,778,387 tons of commodities worth 10,447,084,435 dollars.

Iran exported to nine ECO members more than 18,631,000 tons of goods worth 6,823,246,367 dollars, indicating 46 and 54 percent increases in terms of weight and value respectively, Latifi noted.

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## Iran Buys About 500,000Tons of Wheat in Tender

HAMBURG (Dispatches) -Iranian state agency the Government Trading Corporation (GTC) is believed to have purchased around 500,000 tons of milling wheat in a tender that closed on Wednesday, European traders said on Thursday.

It was believed to have been bought in eight consignments of around or just over 60,000 tons for shipment to Iranian ports in the Middle East Gulf.

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## AUCTION SJSCO 140018



Hereby Sirjan Jahan Steel Complex announces selling and export 30,000 STEEL BILLET (5SP & 3SP Size 150 x 150 mm) on basis of FOB, Interested bidders are invited to get documents with send an email to [sjsco.sales.info@gmail.com](mailto:sjsco.sales.info@gmail.com). All the documents will be sent VIA email. All bids on conformity to tender instruction should be submitted no later than Monday, December 27, 2021(2021-12-27)

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## COVID-19 Kills 41 More Iranians Over Past 24 Hours

TEHRAN (IRNA) - The number of deaths from the coronavirus pandemic in Iran increased to 131,124 with 41 more Iranians killed by the deadly disease over the past 24 hours, Iran's Health Ministry announced on Monday.

Some 41 more Iranians have died from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) over the past 24 hours bringing the total deaths to

131,124, Iran's Health Ministry said on Monday.

2,390 new cases of infection with the COVID-19 were found over the past 24 hours, 478 of whom were hospitalized, it said.

The Iranian Health Ministry noted that 6,009,489 patients out of a total of 6,173,369 infected people have recovered or been discharged from hospitals.

## Gen. Soleimani Was Great Asset For Entire World

**TEHRAN (MNA) - President Seyed Ebrahim Raisi has praised the role Martyr Lt. Gen. Qassem Soleimani played in preserving the region and world against the danger of Takfiri groups.**

Raisi on Monday made the remarks in a meeting with the family of Martyr Lt. Gen. Qassem Soleimani to commemorate the second anniversary of the martyrdom of the Iranian top general.

The President said that Gen. Soleimani played a key role in saving Iraq and Syria and the other countries in the region from the danger of Takfiri terrorism.

He also praised the role of Holy Shrine Defenders in Syria as well as other Resistance groups in both Iraq and Syria for their key role in preserving both countries, saying that Martyr Soleimani created a school of thought in the Islamic world as well as other communities.



Raisi said that perhaps lots of Muslims still do not know how valuable the holy shrines and sacred religious places in Iraq and Syria were for Iran, urging for remembering and commemorating the Holy Shrine Defenders who were inspired by Martyr Soleimani.

The president pointed out that had it not been for Martyr Soleimani, the region and the entire world could have been in danger now.

### No Medical Discrimination Practiced Against Refugees



TEHRAN (IP) - Iranian health minister stated that Iran has hosted about four million Afghan refugees for more than 40 years and has not practiced any discrimination in terms of providing services against refugees.

In a meeting with Filippo Grandi, current United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees on Monday Dec. 20, 2021, Bahram Eynollahi said: "The issue of health and treatment of the Afghan nationals is important to us, and we are providing them with free health services especially during the coronavirus pandemic."

Iran's Health Minister stated: "Before we received help from international organizations, we used our vaccine resources for the refugees and vaccinated all of them for free."

Bahram Eynollahi said: "Omicron widespread from South Africa and has affected rich countries, which indicates that we must act globally to control the pandemic."

Health Minister emphasized: "Iranians and non-Iranians are treated equally to receive medical services during the coronavirus and, around 113 million doses of vaccine have been injected."

## No Direct Talks With Americans in Vienna

*IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK*

TEHRAN - The Foreign Ministry spokesman stressed that the Iranian negotiation team in Vienna has not had any direct talks with the United States during the recent negotiations in Vienna.

Speaking in his weekly presser, the Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman answered some questions raised by reporters over the latest regional and international developments.

Referring to the claims leveled by the U.S. National Security Adviser that he had sent a direct message to Tehran about Iran's nuclear program, Saeed Khatibzadeh said that the Iranian negotiation team has not had any direct talks with the United States during the recent negotiations in Vienna.

According to Khatibzadeh, Iran has conveyed its messages to the American side via Enrique Mora who chairs the JCPOA Joint Commission meeting in Vienna.

"Despite its claims, the United States has not yet made any tangible proposals or text to the P4 + 1", the Iranian senior diplomat said, adding that this is questioning the intention of the United States.

Iran makes any efforts to reach an agreement in the talks, he said, adding that if the other side offers a tangible text, an agreement can be reached in the shortest possible time.

He went on to say that the Iranian team just thinks about achieving results in the talks, but they do not trust the intentions of the United States, and unfortunately some Troika countries.

"We hope that we will reach a result if the other side removes the sanctions effectively and verifiably", he stressed.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Khatibzadeh pointed to the return of the Iranian Ambassador to Yemen Hassan Irloo to the country, saying that the envoy was in need of immediate medical treatment, and several countries in the region, including Iraq, helped him to return to Iran.

The Iranian diplomat stressed that the relations between Iran and Ansarullah are strong, that Iran remains committed to helping the Yemeni people by all political and economic means.

Referring to the talks held between Iran and Saudi Arabia, Khatibzadeh said that no changes have been made in this regard and Iran is still waiting for Riyadh's answer.

The 5th round of talks between the two countries has not been held yet, he noted.

He also stressed that any development in the negotiations will depend on the seriousness of the other side, noting that Iran calls on Riyadh to use political and diplomatic solutions and not to interfere in the internal affairs of other countries.

As a member of the IAEA, Iran has always adhered to its obligations under safeguards and the NPT, he said, adding that everything that Iran has done has been in accordance with the provisions of Iran's international obligations, and the Agency has been aware of all our actions.

The level, amount and quality of enrichment is in line with the needs of Iran's peaceful nuclear program, and the Agency was aware of what Iran has done so far, he noted, adding that Iran will keep the Agency informed of everything in the future.

## FM Meets UN High Commissioner for Refugees

TEHRAN (MNA) - (MNA) - Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian on Monday hosted the UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi in Tehran.

UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi met and held talks with Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian on Monday at the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Amir-Abdollahian and Grandi had met on the sidelines of the 76th session of the UN General Assembly in New York.

During the meeting, the Iranian Foreign Minister emphasized the need to improve

the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan.

"Unfortunately, we are witnessing the displacement of the Afghan people inside this country and also their refuge to neighboring countries. The Islamic Republic of Iran has hosted four million Afghan brothers and sisters for four decades, and in all these years, despite the sanctions and economic pressures, it has tried to be a good host. But international organizations need to be more active in their responsibilities to the humanitarian situation in the country to prevent more of Afghanistan's people from being displaced", Amir-Abdollahian said.

## Amir-Abdollahian, Pakistan General Discuss Anti-Terror Fight

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian has discussed cooperation between Tehran and Islamabad in the fight against terrorism with Chief of the Army Staff of Pakistan General Qamar Javed Bajwa.

The meeting took place on the sidelines of the 17th Extraordinary Session of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation Council of Foreign Ministers in the Pakistani capital on Sunday.

During their talks, the two sides emphasized the need for continued cooperation between Iran and Pakistan in fighting terrorism.

Amir-Abdollahian said the two countries' relations were at suitable level in such areas as border security, calling for enhanced cooperation in this regard.

At the end of his official four-day visit to Pakistan in October, the chairman of the Chiefs of Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces, Major General Mohammad Baqeri, said Tehran and Islamabad have agreed to work towards the establishment of full security along the common border and improve bilateral military cooperation by holding joint naval drills.

He said Iran and Pakistan have agreed to improve security along common borders and have made great efforts to create border barriers, control border traffic, fight drugs smuggling and human trafficking and combat other factors causing insecurity at borders.

Elsewhere in their meeting, Amir-Abdollahian and Javed Bajwa discussed the latest developments in Afghanistan, with the Iranian foreign minister emphasizing the need to establish an inclusive government in the war-ravaged country representing all ethnic groups as the only way to establish peace and security in Kabul.

The Pakistani military official, for his part, said the two countries have cordial relations based on good neighborliness, adding that terrorism is the common enemy of Tehran and Islamabad.

He called for the activation of a joint border security committee between the two countries given the importance of promoting security on the common border.

Javed Bajwa also stressed the need for forging closer cooperation between Iran and Pakistan on Afghanistan, particularly in the battle against terrorism.

