

Health Ministry Announced on Sunday That the Number of Deaths From the Coronavirus Pandemic In Iran Increased to 132,075 With 31 More Iranians Killed by the Virus Over the Past 24 Hours

IRAN NEWS

Transit of Goods Through Iran's Railway Network Rose Over 200% During the First 3 Quarters of the Current Iranian Calendar Year to Register the Highest Year-on-Year Increase Over the Past 10 Years

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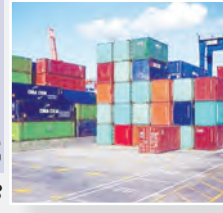
2 DOMESTIC

Iran Backs UN Efforts to Protect Syria Sovereignty
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3 DOMESTIC

\$2.7b of Goods Exported to Persian Gulf States
> SEE PAGE 3



U.S., Israel Preventing Syria From Returning to Normal

IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian has warned that the U.S. military presence and Israeli strikes in Syria are hindering a political solution to the crisis gripping the Arab country, calling on the United Nations to act against such unlawful activities. In a meeting with visiting United Nations Special Envoy for Syria Geir Pedersen in Tehran on Sunday, Amir-Abdollahian hailed the Norwegian diplomat's efforts to promote national dialog, peace and stability in Syria, and underlined that the Islamic Republic has greatly contributed to such attempts. **See Page 7**

Iran-Russia Trade Soars 41% in 9 Months



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Trade volume between Russia and Iran has increased 12 percent in terms of weight and 41 percent

in terms of value in the first nine months of this Iranian calendar year (March 21, 2021 to December 21, 2021), according to an Iranian official.

Spokesman for the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA) Ruhollah Latifi announced on Sunday that the trade figure stood at over 3.5 million tons worth 1.656 billion dollars from March 21, 2021 to December 21, 2021.

Ahead of President Ebrahim Raisi's upcoming visit to Moscow, Latifi said that Iran exported 2,729,889 tons of goods worth 1,224,119,930 dollars to Russia and imported 838,602 tons of commodities worth 432,877,392 dollars during the nine months.

The official statistics of the IRICA indicate that Iran's imports from Russia hiked 11 percent in terms of weight and 45 percent in terms of value, while the Islamic Republic's exports to the neighboring country increased 15 and 29 percent in terms of weight and value respectively in the same period, he added.

Comparing imports from Russia in the same period of this year to two years ago shows an increase of 32 and 41 percent in terms of weight and value respectively, he said, noting that the exports to Russia also increased 51 and 57 percent in terms of weight and value respectively.

Iran imported 2.73 million tons of livestock products, foods, livestock inputs, agricultural products from Russia, Latifi said, adding that Iranian exports to Russia were mainly poultry products, fruits, agricultural and food products worth 267,240,390 dollars.

The Russian Federation is one of the most important neighboring states, the official maintained, adding that Iran attaches great importance to trade, economic, and political ties with Russia, so the mutual relationships witnessed an eye-catching boom in recent years.

According to reports, Russian President Vladimir Putin will host his Iranian counterpart Ebrahim Raisi for talks in Moscow next week, Russian state television channel Rossiya-1 reported on Sunday.

Rossiya-1 did not disclose when precisely the meeting between the two leaders would take place, nor the issues they would discuss.

4 INTERNATIONAL

N. Korea Tests Railway-Borne Missile in Latest Launch
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8 SPORT

Doncic, Mavs End Grizzlies' Win Streak
> SEE PAGE 8



ViewPoint

By: Hamid Reza Naghashian

New Horizon in Tehran-Moscow Ties

A new horizon is waiting for Iran-Russia ties when President Seyed Ebrahim Raisi pays an official visit to Moscow and meets Russian President Vladimir Putin. Days after Iran-China's 25-year cooperation document officially came into force, now countdown has begun for another historic cooperation agreement and this time between Iran and Russia. According to reports, President Raisi is to visit Moscow next year for this historic deal.

A combination of Chinese and Russian infrastructure development will help Iran to replace its decaying structures due to the countries sanctions problems and it will be a blow to the U.S. sanctions and bully against Tehran to corner this independent country.

Tehran and Moscow are about to complete their work on a 20-year agreement on comprehensive cooperation, the Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh has reiterated.

"We have established a new Foreign Ministry program, a roadmap to conclude 20-year agreements with our neighboring countries. The process is almost over with Russia" he said.

Khatibzadeh added that the document was similar to Iran's 25-year comprehensive cooperation agreement with China, signed off in March this year.

President Ebrahim Raisi has recently in a phone call with Russian leader has said that Iran was ready to conclude a long-term agreement on comprehensive cooperation with Russia. The Treaty on the Basis for Mutual Relations and Principles of Cooperation between Russia and Iran, signed in March 2001, has been automatically extended every five years. On September 24, 2020, then Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said during a visit to Moscow that before extending the document once again, Tehran would like to consider the possibility of updating it.

Iran recently became a full member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and is a key player in regional trade and security. Its energy and military assets will be needed in the reconstruction of Afghanistan. Iran also has a renewed Free Trade Agreement with the Eurasian Economic Union which also includes Armenia, and with whom trade relations in particular are quickly progressing. **See Page 7**

Iran May Convert Power Receivable Into Loan to Support Pakistan

LAHORE (Dispatches) - Pakistan and Iran are in talks for converting latter's power receivable into loan for expanding/improving former's electricity import arrangements in the coastal areas of Balochistan province, The News has learnt.

During the negotiations held in Tehran in the first week of January, both parties expressed resolve to implement the project and had detailed deliberations to revive the respective Contract Agreement and allied Financing Agreement.

National Transmission and Despatch Company Limited (NTDC) and Iran's Power & Water Equipment and Services Export Company (SUNIR) have come to an agreement on Draft Amendment-2 to the Contract Agreement covering all technical and other issues based on the alternate financing arrangement proposed by Iran's Power Generation and Distribution Company, known as TAVANIR. **See Page 7**

Foresight in the applied industries
From the point of view of Alireza Ghalichi Yazdi
Managing Director of Iran Alloy Steel Company

Prominent director of the country's steel industry at the 1400 International Steel Symposium

- Using new marketing tools
- Creating conditions for balanced development
- Sustainable provision of primary resources
- Optimization of production costs
- Localization
- Continuous dynamics of research and development in steel companies
- A coherent view of new technologies in the entire industry chain
- Core training and expertise along with the importance of having up-to-date equipment
- Developing the relationship between industry and academia

AUCTION SJSCO 140021

Hereby Sirjan Jahan Steel Complex announces selling and export of 5,000 tons of Rebar AJ400 (sizes 12mm 14mm 16mm 18mm 20mm 22mm 25mm 28mm) on ex-work basis. Interested bidders are invited to get documents by sending an email to sjsco.sales.info@gmail.com. All documents will be sent VIA email. All bids in conformity with tender instruction should be submitted no later than, Saturday, January 22, 2022(2022-01-22)

For more information, please contact us at:
Tel: +2186084642

Sirjan Jahan Steel Complex

IRIB Chief Urges Keeping Names, Memories of Martyrs Alive

TEHRAN (IP) - The head of the Islamic Republic of Iran's Broadcasting (IRIB) emphasized keeping the names and memories of the martyrs alive in the national media.

Peyman Jebelli, the head of IRIB, on Sunday in a ceremony honoring the mothers and wives of the martyrs, said: "In the transformation period of the national media, it is an honor for this media to be dignified with the names and memories of the martyrs."

Jebelli added: "The martyrs are watching our behavior and are worried whether we will reach the desired destination [or not]."

Iran Backs UN Efforts to Protect Syria Sovereignty

TEHRAN (PressTV) - A senior Iranian diplomat says the Islamic Republic has always supported and will continue to back all efforts by the United Nations to strengthen Syria's national sovereignty and territorial integrity, encourage intra-Syrian talks and promote peace and stability in the war-ravaged Arab country.

In a Saturday meeting in Tehran, Ali Asghar Khaji, a senior advisor on political affairs to the Iranian foreign minister, and Geir Pedersen, the United Nations special envoy for Syria, exchanged views about the latest developments pertaining to the ongoing crisis in the Arab state, discussions about the Constitutional Committee and ways to counter sanctions and dispatch humanitarian aid to the Syrian people.

The Syrian government and nation have stood up to Daesh and other terrorist groups for more than 10 years and have now achieved relative stability, and the country's relations with regional states are increasing," Khaji said.

The Iranian diplomat called on the United Nations and other regional and international bodies to "pay attention to the current situation of the Syrian government and people and to step up their efforts to remove sanctions, provide aid to the [Syrian] people, [help] repatriation of the refugees and begin rebuilding the country."

Syria has been gripped by foreign-backed militancy since 2011, with the US and its Western and regional allies fixated on overthrowing the government of Bashar al-Assad.



Khaji and Pedersen also stressed the importance of holding more consultations in the future.

Also in a meeting with Norway's special envoy for Yemen Kjersti Tromsdal in Tehran, Khaji said the UN must make more efforts to end the war and blockade in Yemen.

The senior Iranian diplomat added that the resilient Yemeni people are suffering from a deplorable situation due to the Saudi-led war and the economic siege.

The Norwegian diplomat, whose country currently holds the rotating presidency of the UN Security Council, said the ongoing crisis in Yemen is high on the priorities of the world body.

Norway will continue its efforts to resolve the Yemeni crisis through peaceful means and expresses its support for efforts made by the UN special representative for Yemen, she added.

