

Iran's Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian Is Reportedly To Visit Sri Lanka Next Week For Crucial Talks Following a Visit To India on Sunday

IRAN NEWS

Health Ministry Announced on Wednesday That the Number of Deaths From the Coronavirus Pandemic In Iran Increased to 132,303 With 29 More Iranians Killed by the Virus Disease Over the Past 24 Hours

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Removal of Sanctions Will Open Room for Any Deal

TEHRAN (PressTV) - President Seyed Ebrahim Raisi says an agreement with the parties to the 2015 accord is only possible if the cruel sanctions against the Iranian nation are removed.

"If the parties are ready to lift the oppressive sanctions against the Iranian people, there is room for any agreement," the president said during a live television interview on Tuesday.

Iran and the other parties to a 2015 agreement are negotiating in Vienna, Austria, with the aim of getting the United States to remove the sanctions and return to compliance with the deal.

The Islamic Republic, however, is not directly negotiating with the United States since Washington unilaterally left the accord in 2018 and returned the sanctions that the deal had lifted.

President Raisi reiterated that the removal of the sanctions could lead to the agreement's revival. "If the other party removes the sanctions, there will be a possibility to revive the pact."

The Iranian president, however, asserted that not everything relied on the negotiations. "We will pursue the negotiations, but it is not like the negotiations solve everything."

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Envoy Protests Systematic Violations of Rights in Palestine, Yemen

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's permanent ambassador to the United Nations has protested "serious and systematic" breaches of human rights in Palestine and Yemen.

Majid Takht-Ravanchi made the remarks on Tuesday, addressing a UN Security Council session on "wars in cities: protection of civilians in urban settings."

"The most serious violation of IHL (the international humanitarian law) is the decades-long systematic inhumane and apartheid policies and practices of the Israeli regime in the Occupied Palestinian Territory," he said in a statement.

The violations, the envoy added, include a range of brutalities, such as deliberate, systematic, and massive killing of civilians, including women and children as well as seizure and demolition of their homes.

The Israeli regime claimed existence in 1948 after occupying huge swathes of Palestinian territories during a Western-backed war.

It occupied more lands in another such war in 1967. Ever since, it has built hundreds of settlements upon the overrun territories and put the most aggressive restrictions on the movements of Palestinians there.

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India to Launch New Shipping Line To Chabahar Next Month



TEHRAN (PressTV) - A new direct shipping route between Iran's southeastern port of Chabahar and Indian ports of Nhava Sheva and Kandla will open next month with the arrival of a container service at Shahid Beheshti port, an Iranian official says.

India launched shipping lines between Iran's Chabahar and the Indian ports of Mumbai and Mundra in 2017. It set up the second direct shipping route passing through Mumbai, Mundra, Kandla, Chabahar and finally Bandar Abbas in southern Iran in January 2019.

According to deputy head of Iran's Ports and Maritime Organization (PMO) Jalil Eslami, a new container ship will arrive in Chabahar on February, marking the establishment of a new route.

He said the PMO will offer necessary tariff incentives and facilities on tolls and transportation costs to support the traders that use the lines.

The Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Lines (IRISL), Eslami said, performs regular container service with a traffic schedule of 10 to 15 days.

In November, Iran's ambassador to India said Tehran expected New Delhi to resume oil imports from the Islamic Republic and move on the next phase of developing the Chabahar port project.

According to Ali Chegeni, trade between India and Iran exceeded \$17 billion in 2018-19 and had the potential to reach \$30-35 billion this year had New Delhi not stopped Iranian oil imports.

He also complained that there was "not enough activity" from its side to complete the Chabahar project.

"Chabahar, on paper, is not covered by the U.S.' illegal sanctions," he said, but India is probably still scared of "third parties" to invest and work in Chabahar.

Under a trilateral contract signed with Iran and Afghanistan in May 2016, India is developing two berths at the Shahid Beheshti port of Chabahar with a total capital investment of \$85 million and will operate them on a 10-year lease.

Operations at the terminals have somehow started, but New Delhi has not moved on the next phase of the project, which involves building a rail-link from Chabahar to the Iranian city of Zahedan, near the Afghanistan border.

India was also expected to invest in setting up fertilizer, petrochemical and metallurgical plants in the Chabahar Free Trade Zone, but it abandoned them lest they might invoke the US ire.

Iran decided to develop the rail link on its own last year. Chegeni said the project is more than 70 percent complete, but India can still join it for signaling and other infra development.

"Chabahar is a very big area for investments and there is a free trade zone area. There are a lot of opportunities for India to come and invest. Unfortunately, the private sector from India is still hesitant because of some fear regarding the sanctions. I am sure the Indian government wants that, but the speed is not there," he was quoted as saying.

Saudi Arabia, Iraq to Link Power Grids But Iran Not Out of Picture

BAGHDAD (Dispatches) - Saudi Arabia and Iraq have signed a memorandum of understanding to link their power grids, Saudi state press agency SPA reports.

Saudi Minister of Energy Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman said during a virtual signing ceremony with Iraq's Minister of Electricity Adel Karim that the kingdom aimed to "achieve optimal investment in the electrical connection with Iraq", SPA said.

Iraqi Minister Adel Karim said the linkage would be completed within two years, according to the state-run Iraqi News Agency, though no details of how the grids will be connected nor how much electricity will flow into Iraq were released.

Iraq relies on Iran for natural gas that generates as much as 45 percent of its 14,000 megawatts of electricity consumed daily. Iran transmits another 1,000 megawatts directly, making itself an indispensable energy source for its Arab neighbor.

The U.S., however, has been enlisting its companies and allies such as Saudi Arabia to replace Iran as Iraq's source of energy.

In the past, officials in Baghdad have said there was no easy substitute to imports from Iran because it would take years to adequately build up Iraq's energy infrastructure.

They have said American demand acknowledges neither Iraq's energy needs nor the complex relations between Baghdad and Tehran.

Iraq needs more than 23,000 megawatts of electricity to meet its domestic demand but years of war following the 2003 US invasion have left its power infrastructure in tatters and a deficit of some 7,000 megawatts.

So far, the US. has had to repeatedly extend sanctions exemption by 45, 90 or 120 days, to allow Baghdad to import Iranian energy, but it is unhappy with close relationship and trade between Baghdad and Tehran.

Last month, Iraq's electricity ministry said the Arab country still needed to import natural gas from Iran because its plan to locally provide fuel for its power plants had not been completed yet.

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Oil Output Planned to Reach 5.7m bpd in 8 Years

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) plans to increase the country's crude oil production capacity to 5.7 million barrels per day (bpd) over the next eight years, Karim Zobeidi, NIOC's director of corporate planning, said.

"By attracting the necessary investment, we intend to increase Iran's oil production capacity to 5.7 million barrels in the next eight years," Zobeidi said in a gathering of NIOC and capital market representatives on Tuesday.

As Shana reported, referring to the NIOC investment priorities, the official stated: "The participation of domestic investors in the drilling operations of new oil wells is more important for us." According to Zobeidi, the maintenance projects aimed at keeping the production levels of the existing oil wells can also be good areas for investment. These projects may include repairing existing wells and constructing some process facilities and pipelines.

He further noted that according to the NIOC plans, the country's daily natural gas production capacity is also expected to reach 1.5 billion cubic meters within the next eight years, provided that the necessary investment is made in this sector as well.

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NIOC Welcoming Domestic, Foreign Oil Investment

TEHRAN (Shana) - The CEO of the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) said: "If the oil industry and the country's capital market are combined, the jump in investment in the oil industry under the 13th administration will be materialized."

Mohsen Khojastehmehr underlined the need for capital market investment in the oil industry, and said that the first working meeting at the beginning of the 13th administration should have been held with the capital market activists.

He added: "The issue of investment in the National Iranian Oil Company is one of the priorities because the plans of this company, in addition to generating revenue, are capital-intensive; upstream projects, despite being capital-intensive, can transform the country's economy due to the good economic characteristics they have at their heart."

The NIOC CEO said 120 years have passed since the discovery of oil in Masjed Soleiman and during this period about five billion barrels of oil worth one trillion dollars have been produced and supplied in Iran.

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Turkey Refutes Debt Claims as Efforts Ongoing to Reverse Iran Gas Halt

ANKARA (Dispatches) - Talks and efforts are ongoing to try to reverse the halt in natural gas flows from Iran, Turkey's energy minister said late Monday, as the stoppage of the supplies threatened to severely hit manufacturing and exports.

A delegation, which is said to include a deputy minister and officials from state-run pipeline company BOTAŞ, has flown to Tehran to address the issue, Energy and Natural Resources Minister Fatih Dönmez told an interview with private broadcaster Habertürk.

Iran last week announced it would suspend gas exports to its neighbor for 10 days due to what it said were technical failures, putting enormous pressure on the power network in Turkey. "We are undertaking all efforts possible to solve the problem. That's what we also conveyed to the other side (Iran)," Dönmez said, also categorically rebuffing allegations the halt was due to Turkey's debt to Iran.

"We certainly do not owe Iran anything. Such a statement has not been made from the opposite side either," he said.

Dönmez said maintenance teams have been deployed to address the problem and ensure that supplies are not adversely affected, stressing that the suppliers had reset the flow on Jan. 21 following a leak in the Iranian gas system.