## Gov't Tightens Regulations To Curb Omicron

TEHRAN (Tasnim) - The Coronavirus Fight National Headquarters of Iran decided to impose tougher measures to avert a new wave of the coronavirus pandemic caused by the highly transmissible omicron variant.

The headquarters convened an extraordinary session on Sunday night, attended by President Ebrahim Raisi.

In the meeting, the Health Ministry gave a report on the latest status of the spread of omicron infection in the country and offered plans to curb a new wave of the pandemic.

The ministry also stressed the need for all people to receive the booster shots at least three months after getting the second dose of vaccine.

The headquarters then came up with plans to tighten the health protocols, saying it is obligatory for people to wear masks in the public places and the family reunions.

Customers at the restaurants and halls also have to use masks and observe the health protocols, as people are asked to comply with social distancing rules and avoid crowded places during the winter solstice celebrations.

Moreover, the Interior Ministry and the Health Ministry have been tasked with announcing new restrictions on travels from foreign countries.

The World Health Organization reported Saturday that the omicron variant of the coronavirus has been detected in 89 countries, and COVID-19 cases involving the variant are doubling every 1.5 to 3 days in places with community transmission and not just infections acquired abroad.

## 12,000 Iranians Sacrificed in Fight Against Drug-Trafficking

TEHRAN (MNA)- Eskandar Momeni, Secretary-General of the Illegal Drug Control Headquarters said that during the last year in the Iranian calendar about 1,200 tons of narcotics were seized by Iranian anti-narcotics police.

Momeni said in a meeting on Sunday that Iran is at the forefront of the fight against drug trafficking in the world.

Pointing to Iran's achievements in the fight against drug trafficking, he said that as many as 4,000 soldiers have been martyred in the fight against drug trafficking during the last 40 years since the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979.

Secretary-General of the Illegal Drug Control Headquarters added that 90% of opium, 70% of morphine, and 20% of heroin globally are confiscated in Iran.

He also said that during the last year in the Iranian calendar, Iran anti-narcotics forces seized 1,200 tons of narcotics in the country.

Momeni reiterated that cultivation and production of narcotics in Afghanistan increased several times when the impoverished country was under the occupation of the United States.

He added that according to UN statistics, narcotics production in Afghanistan increased more than 50 times in 2018 compared to 2000.

## Tehran to Host Negotiations on Gen. Soleimani Assassination

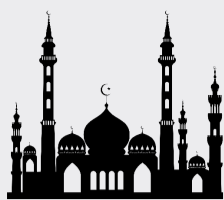
TEHRAN (IRNA) - Deputy Chief for International Affairs Kazem Gharibabadi said that the second round of negotiations between the joint committee of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Republic of Iraq regarding the investigation of the terrorist attack on Martyr Lieutenant General Qasem Soleimani will be held in Tehran in the coming days.

Gharibabadi said that during this two-day meeting, high-ranking judicial delegations from Iran and Iraq will review the issues in the case of the assassination of Lieutenant General Qasem Soleimani along with eight other companions.

The investigations comprise the latest results of investigations in the two states, the role of the US defendants at all levels, and new areas for investigation, he noted.

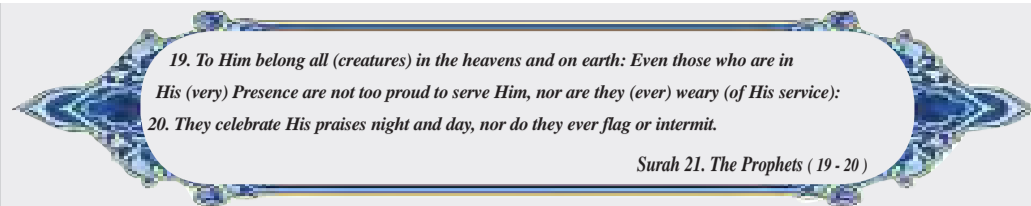
Gharibabadi further noted that the two sides will exchange necessary information.

U.S. terrorists assassinated General Soleimani, the commander of the Qods Force of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC), and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, the former commander of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Units (PMU), along with their companions by targeting their vehicles outside Baghdad International Airport on January 3 on a direct order from US President Donald Trump.



## PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	12:02
■ Evening (Maghreb)	17:15
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	05:40
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	07:10



## Talks on Import of Gas From Turkmenistan In Final Stage

**IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK**

**TEHRAN - The CEO of the National Iranian Oil Company says talks for signing deal for import of gas from Turkmenistan are in the final stage and the talks for renewing contract for export of gas to Turkey are also underway.**

Speaking in a press conference and touching upon the time for resumption of gas import from Turkmenistan, Mohsen Khojasteh Mehr said the deal is being finalized and talks are progressing well. He also said that talks with Turkey for renewal of gas exports to this country are underway.

The CEO of the National Iranian Oil Company also stressed the need to absorb and transfer technology in the company, and said: "Underground capital is not our (Iran's) competitive advantage. It can be an advantage when we can recover it."

Khojasteh Mehr said: "Today, there are a total of 1,200 billion barrels of crude oil equivalent of underground hydrocarbon resources located in 400 oil and gas reservoirs in Iran. The world has become more complex and the era of cheap oil production is over."

Pointing out that in the current situation, less than 30% of the available resources can be extracted with the available technologies, the Deputy Oil Minister said: "This has a meaning; if we want to turn existing resources into wealth, we must use science and technology."



Khojasteh Mehr, stating that science and technology bring both wealth and power, said, "If we are after power, we must get help from science and technology."

"Since the victory of the Islamic Revolution, we have sold more than one trillion dollars of oil. The main question is: 'What is the share of technology?'"

He added: "In the National Iranian Oil Company, according to the emphasis of the upstream documents, we want to have a significant share to generate wealth from underground reservoirs, and in this way we must use technologies maximally."

Khojasteh Mehr went on to say that the ministry will do its best to supply gas for the people in the winter but urged the people to be responsible in gas consumption by stopping overconsumption. He reiterated the households should manage their gas consumptions in order that the industries can have access to the gas supply and gas can also be exported and turned into the wealth.

On the developmental project of Phase 11 of South Pars, he said the project is progressing very well and very fast, adding that next year some part of the Phase 11 production will join to the grid.

## Oil Minister Says Technology Needed to Boost Falling Output

**IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK**

TEHRAN - Oil minister said Monday that output at many oil wells has fallen from 50,000 barrels p/d to 1,000 and local expertise should help restore production.



Speaking at an event dedicated to research at the oil ministry, Javad Owji urged Iranian young scientists to help the oil industry and raise production to much higher capacity, which he insisted is possible for the country. He said 700 oil wells can benefit from infusion of technology to revive production.

Throughout years of American and international sanctions on finance and technology transfers, Iran's oil and gas industry is in a bad need for infusion of investments and assistance of large oil companies with the necessary knowhow to maintain production.

In early November Owji said that Iran needs \$160 billion of investments to avoid becoming a net importer of oil and gas in the future.

Sanctions and Iran's inefficient economic system have used up most of Iran's oil income throughout the 43-year existence of the clerical government in Tehran, leaving its most vital source of wealth in need of serious rejuvenation.

Owji also said natural gas consumption is rising 10-12 percent annually in Iran while production cannot keep. Natural pressure is falling at many extraction sites and Iran needs superior technology to prevent fall in gas production.

## Iran Is World's 3rd Largest Gas Producer



TEHRAN (IP) - Vice president for science and technology says Iran is the third largest gas producer in the world despite sanctions.

Speaking on 'National Science Day', Sorena Sattari stated: "We have done a good job of certifying compliance and developing national standards."

"Although there are good investments in research field, we have not been able to achieve the same amount of production yet," he noted.

Referring to the high gas consumption in Iran, Sattari urged knowledge-based companies to take action in optimizing consumption.

The Iranian Oil Ministry signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Vice-Presidency for Science and Technology on Monday to cooperate for establishing new technology parks.

The MoU aims to finance start-ups and knowledge-based companies in order to encourage them to meet the technological needs of the oil industry.

According to the agreement, the Vice Presidency for Science and Technology will allocate special incentives for supporting knowledge-based and creative companies in various areas, including registering domestic and international patents and trademarks.

## Tehran, New Delhi to Expand Cooperation in Chabahar

TEHRAN, Dec. 19 (MNA) – Mehdi Safari, Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister for Economic Diplomacy has said that Iran-India trade cooperation will expand in the Iranian port of Chabahar.

Mehdi Safari made the comments after the meeting of the Foreign Economic Relations Coordination Council on Sunday. The deputy foreign minister for economic diplomacy said that relations with India topped the agenda of the council's meeting.

