

**IRAN NEWS Extends Its Condolences to Its Muslim Readers On the Occasion of Martyrdom Anniversary of Hazrat Fatemeh Zahra (AS). The Next Issue Will Hit the News-Stands on Saturday**



**Health Ministry Announced on Tuesday That the Number of Deaths From the Coronavirus Pandemic In Iran Increased to 131,736 With 34 More Iranians Killed by the Virus Over the Past 24 Hours**

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## Iran's December Trade Up by 25%

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran has reported a major surge in trade activity in the calendar month to late December as exports reached a total \$4.041 billion over the period, according to figures provided by the Iranian customs administration (IRICA).

IRICA spokesman Rouhollah Latifi said on Monday that the total value of trade reported in the month to December 21 had reached \$8.951 billion, up 25% from the similar month in 2020.

Latifi said Iranian December trade deficit had amounted to around \$869 million as imports into the country rose 27% year on year to stand at \$4.91 billion.

Iran has been reporting a continuous growth trend in non-oil trade activity in recent years despite increased American pressure on its economy.

The boom has accelerated in recent months with an easing of coronavirus restrictions on trade around the world.

Latifi said that Iranian exports had increased by 23% year on year in the month to late December, adding that China remained Iran's main export destination over the period with \$1.126 billion worth of purchases.

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## Hezbollah Leader Hails Martyr Soleimani

BEIRUT (Dispatches)- The secretary general of Lebanon's Hezbollah resistance movement says top Iranian anti-terror commander Lieutenant General Qasem Soleimani, who was assassinated in a U.S. drone strike near Baghdad airport, helped create a resistance front in Iraq and neighboring Syria against the presence of American occupation forces.

Sayed Hassan Nasrallah made the remarks in a televised speech on Monday evening, while addressing a ceremony held in Beirut to commemorate the second anniversary of the assassination of Gen. Soleimani, commander of the Quds Force of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC), his Iraqi trenchmate Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, the second-in-command of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Units (PMU), and their companions in a US drone strike authorized by former President Donald Trump near Baghdad International Airport on January 3, 2020.

"The presence of U.S. forces in the region has brought about nothing other than destruction, bloodshed and displacement," he said, stating that the targeted killings of the two exemplary anti-terror commanders had severe repercussions for the entire Middle East.

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## Iran, Resistance Front Flag-Bearer Of New Regional Geopolitics



**IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK**

TEHRAN - A top military adviser to Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei described the Muslim world as a future power that can compete with current dominating Western and Eastern powers, saying Iran and the resistance front are reshaping the geopolitics in the region.

Speaking at the International Conference on Iran and Neighbors on Tuesday, Major General Yahya Rahim Safavi said the current century will witness the Muslim world as a new pole of power with a cultural, civilizational, economic, and demographic nature that would put up great resistance against Western and Eastern powers.

The geopolitics of resistance means "changing the social, cultural (religious), economic, and military structures and processes of the Islamic Ummah (community) so as to gain freedom and independence and form the Islamic world's power in competition with the dominating powers of the West and East at various national, regional, and global levels," Rahim Safavi said.

"The flag-bearer of this new geopolitics is the Islamic Revolution forces, the Islamic Awakening movements and the Resistance Front led by the Leader of the Islamic Revolution and the late founder of the Islamic Republic [Imam Khomeini]," he added.

Rahim Safavi also noted that following the 1979 Islamic Revolution, the resistance focused on the issue of Palestine and the Zionist regime's aggression and occupation, followed by the struggle against corrupt and oppressive governments in Islamic countries.

He also stressed Iran's role in presenting and institutionalizing the concept of resistance after the former Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein's imposed war against Iran in the 1980s.

The commander further cited Lebanon's Hezbollah resistance movement, Palestinian resistance groups, Iraq, and Syria as members of a new resistance bloc, saying, "With the birth of the Ansarullah movement in Yemen, this bloc or axis is having another official member today."

Rahim Safavi, a former chief commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC), hailed the IRGC Quds Force as "the engine and operating agent of the resistance."

"In fact, what has made the United States angry with the Islamic Republic is the process of generating power in Iran's regional politics. This power has been created in the first layer in West Asia with the wise and courageous leadership of the Leader of the Islamic Revolution and the role of the Quds Force in the battlefield under the command of the martyred general, Qasem Soleimani," he said.

"In parallel with the advent of the new arrangement or order led by the Islamic Republic in West Asia, based on the shared goal of countering American hegemony, Latin American countries, including Venezuela, Cuba, and Peru, have also strengthened their ties with the resistance front," he added.

General Soleimani, Iran's world-renown anti-terror commander, was assassinated alongside Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, deputy head of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Units (PMU), in a US drone strike directly ordered by former president Donald Trump near Baghdad International Airport on January 3, 2020.

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

## Asia May Prefer Spot Crude Procurement In 2022 to Flexibly Manage Pandemic Risks

LONDON (Dispatches) - Major state-run and private refiners across Asia are planning to trim their term crude oil purchases but conduct more spot market trades in 2022 in an effort to flexibly manage both global demand and supply risks that could emerge and evolve during the prolonged coronavirus pandemic.

Refiners across Northeast, Southeast and South Asia were generally cautiously optimistic that regional oil demand would extend the recovery trend in 2022. However, taking uncertainties over the impact of omicron variant and the overall unpredictable nature of the pandemic into consideration, the end-users were broadly hesitant to over-commit to fixed-term crude supply deals.

10 feedstock managers and traders at eight major Asian refiners including ENEOS, BPCL, CPC Taiwan, SK Innovation, Idemitsu, PTT and PetroChina surveyed by S&P Global Platts in the first week of 2022 indicated that the companies would prefer to procure more crude and other refinery feedstocks from the spot market, rather than relying heavily on fixed-term supply deals.

"By allowing more room for spot crude purchases, this would enhance trading flexibility and [help refiners] quickly adapt to highly volatile global supply-demand fundamental changes," said a feedstock management source at an Indian refiner, who declined to be identified due to the sensitive nature of corporate trading relationships.

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## Great Hero, Great Commemoration

Iranians and many freedom-loving people in the world in recent days have commemorated the martyrdom anniversary of General Qasem Soleimani and his comrades in style through holding ceremonies and rallies to show the world how much he was popular among the people due to his services for safeguarding peace and security in the region and even in the world.

Martyr Soleimani was a true hero and it was natural that his martyrdom anniversary is held in style by his lovers worldwide and especially in Iran and Iraq which owe their current peace to the braveries of Martyr Soleimani and his comrades.

General Soleimani, commander of the Quds Force of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC), and his Iraqi trenchmate Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, the second-in-command of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Units (PMU), were martyred along with their companions in a U.S. drone strike authorized by former president Donald Trump near Baghdad International Airport on January 3, 2020.

In recent days several ceremonies and rallies were held in Iraq and Iran and in all of them participants have called for taking revenge on the culprits of this inhuman assassination.

Zeinab Soleimani, the daughter of top Iranian anti-terror commander General Soleimani was one of the participants in the ceremonies where she renewed her pledge to avenge her father's assassination.

"My father loved the Iraqi people from the bottom of his heart... He would ponder a lot about a strong Iraq," Zeinab said during a vigil at the Baghdad airport on Sunday night, on the eve of the second martyrdom anniversary of two anti-terror commanders.

Tonight, she said, "We vow to move closer, hand in hand and step by step, to the horizon of exacting 'harsh revenge' on enemies whose hands are stained with their blood."

Zeinab also stressed that "the tears of sorrow ... would soon turn into joyous tears of victory when dear Iraq and all the countries in the region are purged of the filth of the presence of American invaders."

Addressing the Americans, Zeinab made clear that "we will not forget this blood."

At the same time, Iran's ambassador and permanent representative to the United Nations urged the UN Security Council to hold the United States and the Israeli regime responsible for the assassination of Iran's top anti-terror commander General Soleimani.

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## S. Korean Vice FM To Meet JCPOA Negotiators In Vienna

SEOUL (Dispatches) - South Korea's First Vice Foreign Minister is scheduled to meet delegations of JCPOA members states in the ongoing talks in Vienna.

South Korea's First Vice Foreign Minister Choi Jong-Kun arrives at Incheon International Airport, west of Seoul, on Jan. 4, 2022, Yonhap reported.

The sources added that Jong-Kun is scheduled to head for Vienna, where the talks are underway.

He will meet representatives of Iran, China, Russia, France, Britain, Germany as well as the United States in Vienna.

According to the report, the senior South Korean official also plans to meet with the Austrian Deputy Foreign Minister during his five-day visit.

This comes as South Korea's debt to Iran is worth a total of seven billion dollars, which has not been paid since September 2018 under the pretext of US sanctions.

Although South Korea is not a member of the JCPOA, however, due to US sanctions against the Islamic Republic of Iran it has delayed the transfer of Iranian frozen funds to the country.



## Iranian Diplomat Criticizes Afghan Border Guards

TEHRAN (IP) - Assistant to Iranian Foreign Minister and Director-General of West Asia at Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs criticized the unprofessional act of Afghan border guards due to their lack of recognition on border issues by Taliban forces.

Rasoul Mousavi wrote on Twitter: "According to reports, there have been clashes between Iranian, Pakistani and Turkmen border guards on the one hand and Taliban border guards on the other, which are rooted in the unprofessionalism of Afghan border guards and the lack of recognition of border issues by Taliban forces."

On Monday, Taliban forces had gone to the Khamyab district of Jowzjan province to monitor the situation, but they faced clashes with Turkmen border guards.

