

**Health Ministry Announced on Tuesday That the Number of Deaths From the Coronavirus Pandemic In Iran Increased to 132,113 With 18 More Iranians Killed by the Virus Over the Past 24 Hours**

# IRAN NEWS

**The Head of Iran's Anti-Narcotics Police General Karimi Announced The Discovery of More Than Four Tons of Various Drugs On Iran's Borders and Seven Traffickers Were Also Arrested**

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## DOMESTIC

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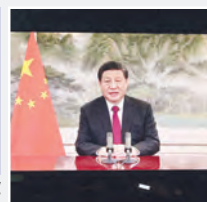


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## Iran Issues 3-Month Permit for Diesel Transit To Afghanistan

TEHRAN (PressTV) – The government authorities have allowed transportation of diesel to Afghanistan through the Iranian territory amid a shortage of the fuel in the neighboring country.

Iran's former trade attaché to Afghanistan Mehdi Javanmard said that the government had agreed to a request from Afghan authorities to allow the transit of diesel through the Iranian territory to help the country respond to larger demand for the fuel during cold winter months.

Javanmard told the official IRNA news agency that the permit will last for three months until April 20, adding that shipments from other countries will be allowed from all borders, including from ports.

He said, however, that the Iranian fleet of trucks working for the country's fuel distribution network will be banned from contributing to the diesel transit scheme to Afghanistan.

The former official told that all qualified trade companies in Iran will be able to transport diesel from other countries to Afghanistan.

Iran has yet to officially recognize a government led by the Taliban group that rose to power in Afghanistan in August.

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## Tehran Ready to Reach Trade Cooperation Agreement With Baghdad

TEHRAN (MNA) – In a meeting with the Iraqi Prime Minister's advisor, the Iranian Minister of Energy announced Iran's readiness to prepare a comprehensive cooperation agreement in trade exchange with Iraq.

The Iranian Energy Minister Ali Akbar Mehrabian met and held talks with the advisor of the Iraqi Prime Minister Rashid Al-Maamouri at the Iranian Ministry of Energy in Tehran.

The Iranian new government is interested in developing relations with various countries, especially its neighbors, Mehrabian said in this meeting which was attended by Iraqi Ambassador to Iran Naseer Abdul Mohsen Abdullah.

Mehrabian announced Iran's readiness to conclude a comprehensive agreement in trade exchange with Iraq.

According to the Iranian Minister, Iran is ready to meet Iraq's needs in the electricity field for the next 20 years with long-term planning.

The Iraqi advisor also emphasized the development of economic relations between the two countries in recent years, expressing hope to witness further developments in the coming years.

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## Iran's Export to ECO Member States Up 52%



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Iran exported over \$7.6 billion worth of commodities to the members of the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) in the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21-December 21, 2021) to register a 52-percent increase year on year, the spokesman of the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA) said.

According to Ruhollah Latifi, the Islamic Republic exported 19,856,531 tons of goods valued at \$7,640,488,517 to the mentioned countries during the said period.

The volume of exports also increased by 41 percent in comparison to the previous year's same nine months, the official said.

Latifi noted that Iran traded over 23.24 million tons of non-oil goods worth \$11.754 billion with the members of the said union in the first nine months of the current fiscal year, indicating a 44-percent increase in terms of value and a 30-percent rise in terms of weight, year on year.

He said major export destinations of the Iranian goods in the said union were Turkey with about \$4.131 billion of imports, Afghanistan with \$1.412 billion, Pakistan with \$911 million, and Azerbaijan with \$388 million.

Meanwhile, the country imported 3,383,507 tons of goods valued at over \$4.113 billion from the ECO member countries, with Turkey, Pakistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, and Kyrgyzstan being the top sources of imported goods.

The value of Iranian imports from the ECO union also increased by 27 percent compared to the previous year's same time span, the official said.

The Islamic Republic had traded over \$10.447 billion worth of non-oil goods with the ECO members in the first eight months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21-November 22, 2021) to register a 44 percent increase year on year.

The total value of Iran's non-oil trade rose 38 percent during the first nine months of the current year as compared to the same period of time in the past year. The country traded over 122.5 million tons of non-oil products worth \$72.1 billion with other countries in the mentioned period.

The Economic Cooperation Organization or ECO is an Asian political and economic intergovernmental organization that was founded in 1985 in Tehran by the leaders of Iran, Pakistan, and Turkey.

Meanwhile stating that both production and trade situation have relatively boomed, Chairman of Tehran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (TCCIMA) said the country's non-oil exports has registered a 40% hike.

Speaking at a meeting among economic activists on Tuesday, Masoud Khansari said that country's non-oil exports hit a 40 percent growth in the nine months of the current Iranian calendar year in 1400 (March 21-Dec. 21).

He put the growth rate of gross domestic product (GDP) at 3.3 percent.

According to the statistics of the Central Bank of Iran (CBI), the net of the capital account in the first half of the current year (March 21-Sept. 21) has hit about \$6.3 billion, showing a 63 percent decline as compared to the last year's corresponding period.

## American Forces Smuggle Stolen Syrian Oil to Their Bases in Iraq

BAGHDAD (Dispatches) - The U.S. military has brought a convoy of vehicles loaded with military equipment and tanker trucks carrying stolen oil from Syria to its bases in northern Iraq.

Syria's official news agency SANA reported on Monday that the convoy was made up of 111 vehicles, adding that it crossed into Iraq via al-Waleed, an illegal border crossing in the countryside of Syria's northeastern province of Hasakah.

Local sources said the convoy was escorted by six armored vehicles, SANA reported.

According to the report, the oil was smuggled out of the area of al-Jazeera in northeastern Syria. Earlier this month, a U.S. convoy of 128 vehicles transferred military equipment and Syrian oil into northern Iraq. On December 30 last year, US forces brought reinforcements from neighboring Iraq into areas in northeastern Syria.

The American forces brought in generators, refrigerators and a number of battle tanks through al-Waleed illegal border crossing between Iraq and Syria, SANA said, adding that 40 military vehicles entered the Syrian territories.

The U.S. military has stationed forces and equipment in eastern and northeastern Syria, with the Pentagon claiming that the deployment is aimed at preventing the oilfields in the area from falling into the hands of the Daesh (ISIS) terrorists. Damascus, however, says the unlawful deployment is meant to plunder the country's resources.

Former U.S. president Donald Trump admitted on several occasions that American forces were in Syria for its oil. Failing to oust the Syrian government of Bashar al-Assad through its proxies and direct involvement in the conflict, the US government has in recent years stepped up its economic war on the Arab country.

## Crimes Against Yemenis Go On

It seems genocide against Yemeni people does not want to come an end as the Saudi-led bombing against this small and strategic country continues and the international bodies just act like lookers-on without taking any serious action against these crimes and even countries like the U.S. rushes in support of them.

According to reports, Saudi warplanes on Monday launched ferocious air raids on Sana'a and other cities after Yemen carried out airstrikes against strategic facilities in the United Arab Emirates in retaliation for its role in the protracted war on the country.

The air raids targeted Libby neighborhood in Ma'een district of Sana'a late Monday, leaving at least 14 citizens dead and 11 others injured, Yemen's al-Masirah television reported.

The network's correspondent in Sana'a said search for survivors under the rubble of a house continued in Libby, where five other residential houses were also damaged in the airstrikes.

The Saudi airplanes also targeted September 11 Park in northern Sana'a.

Al-Masirah said the kingdom had carried out more than 50 air raids on several areas across Yemen, including the central Ma'rib province, over the past 24 hours.

"The coalition's warplanes waged 31 raids on al-Wadi, al-Jubah and Harib districts of Ma'rib province, while eight airstrikes hit Ain district of Shabwa province and seven other targeted Sawma'ah district of al-Bayda province," the network said.

Two air raids hit al-Yatama area in the Khab Washa'f district of the northern Jawf province, and two others targeted Magbanah district in the southwestern province of Ta'izz.

Saudi-led coalition aircraft also attacked al-Jarrah district in the south of the Red Sea port city of Hudaydah and launched another raid on Haradh district in the northern province of Hajjah.

Earlier in the day, the Yemeni army launched an operation deep inside the United Arab Emirates in retaliation for its role in the Saudi-led war on the impoverished country.

Five people are killed and two children injured across Yemen in massive raids conducted by the Saudi-led military coalition.

Saudi Arabia, backed by the United States and regional allies, launched the war on Yemen in March 2015, with the goal of bringing the government of former Yemeni president Abd Rabbuh Mansour Hadi back to power and crushing the Ansarullah movement.

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## Iran Absolutely Right To Ask U.S. for Guarantees In Vienna Talks

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russia's top negotiator to the Vienna talks on the removal of anti-Iran sanctions, Mikhail Ulyanov, says Tehran is "absolutely right" to be asking for guarantees from Washington after the unilateral withdrawal of the country from the 2015 Iran nuclear deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

Ulyanov, who is also Russia's ambassador to international organizations in the Austrian capital, made the remark in a post on his Twitter account early on Tuesday, in response to baseless anti-Iran allegations of Richard Goldberg — a member of the so-called Foundation for Defense of Democracies (FDD).

The Russian diplomat defended Iran's stance on securing a guarantee from the American side so that Washington would not ditch the JCPOA just like what it did at the time of former US President Donald Trump in 2018.

"Some people don't want to learn lessons from the failed maximum pressure policy. Iranians are absolutely right when they ask for guarantees against a repetition of this catastrophic adventure," Ulyanov tweeted.

