

IRAN NEWS Felicitates Its Readers on the Beginning of New Year 2022 and Wish Them a Happy and Prosperous Year

# IRAN NEWS



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## Good Progress Made In Vienna Talks on Sanctions Removal

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's top negotiator in talks held in the Austrian capital with the goal of removing sanctions imposed on Tehran says during the eighth round of negotiations good progress was made with regard to the removal of sanctions and subsequent verification of sanctions removal.

Ali Bagheri Kani made the remarks while speaking to reporters on Thursday before leaving Vienna for Tehran after the negotiators declared a few days of recess on the occasion of the New Year holidays. **See Page 7**

## Iran Successfully Launches Research Cargos into Space



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Ministry of Defense announced the successful launch of the Simorgh-3 space homemade

rocket, carrying three research devices into space. Iranian Ministry of Defense Spokesman said on Thursday that the indigenous satellite carrier of Simorgh-3 successfully launched into space carrying three research devices.

"In this research space mission, for the first time, three research shipments were simultaneously launched to an altitude of 470 kilometers a speed of 7250 meters per second," Ahmad Hosseini, the spokesperson for space affairs at the defense ministry, said.

According to the spokesman, the function of the space base components and the performance of the satellite launch stages were successful, and finally, the intended research goals of the mission were accomplished.

It is for the first time, three research devices were simultaneously launched to space at an altitude of 470 km and a speed of 7350 m/s and led to breakthroughs in the country's space industry.

Hosseini said the launch followed several Islamic Republic's civilian space program achievements. "We will speed up work so that we can become one of the six countries that can launch satellites into the GEO (geostationary) orbit," he added.

"We will speed up work so that we can become one of the six countries that can launch satellites into the GEO (geostationary) orbit," he added.

The United States has expressed concern that Iran's satellite launches are part of an effort by the Islamic Republic to develop ballistic missiles capable of delivering nuclear weapons.

Iran, which has long maintained its nuclear program is entirely civilian in nature, says its satellite launches and rocket tests do not have a military component.


In 2017, Iran's Imam Khomeini Space Center successfully launched the Simorgh carrier with a mission of putting satellites into the orbit.

According to the Iranian Space Agency, the telecommunication satellites' Nahid 1 and 2', 'Zoljannah,' 'Simorgh,' and the remote sensing satellites' Toloo,' 'Pars 1' and 'Zafar 2' are being designed and produced to be placed in the LEO orbit.

'Pars 1', 'Zafar 2', and 'Toloo' satellites with multi-spectral imaging capability are among the remote sensing satellites that are in the launch queue.

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8 SPORT

Man City Extend Lead to 8 Points as Chelsea Stumble  
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## U.S. in Decline, Growing Weaker Day by Day

TEHRAN (PressTV) - President Ebrahim Raisi assures his Nicaraguan counterpart Daniel Ortega that due to the US's declining power, his country can overcome Washington's pressure and sanctions just as Iran did so. Speaking to the Nicaraguan head of state on the phone, Raisi reminded him that the Iranian nation did not stop its advancement in the face of the obstacles and problems that had been created by the United States among others.

"We are certain that Nicaragua too can overcome the U.S.'s threats and sanctions since today the US is in decline and is growing weaker day by day," Raisi said.

The U.S.'s coercive measures and threats, the Iranian chief executive noted, has no impact on the willpower of the world's independent and freedom-seeking countries.

"The [international] hegemonic system cannot impose its will on the Islamic Republic and Nicaragua since the countries rely on their peoples' votes and support, and can [therefore] stand up to hegemonic powers' excessive demands," Raisi stated. **See Page 7**

## U.S. Definitely Responsible for Terror Attack on Soleimani

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in a statement on the occasion of the second anniversary of the assassination of the General Qasem Soleimani by the US army that America's withdrawal from the region was a small consequence of that assassination.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran issued a statement on the eve of the second anniversary of the martyrdom of former Iran's IRGC Quds Force Commander Lt. Gen. Qasem Soleimani.

Martyr Soleimani always played a role in line with the principled policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran and helped to establish peace and stability at the regional and international levels, the statement said.

He spent his life on fighting against international terrorism and growing terrorist groups in the region, it noted.

The United States, in a criminal act that was in violation of international laws and principles, plotted a terrorist attack against one of the Iranian high-ranking officials in the hosting country of Iraq, the statement further said. **See Page 7**

## Former Qatari PM Warns About Any Mischief Against Iran

TEHRAN (MNA) - Ex-Prime Minister of Qatar Hamad bin Jassim bin Jaber Al Thani warned that any mischief and sabotage against Iran will directly affect countries in the region.

Speaking in an interview with RT on Thursday, he said that future agreement between Iran and the West on its nuclear activities will be an important opportunity to reduce tensions in the region, especially any mischief and sabotage against Tehran will directly affect countries of the region and will not serve interests of regional countries both in short- and long-term.

The new round of Vienna talks with a focus on the removal of anti-Iranian sanctions kicked off on Monday Dec. 27 in the Austrian capital of Vienna after Iran. Negotiations have been resumed in Vienna as former US President Donald Trump unilaterally withdrew from the agreement in 2018.

**Happy New Year**

In 2021, millions of clients trusted us as their wealth partner. As 2021 comes to an end, a new blank 365-page book starts. Aron Groups will be on your side to fill 2022 book with success and happiness.

**ARON GROUPS BROKER**

## Azerbaijan to Hand Over 21 Prisoners to Iran

TEHRAN (MNA) - According to the Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran to Baku, in the coming days, the Republic of Azerbaijan will hand over some 21 Iranian prisoners, including three women, to Iranian officials.

The Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran to Baku Seyed Abbas Mousavi said Wednesday that a number of Iranian prisoners will be transferred to the country from Azerbaijan.

Following the visit of Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian to the Republic of Azerbaijan, the follow-up of Iran's Embassy to Baku, and the assistance of the Azeri officials, some 21 Iranian prisoners will be handed over to the country in the coming days.

## President Says Iranian Expats Have No Problem for Return

**TEHRAN (IRNA) - President Ebrahim Raisi here emphasized that no Iranian citizen's entry into the country, or their exit from Iran after that is prohibited and the planning and decision-making in that respect should be in such a way that the entire Iranians traffic to and from the country should be trouble-free.**

The president who was speaking at the newly established Iranian Expatriates Supreme Council emphasized that the concerned officials' entire efforts are aimed at problem resolving for the Iranian expatriates, as using their capabilities in their own country is needed, and the first step is evolutionizing the structure and decision making structure of the Iranian Expatriates Supreme Council and the secretariat of this council.

President Raisi said that the Iranian expatriates have both great potentials and can create great opportunities, which is why the apparatus at their service should be revised thoroughly, including the planners, and decision makers for them, so that they will feel that the Islamic Republic officials are seriously concerned about solving their problems and addressing their concerns.

The president said that being seriously concerned about the problems and worries of the Iranian expatriates is of great significance.

Raisi said that exact census and status of the Iranian expatriates is required for decision making, adding that that is one of the important tasks of the Iranian Expatriates Supreme Council and its secretariat.

According to Iran Civil Laws, both blood and soil are the roots of Iranian citizenship, and therefore, the 2nd and 3rd generations of the Iranian expatriates, too, are considered Iranian citizens, although they might have other countries' citizenship, said the president.



He said that the conditions for transferring money by the Iranian expatriates into Iran and their opening of bank accounts are among the other issues that need to be resolved and they should be immediately informed about the decisions made in this respect.

Devising a comprehensive law for the Iranian expatriates in which all the do's and don'ts for them will be precisely mentioned is necessary and the Iranian Parliament should rarify that law as soon as possible, said the president.

President Raisi said that the ill-wishers of the Iranian nation are spending tremendous efforts aimed at intimidating the Iranian expatriates so that they will not come back to their homeland.

"But the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) and the country's cultural apparatus should launch a campaign to make the entire Iranians realize that they can smoothly travel to Iran," reiterated the president. Raisi also stressed the need to facilitate making investments of the Iranian expatriates in Iran.

Such investments are in need of support, guaranteed benefits, and security and the investors should in practice feel that their activities are supported, he said.

The president also asked the Iranian ambassadors and cultural attachés not to wait for the Iranians to refer to them, but to attend the Iranians gatherings and pursue their demands and resolve their problems.

## Armenia Intends to Open Consulate General in Iran

IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Armenia too is working on opening a consulate general in Iran, Foreign Ministry Press Secretary Vahan Hunanyan said in an interview with Sputnik Armenia

Hunanyan's comments came on the heels of reports that Iran is opening a consulate in the southern Armenian town of Kapan.

"We are also working on the opening of the Consulate General of the Republic of Armenia in the Islamic Republic of Iran on a reciprocal basis," Hunanyan said.

## Iran Pursuing Harsh Revenge Against Killers of General Soleimani

TEHRAN (IFP) - The deputy commander of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps says the Islamic Republic is pursuing its harsh revenge against those who killed top Iranian General Qassem Soleimani in January 2020.

General Ali Fadavi said various methods are being followed for this purpose to satisfy the people of Iran. Fadavi made those remarks at the burial place of General Soleimani in the Iranian city of Kerman.

Iran has said it is going after those who murdered General Soleimani through legal channels as well.

The top military commander was killed in a drone strike directly ordered by former US president Donald Trump. General Soleimani was at the forefront of fighting the Daesh terror group in Iraq and Syria.

