

Health Ministry Announced on Saturday That the Number of Deaths From the Coronavirus Pandemic In Iran Increased to 131,847 With 26 More Iranians Killed by the Virus Over the Past 24 Hours

IRAN NEWS

Head of the Organization for investment Economic and Technical Assistance of Iran Said Despite U.S. And the Zionists' Opposition, the World Bank Has Approved Granting \$90m worth of Loan to Iran

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Iran Ready for Bilateral Talks on 2020 Ukrainian Plane Incident

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran says it remains ready to hold bilateral talks with each of the concerned parties over the accidental downing of a Ukrainian passenger plane near Tehran two years ago.

In a Friday statement, Iran's Foreign Ministry said based on its goodwill and respect for the countries' sovereignty, domestic laws and international obligations, Tehran is still ready to negotiate bilaterally with any of the concerned countries in connection with the downed Ukrainian plane on the measures which have been taken so far.

It added that Iran has participated in three rounds of bilateral talks with the Ukrainian government in Kiev and Tehran and provided the necessary explanations on various aspects of the incident.

The Iranian and Ukrainian experts have precisely investigated all aspects of the plane crash in full detail, it noted.

On January 8, 2020, the Ukraine International Airlines flight PS752, en route to Kiev and transporting mostly Iranians, crashed minutes after takeoff near the Iranian capital, killing all the 176 on board.

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Tehran, Baku Boost Trade Turnover by 22.4%

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Iran and Azerbaijan have increased trade turnover by 22.4 percent or \$87.6 million in January-November 2021, the State Customs Committee has reported.

During the first 11 months of 2021, the trade turnover between the two countries amounted to \$390.4 million, with exports accounting for \$39.1 million and imports for \$351.2 million.

Azerbaijan's exports to Iran increased by 6.6 percent year on year, while imports from that country increased by 32 percent.

It should be noted that the trade turnover between Iran and Azerbaijan amounted to \$302.8 million during the corresponding period of 2020.

During the reported period, the country's trade turnover amounted to \$30.2 billion. Of the total turnover, export amounted to \$19.7 billion or 65.5 percent, while import was \$10.4 billion or 34.4 percent, resulting in a surplus of \$9.3 billion.

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Iran Sanctions 51 of Soleimani's Assassination Perpetrators



TEHRAN (MNA) - Foreign Ministry on Saturday updated the counter-terrorism designations regarding American individuals involved in the terrorist act against General Qassem Soleimani and his companions.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran, in accordance with the "Act on Countering Violations of Human Rights and Adventurist and Terrorist Actions of the United States of America in the Region", particularly, Articles 4 and 5, and in addition to the American individuals including Donald Trump, Michael Pompeo, John Bolton, Mark Esper, Gina Haspel, Christopher Miller and Steven Mnuchin and also Matthew Tueller, Steven Fagin and Rob Waller who were listed respectively on 19 January 2021 and 23 October 2020, identifies and imposes sanctions as set forth in the abovementioned Act on the following persons for the role they played in the terrorist act of the United States against Martyr General Qassem Soleimani and his companions, in glorification of terrorism and in violating the fundamental human rights. The said persons, as the case may be, have taken part in decision-making, organizing, financing, and carrying out the terrorist act or have otherwise justified terrorism which is a threat to international peace and security through supporting such egregious terrorist attacks.

It is reiterated that the United States by conducting the callous terrorist act has flagrantly breached its international legal obligations in countering terrorism and terrorism-financing, in particular, the obligation to refrain and desist from organizing and participating in terrorist acts and the obligation to respect, protect and fulfil human rights which constitute internationally wrongful acts entailing the international responsibility of the United States. As such, the Islamic Republic of Iran, in conformity and compliance with its human rights obligations and also duties in combating terrorism and countering terrorism financing, in particular, the state terrorism perpetrated by the United States and to ensure the international peace and security, imposes the sanctions as stipulated in the Act on the said persons on a reciprocal basis.

The Islamic Republic of Iran underlines that the heinous terrorist act will not in any manner diminish the resolute determination and resolve of the Islamic Republic of Iran in following the path of the revered General Soleimani in fighting terrorism and terrorist groups, in particular, the US-backed terrorist groups.

In the light of the above and taking into account the provisions of the "Act on Countering Violations of Human Rights and Adventurist and Terrorist Actions of the United States of America in the Region", all relevant national authorities will take appropriate measures for effective implementation of the sanctions set forth in the Act.

Pakistan, Iran Working for Joint Border Markets

ISLAMABAD (Dispatches) - Pakistan and Iran are working together to establish two new border crossings and six joint border markets to boost the trade activities between the two countries.

Iran's Ambassador to Pakistan Mohammad Ali Hosseini in an interview with News and Current Affairs Channel of Radio Pakistan said both countries are committed to enhance the existing trade volume of one point four billion dollars to over five billion dollars in the next couple of years.

He said currently one border crossing at Taftan border is operational for trade while new new border crossings are being established at Pak-Iran border in Pashin and Rimdan. The Iranian Ambassador both countries are working to establish six joint border markets and priority work is focused on three markets.

He said Pakistan and Iran have commonalities in all aspects particularly religion, history and culture and frequent high level visits have increased cooperation in all sectors for mutual benefit and development.

The Iranian envoy expressed full confidence that both countries have the potential to increase trade and economic cooperation besides security collaboration.

He said fencing of over 900 kilometers long border will prevent the miscreants and smuggling of goods.

In reply to a question, Mohammad Ali Hosseini said Tehran is extending full cooperation to the International Atomic Energy Agency regarding its peaceful nuclear program and fully committed to international obligations. On Afghanistan, the Iranian Ambassador said the OIC Foreign Ministers' recent meeting in Islamabad was a good initiative of Pakistan in highlighting the humanitarian issue in the war-torn country and currently over five thousand refugees are daily entering Iran.

He further said European countries should extend help to avert the catastrophe in Afghanistan.

The Ambassador said Iran is fully committed to peace and stability in Afghanistan as the instability in Kabul will directly affect all regional countries particularly Pakistan and Iran. He said Pakistan and Iran have regular consultation and interaction for the security on the common border and in the region and institutional level mechanism exists to prevent miscreants. The weekly program "Diplomatic Session" was hosted by renowned journalist and columnist Javed Siddiq while Producer of the program was Rana Ghulam Mustafa and Executive Producer Abdul Raouf Khan.

The weekly program "Diplomatic Session" is being broadcast from News and Current Affairs Channel and FM 101 networks of Radio Pakistan on Saturday at 1815 hrs. The show is also available on Radio Pakistan's official website "www.radio.gov.pk", Social Media Platforms and Radio Pakistan's Podcast "podcast.radio.gov.pk"

ViewPoint By: Hamid Reza Naghashian Capitol Riot, Sign of U.S. Empire's Decline

On Thursday, the U.S. marked the first anniversary of the brief January 6 occupation of the U.S. Capitol building by a large crowd of Americans protesting the outcome of the disputed 2020 election and President Joe Biden in his speech launched a scathing attack at the former U.S. President Donald Trump by calling him a threat to democracy while that incident was a clear sign of the U.S. empire's decline and a serious rift and division in this country.

For years most politicians and analysts have warned that the U.S. is on the verge of collapse and the countdown for this collapse has already begun and any moment it can happen and the Capitol occupation was another proof for this belief and decline a.

The U.S., the self-proclaimed flag-bearer of democracy, was dealt a devastating blow to its image by insurrectionists, apparently encouraged by the then President Trump, storming the Capitol Building in an attempt to overturn the result of the 2020 Presidential election.

The anniversary finds the United States of America on thin ice as far-right and alternative groups and extremist republican politicians have all been instrumental in inciting divisions within the nation.

A recent report has warned of the rising threat of extremism in the United States.

The report, prepared by the Atlantic Council's digital forensic research lab, states that 12 months after the attack on the Capitol by a pro Trump mob, far right groups were traced and arrested by police and federal authorities.

It clarifies that other groups have reorganized, often with an emphasis on local level politics. It found that domestic extremist groups have recruited and spread their messages through culture war debates, including vaccines, race and education.

The report asserts that groups such as proud boys and QAnon conspiracy movements have reemerged in recent months.

They have made progress by shifting to alternative online platforms, embracing rhetoric to engage more broadly with a mainstream conservative base and engaging in new political activities, particularly public health and education issues, at the local level.

On Thursday Biden accused his predecessor, Trump, of posing "a continuing threat to democracy."

The Democratic president accused Trump of creating a "web of lies" to pursue "power over principle." **See Page 7**

Iran Mission to UN Reacts to U.S. Newspaper's Hostile Article

TEHRAN (MNA) - In reaction to an article published by an American newspaper, Iran Permanent Mission to UN said that encouraging leaders to initiate war, amid serious diplomatic talks, are in violation of the principles of International Law.

"Encouraging & advising leaders to opt for war, especially when a serious diplomatic process is underway- is ignorant, hostile, & in contravention of the principles of International Law", Permanent Mission of the Islamic Republic of Iran to United Nations wrote in a tweet on Saturday.

"Those who design & implement such reckless plans will bear responsibilities for consequences", it added.

The Permanent Mission of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations in New York made the remarks in reaction to an anti-Iran and belligerent article published by the Wall Street Journal. Wall Street Journal claimed in the article that in the possible event of failure of the ongoing talks in Vienna, it would be better for US President Joe Biden to prepare for a military strike.

The new round of sanctions removal talks between Iran and JCPOA member states resumed on January 3 in Vienna, after adding some new Iranian demands to a working text.

Earlier, Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian stressed in a tweet that it is now time for the Westerners to show their good faith, seriousness to reach a good agreement in the ongoing talks in Vienna.



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Leader to Deliver Live Speech Today

TEHRAN (MNA) – The Leader of the Islamic Revolution is to deliver a live speech tomorrow on the occasion of the 1978 Qom demonstrations against the West-backed dynasty of Pahlavi.

The Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei is to deliver a live speech on Sunday at 10:30 a.m. on the occasion of the anniversary of the January 9th, 1978 uprising against the West-backed Pahlavi regime.