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# Iran Can Meet Needs of Latin America's Energy Market

TEHRAN (IP) - Vice president said that Iran, as an independent player in the energy market, could meet the needs of Latin American countries.

Masoud Mirkazemi, Vice President and Head of Iran's Program and Budget Organization, met with Brazilian Ambassador to Tehran Laudemar Goncalves de Aguiar Neto in Tehran and said: "As an independent energy market player, Iran can meet the needs of Latin American countries, including Brazil, for oil, gas and petrochemical products."

## Iran's Demand For Assurances in Vienna Talks Logical

**TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iran's demand for assurances and verification in the talks to remove sanctions was logical because the US exited the 2015 nuclear deal last time, leaving its commitments unfulfilled, Russian Ambassador to Iran Levon Dzhagaryan said ahead of Iranian President's visit to Moscow.**

Dzhagaryan mentioned his 10-year presence in Iran as diplomat and said that the Russian Federation was completely ready to work with President Ebrahim Raisi's administration in Iran.

He expressed content over the appointment of Iranian Oil Minister Javad Owji to head of Iran-Russia joint commission, saying that Mr. Owji is experienced in his job.

Dzhagaryan expressed hoped that Owji could meet his Russian counterpart in his upcoming trip in company with the president and specify the next committee meeting date and location.

The meeting of the joint commission is of high importance for both countries, the ambassador noted, as they follow many joint economic projects like railroad, Sirik thermal power plant in Iran's Hormuzgan Province and Bushehr nuclear power plant.

The psychological warfare waged by the Western media has targeted Iran-Russia relationship ahead of Raisi's visit to Russia, Dzhagaryan said while underlining that Tehran-Moscow relationship has nothing to do with the West, the East, the North or the South.

We prefer bilateral ties and we don't care whether other parties are content with the expansion of Tehran-Moscow ties, the ambassador said, adding that the sanctions imposed on Iran and Russia by the West has no impact on their relations.

Asked about the talks between Iran and the P4+1 to remove sanctions against Tehran, he said that the US decision to withdraw from the 2015 nuclear deal with Iran was a wrong and illegal one that clearly violated international law, specifically the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2231.

The talks had a tough beginning, he elaborated, adding that he is, though, so optimistic about the future of these negotiations, as the Iranian team headed by Deputy Foreign Minister Ali Bagheri Kani has shown enough agility.

He rejected criticisms against Moscow's stance with regard to Iran, noting that Russia has always been beside Iran and will continue to be.

Dzhagaryan praised Iran's compliance with the JCPOA even for a year after the



US withdrew from the deal and hoped that the European participants of the deal would play constructive roles in the talks, recalling that the European and Asian companies that engaged in Iran's economy left Iran as a result of U.S. threats to sanction them.

That's why Iran's demands for verification and assurances on removing the sanctions were are natural and based on a bitter historical experience and Russia completely understands the issue, the ambassador went on to say.

Elsewhere in the interview, Dzhagaryan said that Russia was fully ready for cooperation with Iran, whether the US imposed sanctions or not, as both Iran and Russia were victims of the US sanctions.

He also mentioned the EU sanctions against Russia, saying that these sanctions were strengthening Russia domestic economy and Russian farmers were happy because agricultural production has increased.

On the situation with Ukraine, Dzhagaryan highlighted the Minsk agreement as the only way out for the escalation, criticizing the Ukrainian government for ending its commitment to the agreement.

Russian forces are in the Russian soil and have no presence in Ukraine, he underlined, adding that Kiev would exaggerate the danger of a Russian invasion to divert public opinion from internal problems.

The diplomat mentioned the US' failure in Afghanistan after two decades of occupation, saying that the Americans should answer why they failed in Afghanistan, instead of threatening Russia.

The joint military exercise between China, Russia and Iran was not their first drill and it was not against any third party, he responded while asked about the joint military drill between China, Russia and Iran.

The Russian ambassador described Iran's ascension to the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the ministerial meeting of Afghanistan's neighboring countries in Tehran as important achievements by President Ebrahim Raisi's administration in his early months in office.

## Raisi-Putin to Discuss Developing Exports

TEHRAN (IRNA)- Government Spokesman Ali Bahadori Jahromi in a Twitter message said Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi and his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin are to review developing exports to Russia and reinforcing trade ties.

In his Twitter message, Bahadori Jahromi said President Raisi is to address State Duma.

He said that Iranian president is to hold talks with those who are active in economic and oil fields.

The Iranian president will also attend Russian university.

President Raisi at the invitation of his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin will depart here for Moscow on Wednesday (January 19).

The Moscow visit of President Raisi will take place in line with widening cultural, political, and economic interactions.

## Iran, Nakhchivan Discuss Resolving Issues on Customs Cooperation

TEHRAN (MNA) – Iran and Nakhchivan discussed resolving the issues around customs cooperation of the two countries.

Iran's Consul General in Nakhchivan Seyed Ahmad Hosseini met and held talks with the head of the State Customs Committee of the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic Shehet Hebib Beyli.

During the meeting, Hosseini raised customs-related problems of Iranian companies and economic activists, calling for resolving the problems and promoting cooperation between the two countries.

He also termed these meetings as useful, and he emphasized increasing the interactions of the relevant officials of the two countries in these fields.

The head of Nakhchivan's customs also expressed his satisfaction over the good relations of the Iranian and Azerbaijani customs officials.

The spread of COVID-19 and its restriction caused some problems in the process of cooperation and interaction between the two countries, he said, expressing hope that the ties reach a favorable status in the future.

## Iran, Niger FMs Mull Over Deepening Tehran-Niamey Relations

TEHRAN (MNA) - Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian and his Nigerien counterpart discussed expanding and deepening relations in various areas.

Speaking in a telephone conversation on late Monday, Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian and Nigerien Foreign Minister Hassoumi Massaoudou exchanged views on bilateral cooperation and issues of mutual interest.

Conveying the warm greeting of the Nigerien President to President Raesi, Massaoudou said, "The government and people of Niger have always appreciated the good relations between Tehran and Niamey since the establishment of relations, especially after the victory Islamic Revolution."

The Nigerien top diplomat also called for expanding and deepening relations between the two countries in all areas.

Emphasizing the important position of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Nigerien Foreign Minister called for the holding of a joint commission between the two countries in Niamey.

Amir-Abdollahian also emphasized the will of the new Iranian government to strengthen and develop relations with African countries. The relations between the two countries have a great potential for development and expansion, he said, adding that holding a joint commission is a good and effective step.

### All Arrangements Made For Iranian President's Upcoming Visit

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The Russian foreign minister says his country has made all necessary arrangements for the upcoming visit to Moscow by Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi.

Sergei Lavrov made the remarks in a Monday phone call with his Iranian counterpart, Hossein Amir-Abdollahian.

Lavrov told Amir-Abdollahian that his country welcomes Raisi's forthcoming visit, adding that all necessary measures have been taken ahead of the visit.

The two sides also noted that the visit would be an important milestone in the two countries' relations and provide a good opportunity for the expansion and depending of ties between Tehran and Moscow.

According to Russia's TASS news agency, quoting the First Deputy Speaker Alexander Zhukov as saying on Monday, Raisi will address a meeting of the Russian State Duma on January 20.

On Thursday, the meeting will begin with a speech of the president of Iran," Zhukov said.

## Judiciary Official Holds Talks With German, Dutch Envoys



TEHRAN (IRNA) - Secretary of High Council for Human Rights Kazem Gharibabadi in separate meetings with German and Dutch ambassadors in Tehran Hans-Udo Muzel and Frank Mollen respectively followed up rights of the Iranian nationals.

In the meetings, the officials also reviewed issues of mutual interests and consular and judicial cooperation.

Iran official holds talks with German, Dutch envoys on Iranian nationals' rights

During the talks with German ambassador, Gharibabadi called for preparing the ground for meeting between Kazem Darabi and his daughter who is under the custody of a German family.

As he underlined, Darabi and his daughter could not have met each other during the past 14 years.

Also in the meeting with the Dutch ambassador, Gharibabadi called for release of Mehdi Kiasati soon who had been arrested in the Netherlands after the US demand due to ungrounded reason for violating the sanctions. Iran official holds talks with German, Dutch envoys on Iranian nationals' rights

## ECO Cultural Institute Hosts Romania Cultural Night

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Romania cultural night ceremony was held in ECO Cultural Institute (ECOCI) on Monday in Tehran, attended by a number of foreign ambassadors and international organizations representatives.

The ceremony was organized by ECOCI in collaboration with the Romanian Embassy in Iran.

The event was attended by Romanian Ambassador in Tehran Mirela-Carmen Grecu, Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) Secretary General Khosrow Nazeri, ECOCI President Sarvar Bakhti, and ambassadors of Kyrgyzstan, Slovenia, Spain, Austria, Japan, South Africa, Belgium, Brazil, Bulgaria, Bangladesh, New Zealand, Ghana, Oman, South Korea, Poland, Hungary, and Kuwait as well as envoys of the United Nations offices in Tehran.

The ceremony was held to celebrate the national cultural day of Romania, showcasing parts of the Romanian culture and values.

## South Pars Phase 11 Digging Operation Expedited

TEHRAN (MNA) - The managing director of National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) has announced that digging operation has expedited in phase 11 of the giant South Pars gas field in the Persian Gulf, Shana reported.