## Gen. Soleimani Shattered Hegemony of U.S., Global Arrogance

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Majlis Speaker has hailed Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani, who was assassinated by the United States in early 2020, as a popular resistance commander who shattered the U.S. hegemony in the region.

Speaking at a ceremony in Shahr-e-Rey in southern Tehran on Thursday, Mohammad-Baqer Qalibaf said General Soleimani helped the resistance front defeat the US and the Israeli regime by relying on people, adding that he always defended children and the oppressed.

"The shedding of Martyr Soleimani's blood signed off the document for the expulsion of America from the region. Today, we see America is leaving the region with humility," he noted.

He made the remarks during a ceremony marking the second martyrdom anniversary of General Soleimani, the commander of the Quds Force of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC), and Iraq's Popular Mobilization Units (PMU) deputy head Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis.

The top anti-terror commanders were assassinated along with their companions in a US drone strike authorized by former President Donald Trump near Baghdad International Airport on January 3, 2020.

They were highly popular because of the key role they played in eliminating the Daesh terrorist group in the region, particularly in Iraq and Syria.

Qalibaf said that the "ugly and filthy" assassination operation against the resistance commanders exposed the folly of claims by the global arrogance about defending human rights and international law.

"With his exemplary genius, Martyr Soleimani turned into a military commander during his forty years of management... who managed to shatter the hegemony of the American army and the global arrogance in the region," he said.

"The good and effective performance of General Soleimani brought honor and dignity to Muslims and freedom-seekers of the world. The Islamic establishment of Iran is proud of having trained such a military commander," who was a popular figure committed to humanitarian and Islamic values, Qalibaf said.

Thursday's event also commemorated the 12th anniversary of the 2009 nationwide pro-establishment rallies on the ninth of the Persian calendar month of Dey, which falls on December 30.

## President Calls for All-Inclusive Gov't in Afghanistan

QOM (IRNA) - President Ebrahim Raisi said on Thursday that all the efforts of the Islamic Republic of Iran are towards establishing a government in Afghanistan that embraces all groups and ethnics.

Speaking in a meeting during his visit to Qom city, President Raisi said that Afghanistan's security is Iran's security and insecurity in that country is equal to insecurity in Iran.

All our efforts are for a government in Afghanistan that people feel belongs to all Afghan groups and ethnics and assures peace in the country, Raisi noted.

He also mentioned that near four million Afghan nationals live in Iran and their life has been so intermingled with Iranians that cannot be distinguished.

The President also praised Afghan fighters, including Haidarioun, Zaynabiyun, and Fitimiyun militants, who have fought against extremist groups like the ISIS in the region.

Raisi underlined that the same extremist groups now want to prevent peace and security in Afghanistan, as they attack Shia mosques in that country.

He also praised the character of the late General Qasem Soleimani who was assassinated by the US army on January 3, 2020, saying that Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamanei rightfully described Soleimani's path as a school of thought that must be introduced to the world.

## Iran Getting More Powerful by the Day

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - The commander of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps says the country is getting more powerful by the day and the enemies are getting isolated and all these are blessings from Jihad in the cause of God.

General Hossein Salami was speaking at a ceremony held in the holy city of Qom on Thursday to mark the second anniversary of top Iranian General Qassem Soleimani's assassination by the U.S.

Salami referred to the depth of Iran's influence across the region, saying today, the axis of resistance is in pursuit of enemies in all Islamic territories and has prevented them from reaching their goals.

Salami noted that if this power had not been born, the adversaries would have infiltrated all Islamic lands.

The commander of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps said the nation's foes aimed to cause division between the Islamic establishment and people but that conspiracy was foiled thanks to people's vigilance and prudence.

Salami also spoke of the need to resist all sanctions and military threats. He said the Islamic Republic will resolve all problems of the nation by relying on domestic potentials and the people's will.

The commander also said the Resistance Axis is chasing the enemies throughout the Islamic countries and does not allow them to realize their plots.

At a ceremony held on Thursday on the commemoration of the second anniversary of Lt. Gen. Qasem Soleimani's martyrdom, Hossein Salami stressed that if the Resistant Axis had not shaped in the region, the enemies would have invaded all of the Islamic countries.

General Salami noted: "Through the assassination of General Soleimani, the enemy sought to undermine the Resistance Front, but thanks to the blessed blood of Martyr Soleimani, the Resistance Front became more powerful and stronger than before."

On 3 January 2020, Lieutenant General Qasem Soleimani, chief commander of the Quds Force of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), was assassinated by the US via a drone strike at Baghdad International Airport.

Iranian top commander targeted and martyred when he arrived in an official visit at the invitation of the Iraqi government and was his way to meet Iraqi Prime Minister Adil Abdul-Mahdi in Baghdad while Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, deputy chairman of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF or Hashd al-Shabbi) was accompanied him.

## Envoy Hails Opening of Chinese Consulate in Iranian Port

TEHRAN (Tasnim) - The Iranian ambassador to Beijing said the opening of China's consulate general in Iran's southern port city of Bandar Abbas will greatly contribute to the development of trade ties between the two countries.

In a post on his Twitter account on Thursday, Mohammad Keshavarzadeh said the plan for the establishment of China's consulate general in Bandar Abbas signifies the growing significance of Iran's role in China's regional equations.

"It (opening of consulate) could play a significant role in the promotion of trade between the two countries," the envoy added, noting that Bandar Abbas has the necessary infrastructures for trade exchanges.

"Iran has had consulate generals since years ago in three major cities of China, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Hong Kong," the Iranian ambassador said. On Wednesday, the Iranian cabinet of ministers granted permission for the opening of China's consulate general in Bandar Abbas.

The permission has been conditional on reciprocal measures and conformity to the relevant rules and regulations. China became Iran's top trading partner in the previous Iranian year which ended on March 20.

The value of non-oil trade exchanges with China in Iranian year 1399 (March 2020-March 2021) stood at \$18,715 million.

First Announcement

شناسه آگهی: ۱۲۴۶۸۹۷

**TENDER NO.: 01-31-22-9150039**



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

Items	Material Description	Quantity
25	PARTS FOR "AIR PACK" AIR COMPRESSOR TYPE HA-550-LT, SERIAL NO., T-1995-00449-1 TO 00449/3, AIR PACK REFERENCE: 7356-COM	300 NO

Vendors who intend to participate in aforesaid tenders are requested to send their "Intention To Participate" letter via fax to the following number along with their resume according to Qualitative Assessment Form no. 1, available at: [www.nisoc.ir](http://www.nisoc.ir), not later than 14 days after the second announcement, otherwise, their requests for participation in the tender will be disregarded.

The applicants should have relevant background in supplying the required goods and capability to provide and submit a bid bond of 9,430 EURO or 2,563,450,000 RIAL, in favor of NISOC.

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

**ONLY ACCEPTABLE DELIVERY TERM IS D.D.P. NISOC'S WAREHOUSE, AGHAJARI, IRAN**

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

**NO ADVANCE PAYMENT WILL BE PAID**

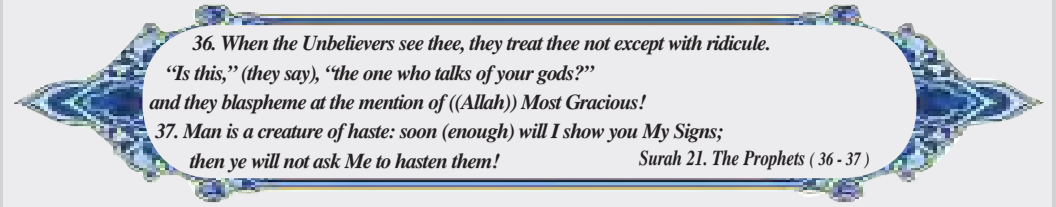
**FOREIGN PURCHASING DEPARTMENT**  
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Kouy-e-Fadaeian Islam (New Site), Ahvaz, Iran  
Tel. No.: 061 34 12 3772 Fax No.: 061 34 45 74 37

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## PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	12:07
■ Evening (Maghreb)	17:21
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	05:44
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	07:14



# Iran-Georgia Trade Down by 15%

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

**TEHRAN – Head of the Georgia-Iran Chamber of Commerce and Industry Seyedeh Fatemeh Moghimi in a webinar said that the trade volume between Iran and Georgia has declined by 15 percent this year and called for exploring ways for expansion of trade with this European country.**

In the webinar on reviewing economic and trade cooperation of Iran with the Caucasus states and Russia after the second Karabakh war which was held by the Institute for Iran-Eurasia Studies in Tehran, Moghimi said Georgia with population over 4 million people has joint borders with Russia, Turkey and Armenia and strategically is the bridge between Europe and Asia.

Pointing to the good trade relation of Georgia with the world, she said cost of living in Georgia is low comparing to other European states and culturally Georgia is close to Iran. She noted that the economic freedom in this country is very considerable, adding that Georgia ranks 9th in the Index Economic Freedom ranking and it is even above countries like France and Norway, and therefore it has favorable condition for foreign investment.

Moghimi said that the ownership of foreign investment in Georgia is 100 percent and in its international trade, the country levies the minimum tariff and on the whole it signs free trade regime with different countries.

She added that investors are respected in this country but reimposition of the U.S. sanctions against Iran caused restriction in exports of Iran to Georgia.

This economic activist pointed to the expansion of tourism industry in Georgia and said the country earns a lot in this sector and tourists after visiting this country try to

get citizenship of Georgia. She added that after cooling down of military crisis between Georgia and Russia, construction has picked up fast in this country.