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Tehran to Nullify Sanctions Through Diversifying Trade Partners

TEHRAN (MNA) - Emphasizing that there is no deadline for the Iranian delegation in Vienna, an Iranian lawmaker stressed that Iran is diversifying its trading partners, which has an important impact on the neutralization of sanctions. Reaching a full agreement to remove the sanctions is on the agenda of the Iranian delegation in the ongoing Vienna talks, Abolfazl Amouei, member of the Iranian Parliament National Security and Foreign Policy Commission said. The interim agreement is not in line with the policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran,

he said, stressing that there is no deadline for the Iranian delegation in the Vienna talks. Removal of sanctions is important for the Islamic Republic of Iran, Amouei said, adding that after the removal of sanctions, Iran's foreign trade should move towards normalization.

If deadline is very important for Americans, they can remove the sanctions, he said, adding, "As a result, then they can witness the results in the process of Vienna talks."

Israel Regime by No Means Can Be a Friend To Muslim Nations

IRAN NEW POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - President Seyed Ebrahim Raisi told visiting Azeri defense minister that Tehran-Baku relations are based on shared religious beliefs, adding that the Israeli regime is the enemy of humanity that cannot be a friend to Muslim states.

President Raisi held a meeting with visiting Azerbaijan's defense minister Zakir Hasanov Zakir Hasanov and his accompanying delegation in Tehran on Wednesday.

The President described Iran and Azerbaijan as two relatives that enjoy deeply-rooted relations based on shared religious beliefs.

Referring to his meeting with the President of Azerbaijan on the sidelines of the ECO Summit in Turkmenistan, the Iranian President added that the process of developing economic and trade relations, including transit interactions between the two countries, is accelerating after the meeting.

Emphasizing that Iran's power in the region is used to create security, Raisi stated that the presence of Takfiri and ISIL groups is not in the interest of the people of the region anywhere. "These gangs were created by the Americans and the Zionists and have committed criminal acts wherever they were.

Raisi added that Tehran is ready to provide Baku with its technical engineering capabilities.



He also pointed out that the Zionist regime is the enemy of humanity and can by no means be a friend to the Muslim nations, and that the Zionist occupation and aggression in the region and against the Palestinian people will bear testimony to that.

The President expressed hope that with the conscious presence and planning of the Azerbaijani Armed Forces, takfiri movements and those who have proven their animosity towards Muslims will not be able to gain a foothold in the region.

The Minister of Defense of the Republic of Azerbaijan, for his part, described his meetings and talks with his Iranian counterparts as very useful, fruitful and laying the ground for the future of cooperation.

We Must Fight Against Sanctions, Distortions

TEHRAN (IP) - Pointing out that the Islamic Development Coordination Council has a great position and mission in explaining the achievements and successes of the Islamic Revolution, President Seyed Ebrahim Raisi said: "Today, the main mission of all bodies in the country is creating change in order to create hope in the society."

Speaking in a meeting of the Fajr Celebration Headquarters, Raisi commemorated the memory of the great Imam Khomeini and martyrs of the Islamic Revolution and appreciated the activities of the Islamic Development Coordination Council from the beginning of the victory of the Islamic Revolution until now, especially Ayatollah Jannati's continuous efforts in this council.

He said: "Today, with creativity and initiative, it is necessary to take big steps towards the further development of this council, and in this direction, the period of the last 40 years will be a valuable experience for future steps".

The President stressed the need for change in all organs and institutions of the country, including the Islamic Development Coordination Council, and said: "Today, change in all organs is an urgent need."

Raisi added: "The main and pivotal mission of all organs of the country is to create change and try to explain the achievements to create vitality and hope in society."

The President pointed out: "The current of distortion and gossip seeks to create deviations in the path of reform and transformation through creating false atmosphere."

The President described "process change" as the second requirement for successful change and said: "It is necessary to review the decision-making process to be implemented and examine its impact on different groups."

Emphasizing the importance and necessity of using communication knowledge in the field of advertising, Raisi said: "Communication is a very important science today and using this knowledge along with the accumulated experiences can be useful in the impact of activities."

Stating that the Fajr and Bahman 22 celebrations are, in fact, a re-reading of the Islamic Revolution, Raisi said: "Today, the people want the institutions that have arisen from their will in the government and parliament to make up for the backwardness."

The President said: "The ceremony of the 10-day Fajr celebration and the 22nd of Bahman is not just a historical event and this ceremony has its own message every year".

Referring to the legitimacy of the Islamic Republic of Iran's positions in the regional and international arenas, Raisi stated: "The legitimacy of the Iranian nation lies in the hearts of the independent governments and nations of the world."

Referring to the importance of creating and strengthening the spirit of hope among the people, the President said: "The enemies are making great efforts to create despair and hopelessness, and in this regard, expressing the measures taken and the plans for implementation can increase hope in among people."

The President stated: "Today, any move to create hope among the people is a move towards the strategy of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and any move is to create despair and hopelessness, a move towards the strategy of the enemy."

Raisi emphasized: "22 Bahman is the manifestation of hope among the people and the peak and manifestation of change that must continue".

Tehran, Doha Discuss Issues of Mutual Interest

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian and his Qatari counterpart Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al Thani in a phone call reviewed issues of mutual interest.

Amirabdollahian and Al Thani discussed ways to develop bilateral relations.

They conferred on the latest regional developments as

well as issues of mutual interest.

The two foreign ministers emphasized reinforcing diplomacy and negotiations in resolving issues.

The regional developments and the continuation of consultations between the two countries on maintaining peace and stability in the regional and global arenas were among other issues discussed by the two sides.

Iran-China-Russia Cooperation Effective In Changing Global Equations



TEHRAN (IRNA) - The secretary General of Islamic Coalition (Motalefeh) Party in Iran has said that cooperation between Tehran, Beijing, Moscow, and other independent states creates a great power, which will lead to fundamental developments in global equations.

Assadollah Badamchian made the remarks in a meeting with Chinese Ambassador in Tehran Chang Hua, according to a report of the Party's office on Wednesday.

In the meeting, Badamchian also exchanged views with the Chinese ambassador about joint naval drills conducted recently by the three countries.

For his part, Chang called for further bilateral relations.

Chang attended the office of Islamic Coalition Party in Tehran to congratulate Badamchian on his appointment as secretary general of the Party.

Iran, Sweden Discuss Yemen Issue

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Foreign Minister's senior advisor in political affairs Ali Asghar Khaji and Sweden's special envoy for Yemen Peter Semneby held online meetings on Tuesday and discussed joint cooperation between Iran and Sweden to help resolve Yemen crisis.

During the online meeting on Tuesday, the two sides reviewed the latest developments in Yemen.

They discussed and exchanged views on the areas of joint cooperation between the Islamic Republic of Iran and Sweden to help resolve the Yemen crisis and end the ongoing humanitarian catastrophe in the country as quickly as possible.

Earlier, Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh condemned the recent air attacks against residential areas in Yemen which have resulted in killing and injuring scores of innocent civilians.

Tehran, Baku Review Regional Issues

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Defense Minister of the Islamic Republic of Iran Brigadier General Mohammad Reza Ashtiani in a meeting with his Azeri counterpart Zakir Hasanov discussed bilateral ties and regional issues.

Ashtiani stressed reinforcing relations in defense and security, saying that thanks to historical and cultural commonalities between Iran and Azerbaijan, the two neighbors should develop all-out relations.

Due to their geopolitical position, Iran and Azerbaijan enjoy various capacities for promoting cooperation, he added.

Meanwhile, Hasanov appreciated Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei and the Iranian government's support for Azerbaijan's territorial integrity.

He also lauded Iranian armed forces' power and capabilities, emphasizing developing bilateral relations.

FM Stresses Resolve to Expand Ties With African Countries

TEHRAN (IRNA)- Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian on Tuesday underlined Iran's determination for promotion of relations with African countries in all areas.

Amirabdollahian made the remarks during a meeting in Tehran with his Togolese counterpart Robert Dussey.

The two foreign ministers discussed different issues of mutual interest, as well as regional and international issues.

The two sides agreed on forming a joint working committee, exploring the possibility of launching embassies in the two capitals and exchange of trade delegations.

The Togolese foreign minister also invited Amirabdollahian to pay a visit to Lomé and Iranian foreign minister welcomed the invitation.

Poland's Donated COVID Vaccines Arrive in Tehran

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

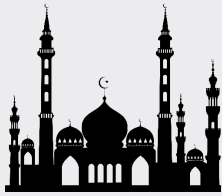
TEHRAN – The second shipment of 1 million doses of AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine, donated by the Polish Government to the Islamic Republic of Iran, arrived at Tehran Imam Khomeini International Airport on Tuesday. The vaccines were shipped to Iran under a bilateral agreement, with the assistance of the European Commission.