Mohsen Khojasteh-Mehr said, "Developing and completing phase 11 is among the main priorities of NIOC. We are now in the stage of digging wells in this phase and some part of gas extraction from phase 11 will start in the next [Iranian calendar] year".

Of course, some measures were made that gas extraction will start sooner than previously planned, the official highlighted.

On Sunday, Seyed Shamsedin Mousavi, the managing director of Iran's Petropars Company, which is in charge of developing phase 11, 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).

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.

"The engineering, procurement and implementation activities corresponding to these two contracts have officially started since the beginning of the current [Iranian calendar] month [December 22, 2021]," Masoudi said.

## Sanctions Taking Heavy Toll on Iran's Patients With Thalassemia

TEHRAN (IFP) - The managing director of the Iranian Thalassemia Society says despite US claims that sanctions imposed on Iran do not cover humanitarian items, including medical equipment and medicine, the bans are taking a heavy toll on the country's thalassemic patients.

Speaking about the supply of medicines for people with thalassemia in Iran, Younes Arab said in an interview with Tasnim news agency on Monday that "currently, there are 23,000 thalassemic patients in the country, most of whom need to use these drugs throughout their life."

Since the beginning of the U.S.-imposed sanctions, Arab said, the restrictive measures have created many challenges for Iranian thalassemic patients and have had a direct impact on the treatment of such patients, the main part of which is related to the provision of their life-saving medicines.

The managing director of the Iranian Thalassemia Society said more than 540 patients with thalassemia have fallen victim to the sanctions since May 2018, when the US administration under former President Donald Trump withdrew from a 2015 landmark deal with Iran, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), and re-imposed draconian sanctions against the country.





## PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	12:15
■ Evening (Maghreb)	17:37
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	05:44
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	07:11

66. (Abraham) said, "Do ye then worship, besides Allah, things that can neither be of any good to you nor do you harm?"  
67. "Fie upon you, and upon the things that ye worship besides Allah. Have ye no sense?"  
Surah 21. The Prophets ( 66 - 67 )

## 2 Brazilian Banks Cooperating With Iranian Traders

**IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK**

**TEHRAN – Head of Iran-Brazil Joint Chamber of Commerce Seyed Fakhreddin Amerian says two Brazilian banks accept the forex of Iranian goods via intermediary banks but the chamber is after setting up a fund in Brazil for the channeling of the forex resulted from exports and imports.**

Speaking to ILNA on the latest development in the trade between Iran and Brazil, he said Iran's annual imports from Brazil are over \$5b which is mainly basic goods like meat, chicken and oil and in return Iran's exports to Brazil are at \$150m.

He added that Brazil demands goods like urea, methanol, bitumen, hand-woven carpet and some agro products, stating that Brazil imports huge amount of petrochemicals but Iran's share of it has not been significant and banking problem as well as transfer of money have been the main reasons for this insignificance share.

Touching upon Iran's proposal of barter trade with Brazil which was raised by the Head of Iran's Trade Promotion Organization meeting with Brazilian Ambassador, Amerian said that the main problem in way of the barter trade is 4200-toman dollar rate because commodities like basic goods are calculated based on the 4200-toman dollar while goods like urea are calculated based on the NIMA-rate dollar, adding that so the Iran's Central Bank (CBI) is unable to remove this hurdle but with



removal of this hurdle, barter trade with Brazil is possible.

He said that ambassadors of the two countries are working hard to resolve this problem for restoring barter trade but as long as the CBI does not step in and resolve the forex rate, this will not happen.

On the banking cooperation of Brazil and Iran, he said two Brazilian banks are cooperating on transfer of the forex of Iranian goods via intermediary banks but the chamber is looking for establishment of a fund that the forex resulted from imports and exports can be transferred into it. He said this is like what Iran is doing now with Russia, expecting hope Brazil would do the same.

Amerian admitted the custom offices of the two countries can not publish official statistics on the trade between the two states, adding that but the statistics of the Brazilian Custom Office show that Brazil's exports to Iran are valued at around \$1.3b but some companies are unable to register their goods to Iran and they use other destination names like Turkey. He added that Iran also sends its goods to Dubai and the consignment is taken to Brazil by other ship via the cross-off and therefore Dubai is the embarking destination.

He reiterated that the real statistics show that the amount of Brazil's exports to Iran is over \$5b and Iran's exports are valued at \$150m.

He said the joint chamber has been set up for five years to resolve the problems for trade between the two countries and recently it has opened its office in Dao Paulo of Brazil.

## Chabahar Port Experiences Maiden Loading of a 76k-Ton Export Consignment

**IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK**

TEHRAN – Director of Ports and Maritime Organization of Sistan and Baluchestan says for the first time a 76,000-ton export



consignment was loaded on a vessel at Chabahar Port.

Behrouz Aqaei said that a 76,000-ton construction material consignment was loaded on a ship which happened for the first time at Chabahar Port. He added that the non-oil export trend from Chabahar Port has had upward growth this year and exports of goods from this port this year have grown by 167% comparing to the same period last year.

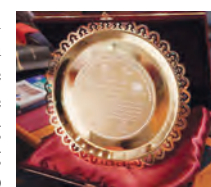
He went on to say that capabilities and potentials of Chabahar Port, strategic equipment for loading and unloading, considerable discounts in the tariffs and port costs and regular shipping lines from Chabahar have facilitated export of various goods via this port.

Aqaei added that with distinguished position of this biggest ocean port among the regional ports, exports from Chabahar Port is the most important priority.

## Another Accolade for HOSCO

**IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK**

TEHRAN – Hormozgan Steel Company (HOSCO) won another accolade and this time the company was feted with the senior manager in expanding communication award during the 18th festival of the top public relations of Iran which was held on the sidelines of the 17th international symposium of public relations at the conference hall of IRIB.



During the ceremony, the CEO of HOSCO was named as the Senior Manager in Expanding Communication and he was awarded with prize.

Choosing the senior manager in expanding communication is done based on four major parameters of good communication with the media, proper communication with personnel and staff of the company, good communication personality and supporting the public relations and communication.

Meanwhile in the festival, Manager of the public relations of the company Mr. Reza Safarian was named the top public relations manager of the country and the public relations department of the company ranked first in the category of communication planning and communication link and was awarded with a prize.

### Iranian, Iraqi Chambers of Commerce Ink MoU for Establishing Arbitration Center



**IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK**

TEHRAN – The Federation of Iraqi Chambers of Commerce hosted a Joint Economic and Trade Conference for the Iranian and Iraqi chambers of commerce on Monday, in which the two sides signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) for establishing an arbitration center for resolving business conflicts.

The conference was attended by senior officials from the two sides including Head of the Federation of Iraqi Chambers of Commerce Abdul Razzaq al- Zuhairi and Head of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA) Gholam-Hossein Shafei, the ICCIMA portal reported.

Head of Iran-Iraq Joint Chamber of Commerce Yahya Al-e-Eshaq, and Head of the Iranian Parliament's Economic Committee Mohammadreza Pour-Ebrahimi were also among the attendees to this conference. During the event, Zuhairi pointed to the close cultural ties between the two countries and noted that familiarity and having 1,400 kilometers of shared borders can greatly support the development of the two countries' economic relations based on common interests.

"Iraq's annual trade is a large figure, of which we hope Iran will have a big share," the official stressed.

He further expressed satisfaction with the signing of the mentioned MOU, saying: "We are very pleased to sign a joint memorandum to reduce barriers to economic cooperation between the two countries. The aim is to reduce the problems in the way of the activities of the two countries' businessmen by establishing a joint arbitration panel."

"It is natural to have disputes in trade and we are expected to make a significant contribution to the development of economic relations by establishing this joint arbitration panel," he added. Elsewhere in this gathering, Shafei delivered a speech, saying: "We have come together in this conference to use the existing opportunities to develop economic relations for a better future. I need to thank Mr. Abdul Razzaq as well as the Iranian ambassador to Iraq for their coordination in this regard."

He pointed to the presence of the head of Iran-Iraq Joint Chamber, along with the managers of a number of specialized commissions, economic organizations, and private sector companies active in the fields of technology and engineering services, oil, gas and petrochemical, construction, agriculture, home appliances, metal structures, steel, and polyethylene pipes, transportation and food industries in the conference, saying: "Hopefully, the talks will yield fruitful results for the two countries' private sectors."

## Tehran, Bucharest Sign MoU on Engineering Services

**IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK**

TEHRAN – Iran and Romania have signed a memorandum of understanding based on which the Islamic Republic is going to provide Romania with engineering services related to the gas industry.

As reported, the MOU was signed between Iranian Gas Engineering and Development Company and Romania's Gaz Vest Company.

Based on the mentioned MOU, Iran is going to cooperate with Romania in the construction of natural gas transmission lines, pressure boosting facilities, and the development of gas storage tanks in the country.

Romania is the first European country to which Iran is going to export technical and engineering services.

As stated by Head of Iran Gas Engineering and Development Company Reza Noshadi, the purpose of signing this memorandum is also to study joint investment opportunities and to interact in other fields such as the construction of refineries, and power plants.

Under the framework of the said MOU, a joint working group is also going to be formed in order to exchange knowledge, expertise, and experiences of the parties in common areas of work.

Over the past few years and especially since the re-imposition of the U.S. sanctions on the Iranian economy, the country has been taking serious steps to boost its non-oil exports and cut dependence on oil.

In this regard, the Islamic Republic's policy has not been limited to increasing the exports of non-oil products, as the country is also determined to expand the export of technical and engineering services.