Moghimi stated that the most important goods being imported from Georgia to Iran are wood and chocolate while goods like tile, bitumen and construction glass are exported to this country. She went on to say that the sanctions against Iran caused 15 percent decline in the trade between Iran and Georgia, adding that when Georgia joined the WTO it was forced to restrict its trade with Iran under international pressures.

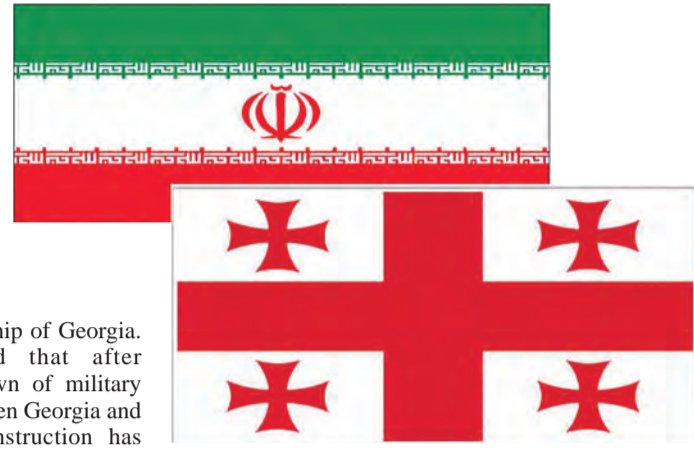
She reiterated Iran usually uses Turkey as a corridor to join Europe but the position of Georgia for access to European market is much more favorable and political infrastructures should be regarded more for economic growth in the ties between Iran and Georgia.

Moghimi stated that most of trade is carried out from Azerbaijan route and this route is easier and much more favorable.

Meanwhile in the webinar, Head of Iran-Russia Chamber of Commerce Hadi Tizhoush Taban, for his part, said that Russia imports goods worth over \$231b per year and Iran ranks 41st in export to Russia, adding that when the COVID-19 virus broke out, Iran's citrus products suddenly surged.

He said land borders to Russia have not been strengthened, adding that Iran should make the most out of its free zones for developing trade with Russia. He said unfortunately officials did not pay heed to the issue of lockdown and consequences of this negligence emerged in the trade relation between Iran and Russia and the country needs a serious decision in this regard.

Tizhoush Taban stated some Iranian investors have started extraterrestrial cultivation in Russia due to the abundance of water in this country.



## Tehran-Seoul Trade Ties At Lowest Level

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

**TEHRAN – Secretary of Iran-South Korea Joint Chamber of Commerce Pouya Firouzi says the trade between Iran and South Korea is at its lowest level and Iran's exports to South Korea have been around \$54m in eight months in the current Iranian calendar year and the figure does not worth mentioning comparing to the previous billion-dollar trade volumes in the past.**

Speaking to ILNA and touching upon the latest condition of trade between Iran and South Korea, Firouzi said that the current trade between the two states is at its lowest level and in the first eight months of this year Iran's exports to South Korea have been around \$54m and in return the country has imported goods worth of \$350m from Korea but one should take into consideration that the current trade figure does not worth mentioning when their trade volume in the past has been over billions of dollars.

He then referred to imported and exported goods in the trade of the two states and said Iran's imports from South Korea have been mostly goods related to medical, dentistry, pharmaceutical and hygienic fields and the country's exports to Korea have been mostly minerals.

On the frozen assets of Iran in South Korean banks, he said the talks between the governments of the two countries are underway and the private sector is not involved in the talks and it just waits for the result of talks.

According to reports, the exports of Iran to South Korea in the first half of 2017 were over \$2b while its imports were \$1.51b.

## Iran Expects Record Petrochemical Sales

**TEHRAN (presstV) - Iran expects hard currency revenues from its trade of petrochemicals to reach record levels this calendar year as industry sources insist the sector has played a key role in Iran's efforts to stand up against American pressure on direct crude sales.**

Ahmad Mahdavi, who represents a syndicate of Iranian petrochemical manufacturers, said on Wednesday that petrochemical shipments from Iran are expected to reach \$14 billion in value terms at the end of the year to late March.

That comes as figures by the Iranian customs office published on Tuesday showed that petrochemical exports had accounted for \$14.7 billion or 42% of the total non-oil exports from Iran in the nine months to December 21.

However Mahdavi said that petchem exporters had returned some \$9.2 billion from their proceeds to a government-run exchange system where Iranian importers can access foreign currency at a price lower than the unofficial market.

He said that hard currency revenues generated by the petrochemical sector in Iran had risen by over 75% in the March-December period. Growing sales of petrochemicals have been a major element in Iran's sanctions-busting toolbox as the country has successfully managed to resist the American sanctions imposed on its exports of crude in mid-2018.

Iranian petrochemical plants have expanded considerably in recent years as they have both increased their output while diversifying the range of products to obtain a larger share of the international markets. Mahdavi said that Iran's petrochemical sector has generated an average of \$11 billion in annual export revenues and around \$5.5 billion in products supplied to the domestic manufacturers in the past three years.

## Gov't Reports Further Surge in Factory Activity

**TEHRAN (PresstV) - Iran's ministry of industries (MIMT) has reported another period of growth in the country's manufacturing captivity, saying output in the home appliances sector rose nearly 10% to reach three million units in the March-November period.**

MIMT figures cited in a Thursday report by the ISNA news agency showed that factory activity had grown for 18 out of 27 manufactured products examined by the ministry for the eight months to November 21.

Largest surge in output was reported in the Iranian truck manufacturing sector where domestic companies reached a record production of 6,177 units in the March-November period, an increase of 75.5% compared to the similar period last year.

Cooking oil production rose by 40.8% to 1.352 million metric tons while washing machine output surged 28.8% to 916,000 units over the eight months to late November.

The report highlighted the continuous surge in activity in Iran's home-grown home appliances sector where total output rose 9% to nearly 3.125 million units over the March-November period.

A breakdown of the figures showed that fridge production by Iranian companies had increased 7.8% to 1.446 million units while TV set production had declined 4.9% year on year in March-November to 763,000 units.

Iran has imposed an outright ban on imports of home appliances, especially from South Korea, to help boost domestic manufacturing and to create more jobs.

The policy has been implemented on a smaller scale in other manufacturing sectors since 2018 when Iran decided to rely more on domestic companies to offset the impacts of American sanctions on the economy.

The MIMT figures pointed to visible growth in manufacturing activity for certain products in Iran in the eight months to late November, including in the production of various vehicles, paper, petrochemicals, and motor oil.

## 90% Progress in PGSOC's Housing Construction in Quake-Hit Areas in Hormozgan



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

**TEHRAN – Director of Public Relations and International Affairs of Persian Gulf Star Oil Company (PGSOC) says the project of constructing housing units in the quake-hit areas in Hormozgan Province has progressed 90 percent due to efforts of the company.**

Ms. Narges Sedaqat said that the company not only has offered aid and support services in the quake-hit areas but also has also executed the operation for construction of housing units in the villages of West Gishan and Zarto villages.

She went on to say that the project for construction of five housing units in West Gishan village and 6 housing units in Zarto village has begun its executive stages due to efforts of PGSOC. She noted the under construction housing units in West Gishan village has currently progressed physically by 90 percent and the units in Zarto village have also progressed physically by 60 percent.

Sedaqat stated that for construction of these units metal structures have been used, and its foundation and inside construction is carried out due to efforts and aids of the company.

She reiterated that the company beside fulfilling its main task of providing and securing the fuels for the country pays great importance to fulfill its social responsibility obligations, and after the quake shook the areas in Hormozgan, it rushed to help the quake-hit areas and their citizens by sending necessary equipment.

## Pakistan National Flag Carrier Resumes Flights to Mashhad

**ISLAMABAD (Dispatches) - Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) has resumed direct flight to the holy city of Mashhad after a five-year hiatus in order to develop people to people contacts and boost religious tourism with the Islamic Republic of Iran.**

The development took place following the serious efforts of the Iranian Embassy in Islamabad to facilitate air travel between the two neighboring countries and to boost the tourism industry.

Earlier this month Chief Executive of Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) Air Marshal Arshad Malik during a meeting with Ambassador of Iran to Pakistan Mohammad Ali Hosseini had announced that the PIA is going to start direct flights from Lahore to Mashhad.

PIA Spokesperson Abdullah Khan told IRNA that the PIA flight departed from Lahore to Mashhad on Wednesday at 23:19 p.m. from Allama Iqbal International Airport and is scheduled to arrive in Mashhad at 01:14 a.m. early Thursday. A cake was also cut on the occasion with the presence of Pakistani officials and staff of the Iranian Embassy.

He said the return flight from Mashhad to Lahore will depart on 30th December, Thursday, 02:30 a.m. Iran local time and land at Lahore airport at 06:30 a.m.

شناسه آگهی: ۱۲۴۶۸۹۸

First Announcement

**TENDER NO.: 01-31-9580041**

N.I.S.O.C.  
NATIONAL IRANIAN SOUTH OILFIELDS COMPANY  
AHVAZ-IRAN

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

Items	Material Description	Quantity
68	PARTS FOR "AIR PACK " AIR COMPRESSOR TYPE AP-66-AC+SFN-250, SERIAL NO., T-2003-00530	242

Vendors who intend to participate in aforesaid tenders are requested to send their "Intention To Participate" letter via fax to the following number along with their resume according to Qualitative Assessment Form no. 1, available at: [www.nisoc.ir](http://www.nisoc.ir), not later than 14 days after the second announcement, otherwise, their requests for participation in the tender will be disregarded.