## Martyr Soleimani's Manner Big Lesson For Next Generations

**KERMAN (IRNA) - Chief of Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces Major General Mohammad Bagheri emphasized on Tuesday that looking at attitudes, spirits, and memos of Martyr Lieutenant General Qasem Soleimani will be a great lesson for all people and the next generations in Iran and other countries.**

Speaking in a visit to Martyr Soleimani's burial site in Kerman on Tuesday, Bagheri addressed reporters as saying that he thanks God for being able to participate in the second martyrdom anniversary of Martyr Soleimani.

He also said that the way of living of the great martyr, including his private life, spiritual and religious manner, social and military management, as well as his assistance to ordinary people and his steadfastness when it came to standing against arrogant powers and the Zionists, is a unique example not only in Iran but also in other states of the region and the whole world.

There are many secrets about his efforts, which had not been uttered by his comrades and friends, but they have started disclosing his attitude, which has been welcomed by Iranian youths, because the hidden lessons of his manners guarantee continuity of the



Islamic Revolution, Islam, and ethics in Iran and the region, Bagheri noted.

Major General Bagheri paid tribute to the late commander of the Qods Force of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) and other martyrs at Kerman cemetery Tuesday morning.

General Soleimani and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, the second-in-command of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Unit (PMU), were assassinated by the United States in Baghdad international airport in a terrorist drone attack on January 3, 2020.

## Conference on Islamic Unity Held In Karachi With Iran's Presence

KARACHI (IRNA) - Religious personalities of the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan strongly condemned the biased approach of global arrogance, including the United States and the Zionist regime against Muslims, and warned against anti-unity conspiracies of common enemies.

A conference titled 'Unity of the Islamic World to Combat Islamophobia' was held on the second anniversary of the martyrdom of Lieutenant General Qasem Soleimani and his companions, hosted by the Culture Center of Iran in Karachi, the capital of Sindh Province.

Secretary General of the World Forum for Proximity of Islamic Schools of Thought Hojjatoleslam Hamid Shahriari and members of his delegation were special guests of event.

Molavi Nazir Ahmad Salami, a member of Iranian Assembly of Experts, Hassan Nourian, the consul general of Iran in Karachi, Kamran Pezeshki, the director of Iranian Culture Center and senior leaders of political and religious parties in Karachi participated in the event.

Conference on Islamic Unity held in Pakistan's Karachi with Iran's presence

Hojjatoleslam Hamid Shahriari as the main speaker of the program highlighting the importance of unity of Muslims and said the enemy is afraid of the formation of the Islamic Union.

He thanked the consulate general and the House of Culture of Iran in Karachi for organizing the Islamic Unity Conference and bringing together prominent personalities and supporters of unity.

The secretary general of the World Forum for Proximity of Islamic Schools of Thought said formation of a united Ummah was one of the ideals of General Soleimani who did not spare any sacrifice to help the terrorized nations and fight against the brutal acts of ISIS in Syria and Iraq because he loved the unity of the Islamic world.

He said Unity of Muslims is the order of the Quran and the Sunnah of the Holy Prophet (PBUH).

"Muslims must unite against the biased approach of the United States and its Western allies," said Asadullah Bhutto, the deputy leader of the Jamaat-e-Islami party in Sindh, while paying tribute to the high-ranking Islamic martyrs, including General Qasem Soleimani.

He added Americans are disgraced today in the region and in other parts of the world and in order to escape defeat and their shameful actions, they are carrying out evil conspiracies in the Islamic world and fanning the flames of division among Muslims.

Praising General Soleimani's position and his sacrifice in the fight against terrorism, the Pakistani politician said terrorism has become a tool and source of income for the arrogant powers like the United States, so Muslims must wake up and do not allow the enemies to accomplish their plans.

Allama Seyed Ahmad Iqbal Razvi, the deputy secretary general of Majlis Wahdat-e-Muslimeen (MWM) said General Soleimani is a martyr of unity and confrontation with the enemies of Islam, and he should not be considered as belonging only to one nation or country.

## Iran Defends Real Human Rights



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Iran's Judiciary Spokesman says that the Islamic Republic defends real human rights, which are Islamic human rights.

Zabihullah Khodaeian, in his live presser on Tuesday, stated: "Having many laws regarding human rights, Iran always observes human rights, while many other countries violate them, especially women's rights to vote."

In further remarks, Khodaeian pointed to the crimes of Mujahedin Khalq Organization (MKO) terrorist group, saying: "Some [group] assassinated 17,000 Iranians in the first days after the Islamic Revolution; Yet they do not have any Special Rapporteur on Human Rights to report and pursue their violations."

He continued: "Some states, like the child-killing Israeli regime, massacre oppressed people with Western-made bombs, but Iran always observes and defends human rights, so it does not need Special Rapporteur on Human Rights."

While condoling the days of mourning for Prophet Muhammad's daughter Fatima (AS) and commemorating the martyrs of the Resistance Front, especially the second martyrdom anniversary of Lt. Gen. Qassem Soleimani, Khodaeian said: "It takes time to get to know General Soleimani politically, socially, culturally, and militarily."

Martyr Soleimani was a symbol of the struggle against the arrogant global powers because he was trained in the humanitarian school of Islam, the spokesman stressed and said wherever the United States stepped in, it sought domination and exploitation. The spokesman said that despite being humble, Martyr Soleimani stood powerfully against the arrogant global powers.

## President Visit to Russia Turning Point in Bilateral Ties

TEHRAN (IRNA) -Iran's Ambassador in Moscow Kazem Jalali has said that the upcoming visit of Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi to Russia will be a turning point in historical relations between the two countries.

The visit will lead to drawing a road map for Iran-Russia cooperation, Jalali told IRNA in an interview.

Such a visit is very important regarding international developments and regional issues and that is why enemies try to damage this travel or the aims of it, the ambassador noted.

Meanwhile, the Islamic Republic of Iran as an effective country in the region enjoys independent foreign policy, Jalali added.

Elaborating on the Moscow visit of the president,



the ambassador said that signing document on comprehensive cooperation between the two countries is not planned.

He went on to say that draft of the comprehensive cooperation has been prepared by Iran, but signing it needs time because the Russian side should also give opinion about it.

As the ambassador underlined, promotion of relations with neighbors is among the main principles of Raisi's administration.

In Moscow, Iranian president will meet with his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin, Jalali said, adding that the meeting will focus on international, regional, and bilateral issues.

According to early reports, President Raisi will leave for Russia in coming days.

## Iran Air Expands Air Routes

TEHRAN (IP) - Iran Air has launched Mashhad-Lahore and Mashhad-Karachi flights since January 1.

The National Airline of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Iran Air, launches Mashhad-Lahore and Mashhad-Karachi flights from January 1 and 5 respectively.

The flights are arranged in response to the demands of the businessmen and traders, Pakistani pilgrimages, and university students.

According to the schedules, each Saturday, the flights depart from Mashhad International Airport at 4:50 am with flight number 816 and arrive at Lahore International Airport at 10. The return flights are on the same day with flight number 817 at 11 local times and arrive at Mashhad International Airport at 13:40.

Similarly, Iran Air will have flights from Mashhad International Airport to Karachi Quaid-e-Azam Jinnah International Airport each Wednesday from January 5. Flights depart Mashhad at 9:30 with flight number 822 and arrive in Karachi at 13:25. The return flights will be on the same day at 14:25 with flight number 823 and arrive in Mashhad at 15:40.

Previously on November 6, 2021, the advisor to the Prime Minister of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan on Commerce, Industries and production and Investment, Abdul Razak Dawood, met with Iran Minister of Transport and Urban Development, Rostam Ghasemi, in which the two sides discussed facilitation of mutual economic transactions.

Currently, Iran Air has flights from Mashhad International Airport to Kuwait Airport on Saturdays and Wednesdays and there are already flights from Tehran to Karachi.

## Zionism Has No Place in Future World

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's foreign minister has slammed recent anti-Iranian remarks by Israel's foreign minister Yair Lapid, saying that the Islamic Republic will defend its interests with power.

Hossein Amir-Abdollahian's remarks came in a Monday tweet in response to earlier claims by Lapid that the Zionist regime "could attack Iran if necessary without informing the Biden administration."

In an interview on Friday, Lapid alleged that "Israel has capabilities, some of which the world, and even some experts in the field, cannot even imagine."

Reacting to Lapid's allegations, Amir-Abdollahian took to Twitter saying that the senseless remarks made by the "fake Israeli regime against the great Iranian nation"

are a dream, which will never come true.

"We will defend the nation's rights, interests and progress with power and wisdom," Iran's foreign minister said.

"Zionism has no place in the future world," Iran's top diplomat emphasized.

The Israeli regime has never stopped advertising the threat of "military action" against Iran and falsely accusing the Islamic Republic of seeking to acquire non-conventional military capability.

Iranian generals, for their part, have decisively warned the Tel Aviv regime on multiple occasions against any adventurism against the country, pledging a crushing response to any attack.

TEHRAN (MNA) - Members of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA) Export Development Committee gathered on Tuesday to discuss the details of the Trade Development Organization (TPO)'s export development roadmap document.

During the meeting while reviewing the draft of the non-oil export development document, the attendees emphasized the need for assessing the level of achievement for the goals defined in the roadmap in certain intervals.

According to the members of the ICCIMA Export Development Committee, if the implementation of the defined programs and the achievement of goals set in this document are not assessed and monitored periodically, it will eventually fail like the previous documents.

In this meeting, Amir Abedi, chairman of the ICCIMA Export Development Committee, announced that the committee has planned a meeting with the TPO Head Alireza Peyman-Pak to further explore various aspects of the mentioned

document, saying that this meeting will be an opportunity for exporters to review the draft document, and raise any issues or opinions.

Abedi criticized the inactivity and ineffectiveness of exports in Iran's economy over the past decade and said: "The diversity of the country's export products and the markets with which we are associated has sharply decreased and unfortunately adverse environmental factors have negatively affected the country's production and exports."