Based on the data provided by the Association of Iranian Exporters of Technical and Engineering Services, Iran has the potential and capability to export technical and engineering services worth \$25 billion in a year.

Considering the country's huge potential in this field, boosting such exports would be an advantage for expanding the country's foreign trade.

## MSC on Course to Sustainable Provision of Raw Material, Energy

**IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK**

TEHRAN – Mobarakeh Steel Company (MSC) Operation Deputy says the company has plans underway for creating sustainability in the production chain which includes sustainable provision of raw material and energy in order that it can produce with sustainability and durability the required products of the national industries for years.

Abbas Akbari Mohammadi said that Mobarakeh Steel Company has put on its agenda in the past years the qualitative and quantitative development in line with providing the domestic needs, adding that despite rise in production and its products, the company has been able to reduce its energy consumption and improve the volume of its products in terms of quality and diversity.

He noted for example MSC has recently mass produced its slab product with grade of APIX70 with thickness of 300 millimeters in order to meet the major demands of the national industries and to make them needless of imports.

He added that the company with producing colored sheets has also made home-appliance manufacturing industries needless of imports and the country has become

self-sufficient in this field and it has produced colored sheets required by the home-appliances with different grades with high quality and sensitivity.

Akbari Mohammadi added that MSC could produce over 550,000 tons of special products with high quality which were used to be imported in the past, adding that production of these products not only makes the country needless of the imports but also becomes a driving force job creation, self-sufficiency and improvement of the economic condition of the national industries.

He added that the company has programs for sustainable provision of energy and raw materials, expressing hope that the progress of the company since its foundation in 1978 would continue with the current programs.



## Protective Coatings for Boosting Quality of Building, Metal Structures Unveiled

**IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK**

TEHRAN – During a ceremony, protective coatings for boosting the quality of building and its metal structures were unveiled.

On the sidelines of the unveiling ceremony, an activist in the knowledge-based industries said that by using these protective coatings against the fires as well as the fatigue in the metal structures, the longevity and quality of the metal structures and buildings will increase.

Iman Ali Bakhshi who is an expert in the protective insulation said that when Pelasco building in Tehran was burned down, policy-makers and those bodies which are in charge of controlling the quality of the building sought to prepare new regulations to protect buildings against the



fire and currently these regulations have been prepared and its observance is mandatory for builders.

He reiterated observing these regulations is more mandatory for the higher buildings with the metal structures like Pelasco. He added that major developments have happened in the country in the field of construction since burning of Pelasco. He added therefore fireproof coatings in the metal

structures for protecting them against the fire has turned into a requirement which is considered a good idea and decision.

Ali Bakhshi noted that metal structures are used in industries, bridges power transfer posts or rebars being used in the concrete in tunnels and they can use anti-metal fatigue insulators which will boost their longevity.

He noted that he predicts by using these knowledge-based products the longevity of the metal structures inside the concrete will increase up to 20 years, adding that the current longevity of buildings in Iran is between 25 to 30 years.

He noted that Road, Housing and Urban Development Research Center is in charge of issuing license for fireproofing insulations and it pursues this issue strongly.



## Mexico President Beaten Covid for Second Time

MEXICO CITY (Dispatches) - Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador said Monday that he had recovered from a second bout of Covid-19, as he resumed his public activities.

Lopez Obrador said that he was no longer infected and his symptoms had been milder -- and his recovery quicker -- than with his first coronavirus infection last year.

"It is demonstrable that this variant does not have the same severity as the previous one, the Delta variant," he told reporters, nearly a week after announcing he had caught Covid-19 again.

"What also helps a lot is the vaccine, getting vaccinated and not missing the booster shot," he added.



## Former Ukrainian President Lands In Kiev to Face Treason Case

KIEV (Dispatches) - Ukraine's former president, Petro Poroshenko, landed in Kyiv on Monday to face treason charges in a case he says was trumped up by allies of his successor, Volodymyr Zelenskii.

In a brief stand-off at border control after arriving on a flight from Warsaw, Poroshenko accused border guards of taking away his passport. He later emerged to a crowd of thousands of cheering and flag-waving supporters outside the airport.

Poroshenko's return sets up a showdown with President Zelenskii's government in what critics say is an ill-judged distraction as Ukraine braces for a possible Russian military offensive and seeks the support of its Western allies.



## China President Warns Global Confrontation Invites Catastrophic Consequences



BEIJING (Dispatches) - Chinese President Xi Jinping warned on Monday that confrontation between major powers could have "catastrophic consequences" in a speech to world leaders at an all-virtual Davos forum.

For the second year in a row the face-to-face gathering of political and corporate power players in the Swiss Alps has had to go online thanks to a coronavirus pandemic that shows no sign of abating.

Xi opened proceedings with a speech much like the one he delivered virtually last year.

He touted China -- where the coronavirus first emerged in late 2019 -- as a rare pandemic success story and the only major economy to continue posting strong growth.

He presented himself as the defender of multilateralism and also gave sober warnings for the future as relations between major powers plunge.

"Our world today is far from the tranquil, rhetoric that stokes hatred and prejudice abound," he said, according to an official translation of the speech which was streamed online.

"History has proved time and again that confrontation does not solve problems, it only invites catastrophic consequences," he added.

China stuck to a strict policy of targeting zero Covid cases once it stamped out its initial outbreak.

Its borders remain largely closed to outsiders but it has remained the world's vital manufacturing base throughout the pandemic.

In his speech to the World Economic Forum in Davos, Xi said the world had fought a "tenacious battle" against the "once in a century pandemic".

But he said the pandemic was "proving a protracted one" with new variants spreading faster than before, deepening challenges for the global economy.

"The global industrial supply chains have been disrupted," Xi warned. "Commodity prices continue to rise, energy supply remains tight."

He added that China was keen "for people-to-people exchange in a bid to facilitate cross border trade, keep the industrial supply chain secure and smooth, and promote steady and solid progress in global economic recovery".

But there were no announcements in the speech on when or whether Beijing might relax its tight border controls.

China has remained comparatively free of the coronavirus but is currently battling a spate of local outbreaks in multiple provinces and key cities just weeks before it hosts the Winter Olympics in Beijing.

Xi is also moving to secure a third term at a major gathering of the Communist Party this autumn and has made clear stability must remain a priority.

## Sudanese Security Forces Shoot Dead Three Protesters

KHARTOUM (Dispatches) - Security forces shot and killed three protesters Monday during rallies against last year's military coup, medics said, ahead of a visit by US diplomats seeking to revive a transition to civilian rule.

The protesters "were killed by live bullets" by "militias of the putschist military council", anti-coup medics said on the Facebook page of Khartoum state's health ministry.

The killings bring to 67 the death toll of protesters killed since the October 25 coup led by General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan.

The military takeover triggered wide international condemnation and derailed a fragile transition to civilian rule following the April 2019 ouster of longtime autocratic president Omar al-Bashir.

The latest rallies, in Khartoum and Wad Madani to the south, came as US envoy to the Horn of Africa David Satterfield and Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Molly Phee were expected in the capital this week.

Security officers who deployed in large numbers fired volleys of tear gas at protesters heading towards the presidential palace, an AFP correspondent said.

Several people were seen suffering breathing difficulties and others bleeding due to wounds by tear gas canisters, the correspondent said. Sawsan Salah, from the capital's twin city of Omdurman, said protesters burnt car tyres and carried photos of people killed during other demonstrations since the October 25 coup.

In Wad Madani, "around 2,000 people took to the streets as they called for civilian rule," said Emad Mohammed, a witness there.

Thousands of protesters demanded that the military return to their barracks and chanted in favour of civilian rule in North Khartoum, witnesses said.

Protesters -- sometimes numbering in the tens of thousands -- have regularly taken to the streets despite a deadly security clampdown and periodic cuts to communications since the coup.

On Thursday, Sudanese authorities said protesters stabbed to death a police general, the first fatality among security forces.

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

Starting Monday in Riyadh, Satterfield and Phee were to meet the Friends of Sudan, a group calling for the restoration of the country's transitional government.

The meeting aims to "marshal international support" for the UN mission to "facilitate a renewed civilian-led transition to democracy" in Sudan, the US State Department said.

The diplomats then travel to Khartoum for meetings with pro-democracy activists, civic groups, military and political figures.

## Vaccinate Whole World to End Pandemic

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - UN chief Antonio Guterres told the all-virtual Davos forum on Monday that the world must vaccinate everybody against Covid-19 to ensure a way out of the pandemic.

The face-to-face gathering of political and corporate power players in the Swiss Alps is online for the second year in a row due to a pandemic that shows no sign of abating.

"The last two years have demonstrated a simple but brutal truth -- if we leave anyone behind, we leave everyone behind," said the United Nations Secretary-General.

"If we fail to vaccinate every person, we give rise to new variants that spread across borders and bring daily life and economies to a grinding halt."

Guterres said the international community needs to "confront the pandemic with equity and fairness."

He noted that the World Health Organization unveiled a strategy last autumn to vaccinate 40 per cent of the planet's population by the end of 2021 and 70 per cent by the middle of this year.



"We are nowhere near these targets," Guterres told the World Economic Forum.

"Vaccination rates in high-income countries are, shamefully, seven times higher than in African countries. We need vaccine equity, now," he added.

Guterres said pharmaceutical companies should "stand in solidarity with developing countries by sharing licenses, know-how and technology so we can all find a way out of this pandemic."

