

Iranian Handicraft Artist Ms. Shahrbanoo Arabian Was Selected to Win the 5th International Handicraft Award 2021 in New Delhi In the Field of Manufacturing and Production Handicrafts

IRAN NEWS

The Health Deputy of Iran's Shahid Beheshti University of Medical Sciences Has Said Varamin, on the Southern Edge of the Capital Tehran Is a Cutaneous Leishmaniasis Endemic Region in the Country

2 DOMESTIC

IRGC Holds Largest Ever Combined Military Drill in Southeast
 > SEE PAGE 2



3 DOMESTIC

Iran Trade With Neighbors Witnessing 42% Growth in Value
 > SEE PAGE 3



Good Progress in Tehran-Beijing Ties

IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian has noted "very good progress" in China-Iranian talks on the expansion of bilateral relations, saying "strategic issues" are being discussed between Tehran and Beijing.

Amir-Abdollahian made the remarks on Friday after arriving in China as head of a high-ranking political and economic delegation at the invitation of his Chinese counterpart, Wang Yi.

See Page 7

President Opens First Super Heavy Oil Refinery in Qeshm



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - President Ebrahim Raisi officially inaugurated a first super heavy oil refinery in Iran on Friday as the country moves ahead with plans to develop its massive petroleum sector despite sanctions imposed by the United States.

On Friday, Raisi opened the Qeshm Heavy Oil Refinery on the second day of his provincial tour to the

southern Hormozgan region.

It is said the refinery had been working on a pilot basis and using a half of its refining capacity in recent years, adding that the facility has now reached its full capacity for processing 70,000 barrels per day of crude.

Iran's Oil Minister Javad Owji said during a visit to the refinery on Thursday that the facility will feed on super heavy oil from Soroush and Nowruz oilfields in the Persian Gulf.

Owji said private owners of the Qeshm Refinery had provided around \$220 million in investment for construction of the refinery and for the supply of machinery and equipment to the facility.

He said the refinery could reach a refining capacity of 100,000 barrels per day within the next three years.

Qeshm is one of the world's largest islands that is located in the Persian Gulf just few kilometers off the southern Iranian coast.

The area is one of major special economic zones of Iran where regulations are more lax compared to the mainland to encourage more investment in trade and manufacturing activities in the region.

On Friday Raisi said efforts to neutralize U.S. sanctions against his country are not tied to Vienna negotiations with the P4+1 group of countries, stressing that his administration is not putting all its eggs in one basket when it comes to dealing with U.S. sanctions and rendering them ineffective.

"Although the pursuit of removing sanctions is a serious agenda of the government, the effort in the thirteenth government to neutralize the sanctions has not been dependent on negotiations, so that today and under the sanctions situation, our oil sales have increased so much that we no longer worry and the proceeds are also returning to the country," Raisi wrote in a tweet on Friday morning.

Diplomats from Iran and the other remaining parties to the 2015 Iran agreement, officially called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), are engaged in the eighth round of diplomatic negotiations in Austria's capital to bring the US back into the deal.

Earlier on Thursday and speaking during his fourteenth provincial trip in Hormozgan province, President Raisi said Iran's oil export has increased by 40% and the revenues from oil exports return to the country.

On his fourteenth provincial trip, Raisi arrived at Bandar Abbas Airport, Hormozgan Province, southern Iran on Thursday morning and was welcomed by the representative of the Supreme Leader in the province, the governor-general and local officials.

Visiting the projects of the province, meeting with different groups of the people, elites, veterans and families of martyrs, participating in the meeting of the Administrative Council and a press conference will be the most important programs of the President's visit to Hormozgan province.

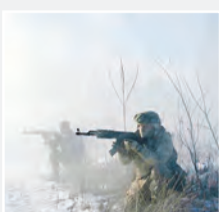
Upon his arrival at the airport of Bandar Abbas, Raisi said, "Agriculture, tourism and the maritime economy have very good fields and capacities for development, and despite these capacities, we should not see some shortcomings, poverty and unemployment in the province."

Stating that there is a high level of security in the province, which has led to good security in the Persian Gulf, he said, "I feel obliged to thank the armed forces of the province for providing good security in the sea and sky of Hormozgan and the Persian Gulf with their conscious and insightful presence."

See Page 7

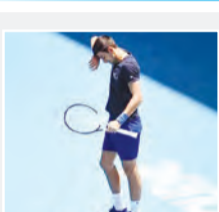
4 INTERNATIONAL

EU Ministers Reject Russian Pressure Over Ukraine
 > SEE PAGE 4



8 SPORT

Djokovic Drawn to Play Australian Open
 > SEE PAGE 8



Iran Successfully Tests First Satellite Carrier Operating on Solid Fuel

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The commander of Iran Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC)'s Aerospace Division says the country has mastered the technology of satellite carriers and has tested its first such carrier using solid fuel.

Addressing a gathering of religious scholars in the Iranian city of Qom on Thursday, Brigadier General Amir Ali Hajizadeh said, "From now on, Iran will be able to launch a great number of satellites using low-cost engines.

Elaborating on a recent test on an Iranian satellite carrier engine operating on solid fuel, Hajizadeh said, "This test has been successfully carried out for the first time" in the country. "During the past two years, all Iranian satellite carriers, which were tested, operated on liquid fuel. But in this test, we succeeded to use solid-fuel engine with a 66-tonne thrust," the Iranian commander said.

Hajizadeh stated that Iran's new satellite carriers are made of non-metal and composite fuselage, which increases the rocket's energy and leads to considerable saving in relevant costs.

See Page 7

Tehran Not to Accept Interim Agreement

TTEHRAN (PressTV) - The eighth round of negotiations between Iran and the remaining signatories to the 2015 deal continued in the Austrian capital as sources close to the talks say the Iranian team insists on a long-term and reliable agreement, rejecting an interim one.

On Thursday, Iran's lead negotiator to the Vienna talks Ali Bagheri Kani and Enrique Mora, the European Union's deputy foreign policy chief and head of the Joint Commission of the nuclear deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), as well as representatives of the three European signatories to the agreement held separate meetings.

A source close to Iran's negotiating team rejected reports that an interim agreement was discussed in the Vienna talks.

See Page 7

Iran Tenders to Buy 60,000 Ton Wheat After Purchase Last Week

LONDON (Dispatches) - Iranian state agency the Government Trading Corporation (GTC) has issued an international tender to purchase about 60,000 tons of milling wheat, European traders said.

The deadline for the submission of price offers in the tender was also Wednesday, January 12.

Volumes in Iran's tenders are nominal and the country regularly buys more than the original tonnage sought.

Traders said Iran last week purchased about four shipments of wheat each of about 60,000 tons likely to be sourced from Germany or Russia and the Black Sea region, traders said.

The new tender seeks shipment in February/March. Iran has been a regular wheat buyer in recent months with about 740,000 tons also bought in December.

Iran needs to import around 8 million tons of wheat after its crop was damaged by the worst drought in 50 years, Reuters reported in October.

But western sanctions on Iran continue to make payment difficult, traders said.

International Conference on Steelmaking & Continuous Casting

2nd ISCC(2022)

- Steel making metallurgy and processes(EAF)
- Optimization of raw materials and ferroalloys
- Secondary metallurgy and processes
- Refractories and their applications
- New developments and advanced technologies in steel continuous casting machines
- Casting and solidification of continuous casting products
- Fluid flow and solidification
- New developments in simulation and modelling
- Microstructure, and properties of continuous casting products
- Surface defects
- Mold fluxes and lubrication
- Plant enhancement technologies
- Energy management
- Artificial intelligence, big data and industry 4.0 solution
- Sustainability and environmental challenges
- Circular economy solutions

22 & 23. Feb. 2022
 Hormozgan Steel Company
 Bandar Abbas, Iran

For more information visit the following site
<https://iscc.hosco.ir>
 Email : iscc@hosco.ir

Mailing address:
 6th floor, Hormoz Science and Technology Park, Bandar Abbas, Iran

Total Vaccine Jabs in Iran Hit 124.9m

TEHRAN (MNA) – According to the Iranian Health Ministry on Thursday, the total number of vaccines injected to Iranian people has reached 124,970,698.