"The country's non-oil exports are not being supported appropriately, and as a result, we are witnessing a decrease in the level of exports," he added.

TPO started the process of drafting the roadmap document for the development of the country's non-oil exports about five months ago. The program is set to increase exports from \$35 billion in the previous fiscal year (ended on March 20, 2020) to \$75 billion in the calendar year 1404 (begins in March 2025).

The draft of this document was previously presented to the members of the ICCIMA Export Development Committee during a meeting with the TPO advisors and experts.

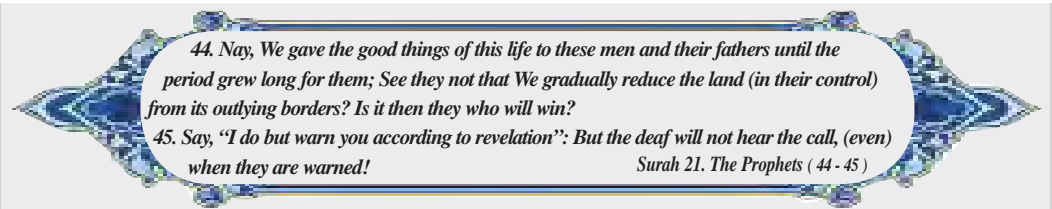
## Non-Oil Export Development Roadmap Discussed





## PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	12:09
■ Evening (Maghreb)	17:25
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	05:45
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	07:14



# Talks Underway For Exports of Iran Oil To Sri Lanka

**IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK**

**TEHRAN – Ambassador of Iran to Sri Lanka Mr. Hashem Ashjaazadeh rejected the reports that Sri Lanka sends low quality tea to Iran in exchange for its dues, reiterating that talks are underway for exporting oil to Sri Lanka**

Speaking to ILNA, Ashjaazadeh rejected the reports that Sri Lanka barter second and third class tea for oil with Iran, adding that the two countries have signed an MoU wherein the mechanism of payment has been changed and now traders of the two countries reach an agreement and then instead of money transfer from Iran to Sri Lanka, the money is paid to Sri Lankan trade partners via Sri Lankan's debts to Iran. He noted of course those traders who are currently active in Sri Lanka are noble traders who try to import good quality tea from Sri Lanka and if low quality tea is imported, it is not because of the MoU and the agreement and it is because of the trader.

Touching upon the recent MoU between Colombo and Tehran regarding mechanism for payment of Sri Lanka's debts to Iran, the diplomat said that it is not correct to use the term of "barter" for this agreement and MoU, and it is not in fact any barter and it is only a mechanism for return of Iran's prolonged debts.

Ashjaazadeh added that in fact in the MoU which has been signed for Iran's nine-year-old debts which is estimated around \$215m, tea is an essential commodity as it once used to be exported to Iran even before this agreement, and it has been taken into consideration in the agreement and therefore by monthly import of tea worth of around \$5m, the prolonged debts of Sri Lanka to Iran will be settled.



He added that of course Iran is willing to get its money through the common banking systems but due to some reasons it is impossible and therefore choosing tea in Sri Lanka as a commodity for barter in exchange of money is quite logical because Sri Lanka is one of the best tea producing countries and currently considerable amount of tea is imported into Iran from Sri Lanka which is welcomed by Iranian consumers.

The ambassador reiterated that in the MoU it has been stipulated that in case sanctions are removed, the agreement will be halted and money plus its interests will be paid via common banking systems. He stipulated that the MoU is currently about for payment of Sri Lanka's debts to Iran and currently Iran does not intend to expand it to other things.

Ashjaazadeh noted that this MoU was mostly welcomed in the Sri Lankan media because Sri Lanka is currently grappling with the debts and financial problems. He also rejected that this agreement and export of tea from Sri Lanka will be a blow to Iranian tea planters and said according to the statistics, Iran produces annually 30,000 tons at its best and some of this volume is also exported while Iran needs between 100,000 to 120,000 tons of tea annually, and it means the country at least needs importing some 80,000 tons of tea annually to meet its demands. He said therefore import of tea is no new issue because 80 percent of the domestic demands are imported and Sri Lanka is one of the best tea producing countries in the world.

The diplomat went on to say that Sri Lankans seek importing oil and fuel from Iran and the talks are underway as a couple of months ago Sri Lankan energy minister had a visit to Tehran, adding that the mechanism for payment for the oil sale is the main hurdle for oil export to Sri Lanka and recent MoU may resolve the problem.

## Iran's Trade With Turkey Rises 75%

**IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK**

TEHRAN - Iran and Turkey registered \$4.29 billion in trade from the beginning of 2021 to the end of November to register a 75.95% growth compared with last year's corresponding period.



Iran exported goods worth \$2.22 billion during the period, up 147.42% year-on-year, while imports from Turkey grew by 34% YOY to \$2.07 billion, latest data by Turkish Statistical Institute show.

Iran and Turkey exchanged \$440.82 million worth of goods and commodities in November 2021, 84.81% higher than the value registered in the same period of last year.

Iranian exports to Turkey accounted for \$292.66 million of the sum, up 147.42% YOY while Turkey's exports to Iran stood at \$219.3 million, up 26.41%.

## No Ban on Imports of Covid Vaccines

TEHRAN (IFP) - Iran's Food and Drug Administration says the Islamic Republic has not banned coronavirus vaccine imports.

"According to an announcement by the National Taskforce Against the Coronavirus, the import of coronavirus vaccine is not prohibited and vaccine imports from abroad will continue if need be," Food and Drug Administration's head Bahram Darayi said.

"The priority of the 13th administration is to supply vaccines from domestic and foreign channels, and with the increase in domestic production, the approach of the National Taskforce Against the coronavirus is to reduce imports, and if the country's needs are fully met with Iranian vaccines, import restrictions will be imposed," the head of Iran's Food and Drug Administration explained.

On Sunday, some media outlets quoted Darayi as saying that the country has banned Covid-19 vaccine imports.

Over 175 million doses of Covid-19 vaccine have been supplied in Iran so far out of which 156 million shots have been imported and the rest were domestically manufactured.

## Loading, Unloading of Goods Up 23% at Bushehr port

TEHRAN (MNA) - Loading and unloading of commodities at Bushehr port in the southwest of Iran rose 23 percent during the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21-December 21, 2021), as compared to the same period in the previous year, a provincial official announced.

Siavash Arjomandzadeh, the director-general of Bushehr province's Ports and Maritime Department, said that 3.257 million tons of goods were loaded and unloaded at the port during the nine-month period.

Of the mentioned figure, 2.129 million tons were non-oil and 1.127 million tons were oil products.

As previously reported, loading and unloading of goods in the ports of Iran rose 15.2 percent during the first nine months of this year, as compared to the same period in the previous year.

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

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

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

## OPEC Sec. Gen. Elected Via Consensus



TEHRAN (Shana) – Oil Minister Javad Owji said that OPEC's new secretary general was elected via consensus.

A special ministerial meeting was scheduled for today at OPEC Ministerial Meeting (held on December 1, 2021), Owji said after the Special Meeting of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries held via video conference on Monday, January 3, 2022.

Making decisions on the new OPEC secretary general was the only meeting agenda. As we know, the current secretary general (Mohammed Sanusi Barkindo) is due to step down at the end of July, he stated.

Introducing nominees for OPEC's new secretary general was considered some time ago and member countries were called at the 182nd Ordinary Meeting of OPEC Conference for announcing their nominees within two weeks.

Despite the call, Kuwait was the only country that officially announced its nominee for the position about two months ago and none of the other OPEC member countries introduced a nominee for the post, he added.

Given the conditions and experiences of Kuwaiti nominee, member countries reached a consensus at the meeting to appoint Haitham Al-Ghais as OPEC's new secretary general for three years, Owji said. The new secretary general will begin his term as of July 2022.

## No Two-Rate Forex Next Year

**IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK**

TEHRAN - Head of Iran's Planning and Budget Organization says that from next year we will not have a two-rate currency in the market, and if we want to allocate subsidies to goods, it will be in the form of rials.

Massoud Mirkazemi's remarks mean the complete elimination of the preferred currency of 4,200 toman for the importation of goods and medicines.

Mirkazemi confirmed the elimination of the 4200 toman currency, saying that under next year's law, we cannot subsidize 4,200 toman and can only support low-income deciles with rials.

In the past few weeks, government officials have repeatedly announced that they will not stop importing 4,200 toman worth of medicines.

Speculation of the elimination of the preferred currency began after the release of the text of the 1401 budget bill,

which doubled the exchange rate to 23,000 toman, and there was no news of the 4,200 toman in the budget.

This fueled a wave of concerns about unbridled inflation of essential items and medicines by eliminating the preferred currency, which media outlets close to the government and security agencies have also dealt with extensively over the past few weeks, calling the preferred currency "a source of corruption."

Mirkazemi claimed that all reports and analysis indicate that the subsidy that enters the market through two exchange rates is not effective and does not fall into the people's table.

At the same time, Mohammad Reza Mirtajeddini, a member of the 1401 Budget Consolidation commission, announced that the system wanted to "realize" subsidies instead of the current state, which is foreign currency, and distribute it directly instead of indirect and hidden subsidies.

## Iran to Produce 141m Tons of Petrochemicals by 2027

TEHRAN (MNA) – Deputy Oil Minister said that Iran will produce 141 million tons of petrochemicals before the termination of 7th Five-Year Socioeconomic and Cultural Development Plan in 2027.

Morteza Shah-Mirzaei Deputy Oil Minister and Chief Executive of National Petrochemical Company (NPC) said on Monday in the first meeting of "Challenges of Petrochemical Industry and Solution to Solve Problems" and put the current production capacity of petrochemical industry of the country at 90 million tons/year, expandable to 141 million tons/year up to the end of 7th Five-Year Socioeconomic and Cultural Development Plan in 2027.