The Iranian and Norwegian diplomats also discussed ways to expand cooperation to help solve the crisis in the war-hit country.

Official Calls for Tackling Social Maladies

TEHRAN (IFP) - A senior Iranian official has called for redoubled efforts to tackle social maladies in the country.

Deputy Interior Minister Taghi Rostamvandi referred to alcohol consumption in the country as a social malady, saying, "Between 9 to 10 percent of individuals ranging in age from 15 to 64 years old use alcohol in the country, which means over five million people consume alcohol across the nation annually," he said in a national conference on social maladies.

The Iranian official said the World Health Organization (WHO) has recommended zero consumption of alcohol, stressing that due attention should be paid to the issue of alcohol use in the country.

Elsewhere in his remarks, the top official said between 50,000 to 60,000 people die in the country due to tobacco and drug use, referring to drug addiction as "a matter of life and death."

He further said as many as 100,000 people attempt suicide in Iran annually, of whom between 5,000 to 5,500 lose their lives. The deputy interior minister said between 11 to 13 million people are residing in unofficial settlements on the outskirts of cities.

He then noted the number of illegal abortions in Iran stands at between 300,000 to 400,000 annually.

The official also called for the promotion of chastity and Hijab (the Islamic Dress Code) in society while referring to sprawling websites and social media pages promoting the practice of temporary marriage (concubinage).

"The number of matchmaking pages promoting concubinage is growing on social media as a social malady, and we should definitely be sensitive about this, so that religious concepts (including 'temporary marriage') are not distorted," he said.

NOC President Meets Chinese Ambassador to Discuss Hangzhou 2022

TEHRAN- Iran Seyad Reza Salehi Amiri, President of the National Olympic Committee of the Islamic Republic of Iran (NOCIRI), has met with the Chinese Ambassador to Tehran to discuss preparations for the Hangzhou 2022 Asian Games.

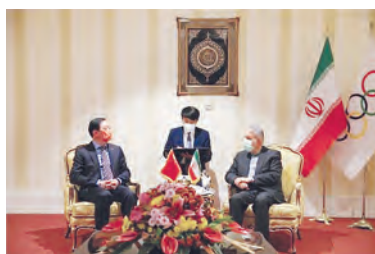
Salehi Amiri welcomed Chang Hua to the National Sport Olympic and Paralympic Museum in Iran's capital.

The pair spoke about the relationship between the two countries and their millenniums-old history of cultural, political and economic exchanges along the Silk Road.

The NOCIRI President said that China had proved to be a successful host of several international sporting events and expressed optimism that Hangzhou 2022 would be no different. "Also, for the Hangzhou 2022 Asian Games, Iran will send a stronger and bigger delegation than for the Asian Games in Jakarta," said Salehi Amiri.

"We are looking forward to the Chinese Embassy and the organisers of the Games to have good support and coordination with us, for example, good conditions and

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK



coordination for the flight of the Iranian sports delegation to Shanghai and then Hangzhou."

A total of 378 athletes represented Iran at the 2018 Asian Games in Jakarta and Palembang in Indonesia, winning 20 gold, 20 silver and 22 bronze medals.

Chang thanked the NOCIRI for supporting China in its hosting of the Asian Games and the Winter Olympic Games.

Beijing 2022 in particular has come under scrutiny, with the United States leading several Western nations in a diplomatic boycott of the Games which has been condemned by Iran's Foreign Minister.

"I know that Iran holds first place in sport in the region and is one of the Asian sports hubs that won three gold medals at the Tokyo 2020 Olympics, as well as two silver and two bronze medals," said Chang.

"Congratulations on this success and I wish success to Iranian athletes in the Beijing Winter Olympics and Asian Games in Hangzhou."

Hangzhou is set to be the third Chinese city to host the Asian Games after Beijing in 1990 and Guangzhou in 2010.

Iran-China 25-Year Deal a Deadline to West To Lift Sanctions

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Implementation of the Iran-China 25-year cooperation program is in fact a deadline to the West to make a decision on lifting anti-Iran sanctions in the Vienna talks, an Iranian official says.

Ahmad Amirabadi, the Chairman of Iran-China parliamentary friendship group, said that strengthening ties with the East will make the US and other Western powers feel threatened, so the fear can push them towards retreating in the talks in Vienna, Austria, and lift anti-Iran sanctions.

In fact, it is a deadline to the West in negotiating with Iran in order to determine the fate of lifting sanctions as soon as possible, Amirabadi argued.

The Iranian lawmaker said that the Western powers have been against the Islamic Revolution from the get-go and they have tried to get in the way of expansion of ties between Iran and other countries.

The Europeans did not assist Iran in past eight years and they even helped the US impose sanctions on Iranians, he added.

Amirabadi went on to say that Iran's membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) as well as strengthening ties with neighboring states such as Iraq, Turkmenistan, and Pakistan are in line with the strategy.

Moreover, the Islamic Republic holds talks with Saudi Arabia to find a way out of disagreements, he said, adding that Iran's ties with Qatar and Oman are also being improved.

Elsewhere in his remarks, the legislator said that the 25-year agreement will help boost regional coordination in Asia, noting that the deal will increase China's investment in Iran's transportation and military industry.

The U.S. wants to destabilize Chinese and Iranian economies, so the existence of such an enemy can make Beijing and Tehran more determined to expand cooperation.

Iran-China Document on Comprehensive Cooperation for Foiling Sanctions

TEHRAN (IRNA) - An Iranian senior lawmaker has said that the 25-year document on comprehensive cooperation between Tehran and Beijing can be used for foiling the sanctions.

Iran can make use of Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) or Shanghai pact and the 25-year cooperation for its economic, trade, and banking exchange to thwart the sanctions, Hossein Nooshabadi said.

Referring to China and Russia which have veto power at the UN Security Council, Nooshabadi said that Iran's relations with those states are strategic.

Nooshabadi, who is member of the Majlis (Parliament) National Security and Foreign Policy Commission, went on to say that Iran has cooperation and holds talks with China and Russia on international, global, and regional issues.

As he underlined, the two countries play an effective role in the international arenas, so they can defend and support Islamic Republic's legitimate stance.

About the upcoming visit of Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi to Moscow, the lawmaker said that the visit will surely focus on talks in Vienna, issues of Syria and Caucasus, and regional security as well.

Security of Iran Red Line of Armed Forces

TEHRAN (MNA) - The Deputy Commander of Iran's Army Air Defense Force said that the security of the country is the red line of Armed Forces and they don't make any appeasement with any country violating the country's airspace.

Brigadier General Alireza Elhami made the remarks on Saturday in his visit to Tabriz Air Defense Area and said that the Armed Forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran never seek conflict and clash with any country.

Turning to the vigilance of Iran's Army Air Defense Force staff in defending the airspace of the country from external threats, he said, "Today, enemies and international organizations are well aware of this issue that slightest invasion of the enemy on the airspace of the country will be harshly and decisively responded."

Today, enemies of the country do not dare to violate the airspace of Iran thanks to the unity, amity and empathy of the Army and IRGC staff, he added.

The security of the country's sky is indebted to the vigilance and curiosity of Air Defense Forces personnel and zealous forces of the Armed Forces have been prepared to provide security and tranquility for all dear fellow countrymen throughout the country round-the-clock, Elhami stressed.

Japan Donates

700,000 AstraZeneca Jabs to Iran

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Iran received 700,000 AstraZeneca vaccine shots from Japan as part of the country's pledge to increase donations in response to the emergence of the Omicron variant of the coronavirus.

The two shipments were delivered to Imam Khomeini International Airport, bringing Japan's total donation to Tehran to 3.6 million jabs, ISNA reported.

Tokyo had sent another batch of AstraZeneca shots to Iran back in July.

Japan has been making large donations to Asian nations most in need of vaccines to help curb the outbreak around the world.

As per a grant aid project signed in October, Japan provided Iran with six MRI machines as well as 14 CT scan machines along other medical equipment.

Iran has vaccinated the majority of its population of over 85 million people with Sinopharm vaccine doses purchased from China. Over 125 million vaccine shots have been administered throughout the country since the start of the immunization campaign.

Iran, Syria Discuss Boosting Economic Cooperation

TEHRAN (MNA) - Iranian envoy to Damascus and governor of Latakia in Syria discussed the ways of expanding economic cooperation between the two countries in various fields.

The Iranian envoy to Syria Mehdi Sobhani met with Latakia's governor Amer Ismail Hilal to discuss the ways of boosting economic cooperation.

Sobhani pointed to the vital role of Latakia in Syria's economic affairs and stressed the need to increase economic cooperation with Syria. He also spoke about the role of provincial cooperation to increase trade relations between the two countries.

Amer Ismail Hilal, for his part, stressed the need to use Iran's experiences in various fields, especially the recycling of dry waste, as well as fruit, and dried fruit industries. Noting that Syrian officials are emphasizing the expansion of economic relations and cooperation with Iranian companies, he added, "We welcome joint projects with the Iranian side, especially in the field of electricity generation in Latakia province."

1st Part of SP Phase 11 Project Set to Go Operational in September

TEHRAN (MNA) - Managing Director of Iran's Petropars Company, which is in charge of developing Phase 11 of the giant South Pars gas field in the Persian Gulf, has said the company is going to take all the necessary measures to complete the first part of the mentioned phase's development project by the third quarter of the next Iranian calendar year (starts on September 23).