Iranian Health Ministry announced that 60,251,217 Iranians have received the first dose, 52,974,192 people the second dose and 11,745,289 people the third dose of the COVID-19 vaccine or the booster.

IRGC Holds Largest Ever Combined Military Drill in Southeast

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - The Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC)'s Ground Force has launched the largest ever combined military exercise in the country's southeast.

The drill, code-named Mohammad Rasoolullah (Muhammad the Messenger of God) (PBUH), was held by the Quds Base of the IRGC's Ground Forces in the southeastern province of Sistan and Baluchestan on Thursday.

Described as one of the largest operational training drills of the IRGC in the country's southeast, the exercise, with a geographical and operational focus, was held in a combined format in two major military and non-military phases, Tasnim News Agency reported.

According to the report, various operational units of the IRGC's Quds Base, including missiles, artillery, drones, helicopters, armored vehicles, special forces and specialized combat units, successfully conducted simulated and actual operations.

In the military phase of the exercise, infantry and commando forces also took part in the drill, which involved practicing electronic warfare, with a focus on offensive operations and strong defense.

"One of the important and operational features of the exercise, which was carried out with the participation of the Basij volunteer forces, Iran's Law Enforcement Forces and border guards, was the focus on the people's role in ensuring lasting security," according to the report.



Last month, the IRGC launched a large-scale military exercise in an area stretching along the southern shores of the country on the Persian Gulf and the strategic Strait of Hormuz.

The drills involved various IRGC units, such as the aerospace force and the cyber-electronic division, and covered the coastlines of the southern Iranian provinces of Hormozgan, Bushehr, and Khuzestan.

Iranian military experts and technicians have in recent years made great progress in developing and manufacturing a broad range of domestically-manufactured equipment, making the armed forces self-sufficient in this regard.

By implementing various stages of the largest joint and combined exercise of the Quds base of the IRGC ground forces, one of the largest exercises of ground forces was held in the southeastern provinces of Sistan and Baluchestan, said Commander of IRGC Ground Force Brigadier General Mohammad Pakpour on Thursday.

"The various operational units of the Quds base of the IRGC, including missiles, artillery, drones, helicopters, armor, destruction and explosions, special forces and specialized combat units of the Quds base successfully implemented all the simulated conditions of real clashes and operations," he added.

Gov't Approves Covid Vaccine SpikoGen for Third Dose

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's deputy health minister on Thursday announced that SpikoGen has been approved for the third dose of all Covid-19 vaccines administered inside the country.

Dr. Kamal Heidari, in a letter to the universities' deputy chancellors for health affairs and universities of medical sciences, wrote, "Based on conducted studies, the authorization of Iran's Food and Drug Administration, and the approval of the National Covid-19 Vaccine Committee, SpikoGen has been approved as the booster for all vaccines used in the country and can be injected at least three months after the second dose.

He added that SpikoGen is being injected as the first and second doses for people aged 18 to 50 and as a booster for the above-18 persons.

SpikoGen has been developed in the Iranian company CinnaGen in collaboration with the Australian Company Vaxine and has received the emergency use license.

Iran is also jointly producing Covid-19 vaccines with Russia and Cuba.

MPs Urge Gov't to Control Petrochemical Industry

TEHRAN (IMF) - 100 Iranian lawmakers have called for an end to the government's lack of control over the petrochemical industry.

Hadi Beiginejad, a member of Parliament's Energy Commission, said the lawmakers sent a letter to President Ebrahim Raisi to this effect.

Beiginejad noted that the petrochemical industry produces many products in Iran and the value of its products is equal to crude oil, saying, "If we sell each ton of crude oil for \$500, the sales value of petrochemical products is about the same and this almost shows that we are selling raw materials."

Beiginejad added that for this reason, Iran needs to design a strategy in the field of petrochemicals to determine where it wants to go in the future, what materials it needs to produce and where the Iranian government stands in this industry.

He maintained, "Petrochemical complexes have been in the hands of the government in recent years, many of which have been handed over to the private sector and some have remained as public sector, but we have not sold these petrochemicals to private individuals, but to a government that does not control the industry, and this has weakened the petrochemical organization in recent years."

Iran's Nine-Month Exports to Syria Up 90%

TEHRAN (IFP) - The head of Iran-Syria Joint Chamber of Commerce on Wednesday announced a 90 percent growth in Iran's exports to Syria during the nine months to December 2021.

Keyvan Kashefi, however, said Tehran-Damascus trade volume has not been satisfactory, adding the economic experts are convinced that the two countries have failed to take optimal advantage of their potentials.

Iran has been focused on the markets of the neighboring and regional states in the recent years, increasing its exports to Arab countries including Iraq and the United Arab Emirates, but its trade with Syria has failed to flourish.

According to Kashefi, Iran's exports to Syria during the nine-month period have fetched the country \$160 million, showing a 90 percent hike compared to \$84 million revenues during the corresponding period last year.

Steam turbine parts, foodstuff, and pharmaceutical products mainly constituted the Syria-bound commodities, continued the official.

Iran's exports to the world countries in the nine months are valued at \$35 billion, revealed Kashefi, adding Syria stood 21st in the country's export target table.

He also mentioned that Iran's imports from Syria in the nine months hit \$22.9 million, indicating a 53 percent increase as compared to nearly \$15 million during the same period of its previous year.

Iran Supports Kazakhstan Sovereignty



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran has once again reaffirmed its support for Kazakhstan's national sovereignty and slammed any foreign intervention in the Central Asian country amid heightened deadly tensions there.

"Since the beginning of the recent unrest in Kazakhstan, the Islamic Republic of Iran has been thoroughly monitoring the developments," Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian said in a phone call with his Kazakh counterpart Mukhtar Tileuberdi.

Iran, he added, "supports Kazakhstan's national sovereignty and condemns any foreign meddling in the country's affairs."

He added that the two countries enjoy positive and cordial relations and are resolved to strengthen ties at bilateral, regional and international levels.

The top Iranian and Kazakh diplomats exchanged views about major issues of bilateral and regional importance.

Tileuberdi outlined the latest developments in Kazakhstan and hailed Iran's position on the situation gripping the country.

He said a planned visit by Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev to Iran remained on the agenda given the importance of expanding trade ties between the two countries.

Mass protests began in Kazakhstan's western province of Mangistau on January 2 after the government decided to lift price controls on liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) — a move that roughly doubled gas prices in a matter of days. Protests then engulfed other parts of the country.

Authorities said on Tuesday that life had returned to normal in the country's main city and former capital, Almaty.

Tehran Denounces UN Voting Right Suspension

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The Iranian Foreign Ministry strongly denounces suspension of its right to vote at the United Nations, stressing that the United States' cruel sanctions have brought about the situation.

Spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh made the remarks after the Islamic Republic was denied the right to cast its vote on various matters at the UN General Assembly and the UN Security Council, due to the sanctions that prevent the country from paying up its membership dues for a second consecutive year.

"As a founding and active member of the world body, Iran considers itself duty-bound to fully and timely pay its membership fee at the UN and other international agencies and organizations," he noted.

However, the country has come across some difficulties concerning payment matters as a result of "the U.S.'s oppressive and illegal sanctions," the official added.

The U.S. returned the sanctions around four years ago after leaving the 2015 agreement with Iran and world powers that had partially suspended the coercive economic measures.

Tehran has prepared the fees and is conducting necessary consultations with others to resolve the issue through a "safe payment channel," said the spokesman.