Shah-Mirzaei also put the current feedstock of petrochemical industry of the country at 52 tons.

He went on to say that 67 petrochemical companies are producing 65 million tons of petrochemical products in the country.

Turning to the export of petrochemicals in the country, deputy oil minister stated that 40 million tons of petrochemical products are currently produced in the country, 30 million tons of which is allocated for export while the rest 10 million tons are sold at the domestic market.

CEO of National Petrochemical Company (NPC) pointed out that 141 million tons of petrochemical products will be produced annually by the end of 7th Five-Year Socioeconomic and Cultural Development Plan in 2027.

In addition, production capacity of polymerized products will increase from eight million tons in the current year in 2021 to 19 million tons in 2027, he added.

## Aluminum Ingot Production up 23%

TEHRAN (MNA) - Production of aluminum ingot in Iran rose 23 percent during the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21-December 21, 2021), as compared to the same period of time in the past year, Iranian Mines and Mining Industries Development and Renovation Organization (IMIDRO) announced.

The country's nine-month aluminum ingot output stood at 400,481 tons, while the figure was 325,223 tons in the same time span of the previous year.

As previously announced by IMIDRO, the production of aluminum ingot in Iran rose 61 percent during the previous Iranian calendar year 1399 (ended on March 20, 2021), compared to the figure for the preceding year.

The country's aluminum ingot output stood at 446,800 tons in the previous year.

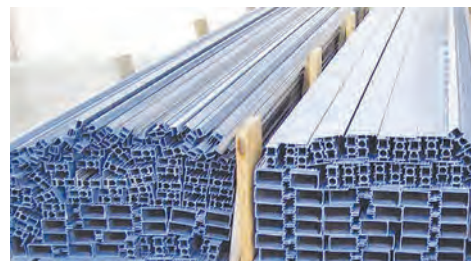
Iran's major aluminum producers had managed to produce 278,318 tons of the product in the Iranian calendar year 1398.

The country's aluminum ingot production in the Iranian calendar year 1398 had declined eight percent in comparison to the figure for its preceding year.

IMIDRO data show that among the country's top producers, Iranian Aluminum Company (IRALCO) had the best performance in the previous year producing 185,000 tons of aluminum ingots.

Aluminum ingot production in the country reached 41,000 tons in the last month of the previous year (February 19-March 20, 2021), registering a 38 percent rise compared to the 30,000 tons in the preceding year's same period.

The official put the value of the Iranian mining industry's production at about \$22 billion, saying that the country is relatively self-sufficient in minerals and a great deal is also exported every year.





## Covid Cases Halt Canaries-Bound Cruise for 3,000

LISBON (Dispatches) - Some 3,000 passengers, mostly Germans, saw their Canary Islands-bound cruise halted Monday after a Covid-19 outbreak forced them to disembark in Lisbon, Portuguese authorities said.

The first passengers to test positive on the German-built AIDAnova were transferred to a bus bound for Lisbon airport before dawn, Lisbon's chief of maritime police Diogo Vieira Branco said. He added the remainder were set to follow by the end of the afternoon.

The vessel with 2,844 passengers and 1,353 crew aboard docked in Lisbon after arriving from the northwestern Spanish port of La Coruna.



## German FM Heads to Washington on Wednesday

BERLIN (Dispatches) - German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock will travel to Washington on Wednesday, where she will discuss topics including the Russia-Ukraine conflict with her U.S. counterpart, Antony Blinken, and other politicians, a ministry spokesperson said on Monday.

Other topics on Baerbock's first official visit to the United States will include future dialogue with Russia, climate, foreign policy and strengthening democracies, the spokesperson said.

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz's foreign policy advisor will also meet his Russian and French counterparts this week, government spokesperson Steffen Hebestreit told a regular news conference.



## World Powers Pledge to Halt Spread of Nuclear Weapons



LONDON (Dispatches) - Five global nuclear powers pledged Monday to prevent atomic weapons spreading and to avoid nuclear conflict, in a rare joint statement setting aside rising West-East tensions to reaffirm a goal of a nuke-free world.

"We believe strongly that the further spread of such weapons must be prevented," said permanent UN Security Council members China, France, Russia, the UK and United States, adding: "A nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought."

The statement was issued after the latest review of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) -- which first came into force in 1970 -- was postponed from its scheduled date of January 4 to later in the year due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Putting aside current differences that have caused major tensions between both China and Russia and their Western partners, the five world powers said they saw "the avoidance of war between nuclear-weapon states and the reduction of strategic risks as our foremost responsibilities."

"As nuclear use would have far-reaching consequences, we also affirm that nuclear weapons -- for as long as they continue to exist -- should serve defensive purposes, deter aggression, and prevent war," they said according to the English text released by the White House.

The powers added: "We each intend to maintain and further strengthen our national measures to prevent unauthorized or unintended use of nuclear weapons."

The statement also contained a pledge to abide by a key article in the NPT under which states committed to full nuclear disarmament in the future.

"We remain committed to our NPT obligations, including our Article 6 obligation" on a treaty on general and complete disarmament under strict control.

According to the UN, a total of 191 states have joined the treaty. The provisions of the treaty call for a review of its operation every five years.

The statement comes as tensions between Russia and the United States have reached heights rarely seen since the Cold War over a troop build-up by Moscow close to the Ukrainian border.

That has raised fears that the Kremlin, worried by the possibility of further eastward expansion of NATO, is planning a new attack on its pro-Western neighbor. Crunch talks between Russia and the US on European security are expected in Geneva on January 10.

The rise of China meanwhile under President Xi Jinping has also raised concerns that tensions with Washington could lead to conflict, notably over the island of Taiwan.

Beijing considers Taiwan part of its territory and has vowed to one day seize it, by force if necessary.

## Erdogan to Visit Saudi Arabia In February

ISTANBUL (Dispatches) - Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan said he will make a visit next month to Saudi Arabia, whose ties with Ankara have been strained in recent years.

Asked about resolving issues in exports to Saudi Arabia as he left a trade event, Erdogan said he would travel to the Gulf state in February.

"He is expecting me in February. He made a promise and I will make my visit to Saudi Arabia in February," he said in a video posted on social media, without giving a name.

Exports to Saudi Arabia have plunged in recent years due to the fraught ties between the countries. Turkey is now working to mend relations with regional powers, including the United Arab Emirates, as its economy grapples with a currency crash and soaring inflation. The Saudi government's media office did not immediately respond to a request for comment.



## 4,400 Migrants Lost at Sea Bound for Spain in 2021

BARCELONA (Dispatches) - More than 4,400 migrants, including at least 205 children, were lost at sea trying to reach Spain in 2021, a monitoring group said on Monday - more than double the figure from the previous year and the most since the group began counting in 2018.

The group, Walking Borders, or Caminando Fronteras, blamed increasingly dangerous routes, inferior boats and the fear of some vessels to help migrants at sea for the surge in deaths. According to Spanish official statistics, 39,000 undocumented migrants successfully reached Spain by sea or land last year, a similar figure to the previous year.

Walking Borders said more than 90% of those missing or dead were lost on 124 shipwrecks en route to Spain's Canary Islands in the Atlantic Ocean as of Dec. 20. Since 2020, the islands off the coast of Africa have become the main destination for migrants trying to reach Spain, with a much smaller share trying to cross the Mediterranean Sea to the Spanish mainland.

Helena Maleno, founder of Caminando Fronteras, told Reuters the group gathered its data from hotlines set up for migrants on vessels in trouble to call for help, and from family members seeking information.

The group investigates the fate of each boat. It presumes those missing at sea for at least a month to be dead. Close to 95% of the figures represent people who are missing.

The United Nations International Organization for Migration (IOM) counted 955 people who died or went missing in 2021 trying to reach the Canary Islands by Dec. 22, the highest figure it documented since 2014.

The IOM obtains its data from official records, media reports and other groups including Walking Borders, but says its numbers are conservative and the real toll is probably higher.

Spain does not keep figures for people who die trying to reach its shores, and an Interior Ministry spokesperson declined to comment on the latest figures.

## South Korea's President Promises Final Push for North Korea Peace

SEOUL (Dispatches) - South Korean President Moon Jae-in vowed to use his last months in office to press for a diplomatic breakthrough with North Korea, despite public silence from Pyongyang over his attempts for a declaration of peace between the two sides.

"The government will pursue normalization of inter-Korean relations and an irreversible path to peace until the end," Moon said in his final New Year's address before his five-year term ends in May. "I hope efforts for dialogue will continue in the next administration too."

In his own address on New Year's Eve, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un made no mention of Moon's calls for a declaration officially ending the 1950-1953 Korean War, or of stalled denuclearisation talks with the United States.

Moon held multiple summits with Kim, including once in Pyongyang, during a flurry of negotiations in 2018 and 2019, before talks stalled amid disagreements over international demands that the North surrender its arsenal of nuclear weapons, and Pyongyang's call for Washington and Seoul to ease sanctions and drop other "hostile policies."

Moon is pushing an "end of war declaration" as a way to jumpstart those stalled negotiations and his administration has hinted at backchannel discussions.

But North Korea has not publicly responded to the latest push, and the United States has said it supports the idea but may disagree with the South over its timing.

"It is true that there is still a long way to go," Moon acknowledged, but argued that if inter-Korean relations improve, the international community will follow. Moon said his outreach to North Korea had been enabled by a large military buildup that helped make South Korea safer.

"Peace is possible on strong security," he said. The COVID-19 pandemic overshadowed the standoff with North Korea, as Pyongyang put the country into an unprecedented lockdown and Moon faced domestic pressure to tamp down the first major coronavirus outbreak outside of China in early 2020.