As Shana reported, Seyed Shamsedin Mousavi made the remarks on Sunday, in a ceremony held for his introduction as the new head of the company. The ceremony was attended by Head of National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) Mohsen Khojasteh-Mehr.

Speaking at the ceremony, Khojasteh-Mehr said: "National Iranian Oil Company trusts Petropars and we have very high expectations from this company and hope that they will be able to implement all projects, especially priority ones as scheduled."

"Phase 11 of South Pars and South Azadegan [development projects] are among the priorities of the National Iranian Oil Company and even a day delay in the implementation of these projects will not be accepted," Khojasteh-Mehr stressed. Earlier this month, Petropars' former Head Hamidreza Masoudi had announced the implementation of two new contracts which would accelerate the development of the mentioned phase. According to Masoudi, the mentioned deals were concerned with the construction of an off-shore pipeline as well as the installation of the phase's SDP11B platform.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	12:14
■ Evening (Maghreb)	17:35
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	05:44
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	07:12

62. They said, "Art thou the one that did this with our gods, O Abraham?"
63. He said: "Nay, this was done by - this is their biggest one!
ask them, if they can speak intelligently!"

Surah 21. The Prophets (62 - 63)

\$2.7b of Goods Exported to Persian Gulf States

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

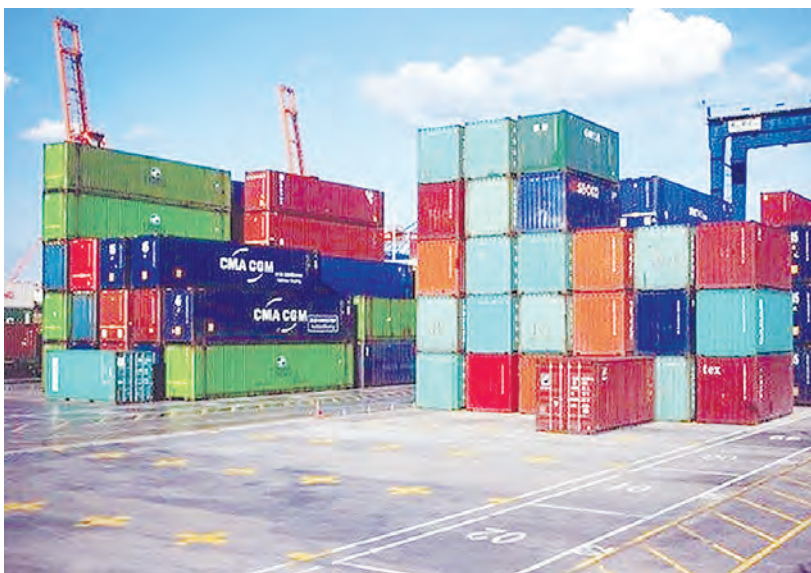
TEHRAN - The managing director of Customs Organization of western Hormozgan said here that since the beginning of the current Iranian year (March 21, 2021) two million and 49,000 tons of goods worth two \$2.775b was exported to the southern Persian Gulf littoral countries.

"Most of exported items were fruits, vegetables, dried nuts, plastic and metallic kitchenware, industrial salt, construction material, tar, petrochemical products, oil derivatives, and various types of construction material," said Nasser Noruzi in a press conference.

He said that that the volume of exports was forwarded to the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, and the other littoral countries of the Persian Gulf and their value was 145% more compared with the same period last year.

The managing director of Bandar Lengeh further reiterated that during that period 66 tons of goods worth more than 157 million dollars were imported through Bandar Lengeh Customs Organization, whose value was 85% more than the same period last year.

He said that Bandar Lengeh is the transit pole in southern coasts of Iran, especially for transiting foreign vehicles, noting that during the first nine months of the current



year more than 149,000 tons of goods were transited through Bandar Lengeh to destination countries and due to the satisfactory and the round-the-clock services offered, the volume of transited goods increased about 50% year on year.

Noruzi said that the Bandar Lengeh income during the said period was 1,470 billion Iranian rials, which was 57% more compared with the previous year.

At the end, he appreciated his colleagues for their effective full-time presence despite their small number and for performing their duties restlessly at service of the people and the country under the current sensitive conditions when Iran is passing through the economic war (of sanctions) and the COVID-19 pandemic, announcing that the Customs Organization is the pioneer in collaboration with the other organizations involved in foreign trade.

The Customs office of west Hormozgan is inclusive of the Bandar Lengeh Customs, the Gong Customs, the Charak Customs, the Aftab Customs, and Shiv Customs the Parsian Special Energy Zone Customs, the Siri Customs, the Lavan Customs and a passenger customs.

Iranian Delegation To Visit Iraq for Economic Talks

TEHRAN (MNA) - An Iranian economic delegation will leave for Iraq today (Monday) to discuss the expansion of cooperation in various fields.

Heading an economic delegation, Chairman of Iran's Chamber of Commerce Gholam-Hossein Shafei is scheduled to pay a three-day visit to Iraq to discuss cooperation between the two countries in the fields of trade, industry, mining, and agriculture at the invitation of the Iraqi Chambers of Commerce Abdul Razzaq al- Zuhairi.

The Iranian delegation also is set to take part in a conference on Iran-Iraq business opportunities which will be held at the Union of Iranian Chambers of Commerce in Baghdad.

During the conference, the ways of cooperation between the two countries' businessmen in the fields of trade, industry, mining, and agriculture will be discussed.

Oil Sales Much Better Than Before

TEHRAN (Shana) - The governor of the Central Bank of Iran (CBI) said, "The government's revenue from the sale of oil and its byproducts is a good source of government funding," adding currently sale of oil and petroleum products has been much better than the past.



Ali Salehabadi told a televised interview on Saturday evening that the country's economic status is such that the inflation rate is currently declining. "In recent months, we have seen more supply than demand in hard currency, and this calm in the market will affect inflation."

He announced the country's economic growth rate in the first six months of the current calendar year, which began on March 21 at 3.3 percent, and added: "A large part of this figure is related to the first three months of the year and the second quarter of the year due to power outages we faced lower economic growth because production of the country was affected by power outage."

Regarding the stability of the hard currency rate in next year's budget, he said: "Now the sale of oil and petroleum products is much better than in the past."

Achievements of MSC Encouragement of Iran Becoming Super Power

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

ISFAHAN - A member of the Expediency Council during his visit to Mobarakeh Steel Company (MSC) hailed the company and said the achievements of the company are the encouragement of Iran becoming a super power.

Mohammad Hossein Safar Harandi said that what he saw during his visit regarding environmental and water consumption issues are in favor of the public interests. He added according to the remarks of the senior officials of the company, nine towns use the treated wastewater of the company and the company is working on a system in order that 6 more towns can enjoy the treated wastewater and this will make the company be independent on consuming crude water.

He added that if this process continues and the company minimizes using river water, this industry will be needless of consuming crude water in the 2025 Outlook.

Safar Harandi then pointed to the capability of Iranian youths for cutting dependence on the foreigners and thwarting the sanctions and hailed them. He said even those who sanctioned Iran are repentant of their actions because they lost a good opportunity to cooperate with Iran and it was an opportunity for Iran to announce it does not need their help because of self-sufficiency.

He went on to say that today almost 95% of the required parts of the company are provided domestically due to the full support of the domestic industry.



40m Tons of National Steel Company, Outcome of 56 Years of ESCO's Experience

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

ISFAHAN - The ceremony marking the 56th foundation anniversary of Esfahan Steel Company (ESCO) with the slogan of "56 Years of Pride, 50 Years of Production" was held in presence of the CEO of the company, the CEO of Mobarakeh Steel Company (MSC) and some officials and steel industry activists.

Addressing the ceremony, the CEO of ESCO Mr. Mansour Yazdizadeh felicitated the 56th anniversary of ESCO and commemorated the memory of the martyrs and founders of this mega industrial complex and said ESCO has high capabilities and God willing will reach its real position with provision of production feeds.

Touching upon the projects which are underway in the company, he said in the field of water, the project for construction of the wastewater treatment is underway by MAPNA Group, adding that Oxygen Plant project with the capacity of 25,000 standard cubic meters will come on stream in the first half of the next year with improvement of the condition. He went on to say that ladle furnace (LF) for relative balancing of steel and cast iron production is underway and expressed hope the projects to back on the track of acceleration, therefore a good prospect is perceived for ESCO.

Yazdizadeh then said provision of raw material is the main challenge that the steel industry in the country is grappling with it and expressed hope the industry ministry would make serious decision in this regard to save the rate of steel production from suffering damage and products



with high value added like rail bear fruit with the least restrictions in ESCO.

Meanwhile former CEO of ESCO and current head of Iran Steel Producers Association Mr. Bahrami felicitated the day and said currently some 30m tons of steel produced in the country and the existing capacity is the production over 40m tons, adding that of course some of the facilities have recently been installed and some of them are also involved in providing raw material or transportation.

He then pointed to the role of ESCO in creating such a capacity for production and development of national steel industry has passed through the route of ESCO, reiterating that job creation is just one example of the achievements of this company.

Production of 40k Tons of Concentrate the Outcome of Karrur Copper Mine

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Head of National Iranian Copper Industry Company (NICICO) on the sidelines of coming on stream of Karrur Anbarabad copper mine said that with the launch of this mine, some 40,000 concentrate will be produced annually.