He, meanwhile, urged the UN secretary general and the world body's Secretariat to take the situation of sanction-stricken countries into account and do not deny these countries their good offices that could enable them to pay up their membership dues.

Secretary General Antonio Guterres said Tuesday that a total of 11 countries, including Iran, are behind in their payments.

Under the UN charter, a member country's right to vote is suspended when its arrears equal or exceed the amount of dues it should have paid over the preceding two years, but if the outstanding debt is deemed to be "due to conditions beyond the control of the member," the assembly may let that country continue to vote.

Iran Ready to Transfer Judicial Experiences to Yemen

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Deputy for International Affairs of the Judiciary and Secretary-General of Iran's Human Rights Office Kazem Gharibabadi said that Tehran is ready to transfer its experiences in the judiciary section to the Yemeni counterpart.

In the meeting of consul general of Yemen in Tehran, Gharibabadi said that despite the difficult situation in Yemen, Yemeni citizens resistance is exemplary, adding that the Islamic Republic of Iran is actively trying to convey the voice of the oppression of the countries of the region, especially Yemen and Palestine, to the world, and in all international organizations.

Gharibabadi said that Iranian envoys in the world have always expressed concern about the difficult

situation of the Yemeni and Palestinian citizens.

Unfortunately, global media structure is under Western influence, but the Yemeni oppressed children and people can be help through planning and using potentials of the region and the capacity of some NGOs, he said.

He also announced Iran's readiness to train Yemeni NGOs to take an active part in the international arena and defend the rights of the oppressed people of Yemen.

In conclusion, in response to the request of the Yemeni consul general regarding the transfer of experience and bilateral judicial ties, Gharibabadi said that in the field of education, transfer of experience, and capacity building, Iran is ready to assist the Yemeni judiciary.

Taliban Must Prove Their Fight Against Smuggling in Practice

KHORASAN (IP) - The Secretary-General of Iran's Drug Control Headquarters says the Taliban must prove that they are fighting against smuggling in practice.

Eskandar Momeni said: "The Taliban have said that they are controlling drugs from entering Iran, but the approach must also be proven in practice."

"Iran expects the Taliban's counter-narcotics policies to be proven in practice, but Iran has made all the necessary predictions for all the hypotheses, whether or not the import of narcotics will increase," Momeni said.

He made the remarks on the sidelines of the Coordinating Council for Combating Drugs meeting in Khorasan Razavi Province, northeastern Iran.

Iran Opens New Consulate General in Basra

IRAQ (IP) - The Islamic Republic of Iran opened its new Consulate General in Iraq's southern city of Basra.

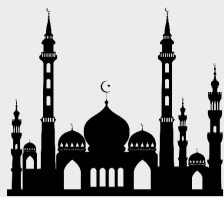
The Consulate General in Basra was opened on Wednesday, in the presence of the Iranian Ambassador to Iraq Iraj Masjedi, Iran's Consul General in Basra Ali Abedi, and Basra Governor Asa'ad al-Idani.

Simultaneously with the inauguration, the meeting of the heads of Iran's missions to Iraq was held at the Consulate General.

Iran's envoy to Baghdad was scheduled to visit the Chancellor of Basra University and Basra Governor.

Iran also resumed issuing tourist visas to Iraqi Kurds on Wednesday, allowing foreign tourists to enter by following health protocols.

According to Iran's Consulate General in Sulaymaniyah, the issuance of visas for the Iraqis is free, except for the money (5,000 Dinars by maximum) they pay for registering their information in the electronic visa system of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	12:13
■ Evening (Maghreb)	17:33
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	05:45
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	07:13

58. So he reduced them into pieces, except for their biggest, that they may return to it.
59. They said, "Who did this to our gods? He is certainly one of the wrongdoers."

Surah 21, The Prophets (58 - 59)

Iran Trade With Neighbors Witnessing 42% Growth in Value

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Iran's business transaction with 15 neighboring countries in the last nine months has increased year-on-year (YOY) 18 percent in weight and 42 percent in value, Head of the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA) said on Thursday.

Alireza Moqaddasi said that expanding political and economic ties with neighbor countries was a key policy in President Ebrahim Raisi's administration that took office in August.

Iran's foreign trade was \$72.87 billion worth of 122,455,000 tons of goods in the last nine months, from which 75.17 million tons worth \$36.81 billion were allocated to neighbors, as said by Moqaddasi.

In this period, according to the official, Iran has exported over 57.335m tons of goods to the neighboring countries with a value of \$18.766 billion which indicated a 9 percent growth in weight and 24 percent in value year-on-year.

He also said that Iran has imported 17,682,000 tons of goods worth over \$18 billion from neighbors in the same period which shows 62 percent increase in weight and 68 percent in value, compared to the last year's corresponding period.



Iraq tops Iran's list of destination target for Iran's exports with \$6.8b and Turkey with \$4.131b, the UAE with \$3.433b, Afghanistan with \$1.412b and Pakistan with \$911m trail Iraq. Russia, Oman, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia rank 6th to 15th.

Moqaddasi went on to say that out of 60m tons of imported goods worth of \$37b, some 17m tons goods worth of over \$18b have been from these neighboring states.

The imports from the neighboring states in the first three quarters of the current year have seen 62% growth in weight and 68% in value and imports from neighboring countries have accounted for 59% in weight and 49% of value of Iran's total imports in this period.

The UAE has been the leading neighboring country in exports to Iran with selling goods worth \$11.497b and Turkey trails it with \$3.7b. Russia, Iraq, Oman, Pakistan, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Armenia, Afghanistan, Kuwait, Qatar and Bahrain ranked 3rd to 14th in exports to Iran.

Iran-Oman Gas Pipeline Project Makes Considerable Progress

TEHRAN (IFP) - The first phase of Minab-Sirik-Jask pipeline in southern Iran carrying the country's gas to Oman has made significant progress.

Hossein Salimi, head of the sixth nationwide gas transmission pipeline project, made the statement and added the pipeline will also feed domestic industries in Minab, the second-largest city of Hormuzgan Province, Sirik, Jask Special Economic Zone, and the region's petrochemical and steel plants.

The gas transmission pipeline will help take a major stride toward the development of the underprivileged region, he continued.

According to him, the Minab-Sirik pipeline is 120 kilometers long and Sirik-Jask pipeline's length is 80 kilometers.

The project has created job opportunities for local experts, said Salimi and continued, "The region will witness great achievements when the project becomes fully operational."

National Capacity of IMI Opportunity for Diagnosing National Industrial Development



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Planning and Development Deputy of Industrial Development and Renovation Organization (IDRO) during his visit of Industrial Management Institute of Iran and addressing the senior officials of the institute termed the accumulated knowledge, over half a century of experience, broad network of professional educated and blender of the institute with warp and weft of the industry and its growth in the past six decades as the national capacity and a unique opportunity for organizational diagnosing the industrial development of the country.

Mehdi Sadeqi Niaraki termed the IMI as one of the rooted centers of the country which is still a leading body in industrializing the country and training the skillful forces and it can strengthen this leadership in the field of industry in the software movement that the Supreme Leader has asked.

He also emphasized constant internal improvement in the process of the IMI in fields of education, consultation and research based on the modern standards and updated ones.

Sadeqi Niaraki noted that value and the national and international credit and brand of the IMI along with other invisible valuable assets of the institute are of the strong points of the institute.

Meanwhile the Head of IMI Mr. Abolfazl Kiani Bakhtiari, for his part, explained broad activities of the institute and said the institute during the pandemic era that most public activities had faced recession and halt had average growth of 30 percent in its performance in all fields.

He said training global level of managers and design of the requirements for industrial development in the bed of the Second Step of the Revolution statement are of the other programs of the IMI.

Industrial Management Institute was launched in 1963 and it is active in research, consultation and training human resources of managers.