## French Presidential Candidate Zemmour Convicted for Racist Hate Speech

PARIS (Dispatches) - A French court on Monday found far-right presidential hopeful Eric Zemmour guilty of racist hate speech for a tirade against unaccompanied child migrants.

Zemmour drew widespread outrage in September 2020 when he told the CNews channel that child migrants were "thieves, killers, they're rapists. That's all they are. We should send them back".

Zemmour, a media pundit who is struggling to assemble the endorsements from elected officials he needs to compete in April's presidential vote, did not show up in court to hear the verdict, having already skipped his trial in November.

The court fined him 10,000 euros (\$11,400) in daily instalments of 100 euros over 100 days. He could be jailed if he fails to pay the sum.

Zemmour's lawyer, Olivier Pardo, said he would appeal the verdict.

The case was "nothing other than another attempt to intimidate me", Zemmour said last year, adding that "they won't shut me up".

The journalist and author has two previous convictions



for hate speech and has been investigated 16 times in total over incendiary remarks on immigration and Islam.

In 2011, he was fined 10,000 euros for claiming on TV that "most drug dealers are black and Arab". In 2018, he was ordered to pay 3,000 euros for comments about a Muslim "invasion" of France.

His dramatic entrance into front-line politics after a career spent in the media sent waves through the French ruling class in September, making him briefly the most talked-about challenger to President Emmanuel Macron.

Like all candidates in the race, Zemmour needs to muster 500 endorsements from elected figures around the country by the middle of March in order to have his name on the ballot for the two rounds of voting in April.

But the anti-Islam populist has admitted he risks being excluded unless more mayors and other elected figures agree to back him under a system he has denounced as discriminating against political outsiders.

## North Korea Fires Two Ballistic Missiles From Pyongyang Airport

SEOUL (Dispatches) - North Korea fired two suspected short-range ballistic missiles (SRBM) from an airport in its capital city of Pyongyang, South Korea's military reported, the fourth test this month to demonstrate its expanding missile arsenal.

Japan also reported the launch, with chief cabinet secretary Hirokazu Matsuno condemning it as a threat to peace and security while China urged all sides to preserve for stability.

"We call on relevant sides to keep in mind the overall peace and stability on the peninsula," Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian told a daily briefing in Beijing when asked about the suspected launch.

Nuclear-armed North Korea had already conducted three other missile tests in less than two weeks before Monday, an unusually rapid series of launches. It said two of them involved single "hypersonic missiles" capable of high speed and maneuvering after launch, while a test on Friday involved a pair of short-range ballistic missiles fired from train cars. Monday's launch appeared to involve two SRBMs fired east from Sunan Airfield in Pyongyang, South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) said in a statement.

## Modi Urges Collective Global Effort to Deal With Cryptocurrencies

NEW DELHI (Reuters) - Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi said that a collective global effort is needed to deal with the problems posed by cryptocurrencies.

"The kind of technology it is associated with, the decision taken by a single country will be insufficient to deal with its challenges. We have to have a similar mindset," Modi said at the World Economic Forum's virtual Davos Agenda conference.

India has been mulling virtual currency-related regulations which were widely expected to be introduced in the winter session of the parliament in December before being shelved.

New Delhi has previously flagged that it plans to ban most cryptocurrencies - a move which would follow recent measures by China that intensified its crackdown on cryptocurrencies.

India's central bank has also voiced "serious concerns" around digital currencies saying that they may impact financial stability.

There are an estimated 15 million to 20 million cryptocurrency investors in India, with total crypto holdings of around 400 billion rupees (\$5.39 billion) according to industry estimates.

India is also working on signing free trade agreements with many countries, Modi added.

India recently announced a start to free trade talks with Britain with the intent of signing a deal by the end of this year.

The prime minister also said that it was the best time to invest in India because the country was willing to become a more trusted partner in global supply chain.







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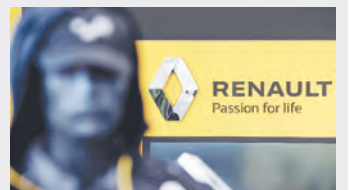
## Renault Sales Fall for Third Year

PARIS (Dispatches) - French auto giant Renault today said its sales fell for the third year running in 2021 due to electronic chip shortages and the impact of its new commercial policy.

Renault's sales dropped by 4.5 per cent last year even as competitors fared better in a relatively stable market compared with the auto industry's pandemic crisis year of 2020.

The company trimmed costs and its workforce and adopted a strategy of targeting more profitable sales instead of large volumes, contrasting with its record sales of low-cost vehicles in recent years.

Renault's vehicle sales in 2021 almost reached 2.7 million, 1.2 million fewer than in 2018, but Volkswagen, Stellantis, Toyota and Hyundai-Kia have suffered less significant falls or recorded higher sales.



## Covid-19 Pandemic Still Taking Heavy Toll on Jobs

GENEVA (Dispatches) - The Covid-19 crisis is continuing to hit jobs hard around the world, the United Nations said, warning it could take years for employment levels to reach pre-pandemic levels.

In a new study, the UN's International Labour Organization revised its previous forecast that the global employment market will make a nearly full recovery from the virus this year.

Blaming the impacts of Covid variants like Delta and Omicron and uncertainty around how the pandemic will evolve, it now projects a significant deficit in working hours in 2022 compared to before Covid-19 emerged.

"Global labor markets are recovering from the crisis much more slowly than we previously expected," ILO chief Guy Ryder told reporters, warning that the outlook "remains fragile."

"We are already seeing potentially lasting damage to labor markets, along with concerning increases in poverty and inequality."

Monday's report predicted that global working hours would be two per cent below the numbers seen in 2019, leaving the world short of the equivalent of some 52 million jobs.

Last May, the ILO predicted the working hour shortage would be just half that this year.

At the same time, the global official unemployment rate remains significantly higher than before the pandemic hit.

This year, 5.9 per cent of workers globally, or some 207 million people, are expected to be officially registered as jobless, which is better than in 2021 and especially 2020, but still up from 186 million in 2019. The ILO report said the global unemployment rate was projected to remain above the 5.4-per cent rate seen before the crisis "until at least 2023".

And it cautioned that the overall impact on employment is significantly greater than what these figures would imply, since many people have left the labor force altogether.

In 2022, the global labor force participation rate is projected to remain 1.2 percentage points below the level three years ago, it said. That corresponds to a deficit of some 40 million workers worldwide, ILO said.

Ryder warned that the pandemic had already "weakened the economic, financial and social fabric in almost every country, regardless of development status."

At the same time, the ILO pointed out that differences in vaccine access and in economic recovery measures meant the crisis was impacting groups of workers and countries in vastly different ways.

Unsurprisingly perhaps, the report said labor markets in higher-income countries appeared to be recovering faster, although some were now beginning to face problems related to labor shortages, Ryder said.

Numerous factors appear to be driving the so-called "Great Resignation" seen in some countries, Ryder said, adding that the crisis clearly "has led a significant number of people in the workforce to reconsider the employment that they have."

Shifts in the way we work meanwhile seem to be deepening various forms of inequality, including exacerbating gender inequity, according to the report.

It has been clear from the start that the pandemic was disproportionately impacting women, who have taken on the lion's share of the additional care work, and also more often work in hard-hit sectors, like services and travel.

But Ryder cautioned the impact could last well after the pandemic ends.

"There are concerns that the long-Covid effect on gender at work would be a negative one," he said.

Changes like the move towards greater reliance on informal self-employment, the rise in remote work and shifting trends in temporary work, "all risk impairing the quality of working conditions", the report said.

Ryder insisted that only a "broad-based labor market recovery" would allow the world to truly recover from the pandemic.

## China Resumes Freight Train Trade With North Korea

BEIJING (Dispatches) - China said today that its border with North Korea has reopened for freight train trade, some two years after it was shuttered by Pyongyang because of the coronavirus pandemic.

A freight train from North Korea arrived at the Chinese border city of Dandong for the first time since early 2020 yesterday, Japanese and South Korean media reported earlier.

"Due to the impact of the pandemic, rail traffic between China and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) had been suspended for some time," said foreign ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian at a routine briefing, referring to North Korea by its official name.

"Now freight trains carrying goods between Dandong and the DPRK have resumed operation. This work will be conducted in accordance with pandemic prevention measures," Zhao added.

Impoverished North Korea sealed off its borders in January 2020 at the start of the pandemic, choking off all land traffic to and from its giant northern neighbor.

China and North Korea share a 1,352 kilometre-long border, while the port city of Dandong — home to the North Korean customs office — sits on the Yalu River which forms the border.

A close economic ally, China accounts for more than 90 per cent of the isolated country's bilateral trade.

North Korea has long been subject to sanctions that have mostly crippled its international trade.

The country claims no virus cases inside its borders but it is reportedly struggling with chronic winter food shortages and reeling economically from its self-imposed coronavirus blockade.



## Turkey's Budget Balance Posts \$21.6b Gap in 2021

ANKARA (Dispatches) - The Turkish government's budget balance posted a deficit of TL 192.3 billion (\$21.6 billion) in 2021, the Treasury and Finance Ministry said Monday.

The figure, below the government's target, widened by 9.7% from a TL 175.3 billion deficit in 2020.

According to the medium-term economic program published in September 2021, the budget deficit was expected to be TL 230 billion last year.

Turkey's budget revenues surged by 36.8% year-over-year to TL 1.4 trillion last year.

Its expenditures reached nearly TL 1.6 trillion in 2021, rising 32.9% from a year ago.

Excluding interest payments, the budget balance saw a deficit of TL 11.4 billion in 2021.