The entire shipment is meant to support the vaccination campaign of Afghan refugees living in Iran. Iran hosts a very large Afghan population and within the framework of its national vaccination campaign provides vaccines also to the refugees. By donating the vaccines Poland responds to an appeal, launched by the Islamic Republic of Iran,



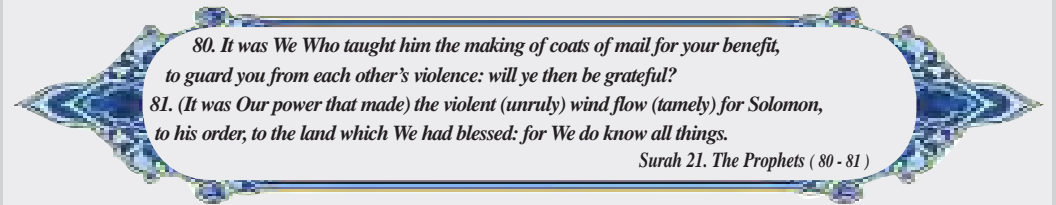
to support its efforts in favor of the refugees. It is believed that the donation will also help step up the national vaccination program in order to ease the emergency situation for the Iranian population. The donation is thus an expression of international responsibility sharing by Poland and of its readiness to help countries hosting large numbers of refugees to overcome the pandemic.

Already on October 16th 2021 Iran received the first shipment of one million doses of AstraZeneca vaccines donated by Poland to support the national vaccination campaign in sign of solidarity with the people of Iran. The second shipment brings the total number of vaccines donated by Poland to 2 million doses.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	12:17
■ Evening (Maghreb)	17:45
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	05:40
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	07:07



Uzbeks Announce Readiness to Invest In Chabahar Port

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Deputy Minister of Transportation of Uzbekistan Mr. Jasurbek Choriev during his visit to Chabahar Port announced readiness of Uzbekistan for investment in Chabahar Port.

Leading a delegation, Choriev visited Chabahar Port and met with Director General of Maritime and Ports Organization of Sistan and Baluchestan Mr. Behrouz Aqaei and during the meeting both sides explored ways for cooperation.

In the meeting, Aqaei pointed to the political will of the two countries for cooperation and economic development so that Uzbekistan and Iran need more interactions in the post-COVID era and this is because of the tough economic competition in the world.

Meanwhile Choriev, for his part, said that during his visit from the facilities of Chabahar Port, they have become more interested in investment because countries of Iran, India and Uzbekistan enjoy having great historical and cultural commonalities and the trade between them has been for long time.

He said the trade volume of Uzbekistan and India by using Chabahar Port can have effective role in easing transportation and logistics between the countries in the region.

He added that the trade volume between Uzbekistan and India increased considerably last year, adding that Chabahar Port can have more effective role in facilitating the transportation and logistics in the regional states.

Then Aqaei announced readiness of the port for any investment from other countries and with the launch of railroad in Chabahar, all will witness development



in the region and trans-region. He then pointed to the traffic and competition for investment in the port, and said if Uzbekistan intends to invest, it should rush and this readiness exists in the port to welcome goods from Uzbekistan as well as transfer of goods to CIS favorably.

Later Aqaei in an interview with ILNA said that Uzbeks after the visit announced their readiness for long term investment in Chabahar and Shahid Beheshti Port, adding that the organization tabled three proposals for cooperation with Uzbeks. He said the first proposal to Uzbeks was to invest in the developmental phases of Chabahar Port and it is possible that the second phase of Shahid Beheshti Port is totally handed over to Uzbeks, adding that of course Uzbeks can also involve in the phases 2 and 3 and also invest in the infrastructures and providing equipment for Chabahar Port.

He noted that the second proposal is to use the existing infrastructures and they can use the infrastructures of the ports in Sistan and Baluchestan for transit of goods.

Aqaei then pointed to the third proposal and said that Uzbeks can join the Chabahar agreement, adding that the trilateral agreement of Chabahar has been signed between Iran, India and Afghanistan and Uzbeks have been asked to join the agreement.

He noted that next month there will be a meeting in the ministerial level between the two countries and during the meeting, the talks will become more serious and Uzbeks will speak out their decisions.

Iran-Uzbekistan Joint Commission to Convene in March



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Head of Iran's Trade Promotion Organization Alireza Peyman Pak met Uzbekistan trade delegation led by Uzbek Deputy Investment and Foreign Trade Bakhtiyar Rakhimov and during the meeting it was announced the Joint Iran-Uzbekistan Economic Commission will convene in March.

In the meeting, some issues like holding the 14th joint economic commission, supporting the traders and making them familiar with capacities of the two countries, holding special exhibitions, exchange of trade delegations and easing the banking transactions were discussed.

Peyman Pak in the meeting called for forming the joint bilateral committees in the field of transportation for using the capacities of Chabahar Port and developing bilateral cooperation in the field of rail and improving the roads.

He also announced readiness of preparing some documents for signing in the upcoming joint economic commission.

Call for Increasing Direct Flights Between Tehran, Bishkek

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Head of Iran's Trade Promotion Organization's (TPO) Central Asia Bureau Mr. Rahmatollah Khormali broke the news that last month a meeting for broadening trade ties between Iran and Kyrgyzstan was held.

In this meeting, Khormali pointed to the capabilities and potentials of the two countries and called for developing bilateral trade ties more than ever and to provide the ground for financial transfer as well as increasing the direct flights between the two countries in line with supporting the traders.

He then pointed to the issues discussed in this gathering like introducing the investment projects in Kyrgyzstan, membership of Kyrgyzstan in the WTO and Eurasian Economic Union, as well as other advantages of this Central Asian country which are good opportunities for boosting bilateral cooperation.

In the meeting, Khormali pointed to the significance of holding the 13th joint economic commission, holding specialized Iran exhibition in Kyrgyzstan, developing cooperation in the fields of agriculture and transportation.

This meeting was held in Tehran in-person and online with presence of the ambassadors of the two countries as well as economic traders.

Iran to Hold 3 Fairs in Brazil To Showcase Products

TEHRAN (MNA) – Iran will hold an exhibition in Brazil's Sao Paulo to showcase its petrochemical products in February while two other exhibitions are planned for later this year.

For the first time, the World Trade Center of Sao Paulo will host an exhibition of Iranian petrochemical products in late February.

The exhibition will be held in order to familiarize the Brazilian traders with Iranian-made products.

Also, according to the IRIB report, two other exhibitions, one on Iranian food products and the other on Iranian goods will open later this year in summer.

The Brazilian ambassador told IRIB that Iran is the biggest trade partner in West Asia region for Brazil and that his country seeks expansion of trade with Tehran as the Brazilian merchants are interested in Iranian-made products.

Tehran, Baku Sign Deal to Construct Border Road Bridge



TEHRAN (IFP) - Iran and the Republic of Azerbaijan have signed an agreement for the construction of a road bridge on the Astarachay river on their border.

The agreement was signed during the second day of a trip by Iran's Minister of Roads and Urban Development Rostam Ghasemi to Baku.

Ghasemi and Deputy Prime Minister of the Republic of Azerbaijan Shahin Mostafayev held a groundbreaking ceremony for the bridge project.

The Astarachay bridge will be 97 meters long and 32 meters wide and will be built in four lanes. Its credit will be provided jointly by the governments of Iran and the Republic of Azerbaijan.

During the signing ceremony on Tuesday, Mostafayev said the construction of the bridge will be completed before the end of 2022.

He also described the Iranian minister's visit to Baku as a good opportunity to examine the cooperation capacities of the two countries in different fields.

Mostafayev said the president and the government of the Republic of Azerbaijan attach special importance to expanding relations with Iran.

Noting that the Republic of Azerbaijan and Iran have deep relations in the fields of trade, economy, energy, customs and investment, Azerbaijan's deputy prime minister said there are good opportunities to implement joint projects.

The Iranian minister of roads and urban development also called the Republic of Azerbaijan the closest neighbor to the Islamic Republic saying "We hope that after the meeting of the two presidents, relations between the two countries will develop as much as possible."

He called the development of relations with neighbors one of the priorities of the Iranian administration and, highlighted Iran's participation in the implementation of projects in the liberated territories of the Republic of Azerbaijan saying bilateral cooperation could accelerate the reconstruction of these areas.

Iranian, Italian Architects Discuss Restoration of Historical Buildings

TEHRAN (IP) - Some of the leading experts of contemporary Italian and Iranian architecture, such as Mario Cucinella, met in a hybrid format on January 25 to talk about sustainable architecture and create opportunities for cooperation in the restoration of historical buildings.

The roundtable, organized by the Italian Embassy in Tehran in cooperation with Domus magazine, provided an opportunity to discuss initiatives to safeguard the architectural heritage of both countries.

Among the participants were representatives of Iran's Ministry of Cultural Heritage, as well as of the cities of Teheran, Shiraz, Persepolis and Isfahan. Italian specialized associations, such as Assorestauro and Alliance of Cooperatives, have presented their own know-how and expertise in safeguarding architectural heritage and proposed ways to promote the architectural heritage and make it accessible to the wider public.

In the session dedicated to sustainability, Italian and Iranian architects discussed the new trends in contemporary



architecture, focused on optimizing the use of resources, minimizing the impact of climate change, choosing local materials, and involving, whenever possible, local communities.

The panelists have also had the opportunity to share their own experience in the field in the

framework of decades-long cooperation between Italy and Iran in the field of architecture and design.