"The next issue regarding the investment of some countries in Chabahar is that neighboring countries, including Afghanistan, can establish joint venture companies and export their products to the countries of the Persian Gulf and India," he said.

He said that the Indians have recently demanded the purchase of condensate from Iran and Iran has suggested they can use a barter system to do business with each other.

He added that Iran can exchange condensate for raw materials to produce drugs inside the country.

"India was able to take advantage of Chabahar, we have suggested to investors from other countries to invest in Chabahar; Chabahar is close to Pakistan and we are trying to operate this corridor as well," Safari said.

## Official Hails Performance of IME in Transparency

TEHRAN (MNA) - The head of Iran's Securities and Exchange Organization (SEO) said that Iran Mercantile Exchange (IME) has made the country's commodity market observable and transparent.

Addressing a ceremony to launch "futures" for the copper cathode deals at the IME, Majid Eshqi said, "Pricing is one of the problems that has always existed in this market and we still have this problem in some products."

Futures contracts (more colloquially, futures) are financial contracts obligating the buyer to purchase an asset or the seller to sell an asset at a predetermined future date and price.

In a bid for more risk management in the country's capital market, Tehran Stock Exchange (TSE) officially launched futures contract during a ceremony held in December 2018 at the place of Central Securities Depository of Iran (CSDI), which is the sole registrar, central custodian and clearing house for the Iranian stock market.



Addressing that ceremony, TSE head at the time, Ali Sahraei, said, "Futures contract is one of the risk management tools (also called hedging tools) which is today becoming operational at the TSE."

He said: "Jurisprudence Committee of the SEO [which oversees compliance of capital market instruments with sharia rules] has approved the regulations related to the futures and we hope that it will act as a highly-applied derivative for hedging in the capital market."

"Today we launch futures for seven indexes mainly in vehicles, banking, base metals, minerals, refined products and petrochemicals sectors", Sahraei further announced.

Addressing the same ceremony, the SEO head at the time, Shapour Mohammadi, said that futures are some very important instruments for the market balance, while they are also some strong hedging tools.

## Goharzamin Co. Resolved in Double Production, Sustainable Development

**IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK**

TEHRAN – Goharzamin Iran Ore Company has played a considerable role in materializing the slogan of the year "Production, Supports and Removal of Obstacles."

According to the public relations of the company, Goharzamin Company in line with materializing the slogan of the current year has produced some 3.175m tons of concentrate and it has played a considerable role in the national steel cycle.

The company is considered as one of the biggest mineral and industrial companies of the country. The company besides doubling production of products like concentrate and pellet has had considerable share in job creation.

It is worth nothing that the company has several developmental projects like projects for increasing concentrate and pellet, the transfer line 2 of Persian Gulf water, construction of 3 sponge iron plants each with capacity of 7.1m tons, construction of melting plant with capacity of 3m tons, construction of rolling plant with capacity of 3m tons and construction of a 500-megawatt power plant.



## Self-Esteem, Endeavor of ESCO Staff Paved Ground for Producing National Rail

**IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK**

ISFAHAN - Vice-President and Head of Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) Mohammad Eslami during his visit to the pavilion of Esfahan Steel Company (ESCO) at the third exhibition on Demands for Iranian Home-Made Production hailed ESCO and its staff and said endeavors and self-esteem of the staff of the company paved the ground for production of national rail.

During the visit, Eslami recalled one of good memories the time when he was minister of Roads and Urban Development and said that when it was decided the production of the national rail to be put on the agenda of ESCO, the personnel of the company with their strong endeavor and self-esteem paved the ground for production of national rail.

He then pointed the way of cooperation between AEOI and Iran Railways and said nuclear knowledge can be used in different industries like steel industry where it is broad, adding that currently ESCO is one of the users of the nuclear science in its different sectors like in its controlling and monitoring sectors. He added that so the ground for expansion of this cooperation is provided.

He reiterated that the two organizations can cooperate in developmental projects.



## Charitable Body Receipts Rose 34% in March-November

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's main charitable body says its zakat receipts have increased significantly this year despite economic hardships facing people in the country because of the coronavirus and the US sanctions.

Head of the Imam Khomeini Relief Foundation (IKRF) said on Sunday that zakat payments to the organization had increased by 34% year on year in March-October to reach a total of 13 trillion rials (over \$43 million).

Morteza Bakhtiari said that the figure is equal to the total zakat receipts collected by the Foundation in the year to late March.

Zakat is one of the five pillars of Islam and an annual obligation on all Muslims to pay a tiny portion of their earnings and wealth for charitable purposes.

Iranian Muslims normally pay their zakat to offices of senior religious authorities or to charity organizations endorsed by those authorities.

However, payment of zakat is voluntary in Iran unlike some Muslim countries where people and organizations could face prosecution for non-payment.

Bakhtiari said that over 80% of the zakat collected by the IKRF goes to cash handouts and other support schemes for the needy in Iran and the rest is spent on charitable causes, including on building mosques and roads.

Other IKRF officials said that the organization seeks to launch information campaigns about how it spends the religious tax revenue.

That comes as authorities have reported an increase in the amount of non-cash settlements of zakat in recent years.

The increase in zakat receipts for IKRF has come despite economic hardships in Iran as the country is still suffering from the impacts of the coronavirus pandemic and the American sanctions.

## UK Brexit Supremo Frost Resigns

LONDON (Dispatches) - British Brexit minister David Frost resigned over disillusionment with the direction of Boris Johnson's government, dealing a major blow to the embattled prime minister as the Omicron variant sweeps the country.

The resignation of Frost, a core architect of Johnson's tumultuous Brexit strategy, raised questions about the future tone of the EU divorce and the immediate course of talks on Northern Ireland. It also added to a sense of turmoil in Johnson's Conservative government.

Frost said he was confident that Brexit was secure, but said he had concerns about the government's direction.



## Malaysian Emergency Services Rescue 21,000 From Flooding

KUALA LUMPUR (Dispatches) - Hard-pressed Malaysian emergency services, reinforced by civilian volunteers, on Sunday rescued 21,000 people displaced by flooding from torrential rain in seven states, officials and volunteers said.

More than 66,000 police, army and fire department personnel were mobilized to help pluck people from vehicles marooned in flood waters or from inundated streets outside their homes.

State news agency Bernama reported that a total of 21,000 people had been evacuated nationwide to relief centers.



## Pakistan Warns of Grave Consequences From Afghan Economic Meltdown



ISLAMABAD (Dispatches) - Pakistan warned Sunday of "grave consequences" for the international community if Afghanistan's economic meltdown continued, urging world leaders to find ways to engage with the country's Taliban leaders to help prevent a humanitarian catastrophe.

Speaking at the opening of a special meeting of the 57-member Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) in Islamabad, Pakistan foreign minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi said fallout from the deepening crisis could mean mass hunger, a flood of refugees and a rise in extremism.

"We cannot ignore the danger of complete economic meltdown," he told the gathering, which also included Taliban foreign minister Amir Khan Muttaqi alongside delegates from the United States, China, Russia, the European Union and UN. The meeting is the biggest major conference on Afghanistan since the US-backed government fell in August and the Taliban returned to power.

Since then, billions of dollars in aid and assets have been frozen by the international community, and the nation of 38 million now faces a bitter winter.

The United Nations has repeatedly warned that Afghanistan is on the brink of the world's worst humanitarian emergency with a combined food, fuel and cash crisis.

Qureshi said the OIC was being asked to consider a six-point plan to help Afghanistan that would engage with Taliban authorities to help ease pressure on their country.

It would include coordinating aid, increasing investment, helping rebuild Afghan institutions and providing technical experts to manage the economy.

Any aid pledges were set to be announced Sunday evening. No nations have yet formally recognized the Taliban government and diplomats face the delicate task of channeling aid to the stricken Afghan economy without also propping up the hardline Islamists.

Nearly all the opening speakers made mention of the Taliban's need to protect the rights of minorities and allow women and girls the right to work and be educated.

Although the Taliban have promised a lighter version of the hardline rule that characterized their first stint in power from 1996 to 2001, women are largely excluded from government employment and secondary schools for girls have mostly remained shuttered.

The OIC meeting was not expected to give the new Taliban government the formal international recognition it desperately craves.

Earlier, Qureshi said there was a difference between "recognition and engagement" with the new order in Kabul.

"Let us nudge them through persuasion, through incentives, to move in the right direction," he told reporters ahead of the meeting.

"A policy of coercion and intimidation did not work. If it had worked, we wouldn't have been in this situation."

## NATO Will Not Let Russia Dictate Its Military Posture

RUKLA (Dispatches) - NATO will discuss Russia's security proposals but it will not let Moscow dictate the alliance's military posture, German Defense Minister Christine Lambrecht said on Sunday on a visit to German troops based in Lithuania to deter a Russian attack.