Iran's Semi-Finished Steel Output Down 8%

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Iran's semi-finished steel output decreased 8% year on year over the first nine months of the current Iranian year (Jan. 1-Dec. 21) to 21.09 million mt, according to the latest report published Jan. 11 by the Iranian Steel Producers Association.

Some 12.47 million mt of billet was produced by Iranian mills during the period, down 13% on the year, while slab production also fell 2% to 8.62 million mt, according to ISPA.

Finished product output also dropped 5% on the year to 14.71 million mt, including 8.43 million mt of long products, down 3%, and 6.28 million mt of flat products, a 9% decline.

The ISPA report noted that 23.8 million mt of direct-reduced iron was also produced in Iran during the nine-month period, up 2% year on year.

"The main reason for the decline in steel production is the governmental restriction of electricity consumption by steel mills - which mainly use electric arc furnace steelmaking technology and need a huge amount of energy," a steel industry source told S&P Global Platts.

Iran, Syria Launch Joint Bank



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Iran's Road and Urban Development Minister Rostam Qasemi who is visiting Syria said on Thursday that the two countries will establish a joint bank.

Qasemi said that he had met Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, discussing Syria's economy and the problems and obstacles ahead of Iran-Syria economic ties.

He added that Tehran and Damascus agreed to establish a joint committee to investigate why some of the many MoUs signed between Iran and Syrian have failed to be implemented.

The minister also said that he had a meeting with Syrian Foreign Minister Faisal Mekdad, where they have agreed to launch a joint bank in Syria and Iranian and Syrian banks open agencies in both countries.

Qasemi said that he and his Syrian counterpart had decided that the top aviation officials of Iran and Syria meet to examine executive issues in air transport.

In a separate meeting with the Syrian economy minister, Qasemi said that it was decided that head of Iran's Free Zones High Council visit Syrian to explore establishing a joint free zone and sign agreements in this regard.

The Iranian minister went on to say that other issues as producing Iranian goods in Syria, including tractors and agricultural machinery, removing tariffs, increasing exports and customs-related issues were also discussed in his meetings with Syrian officials.

The end of the war in Syria is the beginning of a new era of economic ties between Tehran and Damascus, especially since Iran and Syria have been standing beside each other during the years of war against international terrorism.

Meanwhile Qasemi and Prime Minister of Syria discussed increasing cooperation in economy.

On Thursday, Syrian Prime Minister Hussein Arnous met with Qasemi to discuss increasing cooperation in economy, transportation, industry, electricity, and petroleum products.

The meeting stressed the need to create a program for economic synergy between the two countries and implement agreements and memoranda of understanding between the two sides in a way that benefits the two nations.

CBI to Launch Digital Currency on Pilot Basis

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The Central Bank of Iran (CBI) says a pilot version of its digital currency is ready to be rolled out after two years of works and studies on the program.

Head of CBI's information services company Abutaleb Najafi said that the digital currency will be tested in a trial phase with banks, payment service providers and consumers.

"We carried out about two years of continuous work on the platform and on the infrastructure needed for CBI's cryptocurrency and now its pilot version is ready," Najafi was quoted as saying by Mehr news agency.

The CBI hopes the pilot platform could enable the bank to finally launch a digital form of Iran's national currency the rial.

The new currency will serve as an alternative to physical cash, a move which authorities believe could further encourage people to use digitized payment infrastructure in Iran.

Najafi said that the CBI will need at least one more year to examine the economic, social and legal aspects of launching the digital rial, adding that the project could entail massive risk assessment procedures.

"A document has been compiled in the CBI on the issue and we have created the platform which would apparently mature within a year," he said.

The official said state-run and private banks in Iran are expected to launch services that allows customers to open wallets to use the digital currency during the trial phase.

Iran's efforts to create an official digital currency comes amid a spread of cryptocurrencies like bitcoin in the country. The Iranian government has maintained a ban on trade of cryptocurrencies while cracking down on illegal mining activities related to those currencies.

Synchronization of Iran-Russia Power Grids to Secure Way to Demand Response

TEHRAN (IRNA) - The head of the Industries Commission of the Tehran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture said on Thursday that Iran synchronization power grid with Russia can be a good procedure for demand response.

Alireza Kolaheji said that the projects for synchronizing the electricity networks are common in many European countries and if Iran's power network joins Russia's, in addition to the good income, this procedure will also better match the demand for power with the supply.

He added that of course, nowadays, Iran sells its electricity to Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan.

The head of the Industries Commission of the Chamber of Commerce in his remarks added that Iran has also synchronized its power grid with two countries, Turkmenistan and Armenia, which is used at the time of demand peak.

Meanwhile, advisor to Iran's energy minister for international affairs, Mohammad Ali Farahnakian, told

IRNA on January 2, 2022, that the operation of connecting power networks among Russia, Azerbaijan Republic, and Iran will begin in May 2022.

Farahnakian noted that the energy corridor in northern Iran would bring about the nation with unimaginable profits and that it could reduce a remarkable need to invest in the electricity sector of the Islamic Republic.

Given the fact that peak demand in Russia happens in winter, but Iran's peak demand is in summer, the power connection project will help both countries to meet their internal demands for electricity, the advisor noted.

Moreover, Iran faces power shortages just on 10 percent of days in a year, he said, adding that the power connection network among neighboring states can assist Iran to get rid of the lack of investment for new projects. Technical and economic cooperation with the neighboring countries will enhance security because the neighbors will need each other and secure economic development, he argued.

IRISL Plans to Increase Investment in Chabahar Port

TEHRAN (MNA) - The chairman of Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Line (IRISL) says that the Chabahar port links India to Europe through the North-South corridor, adding that the IRISL will extend investment in Chabahar port.

Modaress Khyabani, chairman of Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Line (IRISL) made the remarks in a meeting with senior managers of IRISL, during which he also stated, "The development of Chabahar port as the only oceanic port in the country and transit hub is underway in accordance with a national approach."

The IRISL chairman added, "We should spare no effort [to develop the Chabahar port] because a significant portion of commodities from neighboring countries is currently transited through this route." The Iranian official further there are investment opportunities for the IRISL in Chabahar port including increasing the number of containers, wharves, warehouses, centers for fixing ships, fuel stations, and also increasing the number of operating vessels.

Hamedan Exports Hit \$730m in 9 Months

TEHRAN (MNA) - Hamedan province governor general said that \$730 million worth of non-oil products have been exported from the western province in the first nine months of the current Iranian year (March 21 - Dec. 22, 2021).

Speaking at the 6th Working Group of Promotion of Exports of Non-Oil Commodities in Hamedan province on Wednesday, Alireza Ghasemi Farzad emphasized that

\$730 million worth of non-oil products have been exported to 29 countries from provincial customs offices.

A number of 110 various types of agricultural, industrial, mineral and handicrafts products were exported from the province, the governor general added.

He also added that the target for the value of exports from Hamedan province is set as \$1.3 billion by the year-end (March 21, 2022).

Ex-Officer Jailed for Syrian War Crimes

KOBLENZ (Dispatches) - A German court on Thursday jailed a Syrian ex-intelligence officer for life for murder, rape and crimes against humanity, handing down the first ever conviction for state-backed torture committed during Syria's civil war after a landmark trial.

Anwar Raslan was found guilty on 27 of out 58 counts of murder, rape and sexual assault carried out at a Damascus prison run by a unit of President Bashar al-Assad's security services that he headed.

The 58-year-old, a colonel when he defected to the Syrian opposition in 2012 and who prosecutors said was granted asylum in Germany two years later, had denied all charges.



New Czech Gov't Wins Confidence Vote in Parliament

PRAGUE (Dispatches) - Czech Prime Minister Petr Fiala's new centre-right government won a confidence vote in parliament on Thursday, sealing its authority as it takes over amid a spike in coronavirus cases, rising inflation, a deep fiscal gap and challenges posed by Europe's green transition.