In previous years, Ayatollah Khamenei used to receive thousands of people to mark the anniversary of the 1978 Qom protest, however, due to the coronavirus pandemic, the event will be broadcast from Iranian national TV.

Cheap, Easy Pilgrimage Should Be Provided for People

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - The first meeting of the National Council of Pilgrimage after a two-year break was held with the President taking part in the holy city of Mashhad, during which decisions were made to facilitate travel and reduce pilgrims' expenses.

During the meeting that was held on Friday evening, Ayatollah Seyed Ebrahim Raisi said, "We must provide cheap and easy pilgrimage for the people".

The President said, "People have expressed their love for Imam Reza (AS) and other infallible Imams with all the hardships that have occurred, and they come to visit with different means and different financial and economic conditions".

The President added, "In recent years, despite the problems caused by coronavirus, the love of pilgrimage has not cooled at all, and people have always tried to express their heartfelt devotion to Imam Reza and the Imams in various ways".

Referring to the suggestions of the working group to facilitate the pilgrimage and pay attention to its cultural dimensions, the President said, "It is necessary to have a clear and accurate statistical analysis in the field of pilgrimage so that we can follow up on the relevant matters".

Referring to the importance of the role of media and art in promoting the culture of



pilgrimage, Ayatollah Raisi said, "It is necessary for the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance and the Ministry of Tourism and the IRIB to have a more serious and effective attention to pilgrimage".

Stating that it is necessary to pay attention to the economy of pilgrimage, Raisi said, "One of the things that should be done in the relevant working group is to identify how the ministries of culture and economy relate to this issue to determine what role each ministry can play in this regard".

The President added, "Cheap and easy pilgrimage requires a mechanism that all bodies must be activated in this regard to make this happen".

Ayatollah Raisi described the use of the capacity of people for cultural, social and economic activities important and said, "In different periods, people have been dedicated to pilgrimage and services to pilgrims, and now many investors and entrepreneurs are eager to participate in this".

Tajik President Congratulates 30th Anniversary of Dushanbe-Tehran Ties

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Tajik President Emomali Rahmon in a message congratulated his Iranian counterpart Ebrahim Raisi on 30th anniversary of establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries.

In his message, President Rahmon expressed certainty that the two nations will promote cooperation through determination and sincere efforts in line with serving national interests.

As he noted, the two countries enjoy cultural and historical commonalities.

During the past three decades, officials of the two countries have made efforts to plan for reaching high level of constructive relations and finding new ways to have comprehensive cooperation, the president said.

He further described continuation of those efforts as important. At the end of his message, the Tajik president wished prosperity, peace, and florescence for the Iranian nation and president.

Maadi Among 2022

Sundance Film Festival Jury Members

TEHRAN (MNA) – Iranian actor Payman Maadi has been selected as one of the jury members in the 2022 Sundance Film Festival in the US.

The Sundance Institute announced the jury members of this year's Sundance Film Festival, taking place in hybrid format from January 20 to 30.

Comprising six juries awarding prizes for artistic and cinematic achievement, the jurors include Marielle Heller ("A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood"), Andrew Haigh ("Looking"), Payman Maadi ("A Separation") and more.

Chelsea Barnard, a producer on "C'mon C'mon" and "Booksmart," serves alongside Heller and Maadi on the jury for US dramatic competition. US documentary competition jurors include Garrett Bradley ("Time"), Peter Nicks ("The Force") and veteran documentary cinematographer Joan Churchill.

Payman Maadi is one of the most important Iranian American actors, screenwriters, and directors working today. He is best known for starring in the Academy Award-winning film A Separation and About Elly by director Asghar Farhadi. For his role in A Separation, Maadi won the Silver Bear for Best Actor at the Berlin Film Festival. His recent film credits include Night Shift, 6 Underground, 13 Hours, Camp X-Ray and Just 6.5, and his recent TV credits include HBO's The Night Of and Westworld.

This year, due to rising COVID-19 cases, Sundance will take place online at festival.sundance.org and in person at seven Satellite Screens venues across the US during the festival's second weekend. Awards for feature-length and short films will be announced on Jan. 29.

Iran's Missile Capability Showcased in Exhibition in Tehran

TEHRAN (IP) - On the anniversary of the missile attack on the Ayn al-Assad Airbase, Iran displayed its missile capability in Tehran's Mosalla.

On the sidelines of the exhibition, which was welcomed by Friday prayers, various cultural groups also sang hymns describing the memory of the former Quds Force Commander of the Islamic Revolution Guard Corps (IRGC) Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani.

Lt. Gen. Soleimani and Deputy Head of Iraqi Popular Mobilization Units (PMU) Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis were assassinated along with their companions in a U.S. drone strike authorized by President Donald Trump near Baghdad International Airport on January 3, 2020.

IRGC's Latest Drills Forced Israelis to Halt Empty Threats

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The spokesman of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) says Iran's recent show of force compelled Israeli rulers to halt their empty military threats against the country.

In an interview with Al-Alam television, Ramezan Sharif referred to the IRGC's latest large-scale military exercises, saying the Israelis issued lots of threats against the Islamic Republic only before the drills.

The IRGC held massive military exercises, dubbed Great Prophet 17, in Iran's southern coast last month. During the five-day maneuvers, Iran's senior commanders sternly warned Israel against continuing its anti-Iran rhetoric.

Before the drills, Israeli officials had ratcheted up threats against Iran, especially over the ongoing negotiations in Vienna to revive the 2015 Iran nuclear agreement, which the Israeli regime staunchly opposes.

They suggested that Israel would attack Iran, with minister of military affairs Benny Gantz telling American officials that he had directed the regime's military to prepare for the possibility of a military strike against Iran's nuclear facilities.

Brigadier General Sharif dismissed the remarks as empty rhetoric, echoing Israeli military assessments that the regime lacks the power to launch large-scale attacks against Iran.

"After the exercise, the Zionists' prime minister officially ordered their military figures not to talk about Iran at all," Sharif said.

The Israelis, he said, are clearly interested in taking destructive action against Iran's nuclear facilities, but the Islamic Republic's deterrent power and the location of its nuclear facilities prevent the Tel Aviv regime.

"Regardless of whether they act or not, our assessment is that [the threats] are rhetoric intended for political gains, especially to overcome their problems in their occupied lands, which makes them try to distract [the public] with an external issue," the general added.

He said if the Israelis felt that they were not dealt with decisively, they would conduct major attacks against the intended country, especially with regard to nuclear issues.

Pointing to Israel's attacks against the nuclear facilities of Iraq and Syria, Sharif said the Israelis' main manifesto is that no Muslim or Arab country has the right to have a nuclear program.

GC, Majlis Seek to Reduce Examinations

TEHRAN (IP) - The Guardian Council Spokesman said that the meetings of the Guardian Council and Parliament are aimed to lessen the exchange of bills for approval between the two bodies.

Ayatollah Alireza A'rafi, a member of the Guardian Council jurists and the director of the seminaries of the country had a meeting with Iran's Parliament lawmakers on Wednesday, Jan. 5, 2022.

The council, consisting of 6 lawyers and Islamic Jurists (Faqihs) in Iran is assigned to see if the bills adopted by the parliament are in accordance with Islam (Sharia).

In response to Iran Press on his live presser, Iran's Guardian Council Spokesman Hadi Tahan-Nazif said on Saturday that all the meetings should end to increase the quality of both bodies to offer services for people.

Recently the council addressed the issue of car imports, examining the relevant import regulations to see if it was compatible with the law.

Iranians Consume 30% Less Milk Products

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Iran's health ministry has announced that the average consumption of milk and dairy products has decreased about 30 percent in the last two years.

The director of the ministry's nutrition department, Zahra Abdollahi, said that the rise in food prices and inflation are the main reasons that have made people consume less milk products.

She noted that the country's average consumption has always been under the recommended amount but the economic consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic and inflation has contributed to the sharp decline.

Abdollahi added that such low consumption of dairy products -- and consequently less calcium and phosphorus -- can cause serious health issues among

people, particularly in children.

She stressed that currently osteoporosis is one of the leading diseases in Iran, warning that such a low consumption of dairy products can further increase such problems in the coming years.

Mentioning some reports that predict a 60-percent rise in the price of milk products in the coming months, she urged the authorities to consider subsidies and plans for free-of-charge milk for students.

The Iranian government has cut the subsidy on milk, which resulted in higher prices for dairy products, while free-of-charge milk is no longer distributed in elementary schools.

Despite having the biggest dairy products factory in the Middle East, Iran has a per capita consumption of about 60 to 80 kilograms a year, that is about half of the global average.

Salah Zawawi's Daughter Set to Be Palestinian Envoy to Iran

TEHRAN (MNA) – Informed sources have reported that at the end of the four-decade mission of Salah Zawawi, the Palestinian ambassador to Iran, his daughter will be in charge of the embassy.

Last week, the Iranian Foreign Ministry announced that the long-served Palestinian Ambassador to Iran Salah Zawawi had met with Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian at the end of his term.

Informed sources now say that Salah Zawawi's daughter is set to replace him and take charge of the Palestinian embassy in Iran.

Maximum Pressure Policies Against Iran Have Ended in Failure

TEHRAN (Tasnim) – A member of the Iranian Parliament's National Security and Foreign Policy underscored the failure of the so-called maximum pressure policies against the Islamic Republic and dismissed any deadlines in the ongoing talks on the revival of the 2015 nuclear deal.

Speaking to Tasnim, Abolfazl Amouei said Iran rejects any deadlines in the negotiations, urging the Western side, especially the Europeans to play a constructive role in the talks. The West, the Europeans in particular, must carry out the 11 commitments they had undertaken in the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and change their approach so that the talks will get back to the right track.

He noted that if Iran's national interests are secured in the negotiations, the country will implement its undertakings after verification of the removal of the sanctions.

The new round of talks between Iran and P4+1 – Russia, China, the UK, France and Germany - on the revival of the 2015 nuclear deal and the termination of sanctions on Tehran restarted in Vienna on Monday.

The JCPOA negotiations resumed after the parties took a three-day break for the New Year.