On Friday, Moscow set out a list of demands for the West that includes withdrawing NATO battalions from Poland and Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, once part of the Soviet Union.

Russia is also demanding a legally binding guarantee that NATO will give up any military activity in Eastern Europe and Ukraine and an effective Russian veto on future NATO membership for Ukraine - which the West has already ruled out.

"We need to solve the current tensions on the diplomatic level but just as well by putting up a credible deterrence," Lambrecht told reporters in Rukla on her first visit to German troops abroad.



## Two Rockets Fired at Baghdad's Green Zone

BAGHDAD (Dispatches) - Two rockets targeted Baghdad's ultra-secure Green Zone that houses the U.S. embassy Sunday, Iraq's security forces said in a statement.

"The Green Zone in Baghdad was the target of two Katyusha rockets. The first was shot down in the air by C-RAM defence batteries, the second fell in a square, damaging two vehicles," the statement said.

A security source told AFP that the shot down rocket fell near the U.S. embassy, while the second came down roughly 500 metres (1,640 feet) away.

Previously, the source told AFP that two rockets had been shot down near the U.S. embassy. Captain Bill Urban, spokesman for the U.S. Central Command, told AFP the incident caused no casualties.

He said no shots hit the embassy or the so-called Union III area where U.S.-led coalition forces are based.

No one claimed responsibility for the attack.

In recent months, dozens of rocket assaults or drone bomb attacks have targeted American troops and interests in Iraq.

The attacks are rarely claimed but are routinely pinned on factions.

The latest rocket fire comes after the announcement this week of the end of the "combat mission" in Iraq of the U.S.-led coalition against the Islamic State group. But roughly 2,500 American soldiers and 1,000 coalition soldiers will remain deployed in Iraq to offer training, advice and assistance to national forces. The factions in Iraq are calling for the departure of all U.S. forces stationed in the country.

Sunday's attack also coincides with the 10th anniversary of the departure of U.S. troops from Iraq on December 18, 2011, after the invasion and overthrow of former dictator Saddam Hussein in 2003.

Washington then deployed its troops to the country in 2014 to fight IS, which had captured large swathes of the nation in a lightning offensive.

At the beginning of November, Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhemi escaped unharmed in an unclaimed drone bomb attack which targeted his official residence in the Green Zone.

## Turnout Down as Hong Kong Votes in Patriots-Only Election

HONG KONG (Dispatches) - Dec 19 (Reuters) - Hong Kong government efforts and last-ditch campaigning by candidates were struggling on Sunday to boost turnout in an overhauled "patriots"-only legislative election, the first under a sweeping new security law.

After eight hours of voting, turnout was more than 10 percentage points below the previous Legislative Council election five years ago.

The election - in which only candidates screened by the government as "patriots" can run - has been criticized by some activists, foreign governments and rights groups while mainstream pro-democracy parties are not participating.

Turnout is a central issue, as observers consider it a barometer of legitimacy in an election where pro-democracy candidates are largely absent, more than a third of the seats will be selected by a committee stacked with Beijing loyalists and a crackdown under a China-imposed national security law has jailed scores of democrats. Civil society groups have disbanded.

"Clearly, the government's objective is to secure a high turnout. Otherwise it may delegitimize this election," said Jean-Pierre Cabestan, a professor of political science at Hong Kong's Baptist University.

The government on Saturday sent blanket text messages to Hong Kong residents urging people to vote, and some critics calling on people to stay away as a protest. It is a crime in Hong Kong to incite someone not to vote or to cast an invalid vote.

Hong Kong leaders say the poll is representative. They insist the overhaul, like the security law imposed last year, was needed to ensure stability after protracted protests that rocked the Asian financial hub in 2019.

Security was tight around the city, with 10,000 police and some 40,000 government election workers deployed.

After eight hours of voting, official figures showed 21.02% of the electorate had voted, down from 31.16% at the same point in 2016. That previous turnout ended up at 58%, while the 43.6% in 2000 was the lowest since Britain returned the city to Chinese rule in 1997.

Shortly before casting her ballot, university language teacher Tam Po-chu, 79, said the vote would promote stability and she hoped the new council would be responsive to the public. "There's no use if they do not think of the Hong Kong people," she said. Chief Secretary John Lee, a former security chief, urged people to turn out, saying those excluded were "traitors" who wanted the vote to fail.

By midafternoon volunteers were still pressing flyers on passersby near quiet polling booths, lampposts festooned with flags.

"The situation is critical," Starry Lee, the head of the largest pro-Beijing party DAB said in a recorded loop played on a loudspeaker in the working class Wong Tai Sin district. "I urge everyone to vote."

Lee's appeal did not convince local fruit seller Jack Ng, who said he would not join an election that was neither fair nor democratic. "I don't understand why she is campaigning. She will win for sure, it is absurd," said Ng, who is in his 20s.



## Leftist Wins In Chile's Presidential Election

SANTIAGO (Dispatches) - Leaders in Latin America have rallied to congratulate Chile's President-elect Gabriel Boric, who defeated his far-right rival Antonio Kast to become the country's youngest leader ever.

With almost 99 percent of polling stations reporting, Boric with 56 percent of the votes clearly trumped his closest rival, who garnered 44 percent of the votes. Congratulatory message for the 35-year-old leftist leader started pouring in, led by President Alberto Fernández of Argentina, who pledged to "strengthen ties" with the new Chilean government to combat "inequality" that plagues the region.

Argentinean vice president Fernández de Kirchner had earlier sent her congratulations to Boric and asserted that "the people always come back."

Bolivian President Luis Arce also hailed the historic victory of the leftist lawmaker, saying it represented "the triumph of the Chilean people" and the "strengthening of Latin American democracy."

"Latin American democracy is strengthened based on unity, respect and, above all, the will of our peoples," Arce wrote in a Twitter post.

Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro also praised the Chilean president-elect on his electoral win, hailing it as an "overwhelming victory over fascism," a swipe at Boric's far-right, pro-Pinochet rival.

Maduro also recalled the popularity of Chile's former president Salvador Allende, who was toppled by a US-sponsored coup to install brutal military dictator, Gen. Augusto Pinochet.

In his congratulatory message to Boric, Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel reaffirmed the will to "expand bilateral relations and cooperation" between the two peoples and governments.

Peruvian President Pedro Castillo and Uruguay's President Luis Lacalle Pou also rushed to congratulate the Chilean president-elect.

"The victory you have achieved is that of the Chilean people and the Latin American people who want to live with freedom, peace, justice and dignity share it," Peru's Castillo said in a message.





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## HSBC Fined \$85m UK Anti-Money Laundering Failings

LONDON (Dispatches) - HSBC has been fined 64 million pounds (\$85 million) by British regulators for failings in its anti-money laundering processes spanning eight years.

The Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) said it had found that three key parts of HSBC's transaction monitoring systems in Britain showed serious weaknesses over a period from March 31, 2010 to March 31, 2018.

The fine comes amid a renewed crackdown by the regulator on money laundering failures.

Meanwhile HSBC's domestic rival NatWest was fined 265 million pounds by a British court for failing to prevent the laundering of nearly 400 million pounds, some of it deposited at a branch in bin bags.



## China's Property Distress Sours Steel Sector in Warning Sign for Economy

BEIJING (Dispatches) - Debt problems at a major Chinese property developer have now spilled over into a vital artery of the nation's industrial engine - the steel sector - and started to ripple through to other critical parts of the world's second-largest economy.

The spreading balance-sheet crisis at real estate firms is a warning for policymakers as a swing in the fortunes of the steel industry would have significant repercussions for China's economy, with cement, glass, and household appliances all vulnerable to demand drops.

Already, steel prices are down from their record highs seen earlier this year due to easing demand from construction activities, which account for over half of the metal's consumption, while steelmakers' share prices have also been hurt.

Share prices of major Chinese listed firms dropped from high levels in recent months on easing demand and lower raw materials prices.

Steel's acute sensitivity to the ebbs and flows in construction and manufacturing makes it a closely-tracked bellwether for China's economy, which has started to slow down from the second quarter. Steel firms are also massive employers that support a vast supply chain.

Hitting steel operations, real estate developers have dialled back investment in projects to conserve cash in a sector squeezed by tighter borrowing regulations that have engulfed indebted companies, most notably China Evergrande Group.

"We normally stockpile steel products in winter at relatively lower prices and sell them after the new year holidays when consumption resumes. But we are holding off this year," said Qi Xiaoliang, a Beijing-based steel trader.

"There's still uncertainty in the real estate market for 2022 and the situation is not expected to be fully reversed for another six to 12 months," he added.