The result was expected as the five-party coalition won 108 votes in the 200-seat lower chamber of parliament in an election last October. Fiala, 57, a political science professor and leader of the Civic Democrats, has pledged to slash 80 billion crowns (\$3.74 billion) of spending this year to bring the budget deficit below 300 billion, which would bring the public sector gap under 4% of gross domestic product.



EU Ministers Reject Russian Pressure Over Ukraine



BREST (Dispatches) - European Union ministers said that they would not negotiate with Russia over Ukraine's future while Moscow was massing troops at its neighbor's border.

While stopping short of threatening President Vladimir Putin with a military response, defense and foreign ministers from the bloc said an invasion by Russia of Ukraine would prompt severe sanctions and ruin Moscow's relationship with the EU for decades.

"Russian movements are part of the pressure," EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell told reporters on the sidelines of a meeting of EU defence and foreign ministers in Brest, France. There "should not be negotiation under pressure," he said.

The meeting comes after tense negotiations between US and Russian officials in Geneva on Monday that failed to produce an agreement on de-escalating the conflict but saw both sides offer to continue talking.

"We have received assurances that nothing will be decided nor negotiated without the Europeans, and the coordination with the Americans is absolutely excellent," Borrell said. He added at a news conference that "despite what has been said, we are in constant contact with the U.S., more than 100 contacts this week".

While there would be no formal joint resolution on the crisis, a political statement was likely when the foreign ministers' meeting winds up, he said.

Washington and its allies have accused Russia of planning an invasion after deploying some 100,000 troops along Ukraine's border

"So far no shot has been fired, and no border crossed, and that is a good thing," said Luxembourg's foreign minister, Jean Asselborn, as he arrived for the meeting.

"It is very clear that we will not, as NATO or as European Union, attack Russia," Asselborn said, adding that dialogue was the way forward.

"If there is a military escalation, then all doors will be slammed shut for another 20 years. That cannot be what Russia wants," he said.

French Defense Minister Florence Parly agreed that "dialogue is the only way to reduce these tensions sustainably" but said that the EU also stood ready to impose "massive sanctions" on Russia should it attack Ukraine.

Earlier, US President Joe Biden's Democratic Party had already threatened sanctions in the event of an invasion of Ukraine, including against Putin personally, a move that the Kremlin said Thursday would be "crossing a line".

In Brest, German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock described the situation in Ukraine as "dramatic" and said a joint EU position on the crisis was crucial.

"When Europe is united, we're a heavyweight," she said on arrival. "When it isn't, we punch below our weight."

U.N. Chief Appeals for Release of Money to Save Afghan Lives

UNITED NATIONS (Dispatches) - U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres appealed for a suspension of rules preventing the use of money in Afghanistan to save lives and the economy and for a path to the conditional release of frozen Afghan foreign currency reserves.

"International funding should be allowed to pay the salaries of public-sector workers, and to help Afghan institutions deliver healthcare, education and other vital services," Guterres also told reporters in New York.

Some \$9.5 billion in Afghan central bank reserves remain blocked outside the country, mainly in the United States, and international support given to the previous government has dried up since the Taliban seized power last August.

"The function of Afghanistan's Central Bank must be preserved and assisted, and a path identified for conditional release of Afghan foreign currency reserves," Guterres said.

"We must do even more to rapidly inject liquidity into the economy and avoid a meltdown that would lead to poverty, hunger and destitution for millions," he said.

Guterres said they would discuss the creation of mechanisms to "allow for an effective injection of funds into the Afghan economy" that would also "create the conditions for the financial system in Afghanistan to be able to operate in the local currency."

In December, donors to a frozen World Bank-administered Afghan Reconstruction Trust Fund agreed to transfer \$280 million to the World Food Program (WFP) and U.N. children's agency UNICEF to support nutrition and health in Afghanistan.

"I hope the remaining resources -- more than \$1.2 billion -- will become available to help Afghanistan's people survive the winter," Guterres said. "For our part, the United Nations is taking steps to inject cash into the economy through creative authorized arrangements. But it is a drop in the bucket," he said.



He said Lee would take a holistic approach that would include talks and negotiations, sanctions and pressure - incentives and disincentives. South Korea's election is scheduled for March 9.

Others hollered: "Burhan is dirty, brought to (power) by the Islamists," who were dominant under the three-decade rule of strongman Omar al-Bashir. He was ousted by his own military in April 2019 after months of mass protests.

Following a repeated pattern, security forces fired volleys of tear gas to disperse the protesters in Khartoum and Omdurman, witnesses said.

Online footage appeared to show demonstrators hurling stones and unexploded canisters of tear gas at security forces near the presidential palace.

The military takeover derailed a fragile transition to civilian rule following Bashir's ouster.

Authorities have repeatedly denied using live ammunition in confronting protesters and insist scores of security forces have been wounded during demonstrations that have often "deviated from peacefulness".

Protesters in Khartoum converged on the city center chanting: "With all our power, we are heading to the palace".

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Sudanese Protesters Kill Police Officer

KHARTOUM (Dispatches) - Sudanese anti-coup protesters stabbed to death a police general on Thursday, authorities said, as thousands who kept up rallies against an October military coup faced tear

Brigadier General Ali Bareema Hamad, "fell martyr while doing his duties and securing protests" in the capital Khartoum, a police statement said on Facebook.

Hamad "received deadly stabs by groups of protesters ... in different parts of his body," police spokesman Idris Abdalla Idris told Sudan TV.

Other police personnel "suffered severe wounds," he added.

Hamad's was the first fatality announced among security forces since protests calling for a return to civilian rule began more than two months ago.

A security crackdown has left at least 63 people dead and hundreds wounded, according to medics, who said many of the protesters were killed by live rounds.

Thursday's rallies converged from several parts of Khartoum and came after a United Nations bid to facilitate talks between rival Sudanese factions received tepid support.

The UN push aimed at resolving the crisis since the October 25 military coup led by General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, and the resignation of the civilian prime minister Abdalla Hamdok earlier this month.



Protests in U.S. After Black Man Shot Dead by Off-Duty Officer

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - The death of an unarmed African-American man shot by an off-duty white police officer under mysterious circumstances has fueled outrage in Fayetteville, North Carolina, where relatives of the victim are calling for protests Thursday.

Prominent rights lawyer Benjamin Crump and the family of Jason Walker have scheduled a "rally for justice" at 8:00 pm (0100 GMT) in the city.

Small clusters of residents have already marched this week in Fayetteville to demand the arrest of officer Jeffrey Hash, in a case that has revived debate over whether police use excessive force in the United States, particularly against minorities.

Hash, employed by the city since 2005, was off duty when the shooting occurred on Saturday afternoon.

The officer was driving in his vehicle with his wife and daughter when they neared Walker, an unarmed 37-year-old Black man crossing the street near his parents' house.

Moments later, Hash opened fire, and soon Walker lay dead of gunshot wounds. Exactly what transpired is in dispute.

In an amateur video, filmed just after the shooting and posted online, the police officer explains to colleagues called to the scene that Walker jumped into the middle of the street and that he braked to avoid him.

According to Hash, Walker then threw himself on the vehicle, tore off a windshield wiper and used it to hit the windshield, prompting Hash to draw his weapon to protect his family.

But witnesses say Hash hit the pedestrian before stopping.

"I saw him brake, completely stop and then keep going," Elizabeth Ricks told an ABC station. "I saw him hit Jason... then his body was slammed into the windshield." She then heard shots fired, Ricks said. "I think he fired the first shot through the windshield and three more times outside the vehicle," she said.

According to police, Hash's black pickup truck had no visible dents and Walker's body did not show any signs of impact other than bullet wounds.