Representatives of Iran and the P4+1 group began the eighth round of the Vienna talks on December 27 focused on the removal of all sanctions imposed on Tehran after Washington's unilateral withdrawal from the agreement. The US is not allowed to directly attend the talks due to its pullout in 2018 from the landmark deal with Iran.

69 Countries to Participate in Iran's Int'l Quran Competition

TEHRAN (IQNA) – According to an official, 190 contestants from 69 countries have participated in the 38th edition of the Islamic Republic of Iran's International Holy Quran Competition.

Speaking to IQNA on Saturday, Hamid Majidimehr, head of the competition's department of Awqaf and Charity Affairs Organization's Quranic Affairs Center, revealed more details of the event.

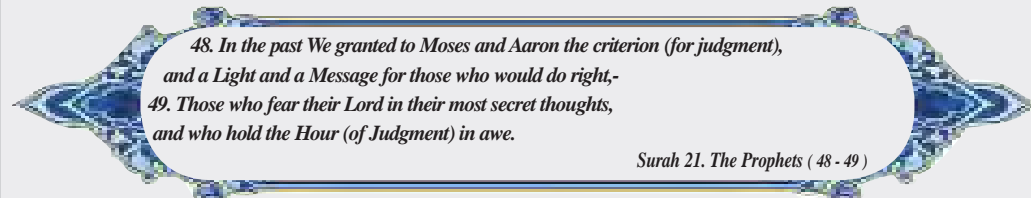
According to plans, the preliminary stage of the competitions will start on January 9 in the women's section, going through for a period of two days, he said.

The men's section is slated for January 12 to 15, he added, noting that the panel of judges will review the performances from 8:30 AM to 7:30 PM local time. Participants at this stage have already sent their performances and the preliminary stage will be held virtually, said the official, adding that contestants can see the process of judging their performance with a link given to them.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	12:11
■ Evening (Maghreb)	17:28
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	05:45
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	07:14



Iran, Algeria Fail to Restore Banking Relation

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

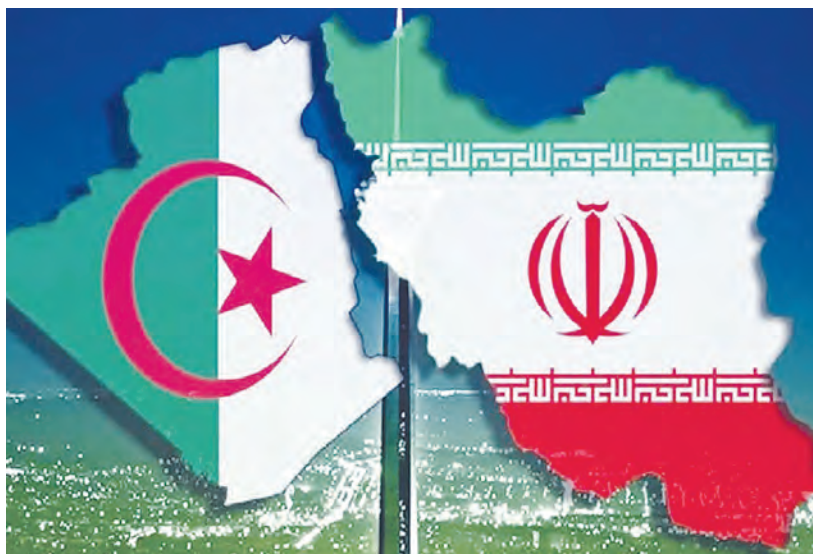
TEHRAN – Deputy Head of Iran-Algeria Joint Chamber of Commerce says the efforts for restoring banking relations between the two countries have failed and it has affected the trade volume between the two countries.

Speaking to ILNA and talking about the latest developments in the trade between Iran and Algeria, Mahmoud Tavalae said that due to the regional problems, sanctions and the Covid pandemic, the trade between Iran and Arab countries like Algeria has worsened. He added that Algeria is one of the important North African states having good ties with Iran while the opportunity for trade and ties between Iran and Algeria has always been good both before and after the Islamic Revolution.

He went on to say that Iran's treaty with Iraq which is named "Algeria Treaty" shows that this country regarding Iran has more colorful role. He said after the victory of the Islamic Revolution and due to political reasons which are not justifiable, the bilateral trade was halted and neglected but after restoration of ties, their trade ties improved.

Tavalae added that Algeria can be a gateway for Iran's entrance into North Africa and even into Central Africa, adding that Algeria is a good opportunity for Iran to work with countries like Libya, Tunisia and even Morocco. He noted that the ties with Egypt are not good yet but Iran can have good opportunities in North Africa.

He reiterated that for long time the chamber had been working for cooperation of an Iranian bank with its Algerian counterpart but it failed, adding that Iranian



contractors have carried out several projects in Algeria that he can point to some of them in the water, wastewater and construction projects. He noted that in a certain period Iranian auto-makers could have activities in Algeria and Iranians acted somewhat successfully in exporting food stuff and textile to Algeria and few Iranians could invest in Algeria and launch factories.

Tavalae said that despite a tough rival like Turkey for competing in Algerian market, Iranians due to good relations with Algerian had shorter course but sanctions hindered Iran from winning the Algerian market, expressing hope with removal of sanctions and finding solutions, the trade between Iran and Algeria would increase and the incomplete projects and businesses would be completed.

He also blamed the pandemic and its negative impact on Iran-Algeria trade and said the pandemic affected dispatches of delegations and businessmen to the exhibitions.

Tavalae went on to say that problem in banking transfer and problems in transportation have also been effective factors in decline of trade between the two states. He said the launch of the joint economic commission by the governments is one of the main requirements for enhancing trade between the two states. He said some of Iranian contractors have failed to get their money despite finishing their projects in Algeria, adding that Iran has no major agro products exports to Algeria and it still continues.

Private Sectors of Iran, Turkey On Course to Boost Economic Ties

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Secretary Generals of Tehran and Istanbul chambers of commerce on Thursday met in Istanbul where both sides called for boosting economic cooperation between economic activists of Iran and Turkey.

Secretary General of Tehran Chamber of Commerce Bahman Eshqi met Secretary General of Istanbul Chamber of Commerce Nihat Alayoglu on Thursday and both sides in the meeting expressed the interest of private sectors of the two states for boosting trade ties and announced readiness for holding joint meetings between economic activists of the two countries with an eye to get familiar with the capacities of the two countries for cooperation between the traders of Iran and Turkey.

In the meeting, Eshqi briefed Alayoglu of the activities of Tehran Chamber and said the interaction between the chambers of Tehran and Istanbul is very important for effective role in the



region and trade between the two states and termed it important for enhancing trade between the two states.

Alayoglu, for his part, expressed his satisfaction over this meeting and expressed readiness of Istanbul Chamber of Commerce for improving the current level of cooperation between traders of the two states and reiterated that Istanbul Chamber of Commerce

will use any means for boosting trade cooperation. He also called for cooperation between the two chambers for holding joint meetings between traders of the two countries for getting familiar with potentials and capacities of the two countries for expansion of ties.

Then both sides announced readiness for preparing joint MoUs between the chambers and it was decided that after talks on the details of the cooperation document are held, it is immediately signed to accelerate cooperation.

Europeans Not Purchasing Iranian Agro Products

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - while the dilemma of returning Iranian exported agricultural products due to the use of "non-standard" pesticides has been widely reflected over the past few weeks, a member of the Tehran Chamber of Commerce noted, "European countries have not bought agricultural products from Iran for years."

"The issue of pesticide residues in agricultural products is not a new issue, and many countries have been strict about Iranian products for many years," Ahmad Reza Farshchian, a member of the delegation of Tehran Chamber of Commerce and an exporter of agricultural products, said.

According to him, this challenge has been overshadowing Iran's agricultural production and exports for more than three decades, leading to the loss of the world's top markets.

Farshchian went on to say that the issue of pesticide residues has remained unresolved for more than 30 years: "In the field of pesticide residue control, Europeans were pioneers, and after upgrading standards in these countries, their strictness towards Iranian products increased. So far they were randomly testing our products. But later these experiments included all Iranian products. Finally, European countries such as Germany, France, Switzerland and the united kingdom gradually reduced the volume of their exchanges with Iran."

In recent weeks, news of the return of Iranian exported agricultural products to Russia, India, Uzbekistan, the UAE and Turkmenistan has been hot for the use of "non-standard" pesticides.

Iran Exports 110 MW of Power to Afghanistan

TEHRAN (IRNA) - A senior advisor to Iran's energy minister said that the country was exporting 110 megawatts of electricity to Afghanistan, with the maximum export capacity being 175 megawatts.

Iran's power grid is connected to Afghanistan's Herat and the power transfer is carried out through four transfer lines, Mohammad Ali Farahnakian said in an exclusive interview with IRNA's economic correspondent on Saturday.

Farahnakian said that Iran was working on plans to add 500 to 600 megawatts to the capacity, adding that Iran and Afghanistan had struck good deals, but the Afghan side didn't cooperate.

The new governing body in Afghanistan showed positive pulse and made promises when the first Taliban minister visited Tehran last month, the advisor to energy minister noted.

He also said that the deals between Iran and Afghanistan were long-term agreements, hoping that the new caretaker government in Kabul will comply with them once it is fully settled.

Iranian Firm Working to Produce Internal Part of Cochlear Implant

TEHRAN (PressTV) - An Iranian knowledge-based company, which had already designed and manufactured the external part of a cochlear implant, is now doing the research and developing work to produce the internal unit of the electronic device that partially restores hearing.

Tanin Pardaz Pasargad previously managed to produce the external part of a cochlear implant, which sits behind the ear, picks up sounds with a microphone, and then processes the sound and transmits it to the internal part, Fars new agency reported.

The external unit with the brand name +TAPPS received IEC 60601-1, IEC 60601-1-2, ISO 13485 standards and a production license for a high risk (Class D) medical device.

Now, the report said, the company is working to manufacture the internal part of a cochlear implant.

This unit is placed under the skin behind the ear during an outpatient surgery. A thin wire and small electrodes lead to the cochlea, which is part of the inner ear.

Cochlear implants can restore hearing in people with severe hearing loss who are no longer helped by using hearing aids. They bypass damaged portions of the ear to deliver sound signals to the hearing (auditory) nerve.