The roundtable on architecture and sustainability is part of a series of events recently promoted by the Italian Embassy in Tehran, focused on architecture and design, such as the video series "Domus Eyes on Iran" and the publication of a special monographic issue dedicated to Iran by Domus in November 2021. On Monday, a preview of the new exhibition "Domus Design - Tehran 2022" was presented at the residence of Ambassador Giuseppe Perrone, in the presence of the Editorial Director of Domus, Walter Mariotti, 47 years after the "Domus Design" exhibition organized by the Milan-based magazine in Tehran in 1975.

Iran, Mali Will Begin Fruitful Cooperation

KARAJ (IRNA) - Minister of Digital Economy and Communications of Mali said on Tuesday that he was assured that Mali and Iran, keeping in mind their capabilities and potentials, will start a fruitful cooperation.

Minister Harun Mamadu Tore made the comment after visiting the Information and Communications Technological Park of Karaj in a virtual meeting with the officials of that park, announcing that his country needs modern technologies, including the ICT and the Nano technologies, asking for signing memoranda of understanding for technology transfer, sharing experiences, and buying the required facilities.

Mamadu Tore said that his country's particular demands in the field of technology parks will be announced to the Karaj ICT Park through Iran Embassy in Mali.

The head of the Karaj ICT Park, too, said in the virtual meeting that the park's area is 22 hectares and some 60 companies that are active in communications, digital economy, and ICT have activities in it.

Mohammad-Ja'far Seddiq-Damqanizadeh said that the active companies in Karaj ICT Park have noticeable capacities and capabilities in information technology field, including being connected to all similar parks in the world through the TAD digital network, turning the park into a player in that scientific field at the international scene.

He said that the stationed companies in the park are ready for expansion of their expertise activities at the service of development of Mali communications network.

Seddiq-Damqanizadeh also invited the Mali communications minister to visit the Karaj ICT Park, and announced readiness for dispatching an expert team to Mali to assess that country's demands precisely.



NIOC Eyes 5.7mbd in 8 Years

TEHRAN (Shana) - The Director of Integrated Planning of the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) announced the company's plans to ramp up Iran's crude oil production capacity to 5.7 million barrels per day over the next eight years.

Karim Zobeidi highlighted the company's plans for the next eight years, and said: "We intend to attract capital in the next eight years to bring Iran's crude oil production capacity to 5.7 million barrels per day." Referring to the investment priorities of NIOC, he stated: "Investment opportunities and the participation of domestic investors in drilling oil wells are more important."

The senior NIOC official said: "Planning to maintain production by repairing existing wells and constructing some process facilities and pipelines can be considered as other domestically investable projects."

Tedros Set to Remain World Health Chief

GENEVA (Dispatches) - World Health Organization chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus is all but guaranteed a second term after a procedural vote on Tuesday made him the sole nominee for a leadership election in May.

The first African leader of the UN health agency said he was “very grateful for the renewed support”, after the WHO’s executive board held a secret-ballot vote approving his nomination as the only candidate for the post of director-general.

“I am actually lost for words,” the visibly-moved WHO chief said after nearly all of the board’s 34 members, representing countries from around the world, threw their weight behind him.



Mahathir’s Condition Improving, To Remain in Hospital

KUALA LUMPUR (Dispatches) - Malaysia’s former leader Mahathir Mohamad, who served as prime minister for more than two decades, is showing signs of improved health, but will remain in hospital to receive specialist care, his daughter said.

The 96-year-old has an improved appetite and even made jokes with family, Marina Mahathir said in a statement. She also said her father requested people not be too worried about his health.

“Mahathir and his family, were moved and thanked all who prayed for his speedy recovery,” Marina said, referring to the wishes conveyed by foreign leaders and the people.



U.S. Threatens Stiff Sanctions, Warns Russia Not to Weaponize Energy



WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - The United States warned Russia of damaging sanctions, including high-tech export curbs, and said attempts by Moscow to “weaponize” its enormous oil and gas industry would backfire.

“We are prepared to implement sanctions with massive consequences” that go far beyond previous measures implemented in 2014 after Russia invaded Ukraine’s Crimea region, a senior U.S. official said.

“The gradualism of the past is out,” the official told reporters, speaking on condition of anonymity. If Russia orders a new invasion of Ukraine, “we’ll start at the top of the escalation ladder.”

Addressing concerns in Europe that Russia could push back against sanctions by curbing its own energy exports to heavily dependent Europe, the official said Russia would also be hurting itself.

“If Russia decides to weaponize its supply of natural gas or crude oil, it wouldn’t be without consequences to the Russian economy,” a senior U.S. official told reporters.

Although the European Union sources about 40 percent of its supply from Russia, Moscow also relies heavily on sales of energy for its national budget, meaning “it’s an interdependency,” the official said.

The United States and its European allies are scouring global markets for alternative energy sources to mitigate fallout from any conflict, as Europe already finds itself struggling with soaring mid-winter energy prices.

“We’re working with countries, companies around the world to ensure the security of supply and to mitigate against price shocks,” the official said.

The “contingency planning” includes negotiations with suppliers in North Africa and Asia to “temporarily surge gas output.”

Liquid natural gas tankers have already started rerouting from Asia, bringing “a significant impact on the resilience of energy supply in Europe,” according to the official.

The economic sanctions being prepared to respond to any Russian invasion of Ukraine would include previously unused restrictions on exports of high-tech US equipment, the official said.

“What we’re talking about are sophisticated technologies that we design and produce,” the official told reporters.

This would include artificial intelligence, quantum computing and aerospace technologies and would “hit (President Vladimir) Putin’s strategic ambitions to industrialize his economy quite hard.”

“These are sectors that Putin himself has championed, as the way forward for Russia to diversify its economy beyond oil and gas,” the official said.

“And in many, many instances, if Russia wants to develop these sectors, it needs to import technologies and products that only we and our allies and partners produce.”

North Korea Fires Cruise Missiles

SEOUL (Dispatches) - North Korea fired two cruise missiles into the sea off its east coast on Tuesday, South Korea’s military said, amid rising tension over a recent series of weapons tests.

South Korea’s Joint Chiefs of Staff did not specify the missiles’ range or trajectory, but said it was conducting an analysis together with U.S. authorities. The launch was North Korea’s fifth of the year, following tests of a tactical guided missile, two “hypersonic missiles” capable of high speed and maneuvering after lift-off, and a railway-borne missile system.

Tension has been growing, with leader Kim Jong Un vowing last week to bolster the military and warning he could lift a self-imposed moratorium on testing atomic bombs and long-range missiles.

North Korea has not launched intercontinental ballistic missiles or nuclear weapons since 2017, but began testing a slew of shorter-range missiles after denuclearization talks stalled following a failed summit with the United States in 2019.

The flurry of recent tests sparked a U.S. push for fresh U.N. sanctions, followed by heated reaction from Pyongyang.

The U.N. Security Council bans North Korea from any launches using ballistic technology, but not cruise missiles. China and Russia have recently called for removing a ban on Pyongyang’s exports of statues, seafood and textiles, and raising a refined oil imports cap.

South Korea’s Unification Minister Lee In-young, in charge of cross-border ties, urged the North to return to talks, not escalate further.

“While thoroughly preparing for additional tests, we’d like to emphasise again that dialogue and cooperation is the only way to peace,” he told a meeting with foreign diplomats based in Seoul.

Japan’s Chief Cabinet Secretary Hirokazu Matsuno did not confirm the latest test but said Tokyo would work with neighbours to gather and analyze necessary information.

Lee Sang-min, a military expert at the Korea Institute for Defense Analyses, said the recent missile volleys could be aimed at building geopolitical tensions and perhaps pushing the United States to come up with a new strategy toward Kim.

Burkina Faso Crowd Celebrates West Africa’s Latest Coup

OUAGADOUGOU (Dispatches) - More than 1,000 people gathered in Burkina Faso’s capital Ouagadougou on Tuesday in support of a military coup that a day earlier ousted President Roch Kabore, dissolved the government and suspended the constitution.

The fifth coup in West and Central Africa this decade comes amid an increasingly bloody Islamist insurgency that has killed thousands and displaced millions across the Sahel region, eroding faith in democratic leaders to combat the problem.

On Monday, soldiers announced they had overthrown Kabore, who came to power in 2015, a move condemned internationally but welcomed by some at home tired of widespread insecurity, alleged corruption and deep poverty.

The putschists, called the Patriotic Movement for Safeguard and Restoration (MPSR), presented Kabore with a hand-written resignation letter on Monday, which he signed, according to numerous sources who shared the letter with Reuters and verified its authenticity.

“In the interests of the nation, following events that took place since yesterday, I have decided to resign from my role as president of Burkina Faso,” said the letter.

An MPSR statement read on television said it was re-opening borders a day after closing them.

Kabore’s whereabouts were unknown on Tuesday. The MPSR has said he was detained at a secure location. Vehicles belonging to the presidential fleet were seen riddled with bullets near Kabore’s residence the day before.

France’s President Emmanuel Macron said the situation had appeared calm in the last few hours and that he had been informed Kabore was “in good health” and not being threatened.

The United States, the United Nations, regional political bloc ECOWAS and the G5 group of Sahel nations all condemned the coup.

Indonesia, Singapore Sign Extradition, Airspace and Defense Agreements

JAKARTA (Dispatches) - Indonesia and Singapore signed a bilateral extradition agreement, a move that Jakarta expects to help authorities in their effort to bring to justice people accused of stashing offshore billions of dollars in state money.