Tax revenues totaled TL 1.2 trillion, while interest payments were TL 180.9 billion in the same period.

One United States dollar traded for TL 8.9 on average in 2021 and TL 13.4 in December.

In December 2021, the budget balance of the central government registered a deficit of TL 145.7 billion, growing from TL 43 billion in December 2020.

Budget revenues were TL 135.1 billion last month, rising 40% year-over-year.

Turkey's budget expenditures doubled from a year ago to TL 280.80 last month.

Excluding interest payments, the central government budget balance recorded a TL 136.7 billion deficit in December 2021.



## China's 2021 Oil Refinery Output Rises 4.3% to Record

SINGAPORE (Dispatches) - China's refinery output hit a record in 2021, up 4.3% from 2020, on robust first-half fuel demand and as refiners ramped up processing to fill a supply gap after a hefty new tax closed loopholes in blending fuel imports.

Total refinery throughput last year reached 703.55 million tons, or 14.07 million barrels per day (bpd), data from the National Bureau of Statistics showed on Monday, roughly 620,000 bpd above the 2020 level.

December output was 58.73 million tons, or 13.83 million bpd, down 2.1% on year, reversing a rebound in November when state refiners raised processing to plug a short-lived diesel supply crunch.

"With the product market flipping into surplus, state-owned refiners cut runs while independents' runs continued to trend lower in December," said Shi Fenglei, an analyst with IHS Markit.

Output surged nearly 11% on the year in first-half 2021, as a rebound in car sales bolstered gasoline use and booming domestic air travel lifted aviation fuel consumption.

A hefty tax slapped on importing blending fuels like light cycle oil and bitumen mixture allowed dominant state refiners to recoup lost market share, previously eroded by cheap blending stocks.

Production, however, declined in the third quarter amid a resurgence in coronavirus cases and as a drastic cut in fuel export quotas hurt plant operations.

The faster growth in last year's throughput versus 2020's 410,000 bpd rise came as Beijing worked to curb processing at smaller independent refiners, particularly in oil hub Shandong, indicating a shift in production increases at larger state refiners.

Monday's data also showed China's crude oil output gained 2.4% on year to 199 million tons, or 3.98 million bpd, the highest since 2016, as the industry strived to sustain a 4 million bpd mark by developing more challenging terrains to make up for depleting mature fields.

Natural gas oil production rose 8.2% to a record 205.3 billion cubic metres, with December volume up 2.3% on the year amid the peak heating demand season.

## Gazprom Has No Europe Gas Exports Planned in February Via Yamal Pipeline

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russian state energy giant Gazprom said on Monday it has not booked any capacity to pump gas to Europe through the Yamal pipeline next month, underscoring a sharp drop-off in Russian exports to the region so far this year.

Gazprom said pipeline exports of Russian gas have tumbled 41% from a year ago so far in January, underlining the impact of a reversal in the Yamal-Europe pipeline, which usually pumps Russian gas into Europe, from Germany to Poland. Data from German network operator Gascade showed that this was occurring for a 28th consecutive day on Monday.

Although the Kremlin-controlled group has not booked any capacity through the pipeline for February, this could change as it is able to take part in daily auctions.

The link has been operating in reverse mode since Dec. 21, helping drive up gas prices, although these dropped on Monday thanks to robust liquefied natural gas (LNG) volumes and higher wind power output.

Exports of Russian commodities have been under the spotlight in recent months amid a broader standoff with the West over Ukraine. Moscow has initiated the talks with the United States and NATO in efforts to stop Ukraine from joining the bloc.

Russia has also been accused by some politicians and experts of deliberately withholding gas exports in order to obtain clearance from Germany and the European Union for its Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline, built to bypass Ukraine.

Russia denies any plans to attack Ukraine and says it meets all contractual obligations on gas exports.

It is not clear when the Yamal-Europe pipeline will revert to normal. A source close to Gazprom said the Kremlin-controlled company is expected to switch flows at some point this month, as Gazprom has paid for westbound volumes for January.

High gas prices present a major problem for European governments, utilities and consumers, with some firms forced out of business by last year's rapid rise in costs.

The British contract for February delivery was down 10.00 pence at 200.00 pence per therm while the Dutch March contract was 5.78 euros lower at 80.50 euros per megawatt hour (MWh).

The Dutch front-month contract was down by 1.95 euros at 81.40 euros/MWh.

The Yamal-Europe pipeline usually accounts for about a sixth of Russia's annual gas exports to Europe and Turkey.

The reverse flows on Monday were around 7 million kWh/h, the same as at the weekend and last week, and are expected to remain in reverse until the early hours of Tuesday, data from the Mallnow metering point on the German-Polish border showed.

## Macron Touts Rosy French Economy, New Jobs Ahead of Election



CHALAMPE (Dispatches) - President Emmanuel Macron on Monday touted 21 new foreign investment projects in France and a booming economy as proof his economic reforms have been bearing fruit less than three months before a presidential election in which he is expected to run.

During a visit to Alsace in the east, Macron inaugurated a 300-million-euro (\$340 million) industrial project by German chemical giant BASF to produce high-tech nylon in France, one of 21 new projects worth 4 billion euros and 10,000 jobs as part of a drive to attract foreign investors.

U.S. drugmaker Pfizer also announced on Monday a 520-million-euro investment plan in France while U.S. company Eastman said it would invest \$1 billion to build a plastics recycling facility.

As the presidential race heats up, Macron is keen to shift the debate away from immigration and law-and-order issues and put the spotlight on the economy, which has been recovering strongly from the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Our country had been de-industrializing for 15 years," Macron told workers at the sprawling site by the Rhine river.

"Since 2019, we have started creating new industrial jobs again. This is the result of the choice we made. Our choice -- it all makes sense -- was to make reforms at the start of the mandate," Macron added.

Since 2017, Macron has pushed through a cocktail of supply-side economic reforms meant to boost businesses' competitiveness, cut taxes on investors and loosen strict labor market rules.

Critics say he has acted as "president of the rich" who wants to do away with France's cherished social safety nets and has cut welfare benefits for some of the poorest.

But three months ahead of the April election, indicators show the French economy is booming, with growth expected to have hit 6.7% in 2021 and France having returned closer to pre-pandemic levels than any G7 peer bar the United States.

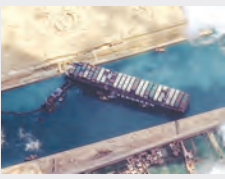


# Iran Oil Passes Through Suez Canal Despite U.S. Sanctions

TEHRAN (MNA) – The chairman of the Suez Canal Authority (SCA) said that despite U.S. sanctions, the Iranian oil passes through the canal.

The SCA announced accelerated plans to extend a second channel of the canal and to enlarge an existing channel after the Ever Given container ship ran aground and blocked the waterway for six days last year, Reuters has reported.

According to Reuters, the SCA chairman Osama Rabie, during the sidelines of an event in Dubai, said that “the project will be completed in 24 months. We started in July 2021 and God willing we will finish in July 2023.”



# Covid-Flu Joint Booster Jab Possible Late 2023

GENEVA (Dispatches) - Moderna aims to roll out a combined Covid-flu-RSV booster vaccine in late 2023, the U.S. pharmaceutical firm said Monday, hoping a joint jab would encourage people to get an annual shot.

The single vaccine for Covid-19, influenza and respiratory syncytial virus -- a common virus that causes the cold, but can be more serious for infants and elderly people -- could appear on the market before 2024.

“Best-case scenario will be the fall of ‘23,” Moderna chief executive Stephane Bancel told a virtual World Economic Forum roundtable session.

“I don’t think it would happen in every country, but we believe it’s possible to happen in some countries next year.

“Our goal is to be able to have a single annual booster so that we don’t have compliance issues where people don’t want to get two to three shots a winter, but to get one dose.”

Bancel said the RSV program was in Phase III trials -- the final stage of human testing -- while the flu programme should be entering Phase III in the second quarter of this year.

Moderna’s experimental flu shot, targeting four major strains, is based on the same mRNA method used in its Covid-19 jabs.

The technology provokes an immune response by delivering genetic molecules containing the code for key parts of a pathogen into human cells.

While Moderna’s Covid-19 vaccine was based on the original strain of the virus, it was working on finishing an Omicron-specific jab within weeks, ahead of trials, said Bancel.

“We’re hoping in the March timeframe we should be able to have data to share with regulators to figure out the next step forward.”

Beyond a vaccine specific to Omicron -- which is rapidly becoming the world’s dominant strain -- laboratories are also pursuing a vaccine that works against all current and future Covid-19 mutations.

“There’s some private sector partners that are pursuing it,” said Richard Hatchett,



chief executive of the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations, which funds vaccine research and development.

“That would be the holy grail because we really don’t want to be in position where we’re chasing the new variants that are going to come.

“We don’t want to be in a position where we’re having to vaccinate everybody in the world every three or six months, or even annually, ideally.”

Top U.S. pandemic advisor Anthony Fauci added: “We really don’t want to get into the whack-a-mole approach towards every new variant... because you’d be chasing it forever.”

Bancel meanwhile said that Moderna had shipped 807 million doses of Covid-19 vaccine in 2021, of which a quarter went to middle- and low-income countries.

Thanks to extra capacity coming on stream before the end of March, the company hopes to be able to make two to three billion doses this year.

# Ozone Pollution Costs Asia Billions In Lost Crops

TOKYO (Dispatches) - Persistently high levels of ozone pollution in Asia are costing China, Japan and South Korea an estimated \$63 billion annually in lost rice, wheat and maize crops, a new study says.