The applicants should have relevant background in supplying the required goods and capability to provide and submit a bid bond of 7,492 EURO or 2,031,650,000 RIAL, in favor of NISOC.

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

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## New Dutch Gov't Expected To Be Installed on Jan 10

AMSTERDAM (Dispatches) - The new Dutch government is expected to be installed on Jan. 10, almost 10 months after the last election, a statement released by Prime Minister Mark Rutte's office said.

Political parties earlier this month agreed on the details of their governing pact, after the longest such negotiations in Dutch history. The coalition will consist of the four parties that have been in power since 2017, but it took almost 300 days to bring them back together after the March 17 elections produced an inconclusive result.

Rutte is expected to lead his fourth consecutive administration as prime minister, making him the longest serving government leader in the European Union together with Hungary's Viktor Orban.



## Bangladesh Scraps Women-Only Beach Zone

DHAKA (Dispatches) - Authorities in Bangladesh's main tourist resort scrapped a dedicated beach section for women and children after a social media outcry over gender segregation, officials said Thursday.

On Wednesday afternoon, Cox's Bazar officials inaugurated a section of the shoreline on the world's longest natural sea beach as an exclusive zone for women and children. But hours later, the administration issued a press release saying that it had "withdrawn its decision" after "negative comments".

Abu Sufian, a senior official in Cox's Bazar, told AFP the section had been created following requests from conservative women in the Muslim-majority country.



## Biden, Putin Exchange Warnings Over Ukraine



WILMINGTON (Dispatches) - U.S. President Joe Biden and Russian President Vladimir Putin on Thursday exchanged warnings over Ukraine but conveyed some optimism that diplomatic talks in January could ease spiraling tensions.

In a 50-minute call, their second conversation this month, Biden said he needed to see Russia decrease its military build-up near Ukraine, while Putin said sanctions threatened by Washington and allies could lead to a rupture in ties. The call was requested by Putin.

"President Biden reiterated that substantive progress in these dialogues can occur only in an environment of de-escalation rather than escalation," said White House press secretary Jen Psaki.

Kremlin aide Yuri Ushakov said the call created a "good backdrop" for future talks.

The leaders' exchange set the stage for lower-level engagement between the countries, including a Jan. 9-10 U.S.-Russia security meeting, followed by a Russia-NATO session on Jan. 12, and a broader conference including Moscow, Washington and other European countries slated for Jan. 13.

Despite the talk of diplomacy, the tone of the call was described by officials on both sides as "serious." And neither country detailed significant progress towards a resolution or the outlines of any deal.

In Kyiv, leaders worry about the 60,000 to 90,000 Russian troops that have gathered to its north, east and south. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization security alliance has been making its own preparations from the west.

Washington has not been convinced by a report over the weekend that Russia would be pulling back about 10,000 troops, with officials saying they've seen little evidence of a drawdown. The United States deployed its JSTARS military plane in Ukrainian airspace for the first time earlier this week, though different types of surveillance aircraft are common in the region.

For his part, Biden reiterated his threat of unprecedented sanctions if Russia chose to invade Ukraine.

"Biden laid out two paths," including diplomacy and deterrence, including "serious costs and consequences," said a senior administration official.

"Both leaders acknowledged that there were likely to be areas where we could make the meaningful progress as well as areas where agreements may be impossible, and that the upcoming talks would determine more precisely the contours of each of those categories."

Aides have said the possibilities include measures that would effectively disconnect Russia from the global financial system, while further arming NATO.

## China Warns U.S. Will Face Unbearable Price on Taiwan

BEIJING (AFP) - China's foreign minister said Thursday the United States will "face an unbearable price" over its actions towards the self-ruled island of Taiwan, in Beijing's latest threat over the flashpoint island.

Tensions between China and the US have soared in recent years over issues including human rights, trade and technological competition, with Taiwan emerging as a major flashpoint.

China claims the democratic island of Taiwan as its own territory, and has vowed to seize it one day by force if necessary.

Although most countries have chosen to formally recognize Beijing over Taipei, many have retained strong unofficial links with the latter, which China bristles at. In an interview with state broadcaster CCTV and official news agency Xinhua broadcast Thursday, Foreign Minister Wang Yi warned that Washington's interference could lead to a dangerous situation.

"The US violated the promises made when China and the U.S. established diplomatic relations, condoned and encouraged 'Taiwan independence' forces, and tried to distort and hollow out the one-China principle," Wang Yi said.

"This will not only bring Taiwan into an extremely dangerous situation, but also cause the US to face an unbearable price."

In a snub to China, the U.S. invited Taiwan to its Democracy Summit earlier this month.

U.S. President Joe Biden last month described Taiwan as "independent" -- but he later clarified his remarks, confirming there was no change in U.S. policy towards Taiwan.

Under the Taiwan Act, the United States does not recognize Taiwan's independence, yet commits to helping the island defend itself.

Beijing regards any formal declaration of an "independent" Taiwan as a provocation and has repeatedly threatened consequences for countries who support Taipei in its self-determination.

In recent months, the Chinese military has mounted an increasingly aggressive series of sea and air military operations near the island, conducting military drills near the Taiwan Strait following a visit by a group of American lawmakers last month.



## New Iraq Parliament to Open on January 9

BAFGDAD (Dispatches) - Iraq's parliament will open on January 9 for its first session since lawmakers were elected in an October vote won by Shiite cleric Moqtada Sadr, President Barham Saleh said Thursday.

In multi-confessional and multi-ethnic Iraq, the formation of governments has involved complex negotiations ever since the 2003 US-led invasion toppled dictator Saddam Hussein, and the inauguration of parliament will come almost three months on since the October 10 vote.

"I signed the presidential decree inviting the new parliament to meet on January 9," Saleh said in a statement, adding his "hope for a genuinely strong and active government... protecting and serving" the Iraqi people.

"This requires the cooperation (of all) to carry out the reforms necessary for a stable and prosperous Iraq," Saleh added.

The oldest of the 329 lawmakers will chair the first session, with parliament given 30 days to elect a president, who will then name a prime minister -- tasked with forming a new government within 30 days.

Some experts and politicians hope for a new government by March.

Sadr's movement won more than a fifth of the seats, 73 out of the assembly's total of 329.

The Fatah Alliance, the political arm of the Hashed al-Shaabi former paramilitary alliance, took 17 seats, sharply down from its 48 seats in the past assembly, and Hashed leaders rejected the result. Former premier Nuri al-Maliki's pro-Iran State of Law Alliance won 33 seats in the legislature.

Iraq is trying to recover from years of war and jihadist violence but remains hobbled by political divisions, corruption and poverty.

Parties from Iraq's Shiite majority have previously struck compromise deals to work together, but Sadr is insistent he wants to forge a coalition capable of forming a parliamentary majority.

Sadr, a political maverick and former anti-U.S. militia leader who opposes all foreign interference, met with rivals from the Hashed al-Shaabi on Wednesday.

## Sudanese Security Forces Fire Tear Gas

KHARTOUM (Dispatches) - Security forces fired tear gas at protesters trying to march towards the presidential palace in Sudan's capital on Thursday, a Reuters witness said.

Thursday was the 11th day of major demonstrations since an Oct. 25 coup, which saw Abdallah Hamdok removed and then reinstated as prime minister. The demonstrators have demanded that the military play no role in government during a transition to free elections.

Most bridges to Khartoum were closed, with at least two of them blocked by shipping containers. An army checkpoint with an armored vehicle was seen stationed at one of the bridges that remained open.

Protesters heading towards a blocked bridge connecting the city of Bahri to the capital chanted: "As much as we sacrifice and die, we won't be ruled by the boot."

The Reuters witness said tear gas was fired towards the protesters in Bahri, near the bridge.

On Saturday, protesters opposed to military rule reached near the presidential palace, despite heavy tear gas and a communications blackout. Internet and mobile services appeared to be disrupted in Khartoum again on Thursday.

Reuters staff were unable to make or receive domestic and international calls and a source from a telecoms company said an order to shut down internet services had come from the state-owned Sudan National Telecommunications Corporation.

The Central Committee of Sudanese Doctors said more than 200 people were injured during Saturday's protest, with six wounded by live bullets.

The committee also reported 48 deaths in crackdowns against military rule since October.

"I come for the martyred. I'm not going to be tired because some people gave their lives for this. Being tired is nothing compared to that," a nurse in Bahri who has attended all 11 protests and gave her name as Jihad.

Several young men wore gloves to allow them to throw back tear gas canisters and stun grenades.

"I wear this glove to keep my brothers and sisters and mothers safe. When the police fire tear gas, I can throw it back," said one young man who asked not to be identified.

Sudan's sovereign council this week reinstated powers of arrests, detentions and seizures to the country's intelligence service.



## Afghan Ex-President Ghani Defends Decision to Flee the Country

LONDON (Dispatches) - Afghanistan's former President Ashraf Ghani has said he had no choice but to abruptly leave Kabul as the Taliban closed in and denied an agreement was in the works for a peaceful takeover, disputing the accounts of former Afghan and U.S. officials.

Ghani said in a BBC interview that aired on Thursday that an adviser gave him just minutes to decide to abandon the capital, Kabul. He also denied widespread accusations that he left Afghanistan with millions in stolen money.