In the final quarter of 2021, the property market took a further hit as the unease in the sector shook already weak buyer sentiment, with unsold housing stock in China's 100 biggest cities reaching a five-year high in November.

Demand for homes is expected to ease further in 2022, hitting downstream manufacturers of household products.

Cement production, another construction material, was down around 16% for September-November year-on-year, and was lower versus the same period between 2017 and 2019. Demand for earth excavators has also dropped off in recent months.

The broadening spillover impact of the property downturn was also seen elsewhere. In the appliances industry, for example, monthly refrigerator output has been falling since May through to November on an annual basis.

Steel producers were among the best performers of the entire Chinese economy over the first three quarters of 2021, with China's 28 major listed mills pocketing over 106 billion yuan (\$16.61 billion) in net profits, up 174% year-on-year and 129% higher than in pre-pandemic 2019.

Major Chinese listed steel mills' profits jumped in the first nine months of 2021.

But the boom times in the steel sector are over. The paralysis that has struck China's mammoth construction industry is triggering a rare contraction in building activity across the country.

New construction starts by floor area have contracted from a year earlier since July - their longest stretch of declines since 2015.

Growth in China's property investment and new construction starts measured by floor area fell in recent months amid developers' default crisis and government's controls.

## French Economic Rebound, Inflation to Moderate Next Year

PARIS (Dispatches) - French growth and inflation will moderate in 2022 after a faster than expected recovery this year, after which a tighter labor market will boost wages, the French central bank forecast on Sunday.

The euro zone's second-biggest economy is set to grow 6.7% this year, the Bank of France said in its latest long term outlook, raising its forecast up from 6.3% previously.

The post-pandemic economy's momentum would wane next year, with growth slowing to 3.6% and easing back further to 2.2% in 2023 and 1.4% in 2024, the central bank said.

It also said that inflation, driven largely by high energy prices, would peak at the end this year at around 3.5% before returning to below 2% at the end of 2022. After that, the central bank expects inflation to settle at 1.7% in 2023-2024, a rate that would be above the low inflation seen in the years preceding the COVID pandemic and closer to rates seen before the 2007-2008 financial crisis, the central bank said.

As current supply-chain difficulties subsided, prices of manufactured goods were seen peaking next year before returning to their long-term average close to zero. Meanwhile, prices for services would gradually pick up, reaching 2.7% in 2024 as a tighter labor market boosted workers' salaries, painting an inflation scenario similar to what was seen in the years from 2002 to 2007, the central bank said.

It forecast that unemployment would ease from 7.8% on average this year to 7.7% by the end of 2024. Meanwhile private sector wage gains would reach 4% next year before slipping back to 3% afterwards, which would still be higher than levels seen in the decade preceding the pandemic.

## Finland's Central Bank Lowers Country's 2022 Growth Prediction

HELSINKI (Dispatches) - Bank of Finland (BOF) on Friday slightly lowered its growth prognosis for Finland next year to 2.6 percent.

The central bank noted the economy is continuing to recover from the steep downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the recovery is slowed by a worsening of the virus situation, shortfalls in raw materials and electronics components, and an increase in the general level of prices.

In September, BOF predicted the country's growth in 2022 to be 2.8 percent.

According to the bank, if the pandemic situation improves in the near future, the outlook could be better. Households could begin spending the savings accrued during the pandemic, and investments by companies

could grow faster than predicted.

By 2024, the economic growth rate will slow down to 1.3 percent as the growth possibilities in Finland will be affected by the aging population structure and the slow pace of labor productivity growth.

The COVID-19 crisis has given rise to an expanded level of debt in Finland's public finances. The recovery in the economy will help to remedy the deficit. However, the public finances will nevertheless still be in deficit at the end of the forecast period, the bank said.

Finnish inflation will remain at 2.1 percent this year, and 2.0 in 2022, and slow down to 1.6 percent in 2023. The bank predicted that energy prices will begin to decline and the supply bottlenecks to ease next year.

## Australia Sees Energy Shortages Driving Record Resource Export Earnings

MELBOURNE (Dispatches) - Australia has raised its outlook for mining and energy export earnings to a record A\$379 billion (\$272 billion) for the current fiscal year as coal and gas shortages in China and Europe pump up prices, the government said.

However, the risks to the forecast are "skewed to the downside", the Department of Industry said in its quarterly resources and energy outlook. Coal prices could drop faster than expected, and higher interest rates and new strains of the coronavirus could hit global growth, it warned.

Annual mining and energy export revenue is expected to jump 22% in the year to June 2022, up from a previous forecast of A\$349 billion.

"Coal is the star performer. Australia's high-quality coal is finding new markets across Asia, including India, with Australian producers enjoying record price increases across all grades of coal," Resources Minister Keith Pitt said in a statement.

Rising consumption in China, India and the United States could bring global coal-fired power demand to an all-time high this year, undermining efforts to cut greenhouse gas emissions, the International Energy Agency (IEA) said on Friday.

The government raised its forecast for thermal coal export earnings to A\$35 billion for 2021-22, more than double last year's revenue and up from its previous projection of A\$24 billion. Prices have been buoyed by utilities racing to stock up for winter.

"With energy inventories lower than normal, the severity of the remainder of the Northern Hemisphere winter will have a critical influence on energy markets in the short term," the department said.

Coal and gas price gains have more than offset a drop in iron ore prices, Australia's top commodity export, to an 18-month low.

Metallurgical coal exports are projected to earn A\$54 billion in 2021-22, up 134% on last year up from an earlier forecast of A\$33 billion, partly due to surging prices caused by supply disruptions.

LNG export earnings are expected to more than double to A\$63 billion in 2021-22, due to soaring oil-linked contract prices.

## Egypt Ready to Pump Gas to Lebanon



DAMASCUS (Dispatches) - Syria's Minister of Oil and Mineral Resources Bassam Tohme revealed that the Arab Gas Pipeline inside Syria is ready to pump natural gas from Egypt into Lebanon.

In an interview with Syria TV, Tohme said, "The Arab Gas Pipeline inside Syria is 100 percent ready. Everything hinges now on a trade agreement between Lebanon and Egypt, pending the signing of a transit agreement with Syria."

The senior official added that the larger the quantity transferred through the Arab line, the greater the benefit of Syria, but it would remain insufficient to fill the country's deficit.

Egypt's Minister of Petroleum and Mineral Resources, Tarek el-Molla, expected his country to start exporting natural gas to Lebanon by the first quarter of 2022.

He added in a phone interview with al-Sharq TV, "It is important to us that the Egyptian gas reaches Lebanon as soon as possible. But it is even more important that the deal would go smoothly without any negative repercussions. Therefore, we need our brothers in Lebanon, and all concerned stakeholders and countries through which the gas will go through, to ensure that all the technical, commercial and political measures are in order."

Molla is referring to potential US sanctions relating to Syria. "We do not want to find ourselves helping ... Lebanon but meanwhile penalized," he told Al-Monitor.

In mid-November, Molla said that Egypt would export between 60 to 65 million cubic feet of gas per day to Lebanon.

Lebanon is banking on Egyptian gas to solve its crippling energy crisis that has worsened over the past month. The country's economic crisis is classified by the World Bank as one of the three worst since the mid-19th century. Since April, Lebanon has been suffering from acute fuel shortages, causing 20 hours of blackout on an almost daily basis during October. Banque du Liban, Lebanon's central bank, is running low on foreign reserves and therefore no longer able to provide importers with dollars.

## Brazil's Oil Auction Raises \$2b as Total, Shell Pile in

RIO DE JANEIRO (Dispatches) - France's TotalEnergies, Royal Dutch Shell, Malaysia's Petronas and Qatar Energy on Friday scooped up big offshore fields in Brazil together with state-owned Petrobras, paying nearly \$2 billion to its cash-strapped government.

While TotalEnergies (28%), Qatar Energy (21%) and Petronas (21%) made the top offer for Sepia field, Petrobras, formally Petroleo Brasileiro SA, later entered the consortium by exercising preference rights to take a 30% stake.

Petrobras (52.5%), Shell (25%) and Total (22.5%) secured the nearby Atapu field.

Officials, who had been keen to attract major foreign players, deemed the auction a success, and analysts said the offers agreed to were relatively rich.

The selloff was widely seen as a test of Brazil's investment climate and of large oil producers' willingness to keep spending big on traditional oil assets, despite increasing pressure over climate change and toward energy transition.

TotalEnergies, which snapped up a stake in both blocks, said the investment will bring output with "costs well below \$20 per barrel of oil equivalent" and with carbon emissions rates below industry levels. "These are unique opportunities to access giant low-cost and low emissions oil reserves," CEO Patrick Pouyanné said in a statement.