Tanin Pardaz Pasargad is focused on solving hearing problems, with the motto "Life without Disabilities and Pain for All".

Iran Oil Sale to Reach Pre-Sanction Level Soon

TEHRAN (IP)- Vice-President for Parliamentary Affairs says that Iran will increase its oil sales to the pre-sanctions levels from the middle of the next month.

Vice-President for Parliamentary Affairs, Mohammad Hosseini on Saturday in Rafsanjan nothing that the volume of oil sales already increased, stated that Iran's foreign exchange resources have improved, and business is booming.

Hosseini emphasized that from mid-February, Iran will reach the volume of oil sales to the pre-sanctions levels.

He noted the efforts of President Raisi's government in improving Iran's diplomatic interaction with many countries said: The situation in the country will definitely enhance and people saw many openings in the field of health, including fighting coronavirus, vaccine production, and nationwide vaccination in the last few months.



Iran Embassy Distributes 1000 Livelihood Packages in Kabul

TEHRAN (MNA) – The Embassy of the Republic of Iran has distributed 1000 livelihood humanitarian packages among poor Afghan people in Kabul, the capital of this neighboring country.

As the people of Afghanistan are suffering difficult live conditions under the US sanctions as well as the harsh weather, Iran continues its humanitarian assistance to this eastern neighbor.

On the second anniversary of the martyrdom of Lt.General Qassem Soleimani, Iran's embassy in Kaul distributed livelihood humanitarian packages, worth more than \$50,000, among poor Afghan people in this country.

Iran's humanitarian aid includes 1,000 food packages, including flour, rice, and liquid oil.

Under the structures of the Leader, the Iran embassy in Kabul has provided humanitarian assistance to the Afghan people since the very beginning of the developments in Afghanistan, the Deputy Ambassador of Iran in Kabul said. Earlier, the missions of Iran in Mazar-e-Sharif, Kunduz, and Kandahar also announced the distribution of non-cash aid to the poor people of the provinces.

Iran, Turkmenistan To Develop Cooperation In Energy



TEHRAN (IP)- Oil Minister said on Saturday that it is possible to increase the capacity of the Turkmen gas swap through Iran to 15 billion cubic meters per year.

Following the meeting with the Turkmen delegation, Javad Owji said that during the meeting, the two sides discussed the development of bilateral cooperation in the field of energy, especially gas swaps, oil and products and petrochemicals.

The Turkmen delegation is headed by Sardar Berdymukhamedov, Deputy Prime Minister of Turkmenistan, and will be accompanied by Turkmen Foreign Minister Rashid Muradov.

Several rounds of talks have already taken place between Iran and Turkmenistan, focusing on the development of energy cooperation.

The implementation of the Turkmen gas swap through Iran to the Republic of Azerbaijan, which became operational last week, is part of the results of the cooperation.

The agreement between Iran, Azerbaijan, and Turkmenistan on a natural gas swap deal for up to two billion cubic meters of Turkmen gas has taken effect as of January 1, 2022.

As reported, of the total received gas from Turkmenistan, about 20 to 30 percent will be the share of Iran as a swap fee, and the rest will be delivered to Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan will reportedly receive four million cubic meters of new energy supplies per day; however, the figure is currently less than four million and will gradually reach that amount.

The deal, which was backed by the presidents of the three Caspian countries during the 15th Summit of the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) in the Turkmen capital city of Ashgabat on November 28, 2021, was signed by the oil ministers of the two countries on November 30, 2021.

Under the swap deal, Iran will receive gas from Turkmenistan and deliver an equivalent amount minus the swap fee to Azerbaijan at the Astara border. The gas that Iran will receive from Turkmenistan under the swap agreement will cater to the needs of the northern provinces of the country.

Iran has major natural gas fields in the south but has imported gas from Turkmenistan since 1997 for distribution in its northern provinces, especially during the winter.

Experts believe that the implementation of the deal could encourage other countries in the region to ink similar deals and to use the Islamic Republic's capacities in this regard.

UNSC to Meet Monday on N. Korean Missile Launch

UNITED NATIONS (Dispatches) - The UN Security Council will meet behind closed doors Monday to discuss the testing of what North Korea said was a hypersonic missile, according to diplomatic sources.

The meeting was requested by the United States, France and the United Kingdom -- three of the five permanent members on the Security Council -- as well as Ireland and Albania, the sources said Thursday.

In 2017, the Security Council unanimously passed three sets of economic sanctions after North Korea carried out nuclear and missile tests -- a rare showing of unity for the often gridlocked body. No joint declaration is expected after Monday's meeting, one diplomat said, although another added that statements are likely to be issued before or afterwards.



U.S., Russia Diplomats to Tackle Ukraine Tensions in Geneva

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - Talks between U.S. and Russian diplomats begin in Geneva on Monday after a weeks-long stand-off over Russian troop deployments near its border with Ukraine, with veteran envoys on each side trying to avert a crisis.

Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman, the No. 2 official at the U.S. State Department, will face Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov. The two combined have more than half a century of diplomatic experience. Russia, which moved nearly 100,000 troops close to its border with Ukraine, says it is not preparing for an invasion but wants to see the West back off from its support for Ukraine's government and halt the eastward expansion of the NATO military alliance.



Kazakh President Gives Shoot-to-Kill Order to Quell Protests



ALMATY (Dispatches) - Security forces appeared to have reclaimed the streets of Kazakhstan's main city after days of violence, and the Russian-backed president said he had ordered his troops to shoot to kill to put down a countrywide uprising.

A day after Moscow sent paratroopers to help crush the insurrection, police were patrolling the debris-strewn streets of Almaty, although some gunfire could still be heard.

Dozens have died and public buildings across Kazakhstan have been ransacked and torched in the worst violence the former Soviet republic has experienced in 30 years of independence.

Moscow said more than 70 planes were ferrying Russian troops into Kazakhstan, and that these were now helping control Almaty's main airport, recaptured on Thursday from protesters.

The uprising has prompted a military intervention by Moscow at a time of high tension in East-West relations as Russia and the United States gear up for talks next week on the Ukraine crisis.

Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev blamed foreign-trained terrorists for the unrest, without providing evidence.

"The militants have not laid down their arms, they continue to commit crimes or are preparing for them," Tokayev, 68, said in a televised address. "Whoever does not surrender will be destroyed. I have given the order to law enforcement agencies and the army to shoot to kill, without warning."

The demonstrations began as a response to a fuel price hike but swelled into a broad movement against the government and former President Nursultan Nazarbayev.

Nazarbayev, 81, was the longest-serving ruler of any ex-Soviet state until he turned over the presidency to Tokayev in 2019. His family is widely believed to have retained influence in Nur-Sultan, the purpose-built capital that bears his name.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has discussed the situation with Tokayev in several phone calls during the crisis, the Kremlin said on Friday.

The protesters in Almaty appear mainly to come from the city's poor outskirts or surrounding towns and villages. The violence has come as a shock to urban Kazakhs, used to comparing their country favourably to more repressive and volatile ex-Soviet Central Asian neighbours.

"At night when we hear explosions, I am scared," a woman named Kuralai told Reuters. "It hurts to know that young people are dying. This has clearly been planned ... probably our government has relaxed somewhat."

In a state where scant political opposition is tolerated, no high-profile leaders of the protest movement have emerged to issue any formal demands.

One man who attended the first night of protests and who did not want to be identified said most of those who initially turned up wanted to "express solidarity spontaneously", before 100-200 "aggressive youths" started hurling rocks at police.

Trump's Hold on U.S. Republicans Persists

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - Former United States President Donald Trump's hold on the Republican Party has only tightened since he left office, despite the storm of controversy and widespread criticism he faced in the aftermath of last year's riot at the Capitol.

Part of the reason for his continued dominance, explained David Schultz, a professor of politics at Hamline University in Saint Paul, Minnesota, is that Trump remains a "charismatic" figure who appeals to the passions of Republican voters.

"Trump has been very successful capturing people through fear, through prejudice, through emotions," Schultz told Al Jazeera. "The Republican Party is Trump now. Without Trump, I don't think there is a Republican Party."

Whether Trump's outsized influence will last is an open question. Near-term political trends are in his favor, but continuing investigations into his role in the January 6 insurrection and ongoing legal troubles related to his New York real estate business pose risks.

Trump has continued to deny he played a role in the riot, despite being impeached by the US House of Representatives for "incitement of insurrection", and to advance false claims that the outcome of the 2020 election he lost to President Joe Biden was rigged.

A mob of his supporters stormed the building after the Republican leader gave an incendiary speech near the White House during which he urged the crowd to "fight like hell" and "stop the steal".

Trump has also tried to block a US House of Representatives committee investigating the events of January 6 from accessing White House documents linked to the riot, accusing the lawmakers involved in the probe of a cover-up.

While that may hurt Trump with the wider majority of Americans who believe January 6 was an attempt to subvert the 2020 election, it is helping to motivate Republican voters who buy what the ex-president is selling. "Trump has formidable support among the population," Matthew Dickinson, a professor of politics at Middlebury College in Vermont, told Al Jazeera.



Poland Defiant as EU Fines Loom Over Disciplining Judges

BRUSSELS (Dispatches) - A Polish minister has accused the European Union of making "illegal demands" on his country ahead of a Jan.11 deadline by which Warsaw is meant to inform Brussels of how and when exactly it plans to dismantle a disciplinary system for judges.

Failure to act would mean Poland having to pay at least 70 million euros in fines, further delay in accessing billions of euros to support its economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, and the possible loss of additional development funds. The case is among many bitter rows between the EU and Poland's ruling Law and Justice (PiS) party, which came to power in 2015 and has since faced accusations of eroding the freedom of courts, the media, women, gays and migrants, among others.

The Jan.11 deadline relates to an order last October by the top EU court fining Warsaw for failing to immediately halt the work of the Polish Supreme Court's Disciplinary Chamber pending a final verdict on the scheme.

Asked about the deadline to dismantle the chamber, which has powers to punish judges over their rulings, or get ready to pay the fines, Poland's Deputy Justice Minister Sebastian Kaleta said the emergency measures ordered by the European Court of Justice (ECJ) "breached competences Poland vested in the EU".