Ghani's sudden and secret departure on August 15 left the city rudderless as US and NATO forces were in the final stages of their chaotic withdrawal from the country after 20 years.

"On the morning of that day, I had no inkling that by late afternoon I would be leaving," Ghani told BBC radio.

His remarks conflicted with other accounts.

Former President Hamid Karzai told The Associated Press news agency in an interview earlier this month that Ghani's departure scuttled the opportunity for government negotiators, including himself and peace council chairman Abdullah Abdullah, to reach an eleventh-hour agreement with the Taliban, who had committed to staying outside the capital.

After calling then-Defence Minister Bismillah Khan, the interior minister and the police chief, and discovering all had fled the capital, Karzai said he invited the Taliban into Kabul "to protect the population so that the country, the city doesn't fall into chaos and the unwanted elements who would probably loot the country, loot shops".

But Ghani in his radio interview with British General Sir Nick Carter, former chief of defense staff, said he fled "to prevent the destruction of Kabul", claiming two rival Taliban factions were bearing down on the city and were ready to enter and wage a bitter battle for control.

There was no evidence upon the Taliban entry of the rival factions Ghani referred to.

Ghani's flight meant an orderly transfer of power was not possible, and allowed the Taliban to simply fill the security vacuum. Many Afghans now accuse Ghani, who is in the United Arab Emirates, of simply handing them over to the Taliban.



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## Argentina to Raise Energy Rates to Help Cut Fiscal Deficit

BUENOS AIRES (Dispatches) - Argentina has authorized an increase in electricity and natural gas rates starting in 2022, a government source and local media reported, in a bid to reduce public subsidies that have helped send the country's fiscal deficit higher.

Public service subsidies are one of the government's biggest expenses.

After years of recession the country is renegotiating a debt of about \$45 billion with the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Reducing the deficit is one of the IMF's requirements for continued support of Argentina.



## U.S. Goods Trade Gap Hits Record; Pending Home Sales Slip

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - The U.S. trade deficit in goods mushroomed to the widest ever in November as imports of consumer goods slipped to a record ahead of the second straight COVID-distorted holiday shopping season along with industrial supplies, while exports slipped after a historic gain a month earlier.

The goods trade gap reported Wednesday by the Commerce Department is likely to remain historically high as long as the coronavirus pandemic continues, economists said. The emergence of the fast-spreading Omicron variant of COVID-19 that has driven U.S. and global caseloads to a record this week may exacerbate it further in the near term if it limits American consumers' spending on services and restokes demand for imported goods.

Omicron also stands as a downside risk in the housing market. A reading of pending home sales also out Wednesday showed an unexpected drop in November, and while that data largely predated Omicron's ascendance in the United States, the highly contagious new variant could further limit home sales in the near term, the National Association of Realtors (NAR) said.

The goods trade deficit widened last month by 17.5% to \$97.8 billion from \$83.2 billion in October, Census Bureau data showed. That exceeds the previous record deficit set in September of \$97 billion and may damp optimism that trade might finally add to U.S. economic growth this quarter for the first time in more than a year.

Imports rose by 4.7% with industrial supplies leading the way with an increase of \$5.7 billion to \$63.2 billion, followed by consumer goods rising by \$2.9 billion to just shy of \$67 billion as retailers rushed to fill store shelves ahead of Christmas. Both were record highs.

"The emergence of the Omicron variant may further ignite demand for imported goods if services activity is restricted" in the first quarter of 2022, Nancy Vanden Houten, lead economist at Oxford Economics, wrote after Wednesday's report.

Goods exports, meanwhile, declined 2.1%, with weakness across the board outside of a 4.3% increase in food exports. The drop was led by declines of \$1.4 billion in industrial supplies in and \$1.3 billion in capital goods.

The worldwide surge of coronavirus cases to a record in recent days - including a record U.S. caseload - may weigh on global demand in the months ahead, risking an even wider trade gap, Vanden Houten said.

The so-called Advance Indicators report also showed wholesale inventories climbed 1.2% last month, while retail inventories increased 2.0%. Retail inventories, excluding autos, which go into the calculation of gross domestic product, edged up by 1.3% to \$465.2 billion, the latest in a string of record-high readings. The economy grew at a 2.3% annualized rate in the third quarter, a step-down from earlier in the year but activity has rebounded in the fourth quarter with a consensus among economists building around a growth rate of 6% to 7% in the final three months of 2021.

Trade has been a drag on gross domestic product growth for five straight quarters, while inventories added to output in the third quarter.

Earlier this month, the Commerce Department reported a sharp reduction in the overall trade deficit - including services - for October, which had generated some optimism that trade may contribute to the improvement in output in the final quarter of the year. The big reversal to a record goods trade gap in November may prompt a rethinking of that. Economists at Action Economics have dialed back their fourth-quarter GDP growth estimate to 6.5% from 7.0%, with exports now seen subtracting from growth rather than adding to it as had been previously expected. Economists at JPMorgan and Goldman Sachs, meanwhile, left their estimates intact at 7%.

## Singapore GDP Growth to Moderate in Q4

SINGAPORE (Dispatches) - Singapore's economic growth is expected to have moderated in the fourth quarter, partly hurt by uncertainty caused by the Omicron COVID-19 variant and analysts say the outlook for next year will hinge on the global progress made against the pandemic.

Gross domestic product (GDP) is seen expanding 5.4% from the same period a year earlier, according to the median forecast of economists in a Reuters poll, marking the fourth straight quarter of growth. The economy grew 7.1% in the third quarter.

"The drop in y/y growth rates would be largely due to unfavourable base effects," said Brian Tan, regional economist at Barclays in a report, noting the year-ago sharp rebound from the pandemic-led downturn. He sees overall growth for 2021 at 6.8%.

Singapore's economy is likely to grow around 7% in 2021 and between 3% to 5% in 2022, according to official forecasts.

Growth in the city state has been picking up this year from the damage caused by virus-related restrictions and the sluggish global economy, as countries around the world shifted their strategies to living with the coronavirus.

However, the tourism hub has suspended the sale of tickets for arriving flights and buses under its quarantine-free travel program last week as the Omicron variant spreads.

Singapore has vaccinated 87% of its population. As of Monday, 38% of the population has received their COVID-19 booster shot.

## BMW to Create Up to 6,000 New Jobs Next Year

BERLIN (Dispatches) - Germany's BMW plans to create up to 6,000 new jobs next year to prepare for growing demand for its electric vehicles, the carmaker's chief executive told daily Muenchner Merkur.

BMW is on a very good path through the transformation and has its plants prepared for e-mobility, Oliver Zipse was quoted as saying in an interview published on Wednesday. "That is why we will increase our workforce by up to five percent next year."

BMW has so far sold more than one million electric vehicles (EV) - including purely electric and hybrid vehicles - and plans to reach two million sales of purely electric vehicles by 2025.

Given ongoing investments by semiconductor

manufacturers, the semiconductor shortage should be over in a year, the CEO said. "I expect that by the end of next year we will see a largely normal situation."

Zipse said demand for EVs was very high. "Our i4 is sold out for months, as is the iX." The i4 is an electric compact executive car and the iX is an electric mid-size luxury crossover SUV. Next year, BMW plans to introduce an electric version of its luxury sedan 7 series. "It won't be any different there," Zipse said.

The carmaker aims for at least 50% of global sales to be fully electric by 2030, but has warned that a lack of charging infrastructure was a major barrier to quicker consumer uptake of electric vehicles.

## China's Dec Factory Activity Likely Flat

BEIJING (Dispatches) - China's factory activity likely neither grew nor shrunk in December, a Reuters poll showed, amid disruptions from COVID-19 outbreaks and as the economy lost momentum in the fourth quarter.

The official manufacturing Purchasing Manager's Index (PMI) is expected to fall to 50 in December, from 50.1 in November, according to the median forecast of 24 economists polled by Reuters on Thursday. A reading below 50 indicates contraction from the previous month, above 50 expansion.

"We expect NBS manufacturing PMI to moderate to 49.9 in December from 50.1 in November," said analysts at Goldman Sachs in a note this week, referring to the National Bureau of Statistics.

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"(The) COVID outbreak in Zhejiang province since mid-December probably affected industrial activities, and container throughput data also pointed to weaker trade growth in December compared with November," they said.

The wealthy Zhejiang province, on China's eastern coast, saw a small-scale COVID-19 outbreak earlier this month, which has now subsided. Some firms were forced to suspend production.

The world's second-largest economy, which staged an impressive rebound from last year's pandemic-induced slump, has lost momentum since the second half as it grapples with a slowing manufacturing sector, debt problems in the property market and sporadic small COVID-19 outbreaks.

Analysts expect a further slowdown in fourth quarter gross domestic product (GDP) growth.

China's central city of Xian reported on Thursday more than 100 new cases of COVID-19, taking its tally of locally transmitted infections to the highest in any Chinese city this year.

Samsung Electronics and Micron Technology, two of the world's largest memory-chip makers, have warned that the ongoing lockdown of the city could affect their chip manufacturing bases in the area.

Profits at China's industrial firms grew at a much slower pace in November, the statistics bureau said on Monday, pressured by falling prices of some raw materials, a faltering property market and weaker consumer demand.

The official PMI, which largely focuses on big and state-owned firms, and its sister survey on the services sector, will be released on Friday. The private Caixin manufacturing PMI will be published on Jan. 4.

## OPEC+ Prioritizes Mid-Term Strategy



MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak said that OPEC+ group of largest oil producers has resisted calls from Washington to boost output because it wants to provide the market with clear guidance and not deviate from policy.