Since then, South Korea used aggressive tracking and tracing, as well as social distancing rules and a belated but thorough vaccination campaign to keep overall cases and deaths relatively low by global standards.



## Trump Endorses to Hungary's Orban

WASHINGTON (Dispatches)

- Former U.S. president Donald Trump enthusiastically backed the reelection of Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban, a hero of the far-right who has been accused of creeping authoritarianism.

In a statement issued along the lines of his frequent blessings to Republican candidates in primary elections at home, Trump wrote that the Hungarian leader has his "Complete support and Endorsement" in elections expected in April.

"He has done a powerful and wonderful job in protecting Hungary, stopping illegal immigration, creating jobs, trade, and should be allowed to continue to do so in the upcoming Election. He is a strong leader and respected by all," Trump wrote.

Trump welcomed Orban to the White House in 2019, a symbolic acceptance for the prime minister who frequently clashes with the European Union leadership and was snubbed both by President Joe Biden and Trump's predecessor Barack Obama.

Some Trump administration officials argued at the time that the goal was to keep in the Western fold a leader who had flirted with Russia, and then secretary of state Mike Pompeo made a point of meeting activists who ran afoul of Orban during a visit to Budapest.

But Orban has increasingly been hailed both by Trump's wing of the Republican Party and European far-right leaders such as France's Marine Le Pen, especially over his refusal to accept refugees.

Tucker Carlson, a Fox News host close to Trump, broadcast last year from Budapest and was given an interview with Orban as well as a helicopter tour of a border fence.

Orban has also sought to mobilize support on opposition to LGBTQ rights, with a ban on "promotion and display" of homosexuality and a related referendum expected on the same day as the election.

Orban, who has been in charge since 2010, faces a potentially serious challenge from Peter Marki-Zay, who describes himself as a traditional Catholic conservative and has vowed to scrap homophobic laws if elected.







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## Daimler Expects Chips to Remain Scarce in 2022

BERLIN (Dispatches) - Daimler Chief Technology Officer Markus Schaefer said the luxury carmaker expects chip supply to remain scarce throughout 2022, particularly in the first half of the year.

"Chip scarcity will also accompany us in 2022, particularly in the first half," Schaefer said to a journalist roundtable. "We do not expect significant production capacity increases in the first half of the year ... these will barely come in the full year," he said.

Daimler, soon to be renamed Mercedes-Benz, produced 23.9% fewer cars in October 2021 than the previous year and 21.8% less in November, mirroring a production drop as carmakers worldwide struggle to get their hands on enough chips to meet demand.



## Keeping OPEC+ Pact Is Top Priority

LONDON (Dispatches) - OPEC's secretary general-elect told Reuters a top priority for him is to keep the group's pact with Russia and other outside producers in place, saying it was in the wider interest of the oil industry.

The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries on Monday agreed to appoint Haitham al-Ghais, a former Kuwaiti governor to OPEC, as its new secretary general, to succeed Nigeria's Mohammad Barkindo, who has held the position since 2016 and helped to clinch the deal with non-OPEC.

Al-Ghais will take over the role on Aug. 1 after the second of Barkindo's two three-year terms ends.

The OPEC+ alliance between OPEC and other oil producers, called the Declaration of Cooperation (DoC), has helped to support the global market since 2017 when it was set up. Oil prices have recovered, in part because of record OPEC+ output cuts agreed in April 2020 as the pandemic hit demand.

"That's one of my top priorities - to support the continuation of this Declaration of Cooperation," al-Ghais told Reuters, asked if he supported keeping the pact into 2023.

"It's in the wider interest of the industry and all the 23 countries that have signed up to this agreement."

In line with the April 2020 pact, which OPEC+ has agreed should say in place until the end of this year, the producers have been easing their output curbs. They are expected to confirm another increment to supply in February when they meet on Tuesday.

Al-Ghais, a veteran of Kuwait Petroleum Corp. and Kuwait's OPEC governor from 2017 to June 2021, currently serves as Deputy Managing Director for International Marketing at KPC.

He said he was "proud and humbled" by the support he received at the OPEC meeting. "Everyone was so supportive and kind with their words," he said.

His appointment, early into a meeting lasting about an hour, contrasts with previous protracted elections when several OPEC countries had nominated candidates.

Al-Ghais said he brought a strong commitment to the role plus experience of OPEC+ panels such as the Joint Technical Committee (JTC) and the Joint Ministerial Monitoring Committee (JMMC), which study the market and help the full group of OPEC+ ministers to decide policy.

"My personal commitment and of course Kuwait's commitment to the DoC is unwavering," he said. "I have hands-on experience of what the JTC does, what the JMMC does. I've attended all these meetings since 2017, I haven't missed a single meeting even when I had a broken leg."

Al-Ghais also said his being brought up in a diplomatic family - his father was a Kuwaiti ambassador - gave him useful experience, as did working earlier in his career in Kuwait's foreign ministry.

"It has given me a kind of flavour of how to act diplomatically and how to bring diplomacy into the equation - that's also another plus to the position and that will help me in this journey hopefully when I take over in August," he said.

"One of the key roles of the secretary general is to be a diplomat. We have 13 member-countries."

## Sri Lanka Unveils \$1Bb Relief Plan as Soaring Food Prices Bite

COLOMBO (Dispatches) - Sri Lanka will increase pay and pension for government employees, remove some taxes on food and medicine, and provide cash for its poorest citizens as prices of essential items surge in the nation that is running out of foreign exchange to pay for imports.

President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's government will increase salaries of public sector staff by 5,000 rupees a month (\$25) from January, his brother and Finance Minister Basil Rajapaksa said in a briefing in Colombo late Monday. About 2 million people on income support will receive 1,000 rupees each and the administration will also buy crops at higher-than-market rates from farmers who suffer losses due to a government rule to stop fertilizer use.

In total, the package amounts to 229 billion rupees, about 1.2% of gross domestic product, and will be re-allocated from the 3.9 trillion rupees budgeted to be spent in the whole of 2022. No new taxes will be announced, Rajapaksa said.

The moves seek to calm public anger about rising prices of wheat, sugar and milk powder, which the island nation is struggling to purchase from abroad as the local currency depreciates and inflates its import bill. The coronavirus pandemic has hurt Sri Lanka's crucial tourism sector, stoking debate among policy makers about whether it should seek a bailout from the International Monetary Fund or rely on bilateral emergency support from nations including China and India.

Sri Lanka's sovereign dollar bonds had gained earlier Monday ahead of a planned cabinet meeting to consider whether the nation should seek IMF support. The government hasn't made a decision, Rajapaksa said.

Sri Lanka has \$500 million of dollar bonds maturing Jan. 18 and another \$1 billion in July. It has \$3.1 billion of foreign exchange reserves, roughly enough to pay for two months of imports, based on extrapolations from previous government calculations. Headline inflation accelerated to 12.1% in December, the second-fastest pace in Asia after Pakistan.



## Russian Annual Oil Output Recovers in 2021 After Slump

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russia's annual oil production rose by more than 2% last year thanks to the easing of output cuts by the OPEC+ group of leading oil producers after a pandemic-induced decline in 2020, data showed.

Russian oil and gas condensate output rose to 10.52 million barrels per day (bpd) last year, according to energy ministry data cited by the Interfax news agency and Reuters calculations, from 10.27 million bpd in 2020.

In tons, oil and gas condensate output increased to 524.05 million in 2021 from 512.68 million tons in 2020, but was still below a post-Soviet record-high of 560.2 million, or 11.25 million bpd, seen in 2019.

According to Interfax, Russian oil exports outside the former Soviet Union declined by 2.2% in 2021 to 214.4 million tons. It also said that Russian natural gas output jumped by 10% last year to 762.3 billion cubic meters.

In April 2020, Russia agreed to reduce its oil production by more than 2 million bpd, an unprecedented voluntary cut, along with other leading oil producers and the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC).

Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak has said that country's oil output is expected to rise further to 540-560 million tons (10.8-11.2 million bpd) in 2022, and to 542-562 million tons in 2023.

He has also said that Russia will restore its oil production to pre-pandemic levels by May 2022, though the timeline has been questioned by some analysts.

Many oil producers have reported they are almost out of spare production capacity having reduced output in tandem with other OPEC+ producers.

OPEC+ is now easing its output curbs, and in early December agreed to stick to its plan to increase output in January by 400,000 bpd.

## Singapore's 2021 GDP Grows at Fastest Pace in Over a Decade

SINGAPORE (Dispatches) - Singapore's economy expanded at its fastest annual pace in over a decade in 2021 as the country emerged from its worst recession on record, caused by the deep hit to activity from the coronavirus pandemic.

The city-state's economy grew 7.2% in 2021, preliminary data showed on Monday, broadly in line with the government's official projection and rebounding from the record 5.4% contraction in 2020.

The financial and transport hub, often seen as a bellwether of global growth,

has staged a rocky recovery as governments around the world shift their coronavirus strategies to living with the pandemic, away from "zero-COVID" policies.

Singapore's annual gross domestic product growth was the fastest since a 14.5% expansion in 2010, when the economy emerged from the global financial crisis.

"I'm expecting growth to be relatively buoyant. As the world economy starts to improve, I think that will also help to support the overall external demand conditions for Singapore," said MUFU analyst Jeff Ng. "The main threat continues to be inflation."

The government has previously said it expects GDP to grow 3% to 5% in 2022.

GDP rose 5.9% in October-December on a year-on-year basis, the Ministry of Trade and Industry said in a statement, faster than the 5.4% growth forecast in a Reuters poll on analysts.

GDP grew 2.6% on a quarter-on-quarter seasonally adjusted basis in October-December, higher than the 1.2% growth in preceding quarter.