While ozone forms a protective layer around the Earth in the upper atmosphere, it is a harmful pollutant at ground level.

It is created by a chemical reaction when two pollutants, often emitted by cars or industry, combine in the presence of sunlight and it can interfere with plant photosynthesis and growth.

The research published Monday harnesses pollution monitoring data from the region and field experiments to show ozone affects Asia’s crop yields more than previously thought.

The study’s authors said the findings should push policymakers to reduce emissions that produce ozone.

“Air pollution control in North America and Europe succeeded in lowering ozone levels,” said Kazuhiko Kobayashi, a co-first author of the study and professor emeritus affiliated with the University of Tokyo.

“We need to repeat that success across East and South Asia,” he told AFP.

Previous estimates of ozone’s effects on staple crops such as rice, wheat and maize have sometimes used varieties that are not prevalent in Asia, or tested plants grown in pots rather than fields.

To get a more accurate picture, the researchers looked at varieties common in the region and did experiments with crops in pots but also in fields.

They exposed rice, wheat and maize to varying levels of ozone and used the resulting crop yields to model how different exposures affected plant development.

They also tested the model with a second experiment in which the crops were treated with a chemical that protects against the effects of ozone, to see if the yield increased in line with their estimations.

To determine real-world effects, the researchers then applied ozone data from more than 3,000 monitoring sites in China, South Korea and Japan to their model.

They found a mean of 33 percent of China’s wheat crop is lost annually because of ozone pollution, with 28

# World’s 10 Richest Men Doubled Wealth During Covid-19

PARIS (Dispatches) - The world’s 10 wealthiest men doubled their fortunes during the first two years of the coronavirus pandemic as poverty and inequality soared, a report said today.

Oxfam said the men’s wealth jumped from US\$700 billion to US\$1.5 trillion (RM2.92 trillion to RM6.26 trillion), at an average rate of US\$1.3 billion per day, in a briefing published before a virtual mini-summit of world leaders being held under the auspices of the World Economic Forum.

A confederation of charities that focus on alleviating global poverty, Oxfam said the billionaires’ wealth rose more during the pandemic more than it did the previous 14 years, when the world economy was suffering the worst recession since the Wall Street Crash of 1929.

It called this inequality “economic violence” and said inequality is contributing to the death of 21,000 people every day due to a lack of access to healthcare, gender-based violence, hunger and climate change.

The pandemic has plunged 160 million people into poverty, the charity added, with non-white ethnic minorities and women bearing the brunt of the impact as inequality soared.

The report follows a December 2021 study by the group which found that the share of global wealth of the world’s richest people soared at a record pace during the pandemic.

Oxfam urged tax reforms to fund worldwide vaccine production as well as healthcare, climate adaptation and gender-based violence reduction to help save lives.

The group said it based its wealth calculations on the most up-to-date and comprehensive data sources available, and used the 2021 Billionaires List compiled by the US business magazine Forbes.

Forbes listed the world’s 10 richest men as: Tesla and SpaceX chief Elon Musk, Amazon’s Jeff Bezos, Google founders Larry Page and Sergey Brin, Facebook’s Mark Zuckerberg, former Microsoft CEOs Bill Gates and Steve Ballmer, former Oracle CEO Larry Ellison, US investor Warren Buffet and the head of the French luxury group LVMH, Bernard Arnault.

# Tehran, Beijing Confer on Joint Cooperation on Sports

TEHRAN (IP) - Chinese Ambassador to Tehran and Iranian Minister of Sports and Youth met to discuss expanding joint sports cooperation between the two countries.

Seyed Hamid Sajjadi, Iranian Minister of Sports and Youth in the meeting with Chang Hua, Ambassador of China to Tehran, said that 52 sports federations, 100 associations, and 225 sports fields are active in Iran, and we have international positions in some fields.

There is a lot of potential for sports activities that can be expanded through joint cooperation to gain growth and development of sports fields, Sajjadi added.

Saying that sports success is part of the symbol of countries’ development, Sajjadi added: “China has shown that it is a powerful country in the world by achievements in global sport events.”

Regarding hosting the Winter Olympic Games in Beijing at the beginning of the New Year in China, he said: “I hope this coinciding will be accompanied by happiness, joy and success for the great Chinese nation and great achievements for all the athletes present at this event.”

The Chinese ambassador to Iran also thanked the Iranian Minister of Sports and Youth for holding the meeting and called Iran a powerful country in the field of sports in Asia.

Chang Hua also referred to Iran’s success in some sports fields and asked Sajjadi to provide a suitable ground for interaction between Tehran and Beijing in the fields that Iran has a title in.



# Black Diamond, Largest Ever Cut, Goes on Show in Dubai

DUBAI (Dispatches) - The world’s largest known cut diamond went on public display for the first time Monday ahead of its sale, when it is expected to reach five million dollars.

The Enigma, the name of the rare black carbanado diamond, was put on display in Dubai, in the United Arab Emirates.

The diamond is believed to have been created when a meteorite or an asteroid hit the Earth more than 2.6 billion years ago, according to Sotheby’s auction house jewellery specialist Sophie Stevens.

One of the most difficult substances to cut, the 555.55-carat diamond has never been shown by its unnamed owner of the past 20 years, but experts turned it into a 55-face jewel.

Its shape was inspired by the Middle East palm-shaped symbol of power and protection, the Hamsa, which is also associated with the number five.

“It is very different,” said Stevens of the jewel, which holds a Guinness World Record as the largest cut diamond.

# Crimes Against... FROM PAGE 1

The war has left hundreds of thousands of Yemenis dead and displaced millions more. It has also destroyed Yemen’s infrastructure and spread famine and infectious diseases there.

Each time when Yemeni forces take retaliatory action against Saudi Arabia or the UAE, the international bodies start crying foul and reaction by condemning the Yemenis but when it comes to condemn the Saudi-led coalition, they close their eyes and keep silent. As we saw the U.S. came to full support of the Emiratis during recent precise attack at Abu Dhabi oil facilities and Western countries supported the UAE and condemned Yemenis.

As the UN reports show, millions of people in Yemen are not in good living condition and facing hunger as the major infrastructures of the country have been demolished and the country needs first peace and then reconstruction.

The war has left hundreds of thousands of Yemenis dead and displaced millions more. It has also destroyed Yemen’s infrastructure and spread famine and infectious diseases there.

Unfortunately Arab countries are blindly siding with the Saudi-led coalition against Yemen and it has emboldened the coalition to continue its attacks against the Yemeni people, mostly the civilians and women and children, and Yemeni forces have no option but to continue its retaliatory responses against the coalition forces and drone and missile attacks against the strategic facilities of those countries.

The world bodies and especially the United Nations should take a serious action against this dirty and criminal coalition to stop genocide in Yemen. Unfortunately Western countries which claim of supporting peace and human rights issues are major supporters of the coalition forces in war against Yemenis who do not want to be under domination of Saudis and want to live independently.

Yemen is a member of the Arab League but in the recent years, it has turned into an organization overwhelmingly dominated by Saudi Arabia, which has been leading a deadly war on Yemen since 2015.

The war, waged by Saudi Arabia and a number of its regional allies, intended to eliminate Yemen’s Ansarullah resistance movement and reinstall former Yemeni President Abd Rabbuh Mansour Hadi, a staunch ally of Riyadh. The aggression has failed to reach its goals and has killed hundreds of thousands of Yemeni people.

On Sunday, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNCHR) warned that millions of Yemenis are facing rising hunger due to reduced food rations.

“Displaced families in Yemen face rising hunger due to the cut of food assistance,” the UNCHR said on Twitter, noting that over half of the country’s four million internally displaced people “live in areas categorized as an emergency food situation.”

“In January, millions will receive reduced food ration,” the UNCHR quoted the United Nations World Food Program in Yemen as saying.

Despite these reports and claims, crimes against Yemenis go on and Yemenis have no other option but taking a devastating retaliatory action against the aggressors unless Saudis come to their senses and stop their attacks and accept an independent Yemen otherwise Yemenis will fight till their last drop of their blood because they are part of the resistant front against colonialism and Zionist and Western-led domination.



# Iran Issues... FROM PAGE 1

However, Tehran has allowed trade ties with Afghanistan to continue or even to increase with the aim of helping people in the neighboring country with their basic needs.

Iran has carried out its limited fuel deliveries to Afghanistan in recent months while electricity exports have continued unabated over the period.

Afghanistan’s former president Hamid Karzai hailed Iran’s constructive role in the country in remarks published on Monday.

Karzai, a major political figure in Afghanistan since the US-led invasion of the country in 2001, told Iran’s ambassador in Kabul that ties between Iran and Afghanistan should expand in future to cover more areas.

# Iran Absolutely Right... FROM PAGE 1

The United States unilaterally abandoned the multilateral nuclear deal in 2018 despite Iran’s full compliance with its nuclear undertakings, as repeatedly certified by the UN nuclear agency. The US then unleashed a “maximum pressure” campaign against Iran, which practically deprived the country of all of the deal’s economic benefits.

# Tehran Ready to... FROM PAGE 1

Meanwhile on Monday, Iraqi Electricity Minister Majid Mahdi Hantoush said that as Iran’s gas supply to Iraq has declined, Iraq has faced severe gas shortages, which has led Iraqis to seek to reach a new deal with Iran.