The United States has repeatedly pushed OPEC+ to accelerate output hikes as U.S. gasoline prices soared and President Joe Biden's approval ratings slid. Faced with resistance, Washington said in November it and other consumers would release reserves.

Asked why OPEC+ rebuffed the calls, Novak said OPEC+ had a long-term vision.

"We believe that it would be right for the market to show in the mid-term how we will increase production as demand grows," he told RBC media outlet.

"The producing companies should understand beforehand which investments they have to plan in order to ensure a production increase."

OPEC and its allies agreed earlier this month to stick to their existing policy of monthly oil output increases despite fears that a U.S. release from crude reserves and the new Omicron coronavirus variant would lead to a fresh oil price rout.

Novak also said the possible release of the strategic stockpiles by the United States and other large consumers will have a limited short-term impact on the oil market.

He said global oil demand was seen rising by around 4 million barrels per day (bpd) next year after an increase of up to 5 million bpd this year.

Novak said an oil price of between \$65 and \$80 per barrel should be comfortable next year. Currently, oil is trading below \$80.

Ten non-OPEC (Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries) nations joined OPEC to form OPEC+ in 2016.

## Japan's Factory Output Soars as Car Production Returns

TOKYO (Dispatches) - Japan's factory output jumped at the fastest pace on record in November, as easing global supply chain bottlenecks helped car production leap out of its recent slump, lifting prospects for a strong fourth-quarter economic rebound.

But while improved manufacturing conditions provide some relief for policymakers, persistent global semiconductor shortages and new risks from the Omicron coronavirus variant are expected to cloud the outlook for the world's third-largest economy.

Factory production gained 7.2% in November from the previous month, posting its largest jump since 2013 when comparable data first became available, thanks to rising output of motor vehicles and plastic products. That meant production rose for the second straight month after increasing 1.8% in October and posted a faster rise than the 4.8% gain expected in a Reuters poll.

"Output recovered to where it was previously because car production rebounded," said Takeshi Minami, chief economist at Norinchukin Research Institute.

"But seen from a global perspective, supply bottlenecks and especially the chip shortage are likely to be prolonged so that will slow down the recovery pace of output." The data showed output of cars and other motor vehicles surged 43.1% from the previous month in November, also a record, while plastic products production rose 9.5%.

Despite the stronger output, Japanese automakers are still unable to completely shake off the drag from persistent global parts and chip supply issues.

Japan's top automaker Toyota Motor Corp (7203.T) said last week it would suspend production at five domestic factories in January due to supply issues and the health crisis.

Analysts say the auto sector could see a prolonged impact from chip supply snags as chipmakers focus on producing cutting-edge semiconductors over less advanced chips.

"What is required for cars aren't the state-of-the-art chips," said Chihiro Ohta, general manager for investment research and investor services at SMBC Nikko Securities. "They need old-generation models."

Manufacturers expect output to rise 1.6% in December and 5.0% in January.

However, a Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) official cautioned firms' forecasts in the monthly survey tended to be overly optimistic.

Output of durable consumer goods rose 39%, while that of capital goods, which analysts say is closely related to the capital spending component in gross domestic product (GDP), was unchanged from the previous month.

More broadly, analysts expected Japan's economy will grow an annualized 6.1% in the current quarter, rebounding from a third-quarter slump with consumer and corporate activity expected to recover, a Reuters poll showed this month.

Separate data on Tuesday showed the jobless rate rose to 2.8% from the previous month's 2.7%, while an index gauging job availability was at 1.15, unchanged from October.



## Iran Has Not Slowed Down Vienna Talks

TEHRAN (MNA) – Turning to the ongoing Vienna talks between Iran and P4+1, Russian Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Maria Zakharova on Thursday said that Tehran has not slowed down the Vienna talks and there is not any evidence in this regard. Speaking in her weekly press briefing on Thursday, she announced that Moscow sees no evidence that Iran is slowing down

JCPOA talks in Vienna.

"We are witnessing the will and approach of negotiators in Vienna to reach an immediate result. We have heard comments that Iran has slowed down the negotiation process. We do not have such an assessment of the situation. We do not see any reason to say that Iran has slowed down this process," Russian FM spokeswoman added.



## Mexicans Join Bid for Covid Compensation From China, WHO

MEXICO CITY (Dispatches) - Devastated by the loss of his daughter to Covid-19, Jaime Michaus joined hundreds of Mexicans seeking compensation from China and the World Health Organization, despite reservations and uncertain prospects of success.

"I'm still not sure if I did the right thing," Michaus said.

"I have mixed feelings because it seems like I'm profiting from the death of my daughter," who died aged 25 in July, leaving behind a month-old baby, he said.

"No amount of money is going to bring her back, but I'm doing it for the future of my granddaughter," the 63-year-old retiree told AFP, estimating that he has a 50 percent chance of winning.

Michaus recently signed an international legal claim against China and the WHO promoted by Buenos Aires-based Poplavsky International Law Offices.

The company woos potential clients on social media in Mexico with the slogan: "Did you suffer from Covid? Know your rights."

"These claims are being submitted due to the negligence of both China and the WHO in the management of Covid-19," Denisse Gonzalez, Poplavsky's representative in Mexico, told AFP.

The firm, which has branches in Latin America, the United States and Dubai, says it has also signed up claimants from other countries including Colombia and Argentina, though Gonzalez did not divulge how many.

The claims, amounting to millions of dollars, are presented to the United Nations in Geneva alleging violations of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

They seek financial compensation ranging from \$200,000 for falling ill with Covid-19 to \$800,000 in the case of death, Gonzalez said.

WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus on Wednesday defended the organization's early response to the initial coronavirus outbreak, saying that its health emergency system had "immediately swung into action."

The coronavirus has left more than 5.4 million people dead worldwide since it was first detected in the Chinese city of Wuhan in December 2019.

Mexico has reported nearly 300,000 Covid-19 deaths -- one of the world's highest tolls -- and more than 3.95 million confirmed cases.

"I had never suffered from high blood pressure and now it goes up and down, which is dangerous," said a 35-year-old gas station employee who is also seeking compensation after catching the virus.



"I was left with ringing in one ear. My vision was also blurry and I have to wear glasses," said the woman, who did not want to be named.

Poplavsky said that its fees will be covered by a percentage of any compensation. Michaus declined to reveal the percentage he had agreed to pay in the event of a win, but said that he considered it to be fair.

The law firm believes that the claims could take at least five years to resolve.

It hopes that at some point countries such as the United States, Britain or Italy will support similar claims from their citizens that would benefit others seeking compensation.

However, Lourdes Marleck Rios Nava, an expert in public international law at the National Autonomous University of Mexico, sees limited chances of a win.

"People know that they're not going to succeed, but suddenly they're filing lawsuits," she said.

A separate attempt to bring a collective claim against China before the Mexican courts has yet to meet the required minimum of 30 plaintiffs.

"I thought there was going to be a queue of people waiting to sue, but strangely it wasn't like that. I think there's a credibility problem," said lawyer Fernando Martinez de Velasco, who was behind the action.

## Tax Receipts Up 60% Y/Y In March-December

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran has reported a major surge in tax receipts between March and December as the government hopes it could easily meet an annual tax revenue target of more than \$9 billion.

Deputy head of the Iranian National Tax Administration (INTA) said on Wednesday that tax receipts had increased by around 60% in the nine months to December 21 compared to the similar period last year.

Mohammad Massihi did not elaborate on aggregate figures but said that tax revenues had exceeded a target set in the annual budget law by 108%.

The major surge in tax revenues is a rarity for Iran, a country where taxes are relatively low and government authorities normally complain about massive tax cheats that cost the economy dearly.

However, the Iranian government has announced it will be tougher on tax evasion as it seeks to increase its revenues to compensate for losses suffered in crude exports because of US sanctions. The INTA has launched numerous data systems to crack down on tax evasion while introducing a series of reforms to simplify its taxation procedure and to help increase the receipts.

Massihi said that a new value added tax law will go into effect in Iran in early January, adding that the law will mostly benefit local manufacturers and households and will not necessarily lead to increased tax revenues for the government.

He said, however, that the INTA expects to easily meet an annual tax revenue target of 2,700 trillion rials (more than \$9 billion) set for the calendar year to late March.

## Syria Seeking to Increase Tourism Travels to Iran

TEHRAN (MNA) - Srian Minister of Tourism says that his country is seeking to increase tourism travels to the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Speaking with Iranian Ambassador to Damascus Mehdi Sobhani on Thursday, Syria's Minister of Tourism Mohammad Rami Radwan Martini said that his country is vehemently interested in boosting tourism travels to the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Emphasizing the importance and role of tourism sector in strengthening relations between nations, he said that one of the programs of Syrian Tourism Ministry is to encourage Syrian citizens to travel to Iran. Welcoming expansion of bilateral relations in the tourism sector, the Syrian minister pointed to increase pilgrimage and tourism activities between the two countries and said, "Iran's tourism destinations should be increasingly introduced to Syrian citizens to witness an increase in travel between Iran and Syria in the future."

Iran is one of the countries that has regular direct flights with Syria, he said, adding that the issue of direct flights is one of the important necessities for the development of tourism between the two countries, so that the two countries must take advantage of this cooperation optimally to increase bilateral travels.