The officer was placed on administrative leave, but has not been arrested or charged with a crime. State investigators have begun a probe into the killing.

Crump said the family and broader Fayetteville community were demanding answers to why Walker was "senselessly shot and killed" by an off-duty officer.

Niavaran Apt (\$2800)
250sq.m, 3bdrs
S/p, Sauna
J, balcony
marble fl
fireplace
pkg, & F.F

Shanon (adviser)

Farmanieh Villa (\$7000)
2000sq.m
5bdrs, S/p
Sauna, J, pkg
green yard
balcony, & F.F

Parsian

Elahieh Apt (\$2400)
230sq.m, 3bdrs, S/p, F.F

Apt (\$2000)
Mahmoodieh
160sq.m, 2bdrs
S/p, S, J, pkg, & F.F

Darrous Villa (\$2500)
700sq.m, 5bdrs, S/p, & yard

Jordan Apt (\$1400)
130sq.m, 2bdrs, F.F

Zaferanieh bldg (\$8000)
5storey, 15bdrs, & pkgs

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Venezuela Gasoline Pipeline Damaged in Explosion

CARACAS (Dispatches) - Venezuela's state-owned oil company PDVSA blamed an explosion along a major gasoline pipeline on "criminal sabotage", adding that the line would be repaired swiftly. Authorities in Venezuela's eastern Anzoategui state reported the blast late on Tuesday. It was presumably caused by "attempts to perforate the pipeline," state governor Luis Jose Marcano said on Twitter. PDVSA said the pipeline distributes gasoline throughout Venezuela's eastern states, adding that it had deployed all available teams to repair the breach and prevent service disruptions.



Kazakhstan President Vows Economic and Political Reforms

BY: F. TAHERPOOR

TEHRAN - Ambassador of Kazakhstan to Tehran on Wednesday said that peace has been restored in Kazakhstan after Kazakhstan President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev vowed to carry out some economic and political reforms in the country which brought hope among the protesters.

Speaking in a press conference on Wednesday, Askhat Orazbay briefed Iran reporters of the latest developments in Kazakhstan which had witnessed one of the bloodiest protests last week.

Mr. Orazbay said that around 8,000 have been arrested during these protests which have been engineered by terrorists, adding that the Kazakh government has started probe and it will release those who have not been terrorists.

The ambassador said that the security forces collected arms and ammunitions which had been distributed among some protester which was aimed at bloodshed and revolt against the legal government.

He then pointed to President Tokayev's speech which was delivered on Monday addressing the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) summit. He pointed to some excerpts from President Tokayev's speech as follows:

*All the events since the beginning of this year are linked, they fall under a single destructive plan, the preparation of which went on for a long time.

*The organizers of the protests used the discontent of the population due to the rise in gas prices as a pretext.

*The attacks simultaneously covered 11 regions but the main hit fell on Almaty. If the city fell to the perpetrators, it would have led to the capture of the entire south of Kazakhstan and then the whole country.

*We saw a gathering of militants around the presidential residence it was a terrorist war against Kazakhstan.

*There are 2,030 peacekeepers and 250 pieces of equipment that form part of the CSTO peacekeeping mission in Kazakhstan and they will leave the country now that peace has been restored in the country.

*What took place will be remembered as the Almaty tragedy".

The Kazakh Ambassador then pointed to the promises of Mr. Tokayev for carrying out economic and political reforms which welcomed by the protesters and the Kazakh people.

"The task now is to rebuild the city in the shortest possible time (...) I have no doubt the city will be restored," President Tokayev has said.

Mr. Orazbay then pointed to some promises of President Tokayev for implementing in the country to reduce the economic gap among the people.

He said the president has vowed to strengthen enforcement and security forces as well as borders but he has reiterated that economic development will be his priorities. The president has vowed to help those people and businesses which have been hit and suffered damages during recent protests and to reduce inequality in earnings of the people by adopting new economic plans. He pointed to the launch of a special fund to help the people and giving grants to the young people in the deprived areas to study.

Orazbay noted that Mr. Tokayev has vowed to fight with economic corruption as well as fair distribution of wealth in the country. The diplomat reiterated that

the main theme of Mr. Tokayev's speech was that he is determined to bring justice in his economic reforms which have been welcomed by the Kazakhs and he has noted that the government has learned a lesson from these protests to not let it happen in the future by spreading economic justice and reforms in the country. Orazbay added that now people in Kazakhstan have pinned hopes on fulfilling the vows of Mr. President, adding that the government has guaranteed the foreign investors not to be worried because they have the government's support and guarantee. He added that now peace has been restored in the country and life goes on in the country and the government has cleaned the unrest-hits areas and foreign peacekeepers are to leave the country.



Erdogan Vows to Tame Turkish Inflation as Skepticism Grows

ANKARA (Dispatches) - President Tayyip Erdogan promised to tame Turkey's surging inflation, which hit 36% last month, but economists predicted it could push much higher, piling further pressure on the battered lira currency.

The lira shed 44% of its value in 2021, its worst performance in Erdogan's near two decades in power. It stood at 13.31 against the dollar, up from Tuesday's close of 13.8. Earlier on Wednesday it had rallied as far as 4.7% to 13.15, its strongest level in more than a week, though it was not immediately clear why it had firmed so much.

Thanks in part to costly state interventions in the currency market and to government measures that helped calm a full-blown crisis last month, the lira had largely held in a 13.7-13.94 range since last Thursday.

Speaking in parliament, Erdogan said Turkey was protecting its economy against what he called attacks and had taken under control "foreign financial tools that can disrupt the financial system".

"The swelling inflation is not in line with the realities of our country," Erdogan said, adding that the government's measures would soon soften the burden of "unjust" price hikes.

Under pressure from Erdogan, who seeks higher growth by boosting production and exports, the central bank has slashed its policy rate by 500 basis points to 14% since September. It holds its next rate-setting meeting on Jan 20.

Goldman Sachs said in a research note it expected annual inflation to exceed 40% in January, after which it could surpass 50% and remain elevated until the end of the year, when base effects would lower it to around 33%.

"The deeply negative real rates and the high level of loan growth are likely to keep inflation elevated and continue to put pressure on the lira," the Wall Street bank said.

Despite the recent market volatility, Turkey's economy is estimated to have grown by a hefty 9.5% in 2021, the World Bank said in its latest Global Economic Prospects report, as it rebounded from the coronavirus pandemic and related lockdowns.

But the bank also forecast that growth would slow to 2.0% this year and 3.0% in 2023. In its previous report last June, it had seen growth of 5.0% in 2021 and 4.5% in both 2022 and 2023.

Turkey's \$720-billion economy grew 0.9% in 2019 and 1.8% in 2020, weighed down by a recession triggered by a separate currency crisis and later by the pandemic.

After the lira slumped to a record low of 18.4 against the dollar in late December, Erdogan announced a scheme to encourage savers to convert foreign exchange deposits, compensating depositors for any losses due to lira weakness.

On Tuesday Turkey added corporate accounts to the scheme, which the Treasury says has attracted some 108 billion lira (\$7.8 billion) of deposits.

U.S. Consumer Prices Increase Strongly in December

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - U.S. consumer prices rose solidly in December, with the annual increase in inflation the largest in nearly four decades, which could bolster expectations that the Federal Reserve will start raising interest rates as early as March.

The consumer price index increased 0.5 per cent last month after advancing 0.8 per cent in November, the Labour Department said today. In the 12 months through December, the CPI surged 7.0 per cent. That was the biggest year-on-year increase since June 1982 and followed a 6.8 per cent rise in November. Economists polled by Reuters had forecast the CPI gaining 0.4 per cent and shooting up 7.0 per cent on a year-on-year basis.

The economy is experiencing high inflation as the Covid-19 pandemic snarls supply chains. The high cost of living is weighing on President Joe Biden's approval rating.