"These are illegal demands," Kaleta, a member of a hardline eurosceptic coalition partner of PiS, told Reuters, adding Poland would not bow to "blackmail by EU institutions". A Polish government spokesman did not reply to requests for further comment on the standoff.

PiS, a populist, nationalist party, introduced the new policing system for judges in 2017, part of a sweeping overhaul of the courts it says was needed to rid them of lingering communist-era influence.

But the EU, the United States, rights groups and democracy watchdogs accused Warsaw of undermining the principle of judicial independence through political meddling.

India Fears Another COVID Catastrophe

NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - India has reported 117,100 new COVID-19 cases, a five-fold increase in a week and the most since early June of last year, as the Omicron variant overtakes Delta in the cities.

The health ministry on Friday also reported 302 new deaths, taking the total to 483,178. Total infections stand at 35.23 million.

Case numbers have yet to match the enormous figures seen during the brutal second wave of the pandemic last year when thousands died each day and crematoriums maintained round-the-clock pyres for mass cremation of victims.

But daily infections have nearly tripled over two days this week, a surge driven by the highly contagious Omicron variant of coronavirus that some experts worry could again see the country's hospitals overwhelmed.

Haunted by the memories of the second wave, India is bracing for a deluge of COVID-19 cases, with authorities in several cities bringing in restrictions in a bid to keep infections in check.

An overnight curfew has been imposed in the capital New Delhi and weekend movement restrictions will begin on Friday evening, with all non-essential workers asked to stay home.

Tech hub Bengaluru has also declared a weekend curfew, while the sprawling financial centre Mumbai

has introduced a night curfew.

"Even a small percentage of a large number of cases translates to a large number in absolute terms," Gautam Menon, a professor at India's Ashoka University who has worked on COVID-19 infection modelling, told the AFP news agency.

"This could potentially stress out healthcare systems to levels comparable to or worse than the second wave."

Doctors and nurses who spoke to AFP have so far been optimistic, with fewer severe cases among those patients admitted to hospital -- and with the benefit of experience.

"Last year, we didn't know what exactly we were dealing with. I think now, mentally, it's a little better," one front-line worker at a New Delhi hospital said.

Suresh Kumar, director of Lok Nayak Jai Prakash Hospital in the capital, where cases have quadrupled from a handful at the start of the week to 20, said the rise was "not a cause for panic".

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's administration has so far shied away from the drastic nationwide lockdown introduced during last year's catastrophic outbreak. But local officials have watched the sharply rising case numbers with alarm.

Earlier, virus lockdowns were a hammer blow to the Indian economy, and many are worried about the financial effect of new restrictions.



Macron Faces Right-Wing Threat

CAVAILLON (Dispatches)

- French right-winger

Valerie Pécresse was a rank

outsider in the race for the

presidency just a month

ago, but with under 100 days to the election she is seen as the best-placed

challenger to Emmanuel Macron.

Backed by her Republicans party which has deep roots nation-wide, the

54-year-old is bidding to be France's first woman president with a slogan that promises "restored French pride".

During a trip to the south on Thursday, the head of the greater Paris region made

clear she planned to campaign on an unabashed right-wing platform of law and order.

While promising to take a "Karcher" power-hose to crime-ridden urban

ghettos in France, she accused President Macron of being soft on drug

dealers and "complicit" in a rise in violence.

"I don't want any more areas without the rule of law, without France," she

told an elderly crowd of a few hundred people in the town of Cavaillon where drug-related gun crime is a source of concern.

Saying she didn't care about "political correctness", Pécresse declared:

"Yes, I can say it: There is a link between delinquency and immigration."

By focusing on identity, crime and immigration, she is targeting areas

where she views Macron as vulnerable -- and borrowing from the playbook of far-right candidates Marine Le Pen and her rival Eric Zemmour.

"There's not an increase in the fear of crime, there's an increase in crime,"

Pécresse said, describing drug-dealers taking over tower blocks and teachers trembling in front of their classes.

Surveys of voters show that immigration and crime are indeed among their top concerns, but below the rising cost of living and jobs.

Pro-business Macron is banking on voters crediting him with falling unemployment and rising wages, as well as his handling of the Covid-19 crisis.

Only days after causing an uproar by saying he wanted to "piss off" the unvaccinated, the 44-year-old is to head south next Monday to Nice for his own trip focused on security. France goes to the polls on April 10 and 24 under an electoral system that sees the top two candidates in the first round advance to a second-round run-off where the winner must garner more than 50 percent.



Farmanieh Apt (\$2200)
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J, balcony
pkg, & yard
Fully Furn

Shanon (adviser)

Pasdaran Villa (\$2500)
1000sq.m
5bdrs, S/p
S, J, balcony
marble floor
Fully Furn

Parsian

Elahieh (\$2500) 200sq.m, 3bdrs, S/p, S, J, pkg, & F.F
Velenjak (\$2700) 300sq.m, 3bdrs, S/p, S, J, pkg, & F.F

Darrous Apt (\$1800)
180sq.m, 3bdrs, balcony, F.F

Zaferanieh bldg (\$10000)
5storey, 20bdrs, S/p, & pkg lots

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Qatar Airways Seeks Over \$600m in Airbus A350 Dispute

LONDON (Dispatches) - Qatar Airways is seeking more than \$600 million in compensation from Airbus over surface flaws on A350 jetliners, according to a court document shedding new light on an escalating business feud worth \$4 million a day.

The Persian Gulf carrier is also asking British judges to order France-based Airbus not to attempt to deliver any more of the jets until what it describes as a design defect has been fixed.

The two companies have been locked in a row for months over damage including blistered paint, cracked window frames or riveted areas and erosion of a layer of lightning protection.



U.S. Job Growth Seen Accelerating in December

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - U.S. employment growth likely picked up in December, culminating in record job creation in 2021, but the labor market could temporarily lose its luster as raging COVID-19 infections cause disruptions at businesses and schools.

The Labor Department's closely watched employment report on Friday is also expected to show the jobs market rapidly tightening, with the unemployment rate seen falling to a 22-month low of 4.1% from 4.2% in November. It will sketch a picture of an economy that closed 2021 on a high note, even if the public health picture is not as improved as officials had hoped.

"Unfortunately the economy's path is still tethered to the pandemic and Omicron is going to deliver a significant blow to the economy in the first quarter," said Ryan Sweet, a senior economist at Moody's Analytics in West Chester, Pennsylvania.

Nonfarm payrolls likely increased by 400,000 jobs last month after rising 210,000 in November, according to a Reuters survey of economists. Should payrolls meet expectations, a whopping 6.5 million jobs would have been created in 2021.

This would be the largest annual increase in employment since record keeping started in 1939, a fact that is likely to be highlighted by President Joe Biden, who celebrates his first anniversary in the White House this month.

Still, employment would be about 3.5 million jobs below its peak in February 2020. Estimates ranged from as low as 150,000 to as high as 1.1 million jobs.

The government surveyed businesses and households for last month's employment report in mid-December just as the Omicron variant was barreling across the country. The United States reported nearly 1 million new coronavirus infections on Monday, the highest daily tally of any country in the world.

Airlines have canceled thousands of flights and some school districts have suspended in-person learning. Some working parents may have to take on childcare duties, with the reversion to online learning. People who are out sick or in quarantine and do not get paid during the payrolls survey period are counted as unemployed even if they still have a job with their companies.

"The chaos caused by the rapid spread of the Omicron variant came too late to have much effect on December payrolls, which we estimate increased by a healthy 350,000," said Michael Pearce, a senior U.S. economist at Capital Economics in New York. "But the huge numbers of people being told to isolate could drive a significant drop in payrolls in January."

Economists expect November's payrolls count, which was the smallest since December 2020, could be revised higher, noting that the response rate to the survey that month was extremely low. The forecast for December payrolls is also highly uncertain, given the vagaries of the model used by the government to strip out seasonal fluctuations from the data.

Economists noted that anomalies with the so-called seasonal adjustment appeared to depress the monthly change in payrolls both last November and in December 2020.

"Unfortunately, those anomalies may get more company on Friday," said Lou Crandall, chief economist at Wrightson ICAP in Jersey City. "We would shrug off the disappointment in the reported (payrolls) level if the seasonal adjustment factors are as stingy as we have assumed."

Payrolls gains below expectations would also be due to an acute shortage of workers. The government said on Tuesday that there were 10.6 million job openings at the end of November.

There were gains in November that some unemployed people were stepping back into the labor market following the end of government-funded jobless benefits early in the fall. But the reentry could be slowed by spiraling Omicron cases.

Canada's Trade Surplus Soars to Highest Point in 13 Years

OTTAWA (Dispatches) - Canada posted its biggest trade surplus in more than 13 years in November as record exports offset the effects of flooding in the west of the country, the government said.

The surplus of C\$3.1 billion (RM10.26 billion) was well above what economists had expected.

For the second month in a row, both exports and imports hit levels not seen since September 2008.

Exports of consumer goods increased nine per cent in November to C\$7.3 billion, mainly thanks to pharmaceutical products, Statistics Canada said.

In November, large shipments of Covid-19 medication came into Canada for packaging and labelling, and most of it was later exported the same month. This caused a boost to both export and import statistics.

The rise in the trade surplus is "another sign that the flooding in British Columbia had only a small impact on overall economic activity," said Stephen Brown of Capital Economics.

"It confirms that the economy headed into the latest lockdowns in a stronger position than we initially expected."

Exports of farm and fishing products, as well as coal, posted the largest decreases.

In mid-November, flooding and landslides damaged infrastructure in British Columbia, disrupting transports of goods to and from major ports on Canada's Pacific coast.

Overall, exports to countries other than the United States, which depend heavily on Vancouver's ports, were down four percent in November.

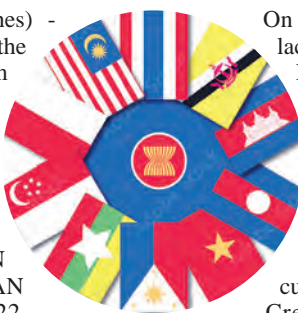
ASEAN Currencies, Including Ringgit, Expected to Perform Well This Year

KUALA LUMPUR (Dispatches) - ASEAN currencies, including the ringgit, are expected to perform well this year after a downward trend against the U.S. dollar last year, said Credit Suisse.