Senior cabinet ministers from both countries also signed bilateral agreements covering airspace and defense in a ceremony aired on Indonesia’s State Secretariat YouTube channel.

The signings follow a meeting between President Joko Widodo and Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong on the Indonesian island of Bintan as part of their annual leaders’ retreat.

The issue of extradition has long been a frustration for Indonesia because of concerns about the difficulty of bringing some fugitives accused of embezzling large sums during the Asian financial crisis to justice.

“The extradition treaty will enhance cooperation and combating crime and send a clear, positive signal to investors,” Prime Minister Lee said at the signing ceremony.

Under the extradition agreement, people who had committed 31 types of crime will be liable to be extradited and it will apply to offences committed up to 18 years ago, a statement from Indonesia’s investment and maritime affairs ministry said.

The agreement would also mean that people would not be able to escape justice by changing their citizenship, it said.

“Therefore, the implementation of the criminal extradition agreement will create a deterrence effect for felonies in Indonesia and Singapore,” the statement said.

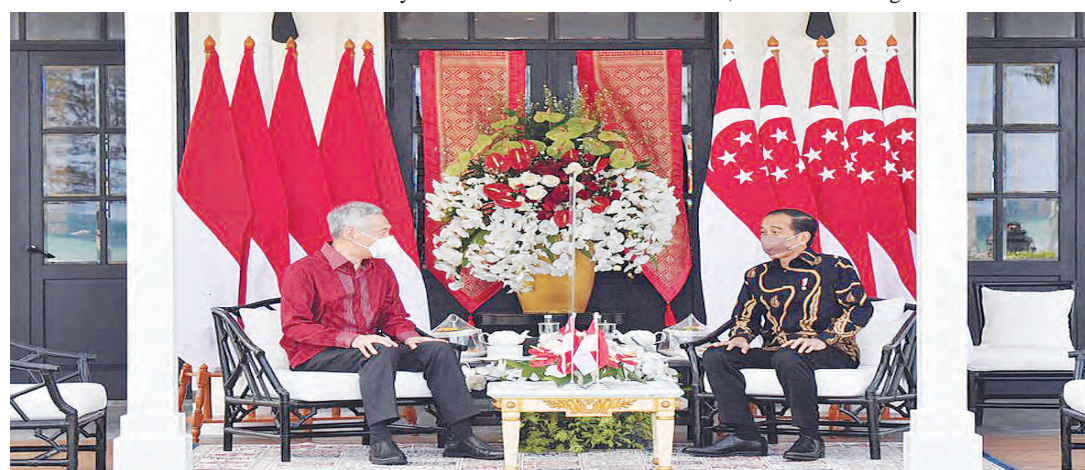
In 2007, Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono and Prime Minister Lee oversaw the signing of an extradition treaty and defence cooperation agreement, but it was never ratified by Indonesia’s parliament.

Indonesia has set up a new so-called “BLBI” task force that is going after \$8 billion of bailout funds given to bank owners and borrowers after the Asian financial crisis in the late 1990s that was never repaid.

The Indonesian ministry’s statement also said the extradition agreement should help “effectively reach” those implicated by the BLBI investigation.

Lalola Easter Kaban of Indonesia Corruption Watch, a non-governmental organization, welcomed the development saying it would help in the hunt for corruption suspects who might have fled to Singapore seeking to maintain “impunity” from law enforcement agencies.

The other agreements signed between the countries included one giving Indonesia more control of airspace over the Riau and Natuna islands, areas close to both countries, and a defense agreement.



Poland Begins Work on \$400m Belarus Border Wall

WARSAW (Dispatches) - Polish contractors have begun work on a new 353 million euro (\$407m) wall along the Belarus border aimed at deterring refugee crossings following a crisis in the area last year.

The 5.5-metre-high wall will run along 186km (115 miles) of the border – almost half the total length – and is to be completed in June.

The construction has raised human rights concerns over how refugees will be able to seek asylum as well as environmental worries about the effect on wildlife along the mostly forested border.

“Our intention is for the damage to be as small as possible,” border guard spokeswoman Anna Michalska told Poland’s PAP news agency on Tuesday.

“Tree felling will be limited to the minimum required. The wall itself will be built along the border road,” she said, adding that contractors will only make use of existing roads.

Thousands of refugees and migrants – mostly from the Middle East – crossed or attempted to cross the border from Belarus into Poland last year.

The West blamed the influx on the Belarusian government, saying it had encouraged would-be asylum seekers to fly to Belarus with the promise of an “easy journey” on foot into the European Union.

Poland branded the crisis a “hybrid” attack from Belarus and its main ally Russia, referring to a type of warfare using non-military tactics.

Belarus has denied this and has accused Poland of inhumane treatment of the refugees.

It has since repatriated thousands of people to Iraq – the main country of origin. At the height of the crisis last year, Poland sent thousands of troops and police officers to the border to reinforce border guard patrols.

It also built a razor-wire fence along much of the border, closed off the border area to media and human rights groups, and approved a new law allowing asylum-seekers to be forced back into Belarus.

While the number of crossings has fallen sharply since then, some still attempt the increasingly perilous crossing despite the freezing conditions.



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Kuwait Draft 2022-2023 Budget Sees Deficit Down 74%

CAIRO (Dispatches) - Kuwait's finance ministry said on Monday it had submitted to the cabinet a draft budget for the fiscal year 2022-2023 with an expected deficit of 3.1 billion dinars (\$10.26 billion), down 74.2% from the previous year. The Persian Gulf OPEC member sees oil income at 16.7 billion dinars throughout the FY that ends in March 2023, up 83.4% from 2021-2022, according to a ministry statement. Total revenues were estimated at 18.8 billion dinars, assuming an oil price of \$65 per barrel, while expenses were seen at 21.9b dinars for the FY 2022-2023. The proposed budget includes 2.9 billion dinars in capital spending, and needs an oil price of \$75 per barrel to break even.



IMF Cuts Growth Forecasts for U.S., China

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - The International Monetary Fund lowered its economic forecasts for the United States, China and the global economy today, and said uncertainty about the pandemic, inflation, supply disruptions and U.S. monetary tightening posed further risks.

"We project global growth this year at 4.4 percent, 0.5 percentage point lower than previously forecast, mainly because of downgrades for the United States and China," Gita Gopinath, the IMF's No. 2 official, wrote in a blog on the latest update of the World Economic Outlook.

The IMF said the rapid spread of the Omicron variant had led to renewed mobility restrictions in many countries and increased labour shortages, while supply disruptions were fuelling inflation. Omicron was expected to weigh on economic activity in the first quarter, but ease up thereafter, given that it was associated with less severe illness, the IMF said. Global growth is expected to slow to 3.8 percent in 2023, a 0.2 percentage-point uptick from the previous forecast in October, the IMF said, but it said the increase was largely mechanical after current drags on growth dissipate in the second half of 2022.

Overall, the pandemic was now projected to result in cumulative economic losses of US\$13.8 trillion (RM57 trillion) through 2024, compared to the previous forecast of US\$12.5 trillion, Gopinath, who previously served as the IMF's chief economist, wrote.

The IMF cut its forecast for U.S. growth by 1.2 percentage points given the failure of U.S. President Joe Biden to pass a massive social and climate spending package, earlier tightening of U.S. monetary policy and continued supply shortages.

The US economy is now forecast to grow by 4 percent in 2022 after expanding 5.6 percent in 2021, with growth seen easing further to 2.6 percent in 2023, the IMF said.

It downgraded China's forecast by 0.8 percentage point to 4.8 percent in 2022 after 8.1 percent growth in 2021, with growth to edge higher again to 5.2 percent in 2023.

Pandemic-induced disruptions related to China's zero-tolerance Covid-19 policy and protracted financial stress among property developers prompted the downgrade, the IMF said.

The IMF also cut its forecast for the Euro area by 0.4 percentage point to 3.9 percent in 2022, and said growth there would slow to 2.5 per cent in 2023. The Fund cut by 1.2 percentage points each its 2022 growth forecast for Brazil and Mexico, Latin America's largest economies. Brazil is now seen growing 0.3 percent this year and Mexico 2.8 percent, while the region is expected to grow 2.4 percent, 0.6 percentage point below the previous forecast.

India and Japan saw their forecasts upgraded somewhat.

The IMF cautioned that the emergence of new Covid-19 variants could prolong the pandemic and induce renewed economic disruptions, while supply chain disruptions, energy price volatility, and localized wage pressures posed further risks.

It revised up its 2022 inflation forecasts for both advanced and developing economies, and said elevated price pressures were likely to persist longer than previously forecast given ongoing supply chain disruptions and high energy prices. It said inflation was expected to average 3.9 percent in advanced economies and 5.9 percent in emerging market and developing economies in 2022 before subsiding in 2023, aided by moderated growth in fuel and food prices over that period.

Australian Inflation Surges in Q4

SYDNEY (Dispatches) - Australia's core inflation flew to its fastest annual pace since 2014 in the December quarter as fuel and housing costs led broad-based price pressures, a shock that will stoke market speculation of an early hike in interest rates.

Data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics out on Tuesday showed the headline consumer price index (CPI) rose 1.3 per cent in the fourth quarter and 3.5 per cent for the year, topping forecasts.