Signing bonuses were fixed in reais at the equivalent of \$1.3 billion for Sepia and \$740,000 for Atapu. Companies bid for a percentage of the

production they were willing to share with the government, winning the highest: 37.43% for Sepia and 31.68% for Atapu.

Petrobras, TotalEnergies and Shell shares fell on Friday, following a 2.60% decrease in Brent prices.

Brazil attempted to auction both fields in 2019, but neither received offers, even from Petrobras. At the time, complex legal issues and rich signing bonuses kept oil majors away.

This time, the bidding terms were considered more attractive, several industry sources told Reuters, largely due to big cuts in both signing bonuses and minimum profit oil.

Government moves to streamline rules and lower fees "drew bids well above the minimums for both assets," said Andre Fangundes, vice president of consultancy Welligence. "Companies were more aggressive than we expected," said Marcelo de Assis, head of Latin America upstream research at Wood Mackenzie.

Eleven companies signed up for the chance to bid on Friday. Exxon Mobil Corp made final arrangements to bid together with Petrobras and a subsidiary of Portugal's Galp Energia SGPS SA, people close to the negotiations said, but never presented a final offer.

Oil majors will be able to add production to their portfolios in the short term. Petrobras is ramping up production at Sepia to 180,000 bpd and has reached the 160,000 bpd maximum capacity at Atapu. A second platform is planned for each field.



# Iranian Sisters Win at World Painting Competitions

TEHRAN (MNA) – Two Iranian sisters won the first award of the FAO’s Painting Competition as well as the second place in the international painting competition of Istanbul in Turkey.

Atrin Afshari-Tavana won the first award of the painting competition that has been organized by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations for the third consecutive year.

Iranian sisters win at world painting competitions Her sister, Anahita Afshari-Tavana, also managed to win the second award in the international painting competition of Istanbul in Turkey.



# Greece Journalists Denounce Press Freedom Backslide

ATHENS (Dispatches) - A reporter’s murder, the prime minister publicly scolding a foreign journalist, and alleged state surveillance. It’s been a bad year for media rights in Greece.

The southern European country fell five spots in the 2021 World Press Freedom Index compiled by media watchdog Reporters Without Borders (RSF), and now ranks 70th out of 180 countries, behind Poland and Mongolia.

George Pleios, head of media studies at the National University of Athens, says the deterioration over the past year has been alarming.

“Freedom of the press has become a concern,” he told AFP.

Pleios said a raft of press freedom violations in recent years have included journalists being detained or intimidated, and police beating photographers during protests.

But in April, a prominent crime reporter, 52-year-old Giorgos Karaivaz, was gunned down outside his home in Athens. The government ordered an investigation, but no arrests have been made.

Over the past year, the government has ignored requests for information on key stories and pressured journalists over unfavorable reports, while parliament in November passed a new law to punish misinformation with up to five years in jail.

People can now go to prison over alleged fake news “capable of causing concern or fear to the public”, in a move Athens newspaper journalists’ union Esiea has said is too vague and risks restricting free speech.

Journalists say that, throughout 2021, police and government ministries have routinely ignored their emails seeking answers on the coronavirus pandemic, police abuses and the migration crisis.

Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis in November became embroiled in a public spat with a Dutch journalist who accused him of “lying” after Athens denied carrying out illegal pushbacks of migrants at sea.

“You will not come into this building and insult me... or the Greek people with accusations and expressions that are not supported by material facts,” he said during a news conference with visiting Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte. The journalist, Ingeborg Beugel, later said she had received threats, and temporarily left the country.

On November 13, leftist daily Efsyn published what it said were internal intelligence memos gathering information on anti-vaxxers and activists helping migrants -- but also on a journalist later hired by AFP.

In response to AFP letters, Minister of State George Gerapetritis insisted “there is no surveillance of journalists in Greece”.

“Greece fully adheres to the values of democratic society and rule of law, especially pluralism and freedom of the press,” he said

He later added that media independence was “sacrosanct”.

“Whilst we may not always agree with what the media writes, we will defend... the right of a free press to report unencumbered by and independent of outside interference,” he said.

But Greece has not opened an investigation following the alleged Efsyn leaks.

The Efsyn reporter who broke the story, Dimitris Terzis, accused the government



and supporting media of “trying to bury the case”.

In February and in December last year, journalists received complaint letters from the government after reporting on two instances where Mitsotakis had apparently broken lockdown rules.

Fabien Perrier, a correspondent for French-language media in Greece, says his editors received a letter from the culture ministry in May over a piece criticising a new concrete walkway at the Acropolis.

He said journalists in Greece were under pressure to “practice self-censorship”.

Two journalists working with Greek media resigned last year, accusing the government of attempted censorship, allegations it denied.

Athens University media professor Lambrini Papadopoulou says Greece has a long history of collusion between Greek media, and the political and financial elites.

“Problematic relations between media and power are nothing new,” she said.

“There is little room for critical and independent journalism in Greece.”

George Tzogopoulos, a research fellow at the Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy think tank, says the coverage of the pandemic in some Greek media consists of simply churning out government announcements.

Dozens of outlets closed during the 2010-2018 Greek debt crisis, leaving the survivors desperate for any form of backing.

Early during the pandemic in 2020, the government introduced a scheme to support media with funds as part of a stay-at-home campaign.

But according to opposition parties, the money disproportionately benefitted government-friendly media. A parliamentary inquest into the issue is ongoing.

All in all, RSF says authorities have taken insufficient measures to protect journalists. The 2010 murder of another journalist, 37-year-old Sokratis Giolias, also remains unresolved.

Pleios, the academic, says such failings leave journalists “under a cloud of fear.”

## Turks Hunt for Vanishing Drugs in Currency Crisis

ANKARA (Dispatches) - Fatih Yuksel is one of thousands of Turks rushing from one pharmacy to another in search of imported drugs that are disappearing as quickly as the lira is losing value.

“Sometimes I have periods where I don’t have the drugs I need and my illness gets worse. I suffer pains,” said the 35-year-old, who has been taking pills to relieve a rare autoimmune disorder known as Behcet’s syndrome, for the past nine years.

“It can be hard but I have to work,” said the shop attendant.

Turks have been rattled by a currency collapse that accelerated when President Recep Tayyip Erdogan last month launched a self-declared “economic war of independence” that defies conventional market theory.

The veteran Turkish leader is trying to fight spiralling inflation by bringing down borrowing costs -- the exact opposite of what countries usually do in similar situations.

The results have been frightening for people such as Yuksel.

The Turkish currency has lost more than 40 percent of its value since the start of November alone. A lira could buy 13 US cents in January. It was worth less than half that this month.

## Tehran May Revive...

FROM PAGE 1

Iran had placed orders for purchases of 200 brand new planes from Airbus and Boeing after it signed the nuclear deal with the P5+1 group of countries in 2015. However, the plane contracts came to a halt in 2018 after the U.S. Treasury banned the two planemakers from supplying the jets to Iran.

“Iran’s demand with regard to its aviation program in the JCPOA negotiations still stands, and even the contracts for the purchase of aircraft have not been canceled yet and remain legally valid,” Mohammadi-Bakhsh said.

“If the other party fulfills its obligations, we will enter into negotiations and wait for the result,” the official said, indicating that his organization has disagreements about the financing model.

During a brief trade thaw between Iran and the West, Iran signed \$36 billion worth of contracts in 2016 to buy airliners from Boeing, Airbus and Franco-Italian turboprop maker ATR.

National flag carrier IranAir ordered 100 passenger aircraft from Airbus, 80 from Boeing and 20 from ATR, but the deals depended on US license because of the heavy use of American parts in the planes.

Iran had imported three aircraft from Airbus and 13 from ATR when the US Treasury Department under former president Donald Trump revoked export licenses. With Trump gone, a searing question on the minds of many Iranians has been whether the duopolists and ATR will be able to consummate the deals.

Mohammadi-Bashkh said some of the aircraft delivered under the JCPOA require heavy maintenance checks, but the Europeans are not fulfilling their obligations to supply repair components.

In February, former CAO chief executive Touraj Dehqani Zanganeh said his organization had written to Boeing to inquire about the fate of its \$16.5 billion deal with the US aircraft maker.

Mohammadi-Bakhsh on Monday stressed that Iran is not just looking at the JCPOA to develop its aviation industry.

“Right now we have weekly updates and new aircraft arrivals. We have set an age limit for the induction of aircraft and at the same time we are updating some of the existing aircraft and furnishing them with the latest equipment in the world,” he said.

Simultaneously, Iran is boosting domestic flights and developing its airports.

Iran’s aviation industry depended on foreign consultants, mainly Americans, before the 1979 Islamic Republic to keep its fleet airworthy, but all the work in the industry today is done by young Iranian technicians.