Dr. Ardeshir Saad Mohammadi said that the amount of reserve discovered in this mine is 500m tons of .24%-karat copper, adding that during the discovery process, some 103m tons of economic reserves with the .29\$ karat and 90ppm molybdenum was discovered.

He then pointed to implementation of mine design and choosing the final and economic pit in the field of construction of road for having access to the mine and said so far four kilometers of road is under construction for having access to the mine.

Saad Mohammadi said the amount of investment in the field of road construction is around 80b tomans and it needs 500b tomans more budget for the remaining 13 kilometers of road.



Seminar on Reviewing Trade Opportunities of Iran and Brazil

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The Iran-Brazil Joint Chamber of Commerce is to hold a seminar on reviewing the trade opportunities in Iran and Brazil on Sunday, January 22.



According to reports, the seminar will host the head of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Mine and Agriculture Gholam-Hossein Shafei as well as the ambassadors of Iran and Brazil.

Those business activists who are keen to attend the seminar can contact the joint chamber.

In recent years the trade between Iran and Brazil has increased as Iran has opened its trade center in Sao Paulo of Brazil to help the bilateral trade.

Weekly Traded Commodities on IME Exceed 1,765,000 Tons

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Iran Mercantile Exchange (IME) last week witnessed trade of 1,765,000 tons of commodities with a total trading value of more than \$482m on its physical market.



According to a report by the IME's International Affairs and PR, the exchange traded on its metals and minerals trading floor 1,310,000 tons of commodities valued at almost \$261m.

On this floor, the IME's customers purchased 897,101 tons of cement, 172,589 tons of steel, 115,000 tons of iron ore, 72,000 tons of sponge iron, 40,000 tons of zinc dust, 9,625 tons of aluminum, 5,360 tons of copper, 1,400 tons of zinc ingots, 140 tons of molybdenum concentrate and 1 kg of gold bars.

Furthermore, the IME saw on both domestic and export pits of its oil and petrochemical trading floor 445,566 tons of commodities worth more than \$214m.

Commodities sold on this floor included 192,000 tons of vacuum bottom, 102,402 tons of bitumen, 68,553 tons of polymeric products, 31,876 tons of chemicals, 48,000 tons of lube cut, 3,639 tons of base oil, 340 tons of sulfur and 100 tons of argon.

Last but not least was the IME's side market with 10,214 tons of commodities traded on it.

Chadormalu Co. Wins Top PR Manager Award of Year

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The 17th international symposium of public relations was held at the conference hall of the IRIB where head of public relations of Chadormalu Mining and Industrial Company Mr. Hossein Talebi was feted with the top public relations manager of the year award.



Mr Talebi won the award for his innovation in designing a decent system of communication as well as improving qualitative and quantitative development in the public relations activities of the company and was rewarded with plaque of appreciation.

Kazakhstan Puts Unrest Death Toll at 225

ALMATY (Dispatches) - The bodies of 225 people killed in unrest in Kazakhstan last week, including 19 members of the security forces, were delivered to morgues throughout the country, the prosecutor general's office said on Saturday.

The figure included civilians and armed "bandits" killed by security forces, Serik Shalabayev, the head of criminal prosecution at the prosecutor's office, told a briefing.

He did not provide an exact breakdown of the figures and said numbers could be updated later.

Violent protests began in the oil-producing Central Asian state this month after a jump in car fuel prices.



Canadian FM To Visit Ukraine

OTTAWA (Dispatches) - Canadian Foreign Minister Melanie Joly will visit Kyiv next week to reaffirm support for Ukrainian sovereignty and reinforce efforts to deter "aggressive actions" by Russia, Ottawa said.

Moscow has stationed more than 100,000 troops near the border with Ukraine and the United States said it feared Russia was preparing a pretext to invade if diplomacy failed to meet its objectives.

Canada, with a sizeable and politically influential population of Ukrainian ethnic descent, has taken a hard line with Moscow since the annexation of Crimea in 2014. "The amassing of Russian troops and equipment in and around Ukraine jeopardizes security in the entire region. These aggressive actions must be deterred," Joly said in a statement.



N. Korea Tests Railway-Borne Missile in Latest Launch



SEOUL (Dispatches) - North Korea tested a railway-borne missile in its firing drills on Friday, state media KCNA said on Saturday, amid a U.S. push for fresh sanctions against the isolated state following its recent series of weapons tests.

South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said two short-range ballistic missiles (SRBMs) travelled about 430 km (267 miles) to a maximum altitude of 36 km (22 miles) after being launched eastward on the northwest coast of North Korea.

The official KCNA news agency did not specify the missiles' range, or trajectory, but said a firing drill was held in North Pyongan Province to "check and judge the proficiency in the action procedures of the railway-borne regiment."

The country tested the rail-based system for the first time last September, saying it was designed as a potential counter-strike to any threatening forces.

Since New Year's Day, North Korea has launched three ballistic missiles in an unusually fast sequence of weapons tests. The previous two launches involved what state media called "hypersonic missiles" capable of high speeds and maneuvering after launch.

Hours before the latest test drill, North Korea slammed the United States for pursuing new sanctions in response to its recent missile launches, calling it a "provocation" and warning of a strong reaction.

U.S. President Joe Biden's administration imposed its first sanctions against Pyongyang on Wednesday, and called on the U.N. Security Council to blacklist several North Korean individuals and entities.

North Korea has defended the missile tests as its sovereign right to self-defence and accused the United States of intentionally escalating the situation with new sanctions.

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un did not attend the drill. KCNA said the military leadership had ordered the test "at short notice" and the system precisely struck the target set in the east coast with "two tactical guided missiles."

The system "demonstrated high manoeuvrability and rate of hits," KCNA said, adding its success led to discussions to "set up proper railway-borne missile operating system across the country."

North Korea has been steadily developing its weapons systems, raising the stakes for stalled talks aimed at dismantling its nuclear and ballistic missile arsenals in return for U.S. sanctions relief.

South Korean Chung Eui-yong and U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken condemned the latest launch during their phone call on Saturday and coordinated responses to the North's recent missile tests, the State Department said.

Both sides highlighted the importance of maintaining firm combined readiness posture and urged Pyongyang to return to a negotiating table, Seoul's foreign ministry said.

Russia Dismantles REvil Hacking Group at U.S. Request

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russia has dismantled ransomware crime group REvil at the request of the United States in an operation in which it detained and charged the group's members, according to Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB) domestic intelligence service.

FSB said in a statement on Friday that it had "suppressed the illegal activities" of members of the group during raids on 25 addresses that swept up 14 people.

The arrests were a rare apparent demonstration of US-Russian collaboration at a time of high tensions between the two over Ukraine.

The announcement came as Ukraine was responding to a massive cyber-attack that shut down government websites, though there was no indication the incidents were related.



Philippines to Acquire Missile System From India for \$375m

MANILA (Dispatches) - The Philippines has finalised a deal to acquire a shore-based anti-ship missile system from India for nearly \$375m to beef up its navy, the Southeast Asian nation's defense minister said.

The Philippines is in the late stages of a five-year, P300 billion (\$5.85bn) project to modernise its military's outdated hardware that includes warships from World War II and helicopters used by the United States in the Vietnam War.

Manila's military was one of the most poorly equipped in Asia when President Rodrigo Duterte's predecessor, Benigno Aquino, began a modest modernisation programme in 2012 - but it is still no match for its superpower neighbour China.

Under the deal negotiated with the government of India, BrahMos Aerospace Private Ltd will deliver three batteries, train operators and maintainers, and provide logistical support, Defence Secretary Delfin Lorenzana said in a Facebook post late on Friday.

BrahMos - a joint venture between India and Russia - has developed a cruise missile that the Indian defence ministry says is the fastest in the world.

The Philippines would be the first country to purchase it. India's defence ministry declined to comment.

The new anti-ship system aims to deter foreign vessels from encroaching on the country's 200-nautical-mile (370km) exclusive economic zone (EEZ). In recent years the Philippines has repeatedly accused China of violating its EEZ by sending hundreds of militia boats into its waters.

"It's part of our territorial defence," said Colonel Ramon Zagala, spokesman for the Armed Forces of the Philippines.

In 2018, the Philippines bought Israeli-made Spike ER missiles, its first-ever ship-borne missile systems for maritime deterrence.

Despite friendlier ties between China and the Philippines under Duterte, Beijing has remained adamant in claiming large portions of the South China Sea, a conduit for billions of dollars worth of goods.

Macron Rival Pécresse Slams EU's Sieve-Like Borders

SAMOS (Dispatches) - French right-wing presidential hopeful Valerie Pécresse slammed the EU's "sieve-like" borders for allowing migrants to enter undetected and backed calls for barbed-wire fences to prevent them crossing illegally into the bloc.

Pécresse, whom polls show as President Emmanuel Macron's top challenger in the April 2022 election, rammed home her position during a visit to a migrant camp on the Greek island of Samos.

"We cannot have a sieve-like Europe, a supermarket Europe where you enter and leave as you please," the conservative politician, who styles herself as a cross between Margaret Thatcher and Angela Merkel, said.

The Samos camp is one of three new migrant facilities on Greece's Aegean islands, which acted as a gateway to the EU for over one million asylum seekers in 2015. Most were Syrian, Iraqi or Afghan, arriving by boat from Turkey.

The new camps come with barbed-wire fencing, surveillance cameras, X-ray scanners and magnetic gates that are closed at night.