Separately, the Southeast Asian city-state on Monday posted a preliminary 5% rise in private home prices in the fourth quarter, the most since 2010.

The government implemented a package of measures to cool its property market last month, including raising stamp duties and tightening loan limits.

The government has flagged a plan to raise the goods and services tax by 2 percentage points to 9% between 2022 and 2025.

While analysts expect the economy to continue to grow, they cautioned that the Omicron coronavirus variant could become a drag if social distancing rules are tightened again.

The city-state has vaccinated 87% of its population. As of Saturday, 41% of the population has received their COVID-19 booster shot.

## Turkish Inflation Surges to Highest Level Since 2002

ANKARA (Dispatches) - Turkish inflation surged to a 19-year high in December, propelled by a slump in the lira and President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's push for cheaper borrowing.

The annual consumer inflation rate rose to 36.08% last month, the highest since September 2002 and up sharply from 21.31% in November.

The figure far exceeded the 27.36% median estimate in a Bloomberg survey of 19 analysts.

Turkey's central bank has slashed its benchmark interest rate by 500 basis points since September in a series of moves encouraged by Erdogan, who has attacked elevated borrowing costs as a challenge for businesses and a brake on economic growth. The cuts have sent the lira into a tailspin that's fueled consumer price rises.

The lira recovered some of its losses in December after Erdogan introduced a mechanism that promises to compensate holders of the lira when the currency weakens to a certain level. However, the currency remains about 31% weaker than it was on Sept. 23, when the central bank started cutting interest rates.

The lira's slide kept Turkey's inflation in double digits since late 2019

The acceleration in inflation takes Turkey's benchmark interest rate adjusted for inflation to negative 22.08%, the lowest real yield among emerging markets.

The decision to slash five percentage points off the central bank's benchmark rate led to an around 44% slide in the lira last year, making it the worst among all major currencies tracked by Bloomberg. The currency also weakened after the December inflation report and was trading 2.3% lower as of 10:30 a.m. local time.

"We expect the headline inflation to accelerate until May-June," said Ozlem Bayraktar Goksen, Istanbul-based chief economist at Tacirler Yatirim. "We don't see a change in policy rate in the first quarter in line with the central bank's guidance."

Below are more details from the data:

\*Annual price gains in food, which makes up roughly a quarter of the consumer basket, reached 43.8% in December, well above the central bank's official estimate of 23.4%

\*The rate of inflation in energy rose to 42.93% in December from 32.14% the previous month

\*A core inflation index showed prices excluding volatile items such as food and energy rose an annual 31.88% compared to 17.62% in November, a sign of strong inflationary pressures underlying the headline figure

Though rising inflation has hurt Erdogan's popularity ahead of the 2023 election, he's insisted he will push on with a policy shift he said aims to boost manufacturing and exports and reduce the influence of international markets on Turkish monetary policy.

## Apple Becomes First U.S. Company To Hit \$3 Trillion Market Value



NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Apple Inc became the first U.S. company to hit \$3 trillion in market capitalization, thanks to investor confidence that the iPhone maker will keep launching best-selling products as it explores new markets such as automated cars and metaverse.

On the first day of trading in 2022, the company's shares hit a record of \$182.88 in mid-day trading.

The world's most valuable company is the first to reach the milestone as investors bet that consumers will continue to shell out top dollar for iPhones, MacBooks and services such as Apple TV and Apple Music.

"The linchpin to Apple's valuation re-rating remains its Services business which we believe is worth \$1.5 trillion in the eyes of the Street," Wedbush Securities analyst Daniel Ives said.

"Being the first company to join the \$3 trillion club is a 'flex-the-muscles moment' for (CEO Tim) Cook & Co."

Apple shared the \$2 trillion market value club with Microsoft Corp (MSFT.O), which is now worth about \$2.53 trillion. Alphabet and Amazon.com Inc have market values above \$1 trillion.

The rapid embrace of technologies such as 5G, AR/VR and artificial intelligence has also helped these stocks become market darlings as investors moved towards cash-rich companies and away from businesses that have been more sensitive to economic growth.

Apple's quick adoption of 5G, a technology that has broad implications in the future, provided a big boost. It recently launched iPhone 13 in its second wave of phones with 5G technology.

In China, one of Apple's biggest markets, it continued to lead the smartphone market for the second straight month, beating rivals such as Vivo and Xiaomi, recent data from CounterPoint Research showed.



## Iranian Student Ranks First In a Neuroscience Competition

TEHRAN (IP) - Fatemeh Tirgar, a Ph.D. student in Neuroscience, Tehran University of Medical Sciences, School of Advanced Technologies in Medicine, won first place in the American Society for Neuroscience Congress competition.

The American Society for Neuroscience Congress Competition is the largest and most important international congress in neuroscience held annually by the American Neuroscience Society.

One of the most important parts of the congress is the scientific competition in various fields of neuroscience, in which Fatemeh Tirgar was able to win first place.



## Gas Shortage Hits Pakistan's Exports

ISLAMABAD (Dispatches) - Pakistan's natural gas shortage is hurting its most important export industry, putting even more stress on an economy already struggling with accelerating inflation and a weakening currency.

About \$250 million of textiles exports were lost last month after mills in Punjab were forced to shut for 15 days, said Shahid Sattar, executive director of All Pakistan Textile Mills Association. Factories in the province are dependent on regasified imports of liquefied natural gas, while domestic supply is being diverted to other regions, he said.

Pakistan has become a fast-growing import market for LNG as local supply has subsided over the last few years. But competition for the fuel — used as an electricity feedstock and for heating and cooking — has intensified due to global shortages, sending spot prices to levels that Pakistan can't afford.

The textiles industry — which supplies everything from denim jeans to hats to buyers in the U.S. and Europe — is one of the country's few economic bright spots. Production grew almost 6% in the nine months through March 2021 and the sector accounted for 60% of total exports, government data show.

"The high gas prices are prohibitive," Sattar said in an interview. The "supply shortfall is due to the energy ministry's inability to arrange supply, and is hurting the very future of Pakistan's exports and economy."

The country exported \$11.4 billion of textiles in the nine months through March 2021, according to government data. Based on those figures, the \$250 million probably amounted to around 20% of Pakistan's textiles exports last month, according to Bloomberg calculations.

The gas shortage is hitting Pakistan at a critical economic and political juncture. The country is struggling with accelerating inflation and a weakening currency, with support for Prime Minister Imran Khan's ruling party ebbing ahead of national elections due in 2023. The government also needs to raise taxes, and has just increased petrol price levies, as a pre-condition to resume its \$6 billion bailout program with the International Monetary Fund.

Officials at the energy ministry didn't respond to phone calls seeking comment.

Pakistan, which is heading into the coldest months of the year, issued an emergency tender to import more LNG in November after suppliers backed out from deliveries amid skyrocketing prices and surging global demand. More recently, gas trader



Gunvor told Pakistan it would be unable to make a delivery scheduled for Jan. 10.

The country faces gas shortages every winter because Pakistan's natural gas fields are seeing a depletion of about 9% each year and imported LNG is very expensive, Energy Minister Hammad Azhar said at a press briefing in late December. Pakistan announced a bidding round to help find more oil and gas reserves, Azhar said in a Twitter post on Friday.

The government restored gas supplies to the textiles sector last Wednesday, but frequent power blackouts are still curbing operations, Sattar said. Mills will only be able to run at about 80% of capacity if the situation persists, he said.

"Our history is littered with episodes of 'stop-go' growth caused by energy shortages and exorbitant costs, both of which are the result of mismanagement" by the government, Sattar said.

## Oxfam Says Severely Affected by Indian Foreign Funds Ban



NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - Oxfam India says restrictions on its access to international funds will have severe consequences for its humanitarian work and hinder provision of vital medical equipment to fight the Covid pandemic.

The charity group's local arm said a decision by the country's home ministry meant that from January 1 it was no longer able to receive foreign funding to finance relief work.

It comes just a week after India imposed the same restrictions on the Missionaries of Charity, founded by the late Catholic nun Mother Teresa.

Oxfam India chief Amitabh Behar said his organization had worked closely with local partners to "provide life-saving equipment and support" during the pandemic.

The ministry's decision "will severely hamper these collaborations which were providing relief to those who needed it the most during times of crisis", he said in a Sunday statement.

Charities and non-profit firms in India need to register under the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) to receive money from abroad.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government has been accused of cutting off access to funding for rights groups and charities based in the country.

Mother Teresa's Missionaries of Charity, which runs shelter homes across India, had its permission revoked last week for "not meeting the eligibility conditions", according to the home ministry, which did not give further details. In total the ministry refused to renew FCRA registration for 179 non-government organizations, according to The Hindu newspaper.

## Iran's December...

FROM PAGE 1

He said that exports to Iraq and the United Arab Emirates had amounted to \$1.15 billion while shipments to Turkey and Afghanistan rose to reach just over \$0.5 billion over the same period.

Main exporters into Iran in December included the UAE with \$1.42 billion worth of shipments followed by China at \$1.191 billion and Turkey at \$454 million, said the official, adding that imports from Switzerland and Germany had amounted to over \$310 million over the same month. IRICA figures showed that freight transit through Iran had reached around 1.57 million metric tons in volume terms in the month to late December, an increase of 53% against the same month last year.

## 84% of Firms in Japan See Economic Growth in 2022

TOKYO (Dispatches) - About 84% of major companies in Japan expect the country's economy to grow in 2022, driven by recovering personal consumption amid hopes that the COVID-19 pandemic will subside, a Kyodo News survey showed.

In the survey of 106 companies, including Toyota Motor Corp. and SoftBank Group Corp., 13 firms predicted the economy will be flat as people remain cautious about the pandemic. But none of the firms said it will contract.