Mohammadi-Bakhsh touched on “special measures” taken at Iranian airports to restrain the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Iran Buys...

FROM PAGE 1

Prices were estimated at around 365 euros and 368 euros (\$413.5 to \$416.9). Iran traditionally buys grains in euros rather than U.S. dollars.

Shipment of the wheat was sought in January and February, 2022.

Possible origins of the wheat purchased were thought to be Russia, Germany and the Baltic Sea region, traders said.

The tender had sought 180,000 tons including some to be shipped via the Caspian Sea and for land transport by railway. Volumes in Iran’s tenders are nominal and the country regularly buys more than the original tonnage sought.

A small volume was also thought to have been purchased for Caspian Sea shipment. The result of the land transport tender was not known by traders.

“It is a hefty purchase but Iran does need a lot of wheat,” one European trader said.

Iran needs to import around eight million tons of wheat after its crop this summer was damaged by the worst drought in 50 years, Reuters reported in October.

But western sanctions on Iran continue to make payment difficult, traders said.Iran said on Nov. 19 it had imported four million tons of wheat since late April.

## Commander Warns...

FROM PAGE 1

In a veiled warning to Washington, the top general pointed out that any Israeli threat against Iranian sites will be impossible without the support of the United States.

The remarks come as Israeli minister of military affairs Benny Gantz told officials in Washington last week that he had directed the regime’s military to prepare for the possibility of a military strike on Iranian nuclear facilities.

Iranian politicians and military officials have repeatedly warned Israel against any adventurism against the Islamic Republic, pledging a crushing response to any attack.

Last week, Iran’s Army Commander Major General Abdolrahim Mousavi said Israel’s empty threats hail from Tel Aviv’s fear of the Islamic Republic, adding that the country’s firm response to any Israeli aggression would bring forward the occupying entity’s annihilation.

The New York Times, citing several current and former Israeli military officials and experts, reported on Saturday that the Tel Aviv regime lacks the ability to act on its threats of launching an attack against nuclear sites in Iran, as the Islamic Republic has significantly promoted its defense capabilities.

According to retired Israeli air force general Relik Shafir, Iran has dozens of nuclear sites, some deep underground that would be hard for Israeli bombs to quickly penetrate and destroy.

One current Israeli security official said the Tel Aviv regime did not currently have the ability to inflict any significant damage to the underground facilities in Natanz and Fordow.

Meanwhile yesterday Iran’s Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) launched a large-scale military exercise in an area stretching along the southern shores of the country on the Persian Gulf and the strategic Strait of Hormuz, with the participation of airborne units, ground, and naval forces.

Brigadier General Abbas Nilforoushan, the IRGC’s deputy chief of operations and spokesman for the Great Prophet 17 joint drills, said the drills involve various IRGC units, such as the aerospace force and the cyber-electronic division, and covers the coastlines of the southern Iranian provinces of Hormozgan, Bushehr, and Khuzestan.

He noted that the participating units will carry out offensive operations so as to destroy the hypothetical enemy’s sources of attacks.

“The military exercise is meant to increase the preparedness of the IRGC combat units. It simulates one of the most sophisticated offensive plans used in hybrid warfare and replicates synchronicity and coherence in soft, semi-hard, and hard areas of combat,” the senior Iranian military official said.

General Nilforoushan went on to say that the Basij volunteer force will bring in human force for naval and ground exercises at the drill.

A series of military systems and weapons recently delivered to the IRGC will be brought into action during the war game, the general noted.

“The military drills carry the message of defending and safeguarding the national security, as well as peace, friendship and comfort for neighbors. Our defense doctrine rests upon security and might, as well as active and smart deterrence in the Persian Gulf region,” he explained.

## Europeans Urged...

FROM PAGE 1

“The truth is that assistance [by the international community] accounts for less than 5 percent of the costs incurred on Iran,” he added.

“As long as there is instability in the region, there will be no reduction in the number of refugees. The result of the wrong policies of some western countries is the refugees whose number rise every single day,” he said.

The official added that some 4 million Afghans including refugees and illegal migrants live in Iran. He said 700,000 have only entered Iran this year, most of them after the recent developments in Afghanistan.

Zolfaghari said Iran has tried to prevent unnecessary illegal migration. But he said hundreds of such people are now residing in refugee camps set up in eastern Iran and are refusing to return to their country.

He said Iran even did not discriminate between its own and other nationals when administering coronavirus vaccines, adding that these people have received 3.4 million doses of COVID jabs.

## ECO-Iran Trade...

FROM PAGE 1

The Islamic Republic also imported from the mentioned countries 3,147,332 tons of goods worth 623,838,068 dollars in the eight months, showing a 10 percent decline in terms of weight but a 28 percent increase in terms of value, the spokesman added.

Turkey stood first among importers of Iran-made commodities worth 3,767,795,797 dollars, followed by Afghanistan with 1,270,610,807 dollars, he said, adding that Pakistan stood third among Iran’s export markets, which imported 764,389,728 dollars during the period.

The Azerbaijan Republic with 553,515 tons, Uzbekistan with 514,022 tons, Turkmenistan with 894,847 tons, Kazakhstan with 311,866 tons, Kyrgyzstan with 28,440 tons and Tajikistan with 54,612 tons have been among the ECO’s next importers of Iranian commodities, he explained.

Iran imported 2,722,301 tons of goods worth 3,243,063,568 dollars from Turkey, showing a 15 percent decrease in terms of weight and a 24 percent increase in terms of value, he said, noting that Pakistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan Republic have

been among ECO’s second to fifth great exporters of commodities to Iran.

The Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), an Asian political and economic intergovernmental body, was founded in 1985 in Tehran by the leaders of Iran, Pakistan, and Turkey.

Now, 10 countries, including, Pakistan, Turkey, Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Azerbaijan Republic and Iran are the member states of the Economic Cooperation Organization.

## Woods Happy With Return At PNC Championship

MIAMI (Dispatches) - A smiling Tiger Woods made a successful return to competitive golf on Saturday, teaming up with his son Charlie to card a 10-under-par 62 at the PNC Championship family tournament in Florida. Woods, playing for the first time since suffering career threatening injuries in a February crash in California, showed flashes of his old brilliance even though he lacked his usual power and length. The 45-year-old golfing icon used a cart to help ferry him around the Ritz Carlton Golf Course's 7,106-yard layout.

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## Second Ashes Test Hit By Coronavirus Scare

LONDON (Dispatches) - The second Ashes Test was hit by another coronavirus scare after two members of the media tested positive for Covid-19 on Sunday.

The two individuals were working for separate organizations at the Adelaide Oval, with one of them confirmed as a member of the crew serving the BBC. Consequently, no members of the BBC Test Match Special commentary team or those from Australian broadcast partner ABC were admitted to the ground for the fourth day's play. ABC provided commentary remotely from a studio.

8 IRAN NEWS

SPORTS

TUESDAY DECEMBER 21, 2021

# Bradley Beal Fuels Wizards' Upset of Jazz

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Bradley Beal bested Donovan Mitchell in a high-scoring duel with 37 points to lead the Washington Wizards to a 109-103 upset over the Utah Jazz in Salt Lake City.

Washington Wizards' guard Bradley Beal lines up a three-pointer in the first half during an NBA basketball game against the Utah Jazz on Saturday in Salt Lake City. - AP

Bradley Beal bested Donovan Mitchell in a high-scoring duel with 37 points to lead the Washington Wizards to a 109-103 upset over the Utah Jazz on Saturday night in Salt Lake City.

Beal hit 13 of 24 field goals and 9 of 10 free throws, dished out seven assists, grabbed five rebounds and fueled a game-changing run in the fourth quarter to help the Wizards snap a four-game losing streak.

Mitchell finished with 32 points and four 3-pointers with five assists, but also committed five turnovers as Utah lost for the second consecutive night at home after an eight-game winning streak.

### Thunder 104, Clippers 103

Luguentz Dort scored 29 points and Shai Gilgeous-Alexander hit a game-winning 3-pointer at the buzzer to give host Oklahoma City Thunder the win over Los Angeles.

The win was just the fourth in 17 games for Oklahoma City. The Clippers have lost two consecutive games. Dort, who missed the Thunder's last game with a left ankle injury, returned to go 12 of 19 from the floor. Gilgeous-Alexander added 18 points. Josh Giddey had 18 rebounds and 10 assists to go with eight points.

### Rockets 116, Pistons 107

Christian Wood scored 21 points against his former team to lift visiting Houston past sliding Detroit. Wood added eight rebounds to his ledger as all five Houston starters scored in double figures.

Eric Gordon added 18 points and five assists, Garrison Mathews 16 points on 4-of-9 3-point shooting, and Jae'Sean Tate 11 points, five rebounds, four assists and three steals.