Inflation is well above the Fed's 2 per cent target and is also being lifted by budding wage pressures. The government reported last Friday that the unemployment rate dropped to a 22-month low of 3.9 per cent in December, suggesting that the labour market is at or near maximum employment. Fed Chair Jerome Powell yesterday said the US central bank stood ready to do what was necessary to keep high inflation from becoming "entrenched," in testimony during his nomination hearing before the Senate Banking Committee for a second four-year term as head of the bank.

"The laundry list of reasons for the Fed to begin removing monetary policy accommodation is growing," said Ryan Sweet, a senior economist at Moody's Analytics in West Chester, Pennsylvania. "Inflation would need to decelerate rapidly to take some of the pressure off the Fed and this is unlikely to occur."

Taiwan to Launch \$1b Lithuania Credit Fund

VILNIUS (Dispatches) - Taiwan will launch a US\$1 billion (RM4.1 billion) credit program to help fund joint projects between Lithuanian and Taiwanese companies in six business categories, a Taiwan government minister said.

Lithuania is under pressure from China which claims democratically ruled Taiwan as its own territory, to reverse a decision last year to allow the island to open a de-facto embassy in Vilnius under its own name.

China has downgraded diplomatic ties with Vilnius, and is pressuring companies, such as German car parts giant Continental to stop using Lithuanian-made components. It has also blocked Lithuanian cargos from entering China.

"The Taiwan authorities' attempts to use dollar diplomacy to expand Taiwan independence activities are doomed to

fail," Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin told a briefing on Wednesday in response to a question about the credit programme.

Taiwan last week announced plans to set up a separate \$200 million fund to invest in Lithuanian industries and boost bilateral trade as it tries to fend off China's diplomatic pressure on the Baltic state.

"The investment and credit funds will help us strengthen the cooperation," Taiwan's National Development Council Minister Kung Ming-hsin told an online news conference.

The credit fund will focus on developing semiconductor talent and facilitating semiconductor development, as well as biotechnologies, satellites, finance and scientific research, said Kung.

China Inflation Eases in December

BEIJING (Dispatches) - Inflation in China eased in December thanks to falling food and commodity costs, with analysts saying Wednesday's figures give policymakers room to unveil measures to kickstart the stuttering economy including interest rate cuts.

Like most other countries, China has seen prices surge for much of the past year owing to pick-up in the cost of energy, putting pressure on an economy also being battered by a crisis in the key, growth-driving property sector.

Factory price inflation has been particularly affected, hitting a 26-year high in October and raising concerns that those rises will filter through to the global economy owing to China's crucial role as an exporter.

But on Wednesday, figures showed producer prices rose a less-than-expected 10.3 percent on-year last month, extending a slowdown seen in November. The consumer price index (CPI), a key gauge of retail inflation, came in at 1.5 percent -- down from 2.3 percent in November and also short of forecasts.

"The probability of a rate cut in the first quarter is high, and the closest window is this month," Bruce Pang, at China Renaissance Securities Hong Kong, said. CPI "will not be a concern in 2022" and the core measure, which strips out volatile food and energy costs, will stay muted below 1.5 percent, he added.

And Sheana Yue of Capital Economics said the current trends suggest inflation concerns are not likely to hold back the central bank from "further loosening measures including policy rate cuts".

Some commentators say the People's Bank of China could cut borrowing costs as soon as next week, marking the first since April 2020.

Inflation-Fighting Rate Hikes Could Increase Rich-Poor Divide



WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - Central banks' interest rate hikes aimed at combating inflation could exacerbate a deepening, "dangerous divergence" between advanced and developing economies, International Monetary Fund Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva said.

Inflation is not a universal phenomenon, Georgieva noted, but was a problem in a number of countries and especially the United States. U.S. consumer prices surged 7% in the 12 months to December, the largest annual increase in nearly four decades.

The Federal Reserve and others have signaled that rate hikes may be imminent in 2022. The "spillover impact on emerging markets ... can add fuel to the fire of divergence," Georgieva said. Rate hikes in advanced economies raise the cost of borrowing and siphon away investments from emerging markets.

Georgieva said in December the IMF was likely to downgrade global economic growth forecasts of 5.9% in 2021 and 4.9% this year due to slowing growth in the United States, China, and the Omicron variant; the revision is expected on Jan. 25.

"Yes, the recovery is likely to continue, but against stronger winds," she said Wednesday, citing inflation and growing debt levels. Social unrest seen in 2019 was also expected to re-emerge this year, which could pose challenges for policymakers, she added.

The IMF is urging countries to keep building up their defenses against the current pandemic and future ones, she said. It is "hugely important" to ensure more diversified production of vaccines and reduce the reliance of Africa and other regions on imports.

She said she expects increasing demand for IMF financing this year. The IMF's executive board is slated to discuss on Friday a new Resilience and Sustainability Trust lending instrument backed by the Group of 20 countries in October.

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Inter Win Italian Super Cup

ROME (Dispatches) - Inter Milan striker Alexis Sanchez scored in the final minute of extra time to clinch a 2-1 win against Juventus in the Italian Super Cup at San Siro on Wednesday, marking the Nerazzurri's first victory in the competition for 11 years.
The home crowd, reduced to 50 per cent capacity due to Covid-19 restrictions, exploded with joy when the Chilean substitute profited from a defensive mix-up to strike in the 120th minute and decide the 'Derby of Italy' clash between two historic rivals.

Gauff Into Semis of Australian Open Warm-Up

ADELAIDE (Dispatches) - Teenager Coco Gauff moved a step closer to a third title on the WTA Tour when she swept past Ana Konjuh 6-3, 6-4 and into the Adelaide semi-finals.
The 17-year-old American is the highest seed remaining at three as she ramps up preparations for next week's Australian Open.
She was simply too good for the Croat, who is on the comeback after multiple elbow surgeries, converting four of 11 break points and dominating on her serve.

Djokovic Drawn to Play Australian Open

SYDNEY (Dispatches) - Novak Djokovic drew a first-round clash against a fellow Serb in the Australian Open on Thursday, taking a step closer to his dream of a record 21st Grand Slam despite a looming decision on his deportation.

The unvaccinated world number one, top seed and defending champion is looking to clinch a 10th title at Melbourne Park.

The 34-year-old tennis superstar was drawn to play Serb Miomir Kecmanovic in the first round. But the openly vaccine-sceptic Djokovic's championship hopes were in peril as Australia's Immigration Minister Alex Hawke pondered whether to revoke his visa for a second time and throw him out of the country.

Hawke is considering using his powers to annul the visa, his spokesman has said, although "lengthy further submissions" from Djokovic's legal team have delayed a decision.

In a lengthy press conference, Prime Minister Scott Morrison said no decision had yet been taken. Djokovic flew into Melbourne airport on January 5 carrying a vaccine exemption because of a claimed positive PCR test result on December 16.

Border agents rejected his exemption, saying a recent infection was an insufficient justification, tore up his visa and placed him in a detention centre.

But Djokovic's high-powered legal team overturned the visa decision in court on Monday on a procedural matter related to his airport interview.

Melbourne's Herald Sun newspaper quoted an unnamed government source as saying that allowing Djokovic to stay in Australia without a Covid-19 vaccine would set a dangerous precedent.

The source was quoted as saying Morrison's government was expected to act despite any international "backlash" because cancelling the visa would be line with Australia's efforts to control the fast-spreading virus.

The government's legal battle with Djokovic is politically charged in a country that has endured nearly two years of some of the toughest Covid-19 restrictions in the world, and in the run-up to May general elections.



"Australia has a policy of not allowing unvaccinated people into Australia. It is beyond my comprehension how we have got to this point," Labor Party opposition leader Anthony Albanese said in an interview Thursday.