Of the surveyed companies, 84 expect growth to be moderate in the year ahead, while five see a more solid expansion.

With multiple answers allowed, 91% expect growth cited a pickup in consumer spending, followed by 64% predicting the unusual situation caused by the pandemic will return to normal, 35% forecasting that capital investment will rise, and 19% looking forward to a recovery in the U.S. economy.

The overall percentage of firms forecasting growth in the world's third-largest economy is up from the 74% in a similar Kyodo News poll conducted last year.

Prime Minister Fumio Kishida has vowed to minimize the spread of the omicron variant of the coronavirus while moving swiftly to get the economy back on track. The fifth wave of infections, which took place when Tokyo hosted the Olympics last summer, prompted the government to declare a state of emergency in a number of prefectures and to urge people to refrain from making nonessential outings.

## Asia May Prefer...

FROM PAGE 1

"End-users are generally cautious not to over-commit to fixed-term deals because another wave of major setback in global demand would lead to a massive stockpile of unwanted crude oil," a crude and condensate trading manager at a major South Korean refiner told Platts previously.

In general, Northeast Asian and Indian refiners typically procure around 20%-30% of their monthly crude requirements from the spot market, at least 60% from fixed-term supply contracts, while a small portion is covered by their overseas upstream equity barrels.

Six of the eight refiners surveyed indicated that the companies may opt to raise the spot procurement proportion by more than 5 percentage points and possibly more in 2022, depending on the regional oil demand trend, OPEC+ production strategy and Middle Eastern official selling prices.

Despite the standstill and little progress in Iranian nuclear deal negotiations, Asian refiners were also looking to leave plenty of room for the potential return of Iranian crude and condensate.

"It's still a big 'If' scenario, but this is another reason not to commit heavily to fixing large volumes of term supply deals because you would not want to be sitting on expensive long positions when highly economical Iranian barrels become available," said a condensate trading manager at a South Korean petrochemical company.

Although Washington-Tehran talks over restarting the Iran nuclear deal ended without progress Dec. 3, Asian refiners said they remain hopeful that Iranian supply would eventually return to international markets in 2022.

Out of the eight major Asian refiners surveyed, four expect Iranian crude trades to resume by no later than end of third quarter, while two companies see the full return of Iranian supply before the end of first half.

"Iran could be a huge game changer in the market in 2022 ... it's crucial to maintain a flexible [crude] import and trading strategy to take full advantage of any surprise situation like possible resumption in Iranian oil exports," said a sour crude and

condensate trader at a Japanese refiner.

S&P Global Platts Analytics expects Iranian oil supply to increase by 1.4 million b/d by December 2022 if a deal is reached and US oil sanctions are removed in the second quarter.

However, those barrels would disappear from global oil supply outlooks if no deal is reached, potentially pressuring declining international stocks and OPEC+ spare capacity by Q3, Platts reported previously.

The survey participants unanimously agreed that major Middle Eastern official selling prices appear too expensive, encouraging the end-users to explore more economical options in international spot markets outside the Persian Gulf region.

"If the market in the past two years has taught us anything, it's that prices and market structures can flip at any one moment," said a senior crude trader at a major Thai refiner. "That's why it's rather dangerous to commit to any medium to longer-term deals in times of volatile prices and there is plenty of cheaper spot purchase available in the Americas."

Saudi Aramco boosted its Asia OSP for Arab Medium crude for loading in January by 70 cents/b from its December price to a \$3.05/b premium to the monthly average of Oman/Dubai, marking the highest ever OSP price differential for the heavy sour grade, Platts data showed.

A sharp decline in Dubai price structure during December could lead to a round of Middle Eastern OSP cuts for February-loading cargoes, but the scale of the price cuts could be limited as OPEC and its allies maintain a tight supply strategy, while the producer group appear confident that the impact of omicron on Asian demand would be limited, industry and trading participants said.

Asian refiners believe the global crude supply remains very tight and outright oil prices overheated. The end-users are continuing to call for the OPEC+ to raise supply by at least 800,000 b/d, doubling the producer group's current stance to increase output by a modest 400,000 b/d.

## Great Hero...

FROM PAGE 1

"Given the dire implications of this terrorist act on international peace and security, the Security Council must live up to its Charter-based responsibilities and hold the United States and the Israeli regime to account for planning, supporting, and committing the terrorist act,"

Majid Takht-Ravanchi wrote in a letter addressed to the rotating president of the UN Security Council Mona Juul.

Of course one cannot expect the UN to issue any resolution or condemnation on assassination of the top general because it follows what the world arrogance wishes, and legal actions over assassination of General Soleimani seem to be in vain and it needs a true response from Iranians and Iraqis to the culprits of this crime and as time passes by, people in these two countries and even in other countries are getting more determined to have a proper response to this state terrorism which led to missing one of the greatest hero of all times and hero of hearts.

The West and especially the U.S. should know this point that Martyr Soleimani will continue to inspire people to resist injustice and oppression long after his cowardly U.S.-ordered assassination and his path will be followed by those who fight for freedom and restoring peace in the region.

General Soleimani's martyrdom has galvanized not only the Iranian nation, but also the forces of resistance to Zionism and imperialism throughout the region and beyond and his killers were apparently too arrogantly stupid to realize that they were creating a martyr who would create even more problems for them dead than alive.

The real revenge for this cowardly and dastardly crime will be the complete expulsion of the Anglo-Zionist empire from the region, which may very precipitate its final downfall and in due time the killers will also be punished.

Although legal actions seem to be in vain, Iranian and Iraqi officials continue, and should continue, their efforts in a way to convince the global arrogance that they cannot evade the punishment and the era of hit-and-run has passed and in case they hit, they should wait for proper response in due time, although it may be late but it will be inevitable.

## Hezbollah Leader...

FROM PAGE 1

He highlighted that Gen. Soleimani and Muhandis made great grounds across the region, adding that all can draw valuable lessons from their martyrdom.

"The United States occupied Iraq for many years, massacred Iraqi people and looted the country's natural resources. It was Washington that created the Daesh Takfiri terrorist group, and it, therefore, bears complete responsibility for the extremists' crimes and acts of terror," Nasrallah said.

While the U.S. ruined Iraq through creation and full support of Daesh, the Hezbollah chief said, the Islamic Republic of Iran defended the Iraqi nation in the face of the terrorists. "Given the horrendous crimes it has committed in the country, the US cannot be trusted and viewed as a friend of Iraq," Nasrallah pointed out.

He said the General Intelligence Presidency (GIP), which is Saudi Arabia's primary intelligence agency, had for years dispatched bombers to Iraq to carry out terrorist attacks, and the Riyadh regime officially welcomed the advance of Daesh Takfiris and occupation of large swathes of Iraqi territories in June 2014. "The U.S. and Saudi Arabia played major roles in the massacre of Iraqi people. Iran, on the other hand, had been a staunch defender of the nation," the Hezbollah leader stressed.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Nasrallah said Palestinian territories have been occupied for decades, lambasting some Arab states for signing normalization agreements with the Tel Aviv regime whilst millions of Palestinians are living under Israel's occupation.

"Washington is responsible for all the crimes that Israel has perpetrated against Palestinians and the Lebanese nation. The US and Israel have killed many Palestinians, while the nation's supporters, Gen. Soleimani in particular, have sacrificed their lives," he said.

The Hezbollah chief noted that the Israeli regime continues to threaten Lebanon and Palestine, saying, "The U.S. cannot be considered a friend of Middle Eastern nations since it actively supports their main enemy, which is Israel."

"The U.S. destroyed Syria, waged an all-out war on the country, and left Syrians unprotected in order to face slow and gradual death. This is while Gen. Soleimani and Muhandis confronted U.S.' fiendish plots in Syria," he said.

Nasrallah also described the devastating Saudi-led military aggression against Yemen as a US project, emphasizing that the Riyadh regime is simply playing out Washington's scenarios in its crisis-hit southern neighbor.

"The United States makes wars in the region in order to plunder our resources. Gen. Soleimani was there to alter equations and defeat enemies," the Hezbollah secretary general said.





## Clement Appointed Monaco Coach

MONACO (AFP) - Belgian Philippe Clement has been named as Monaco's new coach, taking over from the sacked Niko Kovac, the Ligue 1 club said on Monday.

Former Bayern boss Kovac was fired last week with the Principality side sixth in the table, 17 points behind leaders Paris Saint-Germain. The 2017 Ligue 1 winners were knocked out of this season's Champions League qualifying stages with Kovac in charge.

Clement, 47, heads to Stade Louis II on a deal until June 2024 after two seasons with Belgian champions Club Brugge.

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## Shiffrin Over Covid, Back in Zagreb

PARIS (AFP) - American ski star Mikaela Shiffrin has recovered from Covid-19 and will make her return to the slopes in the World Cup slalom in Zagreb.

"See you tomorrow, Zagreb," Shiffrin posted on social media Monday after being listed with bib number seven on the start list, traditionally published on the eve of a race.

The 26-year-old announced last week that she had contracted coronavirus, spending a period of time in confinement that saw her miss two races in Lienz, Austria.

8 IRAN NEWS

SPORTS

WEDNESDAY JANUARY 5, 2022

# Nadal-Less Spain Beat Norway at ATP Cup

SYDNEY (Dispatches) - Veteran Roberto Bautista Agut upset world number eight Casper Ruud to give Spain their second straight win at the ATP Cup, a record matched by Hubert Hurkacz's Poland.

The 33-year-old Bautista Agut is the lead singles player for his country in the absence of 20-time Grand Slam champion Rafael Nadal and has stepped up in style.