"Although stronger growth could pressure import bills, current accounts should remain strong for most ASEAN markets," it said in its ASEAN Market Strategy Outlook 2022.

Credit Suisse said Malaysia ranks second in its aggregate Asia Pacific scorecard, and first on valuations. It has currency potential, and the ringgit features strongly on currency metrics.

"It has the region's second lowest real effective exchange rate, relative to the recent history, and the ringgit has underperformed the rise in oil prices," the investment bank said.



On the negative side, Malaysia lacks the structural potential of Indonesia and Philippines, and the politics remain complex, Credit Suisse noted.

"We keep a slight overweight on Malaysia, which we rank below Indonesia and Singapore in our pecking order, and view it primarily as a currency play," it added.

Credit Suisse is maintaining "overweight" positions in ASEAN stock markets, except for Thailand.

"We see ample catalysts and tailwinds for ASEAN aside from valuations. Economies should bounce back this year, with Asia Pacific's best year-on-year deltas — or change in the asset prices — on gross domestic product (GDP) growth. Earnings per share (EPS) momentum has turned and should continue to outperform regional peers," it said. "Foreign ownership remains near all-time lows. As the cyclical upturn takes hold, we expect investors to return their attention to ASEAN's structural strengths, namely demographics and low digital and credit penetration."

Credit Suisse reckons that although some investors might worry about U.S. Federal Reserve rate hikes, it believes that a new dynamic is now at work.

"We believe that ASEAN is no longer rates-sensitive, and is now growth-driven," it said. On GDP, it said the ASEAN 4 — Thailand, Philippines, Indonesia, and Malaysia — are the only economies in Asia expected to see growth this year.

It does not foresee more severe lockdowns in the region following the Omicron spread. "Although Malaysia has some significant tourism exposure, only Thailand, which stands out for its tourism dependence, seems unusually vulnerable to Omicron," the investment bank said.

China's December New Yuan Loans Seen Lower, Hit Record in 2021

BEIJING (Dispatches) - New bank loans in China likely fell in December, although lending for the full year 2021 set a record, a Reuters poll showed, as the central bank maintained policy support for the Chinese banks are estimated to have issued 1.25 trillion yuan (\$196.06 billion) in net yuan loans last month, down from 1.27 trillion yuan in November, the median estimate in the survey of 21 economists found.

If December data, due during the coming week, is in line with forecasts, total new lending in 2021 would hit 20.07 trillion yuan, up 2.2% from the previous record of 19.63 trillion yuan in 2020.

China's central bank cut the reserve requirement ratio (RRR) for banks on Dec. 15, its second such move in 2021, releasing 1.2 trillion yuan in long-term liquidity to bolster business activity.

The central bank also cut the rates on its relending facility by 25 basis points (bps) to support the rural sector and small firms.

The economy faces multiple challenges heading into 2022 due to a property downturn and strict COVID-19 restrictions that have hit consumption and put pressure on the central bank to loosen policy.

China will continue to implement proactive fiscal policy and prudent monetary policy in 2022. It will keep economic operations within a reasonable range in 2022, said the Politburo, the country's top-decision making body.

Broad M2 money supply growth in December was seen at 8.7%, compared with 8.5% the previous month.

Outstanding yuan loans were expected to grow 11.7% in December from a year earlier, the same as in November.

Beijing has mostly relied on fiscal stimulus to weather the downturn, cutting taxes and issuing local government bonds to fund infrastructure projects.

Any acceleration in government bond issuance could boost total social financing (TSF), a broad measure of credit and liquidity.

China has issued 1.46 trillion yuan (\$229.30 billion) in the 2022 advance quota for local government special bonds to help spur investment and support the economy.

In December, TSF is expected to fall to 2.45 trillion yuan from 2.61 trillion yuan in November.

Japan Warns of Need For Currency Stability



TOKYO (Dispatches) - Japan's Finance Minister Shunichi Suzuki stressed on Friday the need for currency stability and said he was watching market moves "carefully," in the wake of the yen's recent declines against the dollar.

Domestic media and some market participants have warned of the potential demerits of a weak yen, which pushes up import prices and households' cost of living at a time when the economy is recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic.

"I won't comment on the currency market itself, but stability is important above all," Suzuki told reporters.

"From that standpoint, we'll closely watch currency market moves and their impact on the Japanese economy," he said, when asked if the weakening yen was negative for the economy.

Suzuki's remarks came as the dollar hovered near a five-year high at 116.355 yen hit on Tuesday, after strengthening on expectations that the U.S. Federal Reserve will embark on steady interest rate hikes while the Bank of Japan keeps rates ultra-low.

Japanese policymakers have traditionally favoured a weak yen as it gives exporters a competitive advantage. But BOJ Governor Haruhiko Kuroda said last month the boost to export volume from a weak yen may have declined compared with the past as more Japanese companies have shifted production abroad.

Kuroda also said the hit to households from a weak yen may have become bigger due to Japan's increasing reliance on raw material imports, offering the most direct acknowledgement yet of the potential disadvantages of a weaker yen.

With wholesale inflation already hitting a record high and driving up the cost of living, further yen declines could become politically painful for Prime Minister Fumio Kishida ahead of an upper house election looming in the summer.

Data released on Friday showed household spending fell for the fourth straight month and inflation-adjusted real wages slumped 1.6% in November from a year earlier.

Samsung Electronics Forecasts 52.5% Jump in Q4 Profits

SEOUL (Dispatches) - Samsung Electronics expects operating profits for the fourth quarter to soar 52.5 per cent, the South Korean tech giant said in a statement today, spurred by record sales.

The world's biggest smartphone maker forecast 2021 fourth-quarter operating profits at around 13.8 trillion won (RM48.5 billion), up from 9.05 trillion won in the same quarter last year.

The firm was boosted by record sales in the quarter, estimated at 76 trillion won, up 23.5 per cent on-year, according to the statement.

A spokeswoman told AFP annual sales in 2021 were also expected to be the highest ever.



While the coronavirus pandemic has wreaked havoc on the world economy, it has helped many tech companies boom.

Pandemic-driven working from home has boosted demand for devices powered by Samsung's chips, as well as home appliances such as televisions and washing machines.

Analysts had also expected the firm to benefit from the traditionally lucrative holiday season.

Samsung Electronics is the flagship subsidiary of the giant Samsung group, by far the largest of the family-controlled empires known as chaebols that dominate business in South Korea.

The conglomerate's overall turnover is equivalent to around one-fifth of South Korea's gross domestic product.

Niki Karimi's Films to Be Reviewed in UCLA

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Film and Television Archive Center of the University of California, Los Angeles is going to review the films made by Iranian director Niki Karimi.

In the event, the film "Final Whistle" from Karimi will be screened and question and answer meeting will be held at the presence of the director.

The movie has won several awards, including the best film award from Mannheim-Heidelberg International Film Festival and three main awards from Vesoul International Film Festival.



"Ocean Battery" Targets Renewable Energy Dilemma

LAS VEGAS (Dispatches) - A wind turbine sitting idle on a calm day or spinning swiftly when power demand is already met poses a problem for renewables, and is one researchers think can be tackled under the sea.

In one vision, offshore wind farms could use seawater to essentially store energy until it's needed, helping wean humanity off fossil fuels.

"We came up with a solution that we call the ocean battery," Frits Blik, CEO of Dutch startup Ocean Grazer told AFP while showing off the system at the CES tech fair in Las Vegas.

Amid the growing push away from climate-warming energy sources like coal, stockpiling green energy is key, experts say.

That's because nature does not always deliver wind -- or sun -- at the moment when electricity is most in demand.

Blik's "ocean battery" relies on massive flexible bladders on the seabed, which are filled up with seawater by the wind farm.

When the power is needed, the pressure of the ocean squeezes the water through the system on the seafloor that includes turbines -- and the result is electricity.

A key consideration with energy is cost, and storage systems involving some type of battery are not only very expensive but also at risk of leaks or contamination in an ocean environment.

Systems that rely on pressure are already used in hydroelectric dams that pump water into the reservoir behind the dam when electricity demand falls, effectively storing it to come back through the facility's turbines.

The U.S. Department of Energy traces the concept, called "pumped storage hydropower," to Italy and Switzerland in the 1890s, though facilities can now be found all around the world.

As for the underwater version of this type of storage, Ocean Grazer is not alone in trying to make it work.

FLASC, a spin-off of the University of Malta, has a system that uses renewably made electricity to pump water into a chamber that contains under-pressure air, which can then turn a hydraulic turbine to generate power.

Another initiative called StEnSea (Stored energy in the sea), uses hollow concrete spheres under the pressure of the deep ocean, and was tested in a German lake in 2016.

Blik, the Ocean Grazer CEO, said undersea systems take advantage of the



pressure below the ocean that is free, while creating a system that he said is about 80 percent efficient in storing energy.

Frits Blik's 'ocean battery' relies on massive flexible bladders on the seabed, which are filled up with seawater by the wind farm.

He sees storage systems as key for renewables, which have boomed as the price to produce such energy has dropped and made them a steadily growing part of the energy mix worldwide.

Renewables are the fastest-growing source in the United States, increasing 42 percent from 2010 to 2020, according to the nonprofit Center for Climate and Energy Solutions.

Yet deploying systems like the "ocean battery" on the scale needed to work as part of an electricity grid is still years away.

Blik said his company aims to have an offshore system in place by 2025, though one will be deployed onshore in the northern Netherlands by 2023.

Though various aspects of energy storage via pressure are not new, the pairing of it with green energy sources carries significant potential.

"With wind and solar now becoming part of the grid -- basically allowing us to get rid of fossil fuels -- in that context this is very exciting," said Claudio Canizares, an engineering professor and renewables expert at the University of Waterloo in Canada.

Gas Gap in Europe Drives U.S. LNG Exports To Record High



LONDON (Dispatches) - Sky-high European demand drove U.S. liquefied natural gas (LNG) exports to a record in December, Refinitiv data showed, with winter supply worries set to sustain orders for the fuel.