As Covid-related hospitalizations rise in Melbourne, the Victorian state government said Thursday it would cap capacity at the Australian Open at 50 percent. Spectators must be vaccinated or have a medical exemption.

Face masks will also be mandatory at the opening Grand Slam of the year except when eating or drinking, and those watching must socially distance while indoors.

The tournament starts Monday. As the Omicron variant races through Australia's population, Djokovic's anti-vaccine stance has come under scrutiny.

On the day of his claimed positive test in Serbia, he appeared at a ceremony to honor him with stamps bearing his image. The following day he attended a youth tennis event. He appeared at both apparently without a mask.

Djokovic said he only received the PCR test result after attending the children's tennis event on December 17. But he admitted that he also went ahead with an interview with French sports daily L'Equipe on December 18.



Cilic Advances To Semis

ADELAIDE (Dispatches) - Former U.S. Open champion Marin Cilic recovered from a mid-match wobble to beat American Tommy Paul and reach the semi-finals of the Adelaide International 2 event, but Russian Karen Khachanov was knocked out by Frenchman Arthur Rinderknech.

Fourth seed Cilic dug deep to seal a 6-4 2-6 6-3 win over the in-form Paul, who had won 12 of his past 14 matches coming into the contest. Third seed Khachanov, who was runner-up at the Adelaide International 1 event, suffered a 7-6(7) 7-5 defeat by world number 58 Rinderknech.

In the other quarter-finals, Thanasi Kokkinakis is due to play Aleksandar Vukic in an all-Australian clash, while Brazil's Thiago Monteiro will take on French qualifier Corentin Moutet.

In the women's event, third seed Coco Gauff reached the last four with a 6-3 6-4 victory over Croatia's Ana Konjuh but American Madison Brengle was forced to retire from her match against Alison Riske due to a slight calf injury.

Brengle retired from the match with the score 3-3 in the first set, sending Riske through to the semi-finals.

Muguruza Upset, Jabeur Suffers Injury Scare

SYDNEY (Dispatches) - World number three Garbine Muguruza was sent packing from the Sydney Classic in the quarter-finals by clinical Russian Daria Kasatkina, who continued her strong start to the season ahead of the Australian Open.

Muguruza had a first-round bye then had to battle hard to topple 40th-ranked Ekaterina Alexandrova, before crashing to Kastakina 6-4, 6-4.

It was the second semi-final in as many weeks the Russian has reached after losing in the last four of the Melbourne Summer Set to eventual champion Amanda Anisimova.

Kasatkina is a former world number 10 who bounced back up the rankings to 26 last year after winning two titles and reaching a further two finals.

"It's very good preparation before a Slam," she said. "At the beginning I was a bit over-excited but in the end I was able to control myself and make a few good decisions."

She will meet ninth-ranked Paula Badosa for the place in the final after the Spaniard fought past Tokyo Olympics gold medallist Belinda Bencic 7-6 (8/6), 3-6, 6-3.

In-form world number seven Anett Kontaveit also made the last four after Ons Jabeur, ranked three places below her, retired hurt.

The Estonian won a tight first set 6-4 before the Tunisian called for a medical timeout. After lengthy treatment on her lower back, Jabeur forfeited the match.

It is a big setback for Jabeur, with the opening Grand Slam of the year starting on Monday. She had a breakthrough 2021, when she won her maiden WTA singles title and surged into the top 10 for the first time.

Kontaveit will now play world number four and French Open champion Barbora Krejckikova, with the Czech crushing France's Caroline Garcia 6-0, 6-2.

The understated Kontaveit is shaping up as a serious contender at Melbourne Park after her electric form in the second half of last season, capturing four titles in two months before ending runner-up at the WTA Finals to Garbine Muguruza.

Krejckikova also raced through the rankings last year, winning at Roland Garros, Strasbourg and Prague.



Klopp Very Positive Over Salah Contract Talks

LONDON (Dispatches) - Liverpool boss Jurgen Klopp says he is "very positive" over contract talks with Mohamed Salah, stating that the forward wants to stay at the Premier League club.

The Egypt international, 29, has fewer than 18 months left on his current deal and in an interview published this week said he was not asking "for crazy stuff".

Reports have suggested that Salah, who has won the Champions League and Premier League with Liverpool, is looking for a weekly salary of more than £300,000 (\$410,000).

Klopp has said in the past that the contract is not something that can be sorted quickly but he remains upbeat. "I know that Mo wants to stay," he said on Wednesday, on the eve of the first leg of Liverpool's League Cup semi-final against Arsenal.

"We want Mo to stay. That's where we are. It takes time," he said. "I think it is in a good place. I'm very positive about it. The fans are not as nervous as you (the media) are."

"They know the club and know the people dealing with things here. We cannot say anything about it." Salah, who has scored 111 goals in 165 Premier League matches for Liverpool, and is on track for a third Golden Boot in five years, said in an interview with GQ magazine that he wanted to be appreciated.

Man Utd Must Finish In Top Three

LONDON (Dispatches) - Cristiano Ronaldo says finishing outside the top three in the Premier League would be unacceptable for Manchester United as Ralf Rangnick struggles to turn around his under-performing team.

The German interim boss has steadied the ship since taking over from the sacked Ole Gunnar Solskjaer but United are languishing in seventh place, 22 points behind leaders Manchester City.

Five-time world player of the year Ronaldo has called for a change of mindset within the dressing room to address United's poor form, which resulted in a 1-0 loss at the hands of Wolves in their most recent league outing.

"Manchester United should win the league or be second or third," he told Sky Sports. "I don't see any other position for Manchester United."

"In my heart, I don't accept that our mentality be less than being in the top three in the Premier League, in my opinion."

"I think to build up good things sometimes you have to destroy a few things. New year, new life, I hope that Manchester can be at the level people want, especially the fans. We are capable of changing things now."

"We can do it better, all of us. I don't want to be here in the club to fight to be in sixth or seventh place. I am here to try to win, to compete. I believe if we change our mind we can achieve big things." Rangnick was brought in until the end of the season after Solskjaer was dismissed in November following a run of heavy defeats.

He has won four of his seven games in charge in all competitions but the team's style of football has still attracted criticism and there have been reports of disquiet within the squad.

United produced another disjointed display in their FA Cup third-round tie against Aston Villa on Monday but managed to scrape through 1-0.

Ronaldo, 36, backed Rangnick to make a difference but pleaded for patience ahead of Saturday's league trip to Villa Park to face the same opponents.



Chelsea Play With Fire to Reach League Cup Final

LONDON (Dispatches) - Thomas Tuchel said Chelsea reached the League Cup final despite "playing with fire" as Antonio Rudiger's goal and three VAR decisions helped the Blues seal a 1-0 win at Tottenham.

Rudiger's first half header ensured Chelsea pressed home the advantage they had earned with a 2-0 win in the semi-final first leg last week.

Tuchel's team also had VAR official Mike Dean on their side as Tottenham were given two penalties by Andre Marriner, only for reviews to overturn both, while Harry Kane saw a goal disallowed for offside.

Chelsea, 3-0 aggregate winners, will play Liverpool or Arsenal in the final at Wembley on February 27.

Liverpool host the coronavirus-delayed first leg of their semi-final against the Gunners on Thursday.

"We started good. We had big chances and controlled the match, but I had the feeling we played with fire," Tuchel said.

"We allowed chances from sloppy mistakes and were lucky. We almost gave a penalty away for no reason, for a bit of over-confidence."

"We needed luck to not give away another penalty, to have an offside VAR decision."

Tuchel is the first manager in Chelsea's history to lead the club to the Champions League, FA Cup and League Cup finals, a feat he has achieved just 350 days after his first game in charge in January 2020.

It is Chelsea's first League Cup final appearance since 2019 as they aim to win the competition for the first time since 2015.

"We need to play better if we're going to really deserve results like this. We have to meet the standards," Tuchel said.