Kenyon Martin Jr. (10 points, 11 rebounds) added a double-double off the bench as Houston shot 49.5 percent from the floor. The Pistons suffered their 14th consecutive loss, committing 21 turnovers and missing 26 of 36 from 3-point range. Cade Cunningham had 21 points and 11 assists, while Saddiq Bey led Detroit with 23 points.

## Liverpool Will Not Sign Unvaccinated Players

LONDON (Dispatches) - Liverpool manager Juergen Klopp said players not vaccinated against Covid-19 pose a health risk and it was unlikely the Merseyside club would sign players who refuse the vaccine.

Aston Villa boss Steven Gerrard and his Crystal Palace counterpart Patrick Vieira both said that vaccine status might be a consideration when signing new players as cases continue to rise in the Premier League.

The league said in October that 68 per cent of its players were double-jabbed but on Monday announced a record 42 cases in a week.

Covid-19 outbreaks at various clubs have forced the postponement of 10 games so far, including six from this weekend's round of fixtures.

"We are not close to signing a player but I thought about it and yes, it will be influential, definitely," said Klopp, who was previously undecided on whether vaccination status would influence Liverpool's transfer policy.

"If a player is not vaccinated at all, he is a constant threat for all of us... From an organisational point of view, it gets really messy. If you really want to follow the protocols, it is really difficult to do it.

If one (player) gets Covid, and others are around him, they are in isolation... So of course it will be influential. We are not going to create a building for unvaccinated players. Hopefully it will not be necessary."

## Clear-Thinking Key On Road Back to Top

LONDON (Dispatches) - Andy Murray believes he is playing with more "clarity" and has a better idea of how he needs to compete against the top players as he approaches the new season with renewed purpose and confidence.

The former world No.1, down to 134 in the rankings, had a positive weekend in Abu Dhabi, where he claimed two victories over Dan Evans and Rafael Nadal before losing to Andrey Rublev in the final of an exhibition tournament.



### Raptors 119, Warriors 100

Fred VanVleet and Scottie Barnes combined for 48 points as host Toronto romped over road-weary Golden State.

VanVleet posted game-highs in points with 27 and assists with 12, while Barnes put up a well-rounded 21 points, eight rebounds and six assists, as the Raptors returned to the court after Thursday's game against the Chicago Bulls was postponed for COVID-19 reasons.

The Warriors suited up just nine players for the finale of an eight-day, five-game trip that featured two back-to-backs. Damion Lee added 14 points for the Warriors, who saw a three-game winning streak come to an end, while Gary Payton II had 13, Kevon Looney 12, Moses Moody 11 and Nemanja Bjelica 10.

### Cavaliers 119, Bucks 90

Cedi Osman scored 23 points and Darius Garland added 22 as Cleveland won its sixth straight game, routing short-handed host Milwaukee.

Kevin Love had 15 points, and Ricky Rubio tallied 15 points and 10 assists for Cleveland, which snapped an eight-game losing streak against Milwaukee. The Cavaliers led by as many as 30 points in the third quarter.

### Magic 100, Nets 93

Chuma Okeke hit the tiebreaking 3-pointer with 1:11 remaining in the fourth quarter and Orlando halted a seven-game losing streak by beating significantly undermanned host Brooklyn Nets in New York.

The Magic snapped their second seven-game skid of the season and won for the second time in 15 games after blowing a 17-point lead.

### Celtics 114, Knicks 107

Josh Richardson scored 27 points, Jayson Tatum finished with 25 and nine rebounds and host Boston held off New York in a matchup that saw a combined 12 players sidelined by COVID-19 protocols. Jaylen Brown contributed 23 points, Payton Pritchard added 16 and Robert Williams III scored 15 with eight rebounds for the Celtics.

Boston won for the second time in three games after losing four of its previous five.



# Faivre Leads Alta Badia Giant Slalom

ALTA BADIA (Dispatches) - Mathieu Faivre led the field after the first run of Sunday's alpine skiing World Cup giant slalom at Alta Badia, a hair ahead of pre-race favourite Marco Odermatt.

Frenchman Faivre topped the times in Italy with a run of 1min 11.65sec just 0.02sec in front of Odermatt, who came into Sunday's race first in the standings for the giant slalom

and the overall race for the crystal globe. Alexis Pinterault sits second in the giant slalom standings but was ninth after the first run, 0.67sec behind his countryman Faivre.

Faivre, a 29-year-old from Nice, is a giant slalom specialist and won two gold medals at last year's world championships in Cortina d'Ampezzo, one in his favoured discipline and the other in the parallel giant slalom.

He is aiming for the third World Cup win of his career when the top 30 racers from the first run go back onto the piste on Sunday afternoon at 1330 local time (1230 GMT).

## Nadal Casts Doubt Over Australian Open Participation

LONDON (Dispatches) - Spain's Rafa Nadal said he cannot guarantee he will make the trip to Melbourne for next month's Australian Open after returning to action at the Mubadala World Tennis Championship in Abu Dhabi.

The 20-times Grand Slam champion's comeback at the exhibition event -- his first tournament appearance since the Citi Open in Washington in August -- ended in two close defeats by Andy Murray and Denis Shapovalov.

Nadal, 35, spent four months on the sidelines with a foot injury. He was knocked out at Roland Garros in the semi-finals and was forced to pull out of Wimbledon, the Tokyo Olympics and the U.S. Open.

"The idea is to go there and try my best there in Australia... Being 100% honest, I can't guarantee it," Nadal said. "I need to speak with my team.

"It's more than six months since the last real official match. Things are difficult and I accept that... I was able to compete in both matches and even had my chances, so if we put that in perspective it's a very positive thing. "I went through this process unfortunately a lot of times in my tennis career but I need to practice and I need to be healthy enough to go through this process. If that happens, I'm confident that I will be back."

World number six Nadal said he would not have returned to tennis if he did not feel he was competitive enough to challenge for the biggest titles in the sport.

"I am not playing at all for money or just for fun, I am playing to keep achieving goals or at least to enjoy the process to try to achieve my goals," he added.



## Bernardo Silva Masterclass Helps Man City to Victory At Newcastle

LONDON (Dispatches) - Bernardo Silva staged a midfield masterclass as Premier League leaders Manchester City swept aside struggling Newcastle 4-0 to claim a record 34th win of 2021.

The Portuguese, aided and abetted by Rodri and Kevin De Bruyne, steered City to a commanding victory at St James' Park to eclipse Liverpool's mark of 33 top-flight wins in a calendar year set in 1982.

Goals from Ruben Dias and Joao Cancelo before the break and Riyad Mahrez and Raheem Sterling after it secured the points with the minimum of fuss as Newcastle were once again left to count the cost of a combination of dreadful defending, shot-shyness and questionable decisions.

Eddie Howe's men have now won just one of the 18 league games they have played this season and while their fate will not be dictated by what they achieve against the division's powerhouses, a worrying trend shows little sign of abating.

Having been repeatedly punished for their own mistakes in recent games, the Magpies set out with a makeshift back four and knowing there was no margin for error against the reigning champions, but capitulated in depressing fashion within five minutes.

Goalkeeper Martin Dubravka needlessly conceded a corner after dwelling on Jamaal Lascelles' back-pass and after De Bruyne's initial delivery had been half cleared, Ciaran Clark inexplicably failed to intervene when Cancelo played the ball back across the six-yard box and Dias headed into the unguarded net.



RIO DE JANEIRO (Dispatches) - Former Brazil striker Ronaldo said on Saturday that he was buying Cruzeiro, the club where he made his professional debut, but which has been languishing in Brazil's Serie B for two seasons.

"I am very happy to have concluded this deal," the 45-year-old said in a video posted on social media by club president Sergio Santos Rodrigues.

"I have a lot to give back to Cruzeiro, to take Cruzeiro where it deserves to be," Ronaldo added holding a club shirt with the No.9 and his nickname 'Fenomeno' on the back.

"We have a lot of work ahead of us. I ask the fans to get connected to the club again, to go to the stadium, because we will need a lot of strength and unity. We have a lot of work and ambition to make Cruzeiro great again."

Globoesporte.com reported that Ronaldo will pay 400 million reais (about 60 million euros) to become the club's majority shareholder.

He already has a controlling stake, acquired in 2018, in Spanish club Valladolid, who were relegated to the second division last season.

Ronaldo, who is from Rio de Janeiro, joined Cruzeiro, in Belo Horizonte, making his professional debut in 1993 aged 16.

He scored 56 goals in 58 matches for the club, which earned him a call-up to the 1994 World Cup in the United States where he collected a winner's medal without playing a single minute.