Built with EU funds, they offer a greater level of comfort, including running water, toilets and more security,

than the dingy tented camps they replaced.

NGOs and aid groups have however voiced concern about the confinement of migrants in the camps.

During Pécresse's visit, a dozen Somali migrants protested over being stuck in what they called "a detention camp".

But the 54-year-old head of the Greater Paris region was full of praise for the facility, calling it a "model" for Europe that blended "firmness" and "humanity" and helped reduce the flow of migrants across the Mediterranean.

She accused the centrist Macron, who is currently tipped to win a second term, of sweeping the issue of migration "under the carpet".

"A wall is not the solution, but it can be the answer," she declared, calling for the EU to fund the construction of barbed-wire border fences in countries with external EU borders.

Polls show immigration as one of French voters' top concerns.

Pécresse has been accused of chasing far-right votes by taking a tough line on immigration and crime, issues which she claims are linked.



Calls Grow for Johnson to Resign Over Lockdown Parties

LONDON (Dispatches) - Calls are growing for British Prime Minister Boris Johnson to resign after more revelations came to light about regular parties organized at Downing Street that broke COVID-19 lockdown rules, with Labor party leader Keir Starmer saying Johnson was "unable to lead".

The UK prime minister witnessed weekly "wine-time Friday" drinking sessions by his staff throughout the coronavirus pandemic, for which they installed a specially bought wine fridge, according to a new report by the Daily Mirror newspaper.

The report in the British newspaper caps a torrid week of revelations about lockdown breaches in Downing Street that saw Johnson's office forced on Friday to apologize to Queen Elizabeth II.

On Wednesday Johnson apologized to parliament for attending what he called a "work event", at a time when social mixing was banned.

The drip feed threatens to overshadow reported plans by Johnson to relaunch his embattled premiership, starting with a relaxation of continuing pandemic restrictions later in the month. Whether Johnson and his staff knowingly broke the law during prior lockdowns is the central question being addressed in an inquiry by senior civil servant Sue Gray, who could report back next week.

Gray is said to have been "completely blindsided" by the latest revelations, the Times newspaper reported. The Daily Mirror published a photograph of the wine fridge being delivered to a back door in Downing Street in December 2020, and said staff would regularly stock it with suitcase loads of alcohol.

"Wine-time Fridays" were scheduled into the electronic calendars of approximately 50 staff at Number 10, in apparent violation of a ban on indoor socialising during the pandemic, it reported.

Johnson would often drop by for a chat at the end of the working day, the newspaper said, quoting one source as saying: "The idea that he didn't know there were drinks is total nonsense. 'If the PM tells you to 'let off steam', he's basically saying this is fine," the source reportedly added.

Witnesses told the Telegraph newspaper that alcohol was consumed and guests danced to music, with a person sent to a local shop with a suitcase to buy wine.

In response, a Downing Street spokeswoman said the government was awaiting Gray's inquiry "to establish the facts around the nature of gatherings" during the pandemic. "The findings will be made public in due course," she added.





Niavaran Apt (\$2500)
250sq.m, 3bdrs
S/p, Sauna
J, balcony
marble fl
fireplace
Fully Furn

Shanon (adviser)

Darrou Villa (\$3000)
800sq.m
5bdrs, S/p
S, J, balcony
yard, & pkg
Fully Furn

Parsian

Jordan (\$1500)
2bdrs, S/p, F.F

Apt
Sa'adat abad
160sq.m, 2bdrs, S/pool
balcony, pkg lot
(\$1700)
F.F

Vanak office (\$2500)
200sq.m, pkgs

Zaferanieh (\$2700)
300sq.m, 3bdrs, S/p, F.F

Elahieh bldg (\$7000)
4storey, 10bdrs, pkgs

Farmanieh Apt (\$3000)
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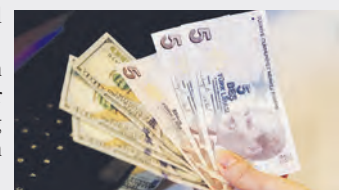
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Turkey's De-Dollarization to Accelerate in Coming Weeks

ANKARA (Dispatches) - Turkish Finance Minister Nureddin Nebati said on Saturday that de-dollarization will accelerate in the coming weeks.

Speaking to heads of nongovernmental organizations in Istanbul, Nebati said inflation in Turkey will come down to single digits by the time of presidential and parliamentary elections set for mid-2023, after it had soared to a 19-year high of 36% in December. He also said the conversion of forex holdings to Turkish lira will accelerate in the coming weeks. The minister added that as of Friday night more than 131 billion lira (\$9.69 billion) had been deposited in accounts under a government scheme that protects lira deposits from forex depreciation.



Turkey's House Sales More Than Double in December

ANKARA (Dispatches) - House sales in Turkey leaped 113.7% year-over-year in December, official data showed, accelerating a surge a month earlier as locals opted to invest in real estate as a shield against soaring inflation.

Some 226,503 changed hands last month, the Turkish Statistical Institute (TurkStat) said, up from 178,814 units in November that marked a 60% year-over-year increase. Real estate sales in December accelerated from a month earlier amid a depreciation in the Turkish lira, with the authorities pursuing the policy of low interest rates to boost exports and credit.

The data showed December mortgage sales rocketed 209.3% from a year earlier to 45,260.

The data came amid high volatility in the exchange rates after the Central Bank of the Republic of Turkey (CBRT) slashed its benchmark policy rate by 500 basis points to 14% since September.

The Turkish lira had fallen to a record low of 18.4 against the U.S. dollar in December before rebounding sharply the week before last after Erdoğan announced the scheme to encourage savers to convert deposits from foreign exchange, compensating depositors for any losses due to lira depreciation.

Turks see real estate as an investment to protect their savings from inflation, given real yields are deeply negative, said TSKB Real Estate Valuation Manager Makbule Yönel Maya.

"People have turned to real estate purchases from the moment inflation began to rise. Construction costs are consistently rising, this means housing prices are increasing, which support real estate investment," she said. Maya added that people also sought to purchase real estate in the last month of the year before taxes and fees were hiked in the new year.

In 2021 as a whole, total house sales fell 0.5% to around 1.49 million properties, with mortgaged sales down 49%.

The most popular place for house sales was Istanbul, with 276,223 sales, followed by the capital Ankara with 144,104 and the Aegean province of Izmir with 86,722.

Last year, sales surged due to cheap credit, as the central bank lowered its policy rate to fend off the impact of the coronavirus pandemic and state banks ramped up lending, prompting real estate developers to launch campaigns for buyers.

Driven by low-cost loans, overall sales in 2020 were up 11.2% year-over-year to nearly 1.5 million, an all-time high.

Sales to foreigners jumped 77% year-over-year to 7,841 properties in December, the data showed, as the lira decline made purchases much cheaper in hard currencies. It marked an all-time monthly high after exceeding the previous record set in November.

Property sales to foreign buyers were strong throughout the year and had exceeded the annual threshold of 50,000 units for the first time through November even before the year-end.

Sales to foreigners accounted for 3.9% of all housing sales and ended 2021 with a 43.5% year-over-year increase to hit 58,576 units, the data showed.

The previous annual record was set in 2019 when 45,483 houses were sold to foreigners in 12 months.

UK Economy Bounces Back Above Pre-Pandemic Levels in November

LONDON (Dispatches) - The United Kingdom's economy, the world's fifth-biggest, strongly expanded in November to surpass levels seen just before the country entered its first COVID-19 lockdown, official data showed.

U.K. economy expanded by a much faster than expected 0.9% in November – before the latest wave of COVID-19 infections and restrictions for many firms – leaving it 0.7% bigger than it was in February 2020, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) said.

Economists polled by Reuters had forecast monthly gross domestic product growth of 0.4% for November.

"It's amazing to see the size of the economy back to pre-pandemic levels in November – a testament to the grit and determination of the British people," Britain's Finance Minister Rishi Sunak said.

Other economies have already recovered their pre-COVID-19 size, chief among them the United States.

Britain's economy shrank by more than 9% in 2020, one of the biggest pandemic slumps among the world's rich nations.

Despite November's growth acceleration, GDP probably took a fresh hit in December when the omicron variant swept Europe, and the loss of momentum is likely to have stretched into January with many firms reporting severe staff absences and consumers still wary of going out.

On Thursday, data showed record levels of staff absence due to COVID-19 around the turn of the year.

But health officials think the omicron infections wave has now peaked in Britain and analysts say the blow to the economy is likely to be short-lived, allowing the Bank of England (BoE) to continue raising interest rates this year.



China President Calls for Measures Against Unhealthy Development of Digital Economy

SHANGHAI (Dispatches) - President Xi Jinping has called for improved regulation and governance of China's digital economy to guard against its "unhealthy" development as Beijing aims to boost the sector's contribution to the country's growth.

In an essay in the ruling Communist Party's publication Qiushi on Saturday, Xi called for focusing on key areas including integrated circuits, displays, communications equipment and intelligent hardware.

China should "cultivate a number of enterprises with international competitiveness, and leading ecological firms with control over industrial chains, to create world-class digital industry clusters," he said.

"We must see that compared with large and powerful countries in the global digital economy, China's digital economy is big but not strong, and fast but not superior."

Xi also called for regulation and standardisation to plug regulatory loopholes and prevent "monopolies and disorderly expansion of capital" in the world's second largest economy.