About half of the record U.S. LNG volumes shipped last month went to Europe, up from 37% earlier in 2021, data from Refinitiv and the U.S. Energy Information Administration showed.

The gains reflected soaring demand for the home heating and industrial fuel that pushed prices in Europe and Asia to record highs. The United States has ample and cheap supplies as its shale oil and gas boom in the last two decades led to domestic production that has exceeded U.S. demand by about 10%.

Vessel tracking data showed about 7.15 million tons of LNG were shipped last month on 106 vessels, up 16% compared to 6.14 million tons on 89 vessels the same month a year ago. That topped the previous record of 6.51 million tons set in May.

Dutch gas prices, the European benchmark, have cooled since late December removing their premium to Asia. On Wednesday, the Japan Korea Marker (JKM) price for Asia spot gas was \$34.19 per million British thermal units, a premium of about \$4 to Europe.

Two LNG cargoes originally destined for Europe have been re-routed this month, people familiar with the matter said, with one heading to Asia. That is a reversal to late last year when at least 10 cargoes heading for Asia were re-routed to Europe attracted by the price differential.

"LNG diversions from Asia are a useful stop-gap measure but are not a sustainable substitute for stable pipeline supplies," Wei Xiong, senior analyst at consultancy Rystad Energy, said.

LNG demand in Asia may jump in January, halting further diversions to Europe, she added.

"Prices are volatile right now," said Reid I'Anson, senior commodity analyst at data provider Kpler.

While LNG prices being higher in Asia than in Europe lowers the likelihood of a new record for U.S. exports to Europe, flows could shift again if temperatures tumble there, I'Anson said.

Ports in Britain, the Netherlands and Belgium have around 30 LNG tankers scheduled for delivery this month, with at least 13 arriving from the United States.

Indonesia Survey Finds 85% of Population Have COVID-19 Antibodies

JAKARTA (Reuters) - More than 85% of Indonesia's population has antibodies against COVID-19, a government-commissioned survey showed, but epidemiologists warned it was not clear whether this immunity could help contain a fresh wave of coronavirus infections.

The survey, conducted between October and December by researchers at the University of Indonesia, found Indonesians had developed antibodies from a combination of COVID-19 infections and vaccinations. Pandu Riono, an epidemiologist involved in the survey that covered some 22,000 respondents, said the level of immunity could explain why there had not been a significant jump in COVID-19 infections since the middle of 2021.

Indonesia's second wave of infections - driven by the Delta variant - peaked in July and August, with infections plummeting from more than 50,000 a day to just a few hundred a day in recent months.

The antibodies may provide some protection against new variants, including the highly contagious Omicron, Pandu said, though adding it would take months for this



to become clear.

Omicron has infected more than 250 people in Indonesia, but most cases have been imported and a handful of local cases have not so far brought the type of surge recorded in many countries.

Pandu said the survey did not negate a need for more people to be vaccinated, even those that

had already been infected.

"The point is to have the majority of people develop a hybrid immunity to control the pandemic," he said, referring to the stronger immunity among some people who are vaccinated and have also been infected.

Indonesia has only fully vaccinated just over 42% of its population of 270 million people.

The survey's findings were still being examined to assess how different brands of vaccines might contribute to different levels of antibodies, Pandu said.

Dicky Budiman, an epidemiologist at Australia's Griffith University, who was not involved in the survey, said the findings should be treated cautiously since Indonesia's vaccination rates lagged many countries and there was no guarantee how long antibodies might last.

Almost 100,000 Children Lost Parents to Covid in Peru

LIMA (Dispatches) - Covid-19 killed at least one parent or primary caregiver for nearly 100,000 children in Peru, the country with the world's highest coronavirus death rate, its government reported Thursday.

"Unfortunately our country has almost 98,000 children who lost their father, mother or guardian during the pandemic," said Peru's Minister of Women Anahi Durand, citing figures published in the medical journal The Lancet.

Peru leads the world in overall Covid deaths per capita, with more than 6,000 Peruvians per million having died from the disease, according to an AFP analysis of official figures.

The government currently provides a pension of 200 soles (\$50) every two months to more than 18,000 families.

Durand hopes to expand the benefit to cover psychological and educational support, and to reach more than 83,000 children and adolescents. A key issue under the current system is that many families lack the necessary documentation to receive the benefit, Durand said.

"Many families come to us and want to access the pension, but they do not have a death certificate for Covid-19 -- in the first and second wave people died at home, they did not have conditions to get that certificate," she explained.

The country of 33 million is undergoing its third Covid wave and has recorded more than two million cases.

More than 202,900 people in Peru have died since the beginning of the global pandemic in early 2020.

Tehran, Baku...

FROM PAGE 1

On November 28, 2021, Azerbaijan, Iran, and Turkmenistan signed a trilateral agreement on swapping gas supplies in Ashgabat. The agreement envisages deliveries of 1.5 to 2 billion cubic meters of gas each year, with Turkmenistan supplying gas to Iran and Iran delivering an equal quantity of gas to Azerbaijan. Thus, under the trilateral deal, Turkmenistan will sell 5-6 million cubic meters of gas per day to Azerbaijan.

In addition, a new transport corridor through Iran, Azerbaijan, and Georgia

has been launched in test mode recently, which will connect the Persian Gulf with the Black Sea.

After liberating its lands from Armenia's occupation in a 44-day war with Armenia in 2020, Azerbaijan restored control over the 132-km section of the Azerbaijan-Iran border. The restoration of control over the state border created new opportunities and prospects for broader cooperation between the two countries.

Capitol Riot...

FROM PAGE 1

"We must be absolutely clear about what is true and what is lie. Here's the truth: A former president of the United States of America has created and spread a web of lies about the 2020 election. He's done so because he values power over principle," Biden said.

Biden added that "for the first time in our history a president had not just lost the election he tried to prevent the peaceful transfer of power."

Biden condemned Trump for watching the protest on television "and doing nothing for hours."

"The former president and his supporters have decided the only way for them to win is to suppress your vote and subvert our elections," Biden said.

"One year ago today in this sacred place, democracy was attacked. Simply attacked," Biden said. "The will of the people was under assault. The Constitution, our Constitution, faced the gravest of threats."

Despite Biden's accusation against Trump, all those incidents in the recent years bespeak of this fact that Americans are losing their faiths in their politicians and the elections and it is a step forward to the collapse of this country which has always proclaimed supporting democracy.

According to a recent conducted polls, Americans' faith in the integrity of their country's election system has dropped following the events of Jan. 6.

Now, just 20% of the public say that it is very confident about the system, a new ABC/Ipsos poll finds.

The new findings show a significant fall from 37% in an ABC News/Washington Post poll carried out in the days after the insurrection last year.

The lack of strong confidence in the U.S.' ability to hold an honest election crosses partisan lines.

Among Democrats, 30% believe they are very confident in the election systems overall, while among, only 1 in 5 consider themselves "very confident" in the country's elections.

And among Republicans, only 13% are very confident, with a significant majority (59%) having little faith in the system.

A recent poll has found that at least 50 percent of Republican voters surveyed believe their vote will not be counted accurately the next time they cast a ballot.

Commenting on Biden's statement, American journalist Don DeBar said, "In 2016, Trump was elected in the face of the most aggressive negative campaign U.S. intelligence and U.S. media have ever conducted. For the 4 years he governed, the FBI, the CIA, the leadership of both political parties and the entire U.S. media attempted to drive him from office. Despite all of that, Trump nearly won in 2020 and, absent massive fraud, would have been re-elected."

So the U.S. as the flag-bearer of the so-called democracy and fair election is no longer a haven for democracy and what the American politicians claim are void, and through the time the world public will see more signs of U.S. decline no matter who rules the country whether a Democrat or a Republican as this car is falling the bottom of the valley of mistrust and rift which ultimately leads to full collapse and there will be no longer any United States but divided states.

Iran Ready for...

FROM PAGE 1

The plane was shot down by Iran's air defenses, which mistook the aircraft for a military target amid tensions between Tehran and Washington following the US assassination of revered Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani in Iraq days earlier.

The Foreign Ministry warned, however, that some countries have taken illegal actions and are trying to exploit the tragic incident.

The statement, which was issued on the second anniversary of the tragic event, said all relevant bodies in Iran have carried out their duties with precision, transparency and speed in accordance with domestic and international laws immediately after the crash.

"So far, several hearings have been held in the presence of the families of the victims," it added.

It emphasized that some reparations have already been paid and Iran has already declared its readiness to make payments to the families of the foreign victims from 30 countries.

Di Maria, Draxler Test Positive for Covid-19

PARIS (Dispatches) - Paris St Germain winger Angel di Maria and midfielder Julian Draxler have tested positive for Covid-19, the Ligue 1 club said.

Argentina international Di Maria has three goals and five assists in 16 games in all competitions for PSG this season, while Germany's Draxler has two goals and two assists in 14 games.

PSG said in a statement the pair returned positive results on Thursday morning and have been placed under isolation.

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Barcelona Hit by De Jong And Araujo Injuries

MADRID (Dispatches) - Barcelona have been dealt a double injury blow after the club confirmed that Frenkie de Jong has sustained a calf strain while Ronald Araujo will need surgery on a fractured hand.

De Jong and Araujo were both substituted during Barca's Copa del Rey win over Linares Deportivo. Araujo will undergo surgery tomorrow and is likely to be out for a few weeks. De Jong should be back sooner but the Dutchman is not expected to be available for the game against Granada in La Liga.

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SPORTS

SUNDAY JANUARY 9, 2022

Paul Powers Suns Over Clippers as Warriors Fall

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - Phoenix star Chris Paul posted his first triple-double of the season to power the Suns to a 106-89 NBA victory over the Los Angeles Clippers that boosted their Western Conference lead over the Golden State Warriors.

With stars Stephen Curry and Draymond Green sidelined by injury, the Warriors fell 101-96 to the Pelicans in New Orleans, the defeat coming on the heels of Wednesday's setback in Dallas and marking the Warriors' first back-to-back losses since last season.

The Suns became the first team to win 30 games this season, improving to 30-8 and moving one game ahead of the Warriors for the best record in the league.