The trimmed mean measure of core inflation favored by the Reserve Bank of Australia (RBA) jumped 1.0 per cent in the quarter, the largest increase since 2008.

The annual pace picked up to 2.6 per cent, above both the 2.3 per cent forecast and the middle of the RBA's 2 per cent to 3 per cent target range.

That will be a surprise to the RBA, which had expected core inflation would not reach 2.5 per cent until the end of 2023, a major reason it did not expect to hike rates this year.

That outlook will now be sorely challenged when the RBA Board meets on February 1. Analysts generally assume it will keep rates at 0.1 per cent but could well call an end to bond buying, part of its quantitative easing campaign.

"The RBA is all but certain to end its asset purchase scheme at its meeting next week," said Ben Udy, an economist at Capital Economics. "Our expectation for wage growth to firm up over the course of this year means the Bank should have enough evidence to hike rates by November."

The rising cost of living, coupled with sky-high housing prices, is also shaping up to be a bone of political contention in a national election due by May. The ABS noted a boom in home building combined with shortages of materials and labour to drive the largest increase in new dwelling prices in two decades.

Today's data emboldened markets, which have long wagered the RBA was behind the curve on inflation and would have to tighten early, perhaps even by May this year.

A rise to 0.25 per cent is fully priced in by June along with three more moves to 1.0 per cent by year end.

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Persian Gulf Economies To Grow Faster in 2022

LONDON (Dispatches) - The economies in the six-member (Persian) Gulf Cooperation Council will grow at their fastest paces in several years, according to a Reuters poll of economists who cautioned the risk to that outlook was skewed to the downside.

Crude oil prices, a major driver for Persian Gulf economies, climbed to their highest since 2014 on Wednesday, driven by escalating global political tensions involving major producers including United Arab Emirates and Russia, which could worsen already tight supplies.

That is bullish news for the six wealthy oil-exporting countries in the region.

The Jan. 11-19 poll of 25 economists forecast all six economies in the Gulf Cooperation Council would grow faster this year than was expected three months ago.

Saudi Arabia was predicted to top the list with growth of 5.7%, followed by Kuwait and UAE with 5.3% and 4.8% respectively.

Economic growth in Qatar, Oman and Bahrain was expected to average between 3%-4% for 2022. If realized, that would be the best these countries have witnessed in several years.

"Despite relatively tight fiscal policy, and some external headwinds, we expect the (P) GCC economies to see faster growth in 2022 as they continue to build on the progress made last year," said Khatija Haque, head of research and chief economist at Emirates NBD.

"While the outlook for 2022 remains broadly constructive, there is still a high degree of uncertainty especially with regards to the evolution of the coronavirus pandemic."

As the global economy deals with the prospect of persistent inflation, the region's price outlook was modest, but varied.

Inflation was expected to stay between 2.0% and 2.8% this year, with the lowest reading for the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Oman at 2.0% and the highest for Qatar at 2.8%.

Saudi Arabia, the world's largest crude oil exporter and the region's economic and political heavyweight, will see 5.7% economic growth this year. If realized, it would be the fastest growth since 2012 when oil averaged around \$111 per barrel.

Apart from an upgrade to the median forecast from the October Reuters poll, the range of forecasts also showed higher highs and higher lows.

The UAE, a global trade hub and the PGCC's second-biggest economy, was forecast to grow 4.8% this year, the fastest since 2015.

Dependency on energy prices has the attendant risk that any disruption in prices due to geopolitical tensions and a slowdown in the global economy could hurt the recovery.

Nine of 10 economists who answered an additional question said a decline in oil prices and new coronavirus variants were the biggest threats to (P) GCC economic growth this year.

"The risk of oil price declines is still the biggest risk for the (P) GCC region, while supply chain disruptions will continue to play a role and throw a wrench into global growth, but probably not so much for (P) GCC economies," said Ralf Wiegert, MENA economics team head at IHS Markit.

S.Korea's GDP Growth Climbs to 11-Year High



SEOUL (Dispatches) - South Korea's economy expanded at the fastest pace in 11 years in 2021 helped by a jump in exports and construction activity, tempering declines in capital investment and a slow recovery in the coronavirus-hit service sectors.

Record exports drove the rebound but swathes of the economy have fallen behind. Jobs are still vanishing across manufacturing and service sectors, a reminder that liberal President Moon Jae-in's promises to boost employment have not materialized.

Hours after Bank of Korea data showed the economy expanded 4.0% last year, hundreds of small business owners plan to gather near the National Assembly in Seoul to shave their heads in protest against social distancing rules that have hammered retail and service sector sales.

Sentiment remains pessimistic as South Koreans head to the polls for the 2022 Presidential election slated for March 9.

The main candidates from the ruling and opposition parties have seized on the discontent, making an equitable society a centerpiece of their policy visions.

The BOK expects GDP to grow 3.0% this year as Asia's fourth-largest economy benefits from strength in semiconductor exports and increased public spending, though record domestic COVID-19 cases this week are a threat to consumption.

"Global demand for our chips is resilient and strong exports will keep (South Korea's) growth momentum solid," said Hwang Sang-pil, head of BOK's Economics Statistics department.

"People are getting used to social distancing curbs. Activity was slower in December but the hit is smaller than before."

Poor Nations Pay Highest Debt Service in 20 Years

JOHANNESBURG (Dispatches) - Developing countries are paying more to service their debt than at any other time in the past two decades, with a heavier burden on the horizon if the United States raises interest rates this year as expected, a leading debt campaigner said.

Many developing nations have been hit hard by the economic fallout from the global pandemic. And while wealthy creditor countries granted the poorest ones temporary relief through a Debt Service Suspension Initiative (DSSI), that program is now expiring and governments must resume payments.

The warning from the UK-based Jubilee Debt Campaign echoed a call to action earlier this month from the World Bank, which said the pandemic-induced downturn had left around 60% of low-income countries in or at high risk of debt distress. "The debt crisis continues to engulf lower income countries, with no end in sight unless there is urgent action on debt relief," Heidi Chow, Jubilee's Executive Director, said in a statement.

Data compiled by Jubilee showed that developing country debt payments increased 120% between 2010 and 2021, reaching their highest level since 2001.

Average government external debt payments represented 14.3% of government revenue in 2021, more than double the 6.8% recorded in 2010.

The U.S. Federal Reserve is due to meet this week and markets are pricing in four interest rate hikes for this year. Higher Fed rates will likely make borrowing more expensive for emerging market countries, which will need to price debt at a premium as safe haven baseline U.S. Treasuries become more attractive to investors.

Globally, 54 countries are now in debt crisis, according to Jubilee, meaning debt payments are undermining the ability of governments to protect the basic economic and social rights of their citizens.

German Firms Fear Supply Chain Pain

BERLIN (Dispatches) - German companies doing business in China are worried the Omicron coronavirus variant will trigger more strict lockdown measures from Beijing that could exacerbate supply chain problems, the DIHK Chamber of Commerce said.

"The Chinese strategy with targeted lockdowns has been very efficient so far," Jens Hildebrandt, DIHK's executive board member in China, told Reuters in an interview.

But the more contagious Omicron variant could challenge the zero-Covid approach by

Chinese authorities, especially as more Chinese citizens will travel across the country due to the upcoming holiday season, Hildebrandt said.

"There will be a lot of travel despite warnings," he said.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) on Friday called on China to reassess its zero-Covid approach given the emergence of the highly contagious Omicron variant.

IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva said the strategy, which has included sealing off entire cities with millions of citizens, had increasingly proved to be a burden for the domestic and global economy.

"The criticism of the IMF is not entirely unjustified," Hildebrandt said.

But he added Beijing would probably stick to its zero-Covid strategy, in part because scientific studies suggested Chinese vaccines were not as effective against Omicron as mRNA vaccines from Western countries.

The DIHK's concerns were echoed by the BDI industry association.

"Should the Omicron variant also be transmitted more quickly and easily in China, this could again become a bottleneck for global supply chains and fuel a recession in certain sectors of German industry," BDI said in its "Global Growth Outlook" published yesterday.

With the Olympic Games starting in Beijing next week, thousands of foreigners would enter the country and increase the infection risk from Omicron, potentially leading to more strict lockdowns, BDI warned.

This could pose new challenges for producers and exporters as well as companies at the end of the supply chain, it said.

"The bottlenecks would probably also be accompanied by higher prices, which would continue to affect inflation," BDI said. "The development of the coronavirus pandemic in China thus poses a risk for the recovery process of the German industry."

Millions of Under 12 Iranian To Get COVID Vaccine

TEHRAN (MNA) - Ministry of Health Official Mohammad Mehdi Gooya announced that Iranian children of the age 9-12 can receive the COVID-19 vaccine.

After the vaccination of this group, the younger group will also be called to receive the vaccine, according to Gooya.

According to the latest statistics released by the Iranian

Health Ministry on Tuesday, 60,544,155 Iranians have received the first dose, 53,733,768 people the second dose, and 15,254,504 people the third dose of the COVID-19 vaccine or the booster.

This is while the daily infection rate has decreased sharply recently as more Iranians are getting vaccinated.