"In the course of rapid development, China's digital economy has also displayed some unhealthy and irregular seeds and trends that not only affect the healthy development of the digital economy, but violate laws and regulations and pose a threat to national economic and financial security," he said.

China should also improve its national security system, with a focus on strengthening digital economy early warning, prevention and control systems to ensure the security of key technologies, important industries and facilities, strategic resources, and leading enterprises.

Philippine Economy Still Most Vulnerable to COVID-19

MANILA (Dispatches) - Although the gradual lifting of restrictions improved the Philippines' score, it remained as the most vulnerable country to COVID-19 in the latest scorecard of UK-based think tank Oxford Economics.

In a Jan. 14 report, Oxford Economics head of global strategy services and emerging market macro research Gabriel Sterne and economist Yash Adwani said that compared with the previous COVID-19 vulnerability

scorecard in October 2021, "the biggest improvements were in Bangladesh, Egypt, New Zealand, and the Philippines."

However, the Philippines' COVID-19 vulnerability score — at over 5 in a scale where zero meant the least vulnerability — remained the highest among the 56 advanced and emerging markets covered by the January 2022 scorecard.

On the other extreme end of the list was Norway, which was deemed the least vulnerable to the prolonged pandemic.

In its updated scorecard, Oxford Economics assigned a weight of 15 percent to health infrastructure, 19 percent to health policy, 24 percent to epidemiology, and the biggest share of 42 percent to economic vulnerability.

It did not help that the Philippine economy relied much on the travel, tourism and hospitality sectors, which had a combined 13-percent share in the scorecard.

The tourism sector's direct and indirect contributions accounted for about 25 percent of the Philippines' gross domestic product (GDP) — the largest in the region, Oxford Economics' earlier estimates had shown.

Globally, Oxford Economics said richer nations or advanced economies tended to take the brunt of the ongoing surge in infections caused by the more contagious Omicron strain.

"Omicron has caused a significant turnaround in the relative affliction of emerging markets and advanced economies — the latter having become relatively more affected. The pattern is similar to the situation a year ago when the Delta variant began to spread," Oxford Economics said.

"The biggest deterioration in overall vulnerability since October has been in advanced economies (Canada, Sweden and Finland). The number of new COVID-19 cases or deaths has approached new highs in these countries, prompting the reintroduction of stricter lockdown measures," the think tank said.

U.S. Talks to Energy Firms On EU Gas Supply in Case of Russia-Ukraine Conflict

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - The U.S. government has held talks with several international energy companies on contingency plans for supplying natural gas to Europe if conflict between Russia and Ukraine disrupts Russian supplies, two U.S. officials and two industry sources told Reuters on Friday.

The United States is concerned Russia is preparing for the possibility of a new military assault on the country it invaded in 2014. Russia denies it plans to attack Ukraine.

The European Union depends on Russia for around a third of its gas supplies, and U.S. sanctions over any conflict could disrupt that supply.

Any interruptions to Russia's gas supply to Europe would exacerbate an energy crisis caused by a shortage of the fuel. Record power prices have driven up consumer energy bills as well as business costs and sparked protests in some countries.

State Department officials approached the companies to ask where additional supplies might come from if they were needed, two industry sources familiar with the discussions told Reuters, speaking on condition of anonymity due to the sensitivity of the matter.

The companies told the U.S. government officials that global gas supplies are tight and that there is little gas available to substitute large volumes from Russia, the industry sources said.

The State Department's discussions with energy companies were led by senior advisor for energy security Amos Hochstein, a senior U.S. State Department official said, also speaking on condition of anonymity. The State Department did not ask the companies to increase output, the official added.

"We've discussed a range of contingencies and we've talked about all that we're doing with our nation state partners and allies," the source said.

"We've done this with the European Commission, but we've also done it with energy companies. It's accurate to say that we've spoken to them about our concerns and spoken to them about a range

of contingencies, but there wasn't any sort of ask when it comes to production."

As well as asking companies what capacity they had to raise supplies, U.S. officials also asked whether companies had the capacity to increase exports and postpone field maintenance if necessary, the sources said.

It was unclear which companies U.S. officials contacted. Royal Dutch Shell, ConocoPhillips and Exxon declined to comment when asked if they had been contacted. Chevron Corp, Total, Equinor and Qatar Energy did not immediately respond to a request for comment. A second industry source said his company was asked whether it had the ability to postpone maintenance at gas fields if necessary.

A spokesperson for the U.S. National Security Council would not comment on U.S. discussions with energy companies, but confirmed contingency planning was underway.

"Assessing potential spillovers and exploring ways to reduce those spillovers is good governance and standard practice," the spokesperson said.

"Any details in this regard that make their way to the public only demonstrate the extensive detail and seriousness with which we are discussing and are prepared to impose significant measures with our allies and partners."

Global Crypto Funds Post Sharp Gains in 2021



NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Global cryptocurrency funds racked up steep gains last year after most digital currencies soared in price, led by bitcoin and ether amid strong institutional interest and greater acceptance from regulators worldwide, according to BarclayHedge, a division of Backstop Solutions.

The BarclayHedge cryptocurrency traders index was up 138.1% for 2021, according to data the firm posted on Friday, showing results for about 39 funds, or less than 50% of the digital asset management firms it tracks. That followed record gains of 173% in 2020, as crypto funds benefited from extreme volatility that the coronavirus pandemic stoked across financial markets.

Bitcoin gained 60% in 2021 as it hit a record peak of \$69,000 in November, while ether, the token used for the Ethereum blockchain, surged roughly 400%.

"There is an air of legitimacy now. Bitcoin is no longer viewed as an esoteric digital currency used only on the fringes by techies and cypherpunks," according to CoinDesk's annual crypto and blockchain review for 2021.

For the month of December, however, crypto funds showed losses of around 11%, as bitcoin and ether slumped as well. Bitcoin dropped 19% last year, while ether fell 20%.

"Crypto was the only sub-sector that didn't make money in December, as many of the industry's headline assets suffered whiplash from a sharp price downturn," said Ben Crawford, head of research at BarclayHedge.

Iran Returns 38 Illegal Pakistani Migrants

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Iranian authorities on Sunday returned 38 illegal Pakistani migrants, after arresting them from the Pak-Iran border, to Levies Force, Bol news reported quoting sources on Sunday.

The sources said that they were attempting to reach European countries via Iran for better job opportunities.

The illegal migrants included 51 citizens from Punjab, 11 from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), and six from Balochistan. The Iranian force handed over Pakistani citizens to Levies Force at the Raahdari Gate of Taftan border.



Emissions Set to Rise With Global Power Demand



PARIS (Dispatches) - Global electricity demand over the next few years is set to slow after a record 2021 but will still result in higher carbon emissions without rapid gains in low-carbon supply and energy efficiency, the International Energy Agency (IEA) said.

Global electricity demand rose by 6% or 1,500 terawatt hours (TWh) in 2021, the largest percentage gain since the recovery from a global financial crisis in 2010 and the largest total rise on record, the agency said in its annual report on the electricity sector.

China accounted for about half of the increase in global electricity demand last year with a 10% rise.

However, global electricity demand is expected to slow in the next few years as energy efficiency measures take effect and economic recovery slows.

It is forecast to increase by 2.7% on average to 2024, though the effects of the coronavirus pandemic and high energy prices are still uncertain, the report said.

South East Asia is expected to see the strongest electricity demand, growing by an average 5% between 2022 and 2024, followed by the Asia Pacific region, which includes China, at around 4% over that period, slightly below pre-pandemic levels.

Demand in North America and Latin America, is seen rising by around 1% over 2022-2024, with the largest percentage gains in Mexico and Canada at 3-4% a year.

Europe is set to register 1.7% growth in 2022 and then stay flat in 2023 and 2024.

Power sector carbon dioxide emissions climbed 7% to a record high in 2021 after falling the previous two years.

Although slower electricity demand growth and the rise of low-carbon generation should limit emissions growth to less than 1% per year between 2022 and 2024, emissions need to fall sharply to meet net zero targets by 2050, the report said.

To fulfill its role in de-carbonizing the energy system, the electricity sector needed big improvements in energy efficiency and low-carbon supply, IEA said.

Fossil fuel generation is set to stagnate over the next three years while renewables are expected to grow 8% per year through 2024, and account for over 90% of total demand growth over that period.

Commenting on the report, David Jones, the global lead for independent climate think tank Ember said: “Failure to build enough new clean electricity to keep up with demand will slow the phase-out of coal-fired and gas-fired electricity; a mistake

we cannot afford to make for the climate.”

On the electricity supply side, most of the growth to 2024 is expected in China, accounting for around half of the net total increase, followed by India at 12%, Europe at 7% and the United States at 4%.

Last year, a surge in consumption, combined with a reduced natural gas and coal supply, resulted in volatile power prices and negative effects on power generators, retailers and end- users in China, Europe and India, the IEA said.

The IEA’s price index for major wholesale electricity markets in 2021 nearly doubled compared to 2020, up 64% from the average over 2016 to 2020. In Europe, fourth quarter 2021 prices were over four times the 2015-2020 average.

“Sharp spikes in electricity prices in recent times have been causing hardship for many households and businesses around the world and risk becoming a driver of social and political tensions,” said IEA Executive Director Fatih Birol.

The IEA did not provide detail on where price volatility might be most concentrated over the next few years.