Paul led the way with his 17th career triple-double, grabbing a career-high 13 rebounds alongside 14 points and 10 assists.

Cameron Johnson added a career-high 24 points, and Jalen Smith chipped in 19 points and 14 rebounds to boost a Suns lineup depleted by Covid-19 concerns.

Paul shrugged off the difficulties of powering through with center Deandre Ayton, Forward Jae Crowder and JaVale McGee all absent as they regain fitness after being sidelined by Covid issues.

"Everybody's got guys out right now," Paul said.

Phoenix led by as many as 17 points in the third quarter, but Los Angeles trimmed the deficit to 79-76 with 8:36 remaining.

"You've just got to stay the course," Paul said after the Suns bore down and pulled away again late to win their third in a row.

Nishikori Pulls Out of Australian Open Due to Injury

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - Japan's Kei Nishikori has withdrawn from this month's Australian Open Grand Slam because he is still recovering from a hip injury, the 32-year-old said.

Nishikori, who reached a career-high ranking of fourth shortly after becoming the first man from Asia to reach a major final at the 2014 US Open, has been plagued by injuries in recent years and struggled for consistency.

"Since the end of last year I have been struggling with my hip," Nishikori, currently ranked 47th, said on Twitter. "It is not 100 per cent recovered yet and I will have to pull out of the Aussie swing."

"This is very disappointing as the Australian Open feels like my 'home' Grand Slam... And can't wait to be back next year."

Nishikori suffered a first-round exit in last year's edition of the Melbourne Park major. The tournament begins on Jan. 17.

Cruzeiro Fans Protest Against New Owner Ronaldo

SAO PAULO (Dispatches) - Ronaldo's start as the new owner of Brazilian club Cruzeiro hit early snags on Thursday as hundreds of fans demonstrated against his new regime outside the team's training ground.

Supporters from Cruzeiro's organized fan groups were angry at a decision to let a club stalwart leave the side prematurely and chanted "Big fat Ronaldo! Come and explain!"

The anger bubbled over the day after goalkeeper Fabio, who joined Cruzeiro in 2005, said he was leaving. In a public letter to fans he said the new administration did not honour an agreement reached with the previous directors.

"My contract renewal had been agreed with the club ... but this administration has not given me this option," he wrote on Instagram.

Fabio, who played 976 times for the club, said he had agreed to extend his contract for one more year but was offered a three-month deal, something he said caused him "tears and pain".

Cruzeiro later published a series of tweets honoring the keeper, without addressing his allegations.



Finney-Smith in Golden State's loss to the Mavericks on Wednesday. Green was sidelined with a sore left hip and Juan Toscano-Anderson was also out with an ankle injury.

Even so the Warriors led much of the first half, but with 13 points from Ingram in the second quarter the Pelicans took a one-point lead into halftime.

New Orleans' Brandon Ingram shoots over Golden State's Moses Moody in the Pelicans' 101-96 NBA victory over the Warriors

New Orleans' Brandon Ingram shoots over Golden State's Moses Moody in the Pelicans' 101-96 NBA victory over the Warriors Sean Gardner GETTY IMAGES NORTH AMERICA/AFP

Up by 10 with 1:27 remaining, the Pelicans withstood a Warriors surge that pulled the visitors within 94-91 with less than a minute to play.

But the Pelicans made a string of free throws to close out the victory.

In New York, RJ Barrett banked in an unlikely off-balance three-pointer at the buzzer to cap the Knicks' 108-105 comeback victory over the Boston Celtics.

Knicks guard Evan Fournier helped set up the dramatic ending, draining 10 three-pointers on the way to a career-high 41 points to fuel New York's fightback from a 25-point first-half deficit.

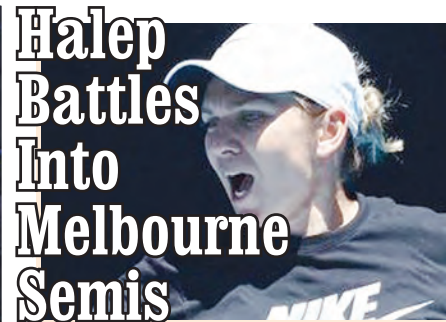
His three-pointer with 2:07 left to play gave New York their first lead of the game, 99-98.

It was a major turnaround for France's Fournier, who went scoreless against the Toronto Raptors on Tuesday.

Fournier has struggled to find his feet in New York since moving from Boston this season, but he has three 30-point games against his former club.

"Maybe there's a little bit of extra motivation, but it's not something I do on purpose," he said. "I don't wake up thinking 'OK, it's the Celtics, I have to play better.'"

Boston's Jayson Tatum knotted the score with a step-back jump shot with 2.2 seconds remaining -- Barrett getting there too late to contest the shot.



MELBOURNE (AFP) - Two-time Grand Slam champion Simona Halep laboured into the last four of the Melbourne Summer Set to stay on track for a final showdown with Naomi Osaka.

The former world number one, whose season was blighted by injury last year, overcame Switzerland's Viktorija Golubic 6-2, 5-7, 6-4 on Rod Laver Arena, but it was a hard slog.

"It was really difficult I have to admit," said Halep, who missed Roland-Garros, Wimbledon and the Olympics last year with a calf injury and ended her season early due to a knee issue.

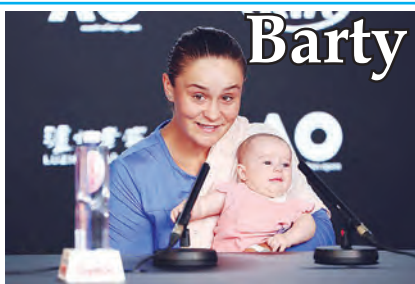
"I didn't believe I could win this match but I fought till the end and I'm very proud of this."

She was in charge in the first set but her killer instinct deserted her in the second, broken when serving for 5-3 then again when serving for the match, racking up 23 unforced errors.

They traded breaks in the third set until Halep dug deep, saving four break points in the seventh game then breaking in the ninth to clock a tough win.

Now ranked 20, she will play Zheng Qin-wen in the last four after the 126th-ranked Chinese player upset Croatia's Ana Konjuh 7-6 (7/1), 7-6 (8/6).

Top seed Osaka faces veteran German Andrea Petkovic later Friday while Veronika Kudermetova takes on fellow Russian Anastasia Potapova in the other quarter-finals.



Barty Serves Her Way to Brilliant Win Over Kenin

ADELAIDE (Dispatches) - World number one Ashleigh Barty fired off 17 aces as she downed former Australian Open champion Sofia Kenin 6-3, 6-4 in the quarter-finals of the Adelaide International.

Barty was in superb form as she saw off world number 12 Kenin in just 68 minutes of quality tennis.

The 25-year-old Australian served beautifully, winning 31 of 32 points on her first serve and nine of 16 on her second, not giving Kenin any opportunities to break.

By contrast, Kenin's serve was not nearly as effective and while she was only broken once in each set, she struggled to hold throughout.

The American's chances were also not helped by the 26 unforced errors she made, many coming from her forehand side.

Barty, who has not played a tournament since taking a pandemic-enforced break at the end of

last September's US Open, has had a tough run at the season-opening Adelaide tournament.

She had a first round bye before beating rising American star Coco Gauff in three sets in the second round and then facing Kenin in the quarter-finals.

And her path doesn't get any easier, with her semi-final opponent to be either in-form Iga Swiatek or former world number one Victoria Azarenka.

"That's what you want," she said.

"It's nice to be able to come out here and be really tested from the start and know you have to bring your very best level."

"Looking at both these previous two matches, there's still work to be done, but it's been a really solid start and we're happy with the foundation we've set to start the year off."

Seventh seed Elena Rybakina moved into the final four with a come behind win over American Shelby Rogers.

The towering Rybakina struggled on serve in the first set but recovered to win 3-6, 6-3, 6-2.

She will take on Misaki Doi in the semi-finals after the Japanese player downed Slovenia's Kaja Juvan 6-3, 4-6, 7-6 (7/5).

U.S. Boycott of Beijing Insult to Olympic Spirit

SEOUL (Dispatches) - North Korea has slammed the U.S.-led diplomatic boycott of February's Beijing Winter Games, state media reported Friday, describing it as an "insult" to the Olympic spirit.

Washington and some of its allies have announced a diplomatic boycott, citing China's human rights record, in a decision that incensed Beijing.

China is the main ally and economic benefactor of impoverished North Korea, which is suspended from competing in the Chinese capital.

North Korean Olympic and sports bodies criticised the boycott in a letter to their Chinese counterparts, the official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) said.

"The U.S. and its vassal forces are getting evermore undisguised in their moves against China aimed at preventing the successful opening of the Olympics," the letter said, according to KCNA.

Their moves are "an insult to the spirit of the international Olympic Charter".

North Korea stayed away from the pandemic-delayed Tokyo Games last year, refusing to send its athletes over Covid concerns.

The International Olympic Committee punished it for the no-show with a suspension that meant it could not participate in the Beijing Winter Games.



Kyrgios Slams Djokovic Treatment

MELBOURNE (Dispatches) - Novak Djokovic has received support from one of his fiercest critics with Nick Kyrgios criticizing the way the world number one has been treated in Australia and saying authorities must do better for "one of our great champions".

Djokovic, who has won a record nine Australian Open titles, was detained at the Melbourne airport on Wednesday evening and his entry visa, supported by a medical exemption from the country's vaccination requirements, was revoked.

Federal Border Force officials at the airport said Djokovic was unable to justify the grounds for his exemption. Chasing a men's record 21st Grand Slam, Djokovic is holed up in immigration detention as his lawyers battle to secure his release to play in the Australian Open and be exempt from strict COVID-19 vaccination requirements.

Kyrgios, who labelled Djokovic a "tool" after the Serb sought to improve quarantine conditions for players ahead of last year's Grand Slam, said the situation had been handled poorly.

"Look I definitely believe in taking action, I got vaccinated because of others and for my mum's health, but how we are handling Novak's situation is bad, really bad," tweeted Kyrgios.

"Like these memes, headlines, this is one of our great champions but at the end of the day, he is human. Do better."