World Bank Berates Lebanon's Elite for Zombie Economy

DUBAI (Dispatches) - The World Bank blasted Lebanon's ruling class today for "orchestrating" one of the world's worst national economic depressions due to their exploitative grip on resources.

The global lender said the nation's elite were still abusing their position despite Lebanon suffering possibly one of the three biggest financial crashes globally since the 1850s.

"Lebanon's deliberate depression is orchestrated by the country's elite that has long captured the state and lived off its economic rents," the World Bank said in a press release attached to a report on the Lebanese economy.

"It has come to threaten the country's long-term stability and social peace," the released added, echoing public sentiments that have prompted angry protests in recent years.

Fuelled by massive debt and the unsustainable way it was financed, the crisis has slashed Lebanon's gross domestic product (GDP) by 58.1 percent since 2019, plummeting to an estimated US\$21.8 billion (RM91 billion) in 2021, the World Bank said.

Already one of the most unequal countries, millions more have been pushed into poverty. The World Bank expected those below the poverty line to have risen by as much as 28 percentage points by the end of 2021, after an increase of 13 percentage points in 2020.

Government revenues collapsed by almost half in 2021 to reach 6.6 per cent of GDP: the lowest ratio globally after Somalia and Yemen, the bank said.

Real GDP is estimated to have declined by 10.5 per cent last year, according to the report, while gross debt is estimated to have reached 183 per cent per cent of GDP, a ratio only exceeded by Japan, Sudan and Greece.

"Deliberate denial during deliberate depression is creating long-lasting scars on the economy and society," said Saroj Kumar Jha, the World Bank's regional director of the Mashreq.

"Over two years into the financial crisis, Lebanon has yet to identify, least of all embark upon, a credible path toward economic and financial recovery."

While government finances improved in 2021 that was driven by a decline in spending even steeper than in revenues, the World Bank said.

It projects a fiscal deficit of 0.4 percent of GDP in 2021 from 3.3 per cent of GDP last year, helped by a recovery in tourism. Arrivals leapt 101.2 per cent in the first seven months of last year, though still impacted by the pandemic.

But a sudden halt to capital inflows and a large current account deficit was steadily eroding reserves, the World Bank said.



Lebanon began talks with the IMF on Monday, hoping to secure a bailout — something Beirut has failed to achieve since 2020, with no sign of long-delayed economic reforms sought by donors.

"This elite commands the main economic resources, generating large rents and dividing the spoils of a dysfunctional state," the World Bank said.

Lebanon's politicians, former militia leaders and others from families wielding influence for generations over the Christian and Muslim communities often acknowledge corruption exists. But they generally deny individual responsibility and say they are doing their best to rescue the economy.

The crisis has caused massive losses in the financial system, estimated by the government in December at US\$69 billion.

"Worryingly, key public and private actors continue to resist recognition of these losses, perpetuating the zombie-like state of the economy," the World Bank said.

The nosediving exchange rate — the Lebanese pound has lost more than 90 per cent of its value since 2019 — should have boosted exports. "This did not happen," the World Bank said, hindered by pre-crisis economic fundamentals, global conditions and the institutional environment.

Pfizer-BioNTech Begin Omicron Vaccine Trial



WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - Pfizer and BioNTech have begun enrollment for a clinical trial to test the safety and immune response of their Omicron-specific Covid-19 vaccine in adults aged up to 55, the companies said in a statement.

Pfizer's CEO Albert Bourla has previously said that the pharmaceutical giant could be ready to file for regulatory approval of the shot by March.

The company's head of vaccine research Kathrin Jansen said in a statement that while current data showed that boosters against the original Covid strain continued to protect against severe outcomes with Omicron, the company was acting out of caution.

"We recognize the need to be prepared in the event this protection wanes over time and to potentially help address Omicron and new variants in the future," she said.

Ugur Sahin, CEO of the German biotech company BioNTech added that the protection of the original vaccine against mild and moderate Covid appeared to wane more rapidly against Omicron.

"This study is part of our science-based approach to develop a variant-based vaccine that achieves a similar level of protection against Omicron as it did with earlier variants but longer duration of protection."

The trial will involve 1,420 people aged 18-55.

A spokesperson for Pfizer said that it did not include people older than 55 because the goal of the study was to examine the immune response of participants dosed, rather than estimate vaccine efficacy.

The trial is taking place across the United States and South Africa, and the first participant was dosed in North Carolina. The volunteers are split into three groups.

The first involves people who previously received two doses of the current Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine 90-180 days prior to enrollment, and will receive one or two doses of the Omicron vaccine.

The second will be people who got three doses of the current vaccine 90-180 days prior to the study and will receive either another dose of the original shot or an Omicron-specific vaccine.

The third and final group are people who have never previously received a Covid vaccine, and will receive three doses of the Omicron-specific vaccine.

The Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine was the first Covid shot to be authorized in the West, in December 2020.

Turkey Refutes...

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Turkey earlier denied that the problem was due to a fault at a pressure station on its side.

Iran's Oil Minister Javad Owji said at the weekend that Turkey had urged Iran to continue gas exports and postpone repair operations.

"But considering that it was risky and could cause incidents, we had no other choice but to bring down the (gas) pressure and exports," Owji told local media. "Based on our contract and safety issues, we have to fix the leak at the first possible opportunity. But the cold weather made us postpone it for a few days. This problem definitely needs to be resolved while we see this as a matter of principle," he added.

The limited supply, along with high demand in household gas use due to colder-than-normal weather, have forced BOTAŞ to order industrial sites and power plants to slash gas use and the government to impose three days of power cuts in organized industrial zones.

More than half of Turkey's electricity is produced in gas-powered plants and manufacturers, particularly automakers, warned the outage would hit output and exports, as some companies temporarily halted production as of Monday.

BOTAŞ on Monday announced an exemption for companies making essential goods including medicines, milk and meat products. "Our priority is supplying households and workplaces, especially office spaces, as we do not want them to be without gas in these cold winter conditions," Dönmez said.

He explained that the supplier has to fulfill obligations on delivery volumes and conditions for gas pressure under the written contract, which he said, has been relayed to the other party.

He reassured that the country is not without a plan to deal with such challenges, with gas storage facilities at full capacity to cope with the higher consumption rates.

Nonetheless, he said that the current consumption in 73 out of the 81 provinces is unprecedented.

"We have not had any problems with energy withdrawal from our critical production facilities in cities, especially for household consumption or for the manufacturing sector," the minister noted.

However, to ensure no critical shortages, he said discussions took place with key organizations in the industrial sector on short-term cutbacks. "Some of the industrialists wanted to stop at full capacity for a few days and then work. Some companies have energy-intensive processes, such as furnaces. We need to supply gas and electricity at a minimum level for them," Dönmez explained.

Industry and Technology Minister Mustafa Varank on Monday said that the manufacturing sector should be able to weather the drop in production due to power cuts.

"The industrial sector is strong enough to overcome this period that will last for a few days," Varank said.

Turkey is almost fully dependent on imported gas from Russia, Azerbaijan and Iran. According to the latest official data, Iran alone provided 16% of Turkey's natural gas needs in the first 10 months of 2021. Energy prices have risen sharply in Turkey, driven by global increases and a 44% decline in the lira's value against the dollar last year.

Envoy Protests...

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"Similarly, in Yemen, the systematic and serious breaches of IHL have caused the widespread and deliberate destruction of civilian infrastructures, targeted killings of civilians, including women and children, and strict unlawful blockades of civilian ports and airports," Takht-Ravanchi added.

He said, "The UN Security Council has a duty to ensure the protection of civilians and compel violators of international human rights law to immediately end such flagrant crimes and hold them accountable for their crimes."

"It is unfortunate and worrying that in the Middle East region, including in the occupied Palestinian territories and Yemen, the implementation of international humanitarian law is brutally violated," Takht-Ravanchi noted.

Yemen, the Arab world's most impoverished country, has been under military aggression by a Saudi-led coalition since 2015. Saudi Arabia, through the war and an all-out blockade, has been seeking to change Yemen's ruling structure in favor of former Riyadh-friendly officials.

Saudi Arabia, Iraq...

FROM PAGE 1

However, another hiccup bedeviling trade ties is Iraq's failure to pay its piling debt from imports of energy and other goods to Iran.

A spokesman for the Iraqi Ministry of Electricity says his country is ready to pay back its debt for imports of gas and electricity to Iran.

The exact amount of the Iraqi debt is not known. In the past, Iranian officials have said between \$6 billion and \$7 billion of Iranian funds are held in the Arab country.

Iraq has paid some of its debts over the years, but US sanctions and economic troubles in the Arab country have made the transfer of money much slower than Iran expected.

Iraq's former prime minister Haider al-Abadi told the New York Times in 2019 that Baghdad was in a precarious situation with the United States because the Americans failed to "look at the geopolitics of Iraq".

Removal of Sanctions...

FROM PAGE 1

Besides trying to have the sanctions removed, the government is also trying to "neutralize the sanctions," he said, adding that proper economic relations with the neighbors constitute one way of negating the bans.

The president said his administration was determined to enhance Iran's economic and commercial relations with foreign countries, which he said were not as advanced as its political ties.

"We should establish some [form of] balance in the country's foreign relations," Raisi noted.