German Economy Struggles Through Virus And Supply Issues



FRANKFURT (Dispatches) - Germany’s economy grew modestly last year, likely shrinking in the final months as the coronavirus pandemic and supply chain issues held back Europe’s industrial powerhouse, official data showed.

The 2.7 percent growth figure likely leaves Germany as a European laggard in the recovery from the economic shock of the pandemic.

Growth across the European Union is expected to have been around five percent in 2021, according to the latest predictions by the European Commission, with France and Italy surging ahead.

Germany’s modest rebound was achieved “despite the continuing pandemic situation, more delivery bottlenecks and material shortages,” the head of the federal statistics agency Georg Thiel said in a statement.

“The German economy managed to recover from the sharp fall last year although the economic performance has not yet reached its pre-crisis level again,” Thiel said.

In 2020, on a price and calendar adjusted basis, Germany’s gross domestic product (GDP) plunged by 4.9 percent as the coronavirus forced large parts of Europe’s biggest economy to shut down.

“The very high expectations placed in the German economy at the beginning of 2021 were only partially fulfilled,” said Fritz Koehler-Geib, chief economist at German public lender KfW.

Early predictions for 2021 tabled growth estimates upwards of four percent. Those forecasts were progressively revised down as industry was hampered by bottlenecks and new health restrictions.

With prices for energy soaring to multi-year highs too, the economy likely shrank by “between 0.5 and one percent” in the fourth quarter of 2021, Destatis said.

“The economic development was highly dependent on Covid-19 infection rates and the associated preventive measures also in 2021,” Thiel said.

A virtual event that will bring key stakeholders together to build a more robust automotive industry capable of a faster turnaround to regain its past glory.

The pandemic was also at the root of upheaval in global supply chains, leading to shortages of raw materials and components that have hampered industry month after month.

German manufacturers, with their vast web of suppliers and reliance on exports, have been particularly hard hit by the widespread shortages.

The country’s flagship carmakers were forced to interrupt production at their factories to manage a shortage of chips, a key component in both conventional and electric vehicles.

Belgium Ghost Town Fights to Return to Life

BRUSSELS (Dispatches) - Doel has a reputation as Belgium’s best-known ghost town. But its few inhabitants -- today numbering just 21 -- now see a glimmer of hope of their village bouncing back to life.

If it does, it would be a remarkable change of fortune for a place that has been steadily emptying out since the late 1970s when its population was 60 times bigger, leaving behind silent streets of crumbling, sealed-up homes covered in graffiti.

Squeezed between Antwerp’s ever-expanding port -- the second-biggest in Europe -- and a nuclear power plant, Doel has become a morbid attraction for curious tourists and “urban explorers” who film themselves daringly traipsing around inside ruined buildings.

Police patrol regularly to prevent vandals and squatters moving in.

Only two cafes -- one attached to a 17th-century windmill -- and an immaculate parish church remind visitors that the village still holds out against oblivion.

“It’s not a ghost town... But if you come here on a Sunday, or especially in the evenings, of course you see the empty houses and that’s what triggers people the most” to think that it looks like one, resident Liese Stuer told AFP.

“I think it’s very important that people know that it’s not a ghost town, that they know there’s still people trying to live here and trying to set up life,” she said.

Stuer, a 37-year-old teacher of Flemish to foreigners and freelance graphic artist, moved to Doel five years ago when she partnered with a local. But she used to visit as a child with her grandparents, who lived nearby, and remembered it as a swanky town. But Doel’s fate hit the skids in the late 1990s when Belgian authorities decided to expropriate and bulldoze villages around Antwerp’s port to build a new container dock.

While most inhabitants left, a hardcore stayed and put up a fight in the courts, through fierce lobbying and by promoting street art to give colour to the empty houses.

Given the importance of the port to Belgium’s economy, it looked like a campaign doomed to failure.

The regional Flemish government prohibited people moving there and vandalism made the place increasingly insecure for the shrinking population.

But in 2016, Belgium’s supreme court shot down the expansion plan, after the European Court of Justice ruled that it threatened Doel’s marshland surroundings and the ecology of the Scheldt river that runs alongside it.

Iran May Convert...

FROM PAGE 1

Pakistan used to pay price of imported power through barter system due to sanctions imposed on Iran. However, now both countries have entered into advance level talks to convert about Rs5 billion worth of payables into loan.

The text of the draft Amendment-2 has been agreed in principle by both parties to be signed after having finalised the amendments in the Financing Agreement between NTDC and Export Development Bank of Iran (EDBI) including the counter parties i.e. TAVANIR and Pakistan’s Central Power Purchasing Agency (CPPAG), to use TAVANIR receivables from CPPAG as a loan extended by EDBI to NTDC.

In the draft Amendment, completion period is locked at 18 months (previously 22 months) and price is fixed at 36,421,000 euros (previously 30.1 million euros, a 21 percent increase on 2009 price) with exclusion of escalation clauses.

Further, TAVANIR assured Pakistani side it would endeavor and do its best to hold necessary meetings with EDBI to resolve any barriers, obstacles, and ambiguities and develop the details of the Finance Model, formerly presented through TAVANIR letter No.11/3178 dated 20th of October 2020, was further agreed in principal by NTDC.

It was agreed the detailed finance model would be presented to NTDC by early in February 2022. From Pakistan side, Muhammad Masood Anjum, Manager Finance NTDC, and from Iranian side, Vahid Gohari, Director General for Foreign Trade of Electricity, were nominated to act as the focal persons for fast communication and coordination in this regards.

Moreover, M/s TAVANIR promised to provide

New Horizon...

FROM PAGE 1

Despite significant U.S. sanctions against it, Iran’s GDP reportedly is \$490 billion, similar in size to Belgium and Thailand. GDP per capita is about \$2,300 amongst a population of 88 million.

A combination of Chinese and Russian infrastructure development will help replace decaying assets due to the countries sanctions problems and ensure that Iran’s huge mineral oil and gas assets – it owns 12% of global reserves – flow east instead of west. Iran is a key part of the multimodal International North-South Transportation Corridor (INSTC) with its ports at Chabahar on the Persian Gulf and Anzali on the Caspian Sea, through which products can be shipped to and from Russian and Iranian markets.

Kazem Jalali, Iran’s ambassador to Russia has also said that Roadmap for Iran-Russia cooperation in the context of an agreement is to be signed by the presidents of the two countries and then must be approved by the Iranian parliament.

Despite good political ties, the trade between the two countries is not satisfactory and this document can boost the trade between these to neighboring countries but this year their trade has improved comparing to last year.

Alexander Palishok, a Moscow State University professor, also believes that an upcoming visit to Moscow by Iranian President Raisi will help the advancement of relations between the two countries.

Palishok, said that Iran-Russia relations have always been on the right track in the recent years. He, also the head of Iran-Russia friendship association, said that the mutual ties have taken a boost since President Raisi took office in August.

That is why Raisi’s visit to Russia is on the spotlight and the two countries are making their best to prepare the ground for the visit, he added.

Referring to the capacities of Iran and Russia for promotion of relations, Palishok said that a nearly \$2 billion trade level is not satisfactory and has to grow to \$10 billion or even more.

He believed that an Iran-Russia strategic document can help relations between the two countries and can be regarded as a roadmap in future planning for bilateral relations.

The agreement can create a strong political, military and economic bloc in the region and it will benefit both countries in countering the West’s hostile policies and sanctions.

Of course Western media and officials as well as some pro-West analysts inside the country have started a campaign to tarnish Iran’s ties with Russia and China and to create a negative feeling towards it among Iranians Iran while the documents will not mean Iran is falling towards the East because the Islamic Republic of Iran is and will be independent forever and nobody can misuse it no matter it is Eastern or Western countries.

So the countdown has begun started for this historic visit of President Raisi and signing the document which will be a new horizon in the relations of Tehran and Moscow and a big earthquake in the region and it can be a milestone in all-out relation between the two neighboring countries which can have significant cooperation in the international and economic affairs.

U.S., Israel...

FROM PAGE 1

The Iranian foreign minister also reiterated Tehran’s stance on the settlement of the Syrian crisis through political approaches and said his country views the UN as the body responsible to help put a peaceful end to the conflict in the Arab nation.

Amir-Abdollahian criticized the illegal presence of US occupation forces in Syria as well as Israeli airstrike on the war-ravaged country, stating that such practices derail the political settlement process.

He called on the international community and the United Nations to take effective measures in this regard.

The Iranian foreign minister pointed to the Syrian refugee crisis and sanctions imposed on the Damascus government, saying that the Syrian conflict cannot be resolved adequately if these issues are not addressed properly.

For his part, Pedersen described the status quo in Syria as stable, saying, “Neither side is currently mulling over regime change in Syria.”

Syria has been gripped by foreign-backed militancy since March 2011. The Syrian government says the Israeli regime and its Western and regional allies are aiding Takfiri terrorist groups that are wreaking havoc in the country.

Genoa Sack Shevchenko

MILAN (Dispatches) - Andriy Shevchenko has been sacked by struggling Genoa after just over two months in charge, the Serie A club announced.

In a statement, Genoa said that Under-17 coach Abdoulay Konko would be caretaker manager until the club finds a permanent replacement for the Ukrainian. Former AC Milan and Chelsea striker Shevchenko had only won one of his 11 matches in all competitions after being hired by Genoa on November 7, his team's latest defeat coming against Milan in the Italian Cup on Thursday.