Iranian envoy to Syria, for his part, emphasized the need for using extant capabilities and capacities to resume travel of Iranian pilgrims to Syria and announced Tehran's readiness to send pilgrims to visit holy shrines of Syria.

## 2021: A Year of Space Tourism, Flights on Mars, China's Rise

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - From the Mars Ingenuity helicopter's first powered flight on another world to the launch of the James Webb telescope that will peer into the earliest epoch of the Universe, 2021 was a huge year for humanity's space endeavors.

Beyond the science milestones, billionaires battled to reach the final frontier first, an all-civilian crew went into orbit, and Star Trek's William Shatner waxed profound about what it meant to see the Earth from the cosmos, as space tourism finally came into its own.

NASA's Perseverance Rover survived its "seven minutes of terror," a time when the craft relies on its automated systems for descent and landing, to touch down flawlessly on Mars' Jezero Crater in February.

Since then, the car-sized robot has been taking photos and drilling for samples for its mission: determining whether the Red Planet might have hosted ancient microbial life forms.

A rock sample return mission is planned for sometime in the 2030s.

With its state-of-the-art instruments, "Percy," as the helicopter is affectionately known, can also zap Martian rock and chemically analyze the vapor.

Percy has a partner along for the ride: Ingenuity, a four-pound (two kilogram) rotorcraft that in April succeeded in the first powered flight on another celestial body, just over a century after the Wright brothers' achieved the same feat here on Earth, and has performed many more since.



"Perseverance is sort of the flagship mission, it's doing a long-term detailed investigation of this fascinating area of Mars," Jonathan McDowall, an astronomer at the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics, told AFP. By contrast, "Ingenuity, is one of these cute, small, cheap little technology demos that NASA can do so well," he added.

The insights gained from Ingenuity could help scientists develop Dragonfly, a planned thousand-pound drone copter, to search for signs of life on Saturn's moon Titan in the mid-2030s.

An American millionaire became the world's first space tourist in 2001, but it took 20 more years for the promise of private space flight to finally materialize.

In July, Virgin Galactic founder Richard Branson faced off against Blue Origin's Jeff Bezos to be the first non-professional astronaut to complete a suborbital spaceflight.

While the British tycoon won that battle by a few days, it was Blue Origin that raced ahead, launching three more flights with paying customers and celebrity guests.

Elon Musk's SpaceX entered the fray in September with a three-day orbital mission around the Earth featuring an all-civilian crew on Inspiration 4.

"It's really exciting that finally, after so long this stuff is finally happening," said space industry analyst Laura Seward Forczyk, author of the forthcoming book "Becoming Off-Worldly," intended to prepare future space travelers.

## Enemies Seek to Disappoint People From Future

TEHRAN (IP) - The representative of the Leader of the Islamic Revolution in the Islamic Republic Guard Corps (IRGC) says the enemies are trying to disappoint the Iranian nation from the future.

In a congregation held on the occasion of the "Dey 9th Epic" (December 30) at Tehran's Imam Hussain square, Hojjatoleslam Abdollah Haji-Sadeghi called Iran's Leader and the Iranian people who follow Leader as two gifts that always will convert enemies' plots into opportunities.

Haji-Sadeghi referred to the US-backed unrest in Iran post-presidential election in 2009 and said the Iranians nipped the sedition in the bud 12 years ago.

"The rioters wanted to destroy the people's beliefs, but the people did not tolerate the insult to their sanctities," he added. The top cleric noted that the "Dey 9th Epic" was not a mere event to be commemorated but rather a beacon for the future path and a means of transmission of resistance culture.

The Leader's representative in IRGC recalled: "Today, the Resistance culture has transcended Iran's borders to Yemen, Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon, and the enemy also is in decline."

December 30, 2009, was a reminder of the march of millions of Iranians to acquit the disruptors of society and decisive response to the sedition elements who had taken the wrong path under the pretext of so-called fraud in the tenth round of the Iranian presidential election.

## Good Progress...

FROM PAGE 1

"The issue of sanctions removal was the main focus of the talks. Iran and the other side continued their negotiations on multiple issues, including a number of sessions on the verification of sanctions removal. The meetings were attended by both the coordinator of the joint commission of the JCPOA and the European side," he said.

"Also, on the issue of verification, Iran held separate sessions with the coordinator of the joint commission and the three European signatories" to the JCPOA, he added.

"There was also some correspondence between the two sides on the issue of sanctions removal. Good progress was made during the first days of the eighth round," he added.

Iran's top negotiator also expressed hope that after a few days of recess over the end-of-year holidays, more serious work would be pursued on the issue of sanctions removal by the other parties.

"We hope more serious work gets underway on the issue of sanctions removal once the delegations return to negotiations after the New Year holidays," he noted.

Iran and the P4+1 group of countries on Monday started the eighth round of the Vienna talks focused on the removal of all sanctions imposed on Tehran after Washington unilaterally withdrew from the agreement.

The U.S. is not allowed to directly attend the talks due to its pullout in 2018 from the landmark deal with Iran, which is officially called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), which took place three years after the accord was clinched by Iran and the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council plus Germany in June 2015.

Meanwhile, the Russian ambassador to international organizations in Vienna also talked to reporters following the conclusion of talks on Thursday, saying that in his opinion an agreement could be clinched by participants in the Vienna talks before the end of February 2022.

"I believe it is doable to achieve an agreement in first half of February; maybe a little bit earlier or later; nobody can say precisely and accurately.... The most important thing is that we observe steady progress. It's difficult but we move ahead," Mikhail Ulyanov said.

The Russian diplomat added in a post on his twitter account that the eighth round of negotiations will resume on January 3.

"Informal consultations still continue within the framework of the #ViennaTalks. But time has come to take a New Year break. The 8th (not the 9th) round of negotiations on restoration of #JCPOA will resume on Monday, January 3," Ulyanov tweeted.

Also on Thursday, the spokesman for Russia's Foreign Ministry denied certain reports that the Iranian delegation is stalling the Vienna talks.

Speaking at a weekly briefing, the ministry's spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said Russia sees no reasons to accuse Iran of stalling the Vienna talks.

## U.S. Definitely...

FROM PAGE 1

The assassination of the international hero of the fight against terrorism reveals the double standards of the United States and it is a message of support for terrorist groups, it stressed.

Undoubtedly, the criminal act of the United States in the assassination of General Soleimani is an example of a "terrorist attack" that was organized by the then U.S. government and now the White House is responsible for the case.

The Islamic Republic of Iran has always taken effective and active measures to establish peace and stability in the region. Now, according to the approaches of the 13th government, which reaches out to the neighbors of the Islamic Republic of Iran for extensive and stable engagement and cooperation, the groundwork for the development and strengthening of relations among the countries of the region is laid more firmly than before.

The government and people of Iran consider themselves to be on the side of the governments and nations of the region and have not and will not spare any assistance to maintain territorial integrity and establish lasting stability and security, and development and prosperity among the countries of the region and the Islamic world.

In the end, together with all Iranians in the motherland and all over the world, we pay tribute to the lofty spirit of the General of Peace and Security, Haj Qasem Soleimani.

## U.S. in Decline...

FROM PAGE 1

The Iranian president also laid emphasis on the development of bilateral ties in light of Iran and Nicaragua's "extensive capacities" in the political, economic, and social areas.

Ortega, for his part, likewise demanded expansion of the relations in various fields.

He also expressed confidence that the countries would be capable of standing together in the face of imperialism and tread successfully down the course of advancement.

Ortega concluded his remarks by stressing that his country "stands by the Iranian nation on all international arenas."

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## Sousa Leaves Poland To Be Flamengo Coach

**RIO DE JANEIRO (Dispatches)** - Brazilian giants Flamengo announced that Paulo Sousa is their new coach, just hours after he paid a release clause to quit his job as coach of Poland's national team.  
The 51-year-old from Portugal, who began his coaching career in England with Queen's Park Rangers, has signed a two-year deal, Flamengo said on Twitter.  
"Paulo Sousa is the Mengao's new coach," said Rio de Janeiro-based Flamengo, the most popular team in Brazil.

## NBA Postpones Heat-Spurs

**LOS ANGELES (Dispatches)** - The Miami Heat's NBA game against the San Antonio Spurs scheduled for Wednesday was postponed as Covid concerns and injuries left Miami without the minimum eight available players.  
Three more Heat players entered the league's Covid health and safety protocols on Wednesday, with Gabe Vincent, P.J. Tucker and Zylan Cheatham joining Kyle Lowry, Udonis Haslem and Max Strus on the coronavirus absentee list.

# Man City Extend Lead to 8 Points as Chelsea Stumble

**LONDON (AFP)** - Manchester City extended their lead at the top of the Premier League to an ominous eight points on Wednesday, beating Brentford 1-0 as Chelsea conceded a last-gasp equalizer at home to Brighton.  
Phil Foden's first-half goal was enough to give Pep Guardiola's champions a 10th consecutive league win as they took full advantage of Chelsea's slip-up at Stamford Bridge.  
The defending champions now have 50 points after 20 matches, putting them eight clear of second-placed Chelsea who are themselves one point ahead of Liverpool, who lost to Leicester on Tuesday.  
Brentford created some good scoring opportunities in the opening stages in west London, but it was City who went ahead in the 16th minute when Foden cleverly tucked in a cross from Kevin De Bruyne.  
City dominated possession but struggled to produce shots on target and Guardiola looked edgy on the sidelines as his team attempted to see out the win.  
They thought they had sealed the three points in the dying minutes when Aymeric Laporte rose to head home but his goal was ruled out by VAR for a marginal offside.  
Thomas Tuchel's Chelsea, who kicked off 45 minutes before City, looked poised for victory after Romelu Lukaku gave them a first-half lead but substitute Danny Welbeck struck in stoppage time.  
Lukaku started his second spell at Chelsea in style after returning from Inter Milan in August but then struggled with his form and fitness before suffering a bout of coronavirus.  
He came off the bench to score in his side's 3-1 victory at Aston Villa on Sunday and was rewarded with a spot in the starting line-up at Stamford Bridge on a mild December night.  
Chelsea wing-back Reece James limped off in the 27th minute with an apparent hamstring injury, to be replaced by Marcos Alonso.