“As far as energy security is concerned, Iraq has no good alternative for its gas imports from Iran”, Hantoush said in a press conference in Iraq that focused on energy consumption and greenhouse emissions.

During the meeting, it was emphasized that efforts to diversify gas resources in order to reduce Iraq’s dependence on Iran were necessary as Iran has reduced its gas supplies to Iraq recently.

However, experts believe that by concluding a new contract between the two countries, Iran will send 50 million cubic meters of gas to Iraq, which could fully meet Iraq’s demands for gas.



## Sampdoria Fire Coach D'Aversa

ROME (Dispatches) - Roberto D'Aversa has been sacked as Sampdoria coach following a run of just one victory in their last eight matches, the Serie A side announced.

According to Italian media Sampdoria will turn to 54-year-old Marco Giampolo, who coached them from 2016-2019.

The club thanked D'Aversa — who replaced Claudio Ranieri last summer when the latter left for Premier League side Watford — for the “serious and professional manner in which they conducted their work.”

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## Guardiola Hails Man City's Mental Strength

LONDON (Dispatches) - Pep Guardiola has praised the way his Manchester City players have dealt with adversity on and off the pitch after they strengthened their grip on the Premier League title race.

City, who beat Chelsea 1-0 on Saturday, are 11 points clear of second-placed Liverpool after 12 straight league wins and closing in on a fourth English title in five years.

Guardiola cited the example of full-back Joao Cancelo, who suffered facial injuries in an attack at his home last month.

# Osaka, Nadal Speed Into Second Round

MELBOURNE (Dispatches) - The Australian Open is underway notably without men's No. 1 player Novak Djokovic, who was deported after an appeal to have his visa reinstated was shot down. Now the attention turns to the tennis action and on day 1 there were a handful of upsets on the women's side, including to the two highest-ranking Americans.

Naomi Osaka moved into the next round with a 6-3, 6-3 win over Camila Osorio. She won the first five games of the match as she looks to defend her Australian Open crown. The four-time Grand Slam singles champion also won in 2019.

Osaka, 24, showed off a bit of a superstition in the opening match by avoiding stepping on the “Melbourne” signage on the court. She had 19 winners to Osorio's five and an 83% win percentage on the first serve. Osaka is seeded 13th after sliding in the rankings while taking time off last year. She withdrew from the French Open and skipped Wimbledon before early exits at the Tokyo Olympics and U.S. Open.

Osaka will face American Madison Bregline in the second round.

Rafael Nadal, seeded sixth in the men's draw, also advanced in straight sets, 6-1, 6-4, 6-2 against Marcos Giron. Nadal missed the end of the 2021 season with a foot injury. He won the Summer Set title in Melbourne two weeks ago, his first tournament win in Australia since the Australian Open in 2009.

Nadal, 35, is tied with Djokovic and Roger Federer for most major singles titles in men's tennis history. Each player has 20 and Nadal is the only one of them in the draw. Djokovic did not meet the country's strict COVID-19 vaccination criteria that created an 11-day saga. Federer is currently injured.

Nadal will face Yannick Hanfmann, who won in straight sets, in the second round.

Ash Barty, the No. 1 ranked player on the women's side, had little trouble advancing through with a 6-0, 6-1 victory over Lesia Tsurenko. Barty will face Lucia Bronzetti of Italy next.

## Suns Roll Over Pistons, Gobert Sparks Jazz

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - Devin Booker poured in a game-high 30 points before sitting out the final quarter as the NBA-leading Phoenix Suns routed the last place Detroit Pistons 135-108.

Booker played 30 minutes, making 11 of 18 field goal attempts while teammates Cameron Payne and JaVale McGee each finished with 20 points in front of a crowd of 18,100 at Detroit's Little Caesars Arena.

“I was just hitting shots and the guys were getting me the ball in good places,” said Michigan native Booker.

“I never got to see the Pistons play in person very often — I grew up about two hours west of here — so I love coming here to play what was my favorite team growing up.”

Booker invited 40-50 family and friends to the game on Sunday.

“Because of the pandemic, I didn't get to have normal interaction with my family,” Booker said. “But at least I got to see them and I got to wave to a lot of friends.”

Landry Shamet added 11 points and Chris Paul chipped in 10 points with six rebounds and six assists for the Suns, who improved to 33-9 and have won six of their last seven contests. Mikal Bridges also scored 10 points in the win.

The Suns are also an NBA-best 16-4 on the road. “We had two 39-point quarters, so we were obviously hitting shots,” Suns coach Monty Williams said. “Detroit wears teams out by getting into the paint and getting to the line, and we were able to stay away from a lot of that.”

Pistons first overall draft pick Cade Cunningham was ejected after being slapped with two technicals during the third quarter.

The second was ruled “taunting” after he pointed at a Suns player after making a dunk. Cunningham finished with 21 points in 25 minutes of action.

Canadian Cory Joseph also had 21 points and added seven assists and Trey Lyles tallied 18 points and six rebounds.

Booker exploded for 21 points on nine-of-11 shooting in the first half as the Suns seized a 64-54 halftime lead.

He scored 15 points in the opening quarter before Phoenix blew the game open with a 10-4 run in the final three minutes of the second.



## Djokovic Could Be Barred From French Open

PARIS (Dispatches) - Novak Djokovic could be barred from playing in the French Open under current rules after the sports ministry said on Monday that elite sportspeople would need to be vaccinated to perform in France.

The ministry said a new vaccine pass, approved by the French parliament on Sunday, “applies to everyone, to volunteers and to elite sportspeople, including those coming from abroad, until further notice.”

The unvaccinated Djokovic was deported from Australia on Sunday before the Australian Open -- the first Grand Slam tournament of the year -- after failing in a

court battle to have the cancellation of his visa overturned.

The French move appears to contradict Sports Minister Roxana Maracineanu's assertion last week that certain events like the French Open had a special exemption which could allow Djokovic to play in the tournament without being vaccinated against coronavirus.

Major events like the French Open previously permitted unvaccinated athletes to compete as they operated a health bubble around the tournament.

If no exemption is possible, the measure would dash the 34-year-old Serb's hopes of defending his French Open title and potentially winning an unprecedented 21st Grand Slam singles crown.

Djokovic's hopes of a Grand Slam success in 2022 would then rest on Wimbledon as New York vaccination rules, as they stand now, would rule him out of the U.S. Open.

France's vaccine pass law will require people to carry vaccination certificates to enter public places such as restaurants, cafes, cinemas and intercity trains.

The first major international sports event to be directly affected would be the upcoming Six Nations rugby championship when France will host Italy on February 6, Ireland on February 12 and England on March 19.

## Tuchel Rules Out Changing Chelsea Approach

LONDON (AFP) - Thomas Tuchel said on Monday it would be wrong to change Chelsea's approach just to suit misfiring striker Romelu Lukaku, insisting the club are doing “everything to help him”.

The Chelsea boss voiced his frustration at the Belgium forward and his other attacking players after the west London side's costly 1-0 defeat by Premier League leaders Manchester City on Saturday.

Tuchel, whose outfit travel to Brighton, was asked at his pre-match press conference on Monday whether he should change Chelsea's style of play to suit their 28-year-old club-record signing, who re-joined the Blues from Inter Milan in August.

But the German said he could not focus just on his under-performing star attacker, who has only scored two Premier League goals since September.

“I think we do everything to help him,” said Tuchel.

“This is what we do constantly for any player. This is a team sport so it's not about 10 players serving one player. This is not Chelsea and this is not football.

“Every player is serving the team. This is the highest principle and it will never change,” he added.

Tuchel repeated he had expected more from his attacking players against leaders City, who are now 13 points clear of his third-placed side.

“He (Lukaku) is included in our offensive performance,” said Tuchel.

“He's a key player so there will always be pressure.

“There will not be more pressure than he puts on himself and we need to find a mix between all the expectation, all the pressure and still to be relaxed enough to play your best game.”



## Defending Champion Bucs Take Ddown Eagles

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Tom Brady threw for two touchdowns as the second-seeded Tampa Bay Buccaneers opened defense of their Super Bowl crown with a smooth 31-15 victory over the seventh-seeded Philadelphia Eagles in an NFC wild-card playoff game in Tampa, Fla.

Brady completed 29 of 37 passes for 271 yards in an efficient performance, enabling Tampa Bay to stay home next weekend for a conference semifinal. Mike Evans caught nine passes for 117 yards and a score.

Philadelphia's Jalen Hurts struggled for most of his first playoff start, connecting on 23 of 43 passes for 258 yards with a touchdown and two interceptions. The Eagles weren't able to run the ball successfully until the game was out of reach, enabling the Buccaneers to tee off on Hurts.

The Buccaneers set an immediate tone by marching 75 yards on the game's first possession. Giovani Bernard got the score on a 2-yard run with 10 minutes left in the first quarter.

Tampa Bay will play host next Sunday afternoon to the winner of the game between the Arizona Cardinals and Los Angeles Rams.

Meanwhile Elijah Mitchell of 49ers ran for 96 yards and a touchdown while the San Francisco defense overcame the loss of star end Nick Bosa to hold Dallas Cowboys 17 in check during the NFC wild-card round in Arlington, Texas.

San Francisco quarterback Jimmy Garoppolo hit 16 of 25 passes for 172 yards with an interception for the sixth-seeded 49ers, who will travel to top-seeded Green Bay next weekend to play in the NFC divisional round. San Francisco's Deebo Samuel added 110 yards from scrimmage, 72 on the ground, with a touchdown.