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Kriechmayr Wins Wengen Downhill

WENGEN (Dispatches) - Austria's Vincent Kriechmayr made the most of a controversial bending of the Covid-19 rules by alpine skiing's ruling body to win the men's World Cup downhill at Wengen.

Kriechmayr denied Switzerland's Beat Feuz a fourth win on the mythic Lauberhorn slope by thirty-four hundredths of a second.

But the Austrian was only in the line-up after a crucial intervention by organisers the FIS.

Doncic, Mavs End Grizzlies' Win Streak

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - Luka Doncic recorded 27 points, 12 rebounds and 10 assists for his 40th career triple-double as the Dallas Mavericks rolled to a 112-85 road victory over Memphis to halt the Grizzlies' franchise-record winning streak at 11 games.

Tim Hardaway Jr. scored 16 points, and Jalen Brunson contributed 15 points, nine assists and a career-best five steals for Dallas, which won for the seventh time in its past eight games. The Mavericks outscored Memphis 62-30 in the second half.

Marquese Chriss also scored 15 points, Dwight Powell and Dorian Finney-Smith added 13 apiece and Reggie Bullock recorded 10 points and nine rebounds for the Mavericks.

Ja Morant posted 19 points and eight assists and Desmond Bane scored 16 points as Memphis lost for the first time since falling 113-104 to the Golden State Warriors on Dec. 23.

Warriors 138, Bulls 96

Jonathan Kuminga paced six double-figure scorers with 25 points on 10-of-12 shooting and Kevon Looney notched 10 points and 12 rebounds as visiting Golden State routed Chicago.

The Bulls have lost three of four following a nine-game winning streak. The Warriors, who had lost four of their previous five, have won 10 straight against Chicago.

Jordan Poole (22 points), Andrew Wiggins (21) and Stephen Curry (19) helped the Warriors to a season high in points. Coby White led the Bulls with 20 points. Chicago's Zach LaVine sustained a left knee injury in the first quarter, and he will undergo an MRI on Saturday, according to multiple media reports.

Pistons 103, Raptors 87

Trey Lyles had 21 points and seven rebounds off the bench and host Detroit defeated Toronto.

Cade Cunningham had 18 points, seven rebounds and five assists and Hamidou Diallo

supplied 18 points with six rebounds. Saddiq Bey contributed 15 points and Josh Jackson added 13 off the bench for Detroit, which held Toronto to 32.2 percent shooting.

Fred VanVleet led the Raptors with 24 points and 10 rebounds, though he shot 6-for-21 from the field. Pascal Siakam supplied 23 points and 11 rebounds.

Suns 112, Pacers 94

Devin Booker scored 22 of his 35 points in the third quarter and Deandre Ayton had 27 points and 12 rebounds to fuel Phoenix



over Indiana in a lopsided affair at Indianapolis.

Booker drained a career-high-tying six 3-pointers to propel Phoenix to its fifth win in the past six games. Ayton made 12 of 18 shots and his lone 3-point attempt to fall one point shy of his season-high point total.

Justin Holiday scored 25 points and Caris LeVert added 20 points and nine assists for the Pacers, who have lost three in a row and nine of their last 10 games. Domantas Sabonis recorded 14 points and 14 rebounds in defeat.

76ers 111, Celtics 99

Joel Embiid posted 25 points, 13 rebounds and six assists as Philadelphia downed visiting Boston for its eighth victory in nine games.

Embiid finished five points shy of what would have been his ninth straight game with at least 30 points, which would have broken the franchise record he shares with Hall of Famers Allen Iverson and Wilt Chamberlain. Tyrese Maxey added 23 points for Philadelphia.

Jaylen Brown scored 21 points and Jayson Tatum added 20 points and 11 boards for the Celtics.

Heat 124, Hawks 118

Tyler Herro scored 24 points, including a pair of go-ahead free throws with 46 seconds left, to help host Miami beat Atlanta and extend its winning streak to four.

Jimmy Butler, who had missed three games with a sprained ankle, returned to amass 23 points and 10 assists for Miami. P.J. Tucker and Omer Yurtseven each scored 17. Max Strus added 16 points, all of them in the first quarter.

Atlanta got 24 points and nine assists from Trae Young, 20 points from De'Andre Hunter, 18 points from Danilo Gallinari and 16 points from John Collins. The Hawks have lost four in a row.

Badosa Issues

Australian Open Warning With Sydney Title

SYDNEY (Dispatches) - Paula Badosa issued an ominous warning ahead of the Australian Open by beating French Open champion Barbora Krejickova in a three-set thriller to win the Sydney Classic.

The world number nine from Spain prevailed 6-3, 4-6, 7-6 (7/4) in two hours and 22 minutes after hitting 32 winners and 12 aces.

"We both went to the limit today. We both broke into the top 100 a few years ago and now we are playing in a big final," Badosa said after defeating the fourth-ranked Czech.

They are on course to meet again at the quarter-finals of the Australian Open when it starts next week.

The 24-year-old Badosa is eyeing a breakout Grand Slam tilt with her quarter-final effort in last year's French Open — which Krejickova won — her deepest run at a major.

She will enter Melbourne Park confident after her third straight victory over Krejickova, having won both their previous matches in straight sets last year.

This was far tougher with an aggressive Krejickova confidently approaching the net early, but it failed to rattle Badosa, who drew first blood.

Krejickova edged ahead early in the second set and overcame service wobbles to force a decider.

Sticking to the script, the topsy-turvy contest saw Badosa gain an early break of serve before Krejickova immediately hit back.

But Krejickova was on the brink and two points from defeat in the 10th game before serving strongly to prolong the contest.

They showed no signs of fatigue, upping the ante with superb winners in a tense tie break.

Badosa, however, kept her composure and fell to the ground in celebration after Krejickova's forehand slammed into the net.

Krejickova, who had saved seven match points against Anett Kontaveit in the semi-finals, plays world No.72 Andrea Petkovic in the first round of the Australian Open.



Gut-Behrami Grabs Downhill as Goggia Crashes

VIENNA (Dispatches) - Lara Gut-Behrami made the most of a fall by Sofia Goggia to take the World Cup downhill in Zauchensee, Austria.

Goggia had dominated the speed events this season winning all three downhills and two super-Gs to lead the standings in both categories.

On Saturday the Italian was heading for the fastest time when she lost her balance, slid

down the slope and careened into the safety fence. After a few seconds she sat up and gave a thumbs up before getting up and walking away.

Gut-Behrami stayed on her feet to take her 34th World Cup victory.

The Swiss skier finished in 1min 45.78sec, one tenth of a second ahead of German Kira Weidle with Austrian Ramona Siebenhofer at 0.44sec.

Goggia still leads the downhill standings ahead of American Breezy Johnson who did not race.

Another American who did not compete on Saturday, Mikaela Shiffrin, remains in the overall lead with 966 points, still 50 points ahead of Slovakian slalom specialist Petra Vlhova who was 26th on Saturday with Goggia a distant third.

De Bruyne Strike Stretches Man City's Premier League lead

MANCHESTER (Dispatches) - Manchester City took another huge step towards retaining the Premier League title as one moment of inspiration from Kevin De Bruyne saw off Chelsea 1-0 to open up a 13-point lead at the top of the table.

A game of few chances was brought to life by the Belgian 20 minutes from time as he curled home the only goal from outside the box to seal a 12th consecutive league win for the champions.

Chelsea got the better of Pep Guardiola's men in last season's Champions League final, but securing their place in Europe's top club competition next season now looks like the height of their ambitions for the rest of the Premier League season.

The Blues remain second but have won just one of their last six league games.

Four of the five meetings between the sides since Thomas Tuchel took charge of Chelsea have been won by a single goal and another cagey encounter ensued.

City dominated possession but struggled to open up a makeshift Chelsea defence featuring second-choice goalkeeper Kepa Arrizabalaga and Malang Sarr on just his second Premier League appearance.

Indeed City's one clear chance before the break came from a Chelsea mistake.

Mateo Kovacic's pass deflected off De Bruyne into the path of Jack Grealish, but the most expensive English player of all-time missed the chance to mark his biggest moment yet as a City player as his shot was turned behind by Arrizabalaga.



Karatsev Downs Murray to Win Sydney Title

SYDNEY (AFP) - World number 20 Aslan Karatsev produced a masterclass to power past Andy Murray in the Sydney Classic final, signalling his intent of making another deep run at the Australian Open.

The No.1 seed won 6-3, 6-3 in one hour and 31 minutes, hitting 29 winners in a near-flawless performance that left the three-time Grand Slam champion out of answers.

"Thanks to my team we are doing an amazing job," Karatsev said during the awards presentation. Karatsev created history at last year's Australian Open after becoming the first Grand Slam debutant to reach a semi-final since the Open era began in 1968.

After his emphatic victory, the 28-year-old will be confident entering Melbourne Park having stymied Murray's bid to win a title for the first time since 2019.

"First time back in a final for three years, it's been a long road," an emotional Murray said at the presentation.

Murray, who has been given a wildcard into next week's Australian Open, had been encouraged by his play heading into a Grand Slam where he has finished as runner-up five times.

But Murray, who had undergone career-saving hip surgery, was blown off the court by the red-hot Russian.

His serve was under immediate pressure as Karatsev muscled him around the court to gain the break in the opening game.

Karatsev continued to stand and deliver, piercing the lines to run Murray ragged.