After crushing Chile's world number 17 Cristian Garin in Sydney on Saturday, he backed it up with a battling 6-4, 7-6 (7/4) victory over Ruud, the first Norwegian to win an ATP Tour title.

"I played very good with very few unforced errors," said 19th-ranked Bautista Agut. "It's a good start (to the season) and I'm feeling good."

It ensured Spain won the tie with an unassailable 2-0 ahead of a dead doubles rubber after Pablo Carreno Busta made a quick start when he dismissed Norway's 345th-ranked Viktor Durasovic 6-3, 6-3 in just 69 minutes.

Former top-10 star Carreno Busta is now 4-1 in singles in his ATP Cup career, having beaten Chile's Alejandro Tabilo on Saturday.

"It's always important to win the first match. Today I felt more and more comfortable than the first day," he said. "We need to get the rhythm, we need to get the confidence."

Norway have lost both their opening ties in Group A, which also features 2020 champions Serbia and Chile, who play Monday evening.

Serbia are led by Dusan Lajovic in the absence of Novak Djokovic and he faces Garin. In the other evening clash, Stefanos Tsitsipas's Greece take on Diego Schwartzman's Argentina.

Meanwhile world number four Stefanos Tsitsipas crashed to defeat in his first singles match since elbow surgery, losing an epic battle with feisty Argentinian Diego Schwartzman 6-7 (5/7) 6-3, 6-3 at the ATP Cup.

The Greek star went under the knife in late November after pulling out of the ATP Finals in Turin, hoping to be at full fitness for the Australian Open later this month.

He was scheduled to return against world number nine Hubert Hurkacz at the teams event on Saturday, but withdrew before the



match, opting instead to ease himself back in a doubles rubber.

He showed up to play 11th-ranked Schwartzman and looked at his battling best in winning the first set tiebreak, moving freely with little sign of his right elbow causing problems.

But the 23-year-old lost his focus, and with it, five games in a row.

Federico Delbonis had earlier continued his perfect start to the season by overcoming Greek number two Michail Pervolarakis 7-6 (7/5), 6-1 to give Argentina a 1-0 lead.

However, he did play doubles that night and is listed to meet Schwartzman in a must-win clash for Greece after losing their opening tie. Argentina are 1-0 after beating Georgia on day one.

Like Spain, Hurkacz ensured Poland also went 2-0.

But the world number nine was forced to dig deep against Georgian Aleksandre Metreveli, ranked just 570, who stepped in after Nikoloz Basilashvili pulled out before the match.

But once he found his groove, last year's Miami Open champion raced to a 6-7 (5-7), 6-3, 6-1 victory.

"He played well in the first set and things were not going my way. But I got better with each set and am happy to get the win," Hurkacz said.

Kamil Majchrzak gave Poland a strong start when he dropped just two games against Aleksandre Bakshi, winning 6-1, 6-1 in 53 minutes.

Poland can book a place in the semi-finals if they defeat Argentina on Wednesday, with only the top nation from each of the four groups making the knockouts.

## Thiago Silva Extends Chelsea Contract To 2023

LONDON (Dispatches) - Chelsea centre-back Thiago Silva has extended his contract with the European champions by one year to the end of the 2022/23 season, the club announced on Monday.

The 37-year-old joined the Blues from Paris Saint-Germain in 2020, initially on just a one-season deal.

However, he has become a key figure as Chelsea won the Champions League last season and sit second behind runaway leaders Manchester City in the Premier League.

"To play here with Chelsea is a real pleasure. I never thought I would play for three years here in this great club, so I'm very happy to stay for another season," Silva, who has made 56 appearances over the last 18 months, told the Chelsea website.

"I'm going to give everything to keep playing at this level in the most important league in the world."

Tying down the Brazilian international to an extended contract has become a priority for Chelsea with fellow centre-backs Antonio Rudiger and Andreas Christensen also out of contract at the end of the season.

"Thiago Silva's experience, leadership and performances have been and remain very important to this squad, so we are hugely pleased to extend his contract by another year," said Chelsea director Marina Granovskaia.

## India Struggle Against South Africa In Second Test

JOHANNESBURG (Dispatches) - Four years after impressing Indian captain Virat Kohli as a teenage net bowler, Marco Jansen produced a destructive spell of bowling for South Africa on the first day of the second Test at the Wanderers Stadium.

Jansen, 21, took four for 31 as India were bowled out for 202 after winning the toss.

South Africa were 35 for one at the close. "He's an amazing bowler," said Kagiso Rabada, South Africa's senior bowler, of the newcomer to the fast bowling pack.

"He's like 38 metres tall (he's actually 2.03 metres) which helps, especially at the Wanderers with the extra bounce. He's a magnificent bowling all-rounder," said Rabada.

Kohli was one of Jansen's five wickets in the first Test in Centurion, which India won by 113 runs, but was absent on Monday because of an upper back spasm.

Stand-in captain KL Rahul top-scored with a patient 50, while Ravichandran Ashwin made a hard-hit 46 on a pitch which Rabada said had "some bounce, some pace and some nip with the grass coverage".

Ashwin said batting first at the Wanderers was a challenge. "You want to bat first. You want to come out and post a good score of 260 or 270. South Africa have posted scores of 250 at the Wanderers and dominated. Maybe we are a bit short but I am confident that with our full bowling arsenal available tomorrow, fingers crossed, we can definitely make something of this score."

Ashwin was referring to a scare for India when fast bowler Mohammed Siraj left the field clutching his right hamstring after pulling up in the penultimate over of the day.

"The medical staff are assessing him overnight and I am hopeful that with the history that Siraj has he will come out tomorrow and give his best," said Ashwin.

Jansen, who towers above his teammates, made the most of the steep bounce, troubling most of the batsmen.



# Wolves End Rangnick's Honeymoon at Man Utd

LONDON (Dispatches) - Wolves ended Ralf Rangnick's unbeaten start as Manchester United interim manager on Monday as Joao Moutinho's strike earned a deserved 1-0 win at Old Trafford.

A first home defeat to Wolves in 42 years leaves United still seventh in the Premier League table, four points adrift of the top four.

But it was another lackluster performance that was just as concerning as the result for Rangnick as the Red Devils were thoroughly outplayed.

An injury crisis at center-back with captain Harry Maguire, Victor Lindelof and Eric Bailly all missing, forced Rangnick to hand Phil Jones his first Premier League appearance in two years.

But the former England international was one of few United players to emerge with any credit from a ragged display that raises questions over their chances of qualifying for next

season's Champions League.

Cristiano Ronaldo was named United captain for just the second time in the absence of Maguire.

In his new year message on social media, Ronaldo said he was "not happy" with the state of affairs at United and that "we have to work harder, play better and deliver way more than we are delivering right now."

However, there was no sign of improvement as Ronaldo was kept quiet up against a number of his Portuguese international teammates.

David De Gea was the difference between the sides when United won 1-0 at Molineux in August and the Spaniard was again his side's saviour with a finger tip save to turn Ruben Neves' volley over.

Wolves managed more shots in the first half than they had in their previous three matches combined.

But Bruno Lage's men have scored just 14 goals in 19 league games and again failed to make their control of the game show in the scoreline.

## Brown Scores 50 Points as Celtics Rally to Beat Magic

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - Jaylen Brown scored a career-high 50 points and the Boston Celtics needed all of them in a 116-111 NBA overtime victory over the Orlando Magic.

Brown scored 21 points in the fourth quarter, helping the Celtics rally from 14 down with 4:20 left in regulation. He opened overtime with his fifth three-pointer of the contest, adding 11 rebounds, four assists and a blocked shot.

"I was just trying to be aggressive the entire time," said Brown, whose previous career-high was 46 against the New York Knicks on October 20. "My teammates encouraged me to take the shots. I feel like I took some good looks and they went down tonight."

Brown's layup with 38 seconds left in regulation knotted the score at 98-98.

He scored again to put Boston up 100-98 with 30 seconds left, but Tim Frazier scored for Orlando to force overtime.

Boston had led 45-42 at halftime after leading by as many as 14 before the break.

But the Magic surged in the second half, outscoring Boston 35-20 in the third quarter to take a 77-65 lead into the final frame. Marcus Smart added 17 points, seven assists and seven rebounds for Boston and Dennis Schroder scored 21.

Both teams were missing their leading scorers. Orlando's Cole Anthony was sidelined by a sprained right ankle and Boston's Jayson Tatum missed a fourth straight game because of Covid-19 concerns.



## Packers Clinch NFC's No. 1 Seed

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Davante Adams had 11 catches for 136 yards and a touchdown to lead the Packers. Allen Lazard had a receiving touchdown and AJ Dillon added two rushing touchdowns for Green Bay (13-3), which clinched the No. 1 seed, a first-round bye and home-field advantage during the NFC playoffs.

Sean Mannion completed 22 of 36 passes for 189 yards and a touchdown for Minnesota (7-9). Dalvin Cook was limited to just 13 yards on nine carries.

The Packers opened the game with 20 unanswered points before the Vikings notched a field goal before halftime. Joe Burrow passed for 446 yards and four touchdowns, finding Ja'Marr Chase 11 times for 266 yards and three scores, as Cincinnati clinched the AFC North title by downing visiting Kansas City 34-31.

Evan McPherson kicked a 20-yard game-winning field goal as time expired after the Bengals did not score a TD on several goal-to-go opportunities from the 1. Burrow went 30-for-39 and executed a second-half comeback after the Bengals (10-6) trailed by as many as 14. They used 17 consecutive points to gain their first lead with 11:44 remaining. Joe Mixon added 86 yards from scrimmage on 19 touches for Cincinnati.

Kansas City (11-5) dropped to second in the chase for the top AFC playoff seed behind Tennessee, despite a 259-yard, two-touchdown passing performance by Patrick Mahomes.