The home side went ahead immediately when Lukaku shook off the attentions of Neal Maupay after a tussle to power a header past goalkeeper Robert Sanchez from a Mason Mount corner.  
Brighton's complaints were waved away as Chelsea -- for so long top of the league this season -- celebrated. But Graham Potter's side came back strongly, with Edouard Mendy forced to push away a fierce Adam Lallana drive.  
The impressive Yves Bissouma stung the hands of Mendy early in the second half as the visitors continued to trouble Chelsea. Minutes later Callum Hudson-Odoi burst forward from his own half but failed to find Mason Mount before Maupay flashed wide at the other end as the game opened up.  
It looked as though it was going to be a familiar story for Brighton, who have struggled to score this season, but substitute Welbeck had other ideas, heading home Marc Cucurella's cross in the 91st minute. City travel to face fourth-placed Arsenal on Saturday knowing a win would take them 11 points clear of Chelsea, who host Liverpool the following day.

## Conte Expects Lloris to Stay at Spurs

**LONDON (Dispatches)** - Tottenham Hotspur manager Antonio Conte expects Hugo Lloris to remain at the London club.  
The France goalkeeper is out of contract at the end of the season and the Spurs captain will be allowed to talk to foreign clubs about a free transfer from Saturday.  
The 35-year-old arrived in north London from Lyon in August 2012 and Conte was confident he would stay with his squad.  
"Hugo is a Tottenham player, he's the captain," he said. "For sure he will talk with the club to try to find a solution."  
"I think Hugo wants to stay in his club, he loves the club, he stays well in Tottenham."

## Booker Hits Milestone In Suns' Win

**LOS ANGELES (Dispatches)** - Devin Booker matched his season high of 38 points while reaching a milestone as the Phoenix Suns earned a 115-97 victory over the visiting Oklahoma City Thunder.  
JaVale McGee contributed 16 points and eight rebounds and Cameron Payne added 16 points and seven assists for Phoenix, which snapped a two-game slide.  
In the first quarter, Booker (25 years, 60 days) became the seventh youngest player in NBA history to reach 10,000 career points. He finished the game with 10,034.  
Ty Jerome established career bests of 24 points and eight rebounds for Oklahoma City, which dropped its second straight contest. Aaron Wiggins added 22 points and eight boards.  
Kings 95, Mavericks 94  
Chimezie Metu connected on a buzzer-beating 3-pointer on an inbounds play that began with 3.8 seconds remaining, giving Sacramento a win over visiting Dallas.  
De'Aaron Fox paced a balanced Sacramento attack with 16 points. Barnes and Davion Mitchell followed with 14 each, Tyrese Haliburton had 12 to go with a game-high 10 assists, and Metu and Marvin Bagley III scored 11 apiece.  
Jalen Brunson had a game-high 25 points to go with a team-high six assists and Kristaps Porzingis chipped in with 24 points to complement a team-high seven rebounds for the Mavericks, who will stay in Sacramento and get a rematch Friday night.

### Knicks 94, Pistons 85

Alec Burks poured in a season-high 34 points off the bench as visiting New York rallied in the fourth quarter to defeat depleted Detroit.  
Immanuel Quickley had 18 points and RJ Barrett tossed in 15 for New York.  
Detroit's Saddiq Bey had a career-high 32 points and Hamidou Diallo supplied 31 points and 13 rebounds for the Pistons, who had 12 players listed as out, including eight in league protocols. They used six players who were signed to 10-day contracts in the past week.



# Djokovic Trying to Get to Australian Open

**SYDNEY (Dispatches)** - Novak Djokovic should still play at the Australian Open, a Serbian teammate said Thursday, despite the world number one's last-minute decision to pull out of the ATP Cup in Sydney.  
The 20-time Grand Slam champion withdrew from this week's teams event days before its start on Saturday, heightening doubts over whether he will defend his Australian Open title.  
Djokovic has refused to confirm if he has been inoculated against Covid-19, with all participants at the opening Grand Slam of the year needing to be vaccinated or have a medical exemption.  
Dusan Lajovic, who will lead Serbia's ATP Cup drive in Djokovic's absence, said his teammate wanted to be in Sydney.  
"Unfortunately he's not able to come here, but, you know, he was I think hoping, same as we did, that somehow he will be here. Unfortunately he's not, and we've got to deal with it," he said.  
"I don't know the official reason. Maybe the ATP knows. He just said that he's not coming to the ATP and trying to get to the Australian Open."  
Pressed on whether Djokovic would be at Melbourne Park, Lajovic said: "I mean, the decision, he said, 'I'm not coming, guys,' to the ATP Cup. We'll see about the Australian Open."

"He didn't specify if he's coming or not but that he's waiting for a decision."  
It is not clear what that decision is, but if he were to apply for a medical exemption it would be assessed by an independent panel of experts and remain confidential.  
However, government officials in Victoria state, which hosts the Australian Open, have been adamant for months that only vaccinated players can play the tournament from January 17-30.  
"They're the rules. Medical exemptions are just that -- it's not a loophole for privileged tennis players," the state's Deputy Premier James Merlino said this month.  
World number four Stefanos Tsitsipas, who will open Greece's ATP Cup against Poland's Hubert Hurkacz on Saturday, said he respected whatever decision Djokovic made.  
"If he thinks he's not ready to play here for whatever reason, it's his choice. I think most of the players respect his choice. He has the freedom to choose," he said.  
Asked whether he felt the rules to play the Australian Open were too tough, he replied: "The rules are rules, and the rules are established for a certain purpose and reason."  
"So if some players decide not to follow them, it's their choice. I wouldn't say it's right or wrong here."  
Spearheaded by Djokovic, Serbia won the inaugural ATP Cup in 2020, beating Rafael Nadal's Spain. Nadal is another no-show in Sydney this year after contracting Covid-19 earlier this month.  
Lajovic admitted Serbia's task will be much harder without Djokovic when they open their campaign against Norway on Saturday.  
"You know, it's never the same when you have the number one in your team and then you don't have him. It's a big difference," he said.

## India Make Perfect Start With Victory Over South Africa

**CENTURION (Dispatches)** - enturion (South Africa) (AFP) - India completed a convincing 113-run win on the fifth day of the first Test against South Africa at SuperSport Park in Centurion on Thursday to make a "perfect start" to the series.  
Resuming on 94 for four in a chase of 305 to win, South Africa were bowled out for 191, losing their last three wickets in the first two overs after lunch.  
Jasprit Bumrah and Mohammed Shami took three wickets each. Fellow fast bowler Mohammed Siraj claimed two wickets and off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin dismissed the last two batsmen off successive deliveries.  
The win gave India a 1-0 lead in the three-match World Test Championship series and boosted their chances of winning a series in South Africa for the first time.  
"We got off to the perfect start," said Indian captain Virat Kohli. "Getting a result in four days (the second day was lost to rain) shows how well we played this Test match and how motivated and keen we were to start off in the manner we did."  
There was early resistance from South African captain Dean Elgar and Temba Bavuma, with Elgar surviving a caught and bowled chance to Shami when he was on 63.  
Bumrah switched to bowling around the wicket and trapped Elgar leg before wicket for 77 when the batter played around a delivery angled into his stumps.  
Siraj ended an aggressive innings of 21 by Quinton de Kock when the batter edged an attempted drive into his stumps and Shami had Wiaan Mulder caught behind with a ball which moved just enough off the seam to take the outside edge of the bat.



## Chelsea Announce £145.6m Loss

**LONDON (Dispatches)** - European champions Chelsea announced Thursday an annual loss of £145.6 million (\$196.7 million, 173.5 million euros) for the year to June 30 2021 despite their Champions League triumph.  
The London club were crowned kings of Europe in May following a 1-0 win over English rivals Manchester City in the Champions League final in Porto.  
But while their turnover rose from £387.8 million to £416.8 million thanks to an increase in broadcasting revenue, Chelsea said they still made a loss after playing games with no crowds because of Covid-19, with a reduction in profits on player sales also damaging their balance sheet.  
Chelsea continue to be backed financially by Fordstam Limited, a company controlled by club owner Roman Abramovich, with their accounts saying "the company is reliant on Fordstam Limited for its continued financial support".  
The Blues added that under a "severe but plausible downside scenario of football being played behind closed doors in December 2021 and January 2022" it would be reliant on additional funding from Chelsea FC PLC, with further funds needed if the financial impact of Covid-19 were even more severe.  
Chelsea said Thursday they have signed three players for a total of £109.7m -- striker Romelu Lukaku, goalkeeper Marcus Bettinelli and midfielder Saul Niguez, on loan from Atletico Madrid, since June 30.  
In the same period, Chelsea added they had sold 13 players for a combined £103.7m. They could also receive a further £16.4m if outstanding clauses in previous transfers are all met.