For instance, the president said, the country could unlock a massive economic and trade capacity in its relations with its 15-strong neighbors.

He said his recent trip to Tajikistan was followed by a triple increase in the volume of the bilateral business relations.

Raesi said his trips to Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan also led to positive developments in the Islamic Republic's economic relations with the ex-Soviet republics.

By the same token, the roughly-\$3-billion volume of economic relations with Russia could be enhanced to as much as \$10 billion, he said.

Regarding his recent trip to Russia, President Raesi said the meeting with his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin in Moscow featured discussions over bilateral and regional issues "with the countries' [respective] national interests as the centerpiece."

The trip, Raisi said, should result in expansion of the bilateral relations in such fields as energy, agriculture, and industry.

"Exports of [Iranian] agricultural products and imports of strategic commodities from Russia, given the possibility of eliminating [trade] tariffs, were among the issues that were discussed," he added.

Raisi said the visit "was accompanied by smiles, but smiles alone do not do anything in favor of the people. Interaction with the world and trips [like this] should result in development of [the concerned parties'] fields of energy, industry, and the peoples' lives."

The Iranian president noted that the two sides discussed "the need for breaking the US dollar's dominance on the countries' monetary and financial interactions."

"I and Mr. Putin agreed that a lot of commercial transactions between the two sides could be done using [each side's] national currency," Raisi said.

Oil Output...

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Pointing to the plans to increase the country's gas production capacity, the official said: "Completion of the development project of South Pars phase 11, completion of some pressure-boosting projects in the existing phases of South Pars, and the development of Kish and North Pars gas fields are among the projects that the National Iranian Oil Company has on the agenda to increase the country's gas production capacity."

The Iranian Central Oil Fields Company (ICOFC), which operates some oil and gas fields in central Iran, also plans to increase its gas production capacity by 320 million cubic meters over the next eight years, Zobeidi added.

Back in November 2021, the Iranian Oil Ministry had announced that plans were underway to boost the country's crude oil capacity to near four million bpd by March 2022, returning to levels not seen since before the U.S. withdrew from the nuclear deal and re-imposed sanctions on the country's crude sales in 2018.

In the budget bill for the next Iranian calendar year (starts on March 21), special attention has been paid to improving oil and gas production and development of energy infrastructure across the country in order to boost the oil output to 3.952 million bpd.

Considering the new resource allocations for the development of the oil industry in the budget bill for the next fiscal year, the country's crude oil and gas condensate production is expected to increase by 144,000 bpd, Tasnim News Agency reported earlier this month.

NIOC...

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The CEO of the National Iranian Oil Company stated that current contract models fail to meet the interests of investors, adding: "The ecosystem of the country's economy indicates an abundance of liquidity inside, and despite these resources and the strong need to invest in oil and gas, these resources are not available, and this is a contradiction in the liquidity of the country's economy, and these conditions have severely affected the oil economy."

Underlining the need of the oil industry to attract \$160 billion in fresh investment, Khojastehmehr said: "If we want to ramp up crude oil output to 5.7 million barrels per day, we need almost \$90 billion in financial resources, and if we want to increase the daily gas production capacity from one billion cubic meters per day to 1.5 bcm/d by 2026, we have to invest \$70 billion."

Balotelli Named In Italy Squad

ROME (Dispatches) - Mario Balotelli was named in the Italy squad for the first time since 2018 on Monday, as the Adana Demirspor striker joined seven uncapped players in Roberto Mancini's 35-man training camp selection. Balotelli, who worked under Azzurri coach Mancini earlier in his career at Inter Milan and Manchester City, has not featured for the national team since September 2018. But the 31-year-old earned a recall for this week's three-day training camp after scoring eight goals in 18 league games to fire Adana Demirspor to fourth place in the Turkish Super Lig.

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Inter Milan Coach Inzaghi Positive for Covid-19

ROME (Dispatches) - Inter Milan coach Simone Inzaghi has tested positive for Covid-19, the Italian champions confirmed. Inzaghi, 45, "tested positive for Covid-19 today (Monday)," the northern club said in a brief statement. "The coach will now follow the protocols set out in the healthcare guidelines." Inter Milan, with a game in hand, are top of Serie A with a four-point lead on rivals Napoli and AC Milan. Because of the international break they are not due to play against until the weekend of February 5-6, when they are set to face city rivals Milan.

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SPORTS

THURSDAY JANUARY 27, 2022

Berrettini Outlasts Monfils to Set Up Nadal Clash in Semis

MELBOURNE (Dispatches) - Seventh seed Matteo Berrettini found a higher gear in the face of a heroic fightback from France's Gael Monfils to script a 6-4 6-4 3-6 3-6 6-2 win today and become the first Italian man to reach the Australian Open semi-finals. The 25-year-old, who reached last year's final at Wimbledon, will take on 20-times major winner Rafa Nadal of Spain for a place in the final at the Rod Laver Arena. Berrettini seemed to be cruising to his third straight win over the flamboyant Frenchman when he won the first two sets but the 35-year-old former world number six forced a deciding set at the floodlit Rod Laver Arena. After an intense battle of three hours and 49 minutes and the clock closing in on 1am local time, the 25-year-old Italian sealed the contest on his third match point when Monfils found the net on a forehand return. Earlier Nadal dug deep into his immense reserves of resilience for the second match running to keep his dream of a 21st Grand Slam title alive at the Australian Open, as unseeded American Madison Keys reached the women's semi-finals. Nadal raced to a two-set quarter-final lead against Denis Shapovalov but then began to feel unwell, needing medical attention for a stomach complaint before surviving a four-hour thriller 6-3, 6-4, 4-6, 3-6, 6-3.

The Spanish sixth seed previously had to show all his experience and tenacity just to reach the quarter-final in an epic 28-minute tiebreak, and he somehow found the willpower again to cross the finish line, despite being badly hampered. "I started to feel not very well in my stomach so I just asked if they could do something," said Nadal of calling for medical assistance. "They just checked everything was all right and then I took some tablets to try to improve the situation. It was lucky that I was serving great in the fifth." Nadal won a warm-up tournament and continues to amaze even himself after being



out for most of 2021 with a chronic foot injury. He then caught Covid-19 in December. "I'm not 21 anymore!" he said. A frustrated Shapovalov smashed his racquet after losing and had a running battle with the chair umpire over the time Nadal was taking to serve, at one point calling the official "corrupt". Earlier on Rod Laver Arena, Keys continued her impeccable start to the 2022 season with a straight-sets destruction of fourth seed Barbora Krejčíková to set up a potential women's semi-final against Ashleigh Barty. The unseeded world number 51 Keys was a semi-finalist in 2015 but endured a terrible 2021 where she tumbled down the rankings. "It means a lot," said Keys, who won 6-3, 6-2 against the French Open champion Krejčíková, who needed medical attention in the heat during the first set. "Last year was really hard." Keys said she had to reset completely for the new campaign — and it clearly worked. She won an Adelaide warm-up event this month and has now amassed 11 straight match wins in Australia — equalling her tally for the whole of 2021. She will face either Barty or a fellow American, Jessica Pegula, in Thursday's semi-finals. World number one Barty, the 2019 French Open and 2021 Wimbledon champion, looks in irresistible form as she chases her first Australian Open crown and the first for an Australian woman in 44 years.



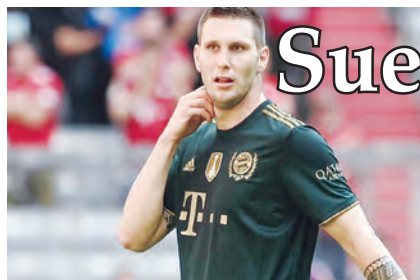
Watford Sack Head Coach Ranieri
LONDON (Dispatches) - Watford sacked head coach Claudio Ranieri after just over three months in charge following a dreadful run of results which has left the club in the Premier League's relegation zone. Ranieri's last game in charge was Friday's damaging 3-0 home defeat by fellow strugglers Norwich City. "The Hornets' Board recognizes Claudio as a man of great integrity and honor, who will always be respected here at Vicarage Road for his efforts in leading the team with dignity," Watford said in a statement. "However the board feels that, with nearly half of the Premier League campaign remaining, a change in the head coach position now will give a new appointment sufficient time... to achieve the immediate goal of retaining Premier League status." Watford, promoted last season, are in 19th position after seven defeats and one draw in their last eight games. The 70-year-old Ranieri took charge in October after Xisco Munoz parted ways with the club just seven league games into the season and with Watford in 14th place. It continues the revolving door policy operated by the club's owner Gino Pozzo who has made 13 managerial appointments in his nine years in charge of the club.

Bernal Undergoes Successful Surgery After Bus Crash

BOGOTA (Dispatches) - Bernal's cycling team Ineos Grenadiers said their lead rider's injuries were extensive. "Egan suffered a fractured vertebrae, a fractured right femur, a fractured right patella (kneecap), chest trauma, a punctured lung and several broken ribs," an Ineos team statement said. "Doctors were able to medically pin his right leg and stabilise the vertebrae fracture in two separate surgeries last night," Ineos said. The surgery was performed "keeping the neurological integrity intact and preserving the functionality of the involved segments," according to the clinic. Bernal's condition will be monitored "over the next 72 hours" in the clinic's intensive care unit. The Colombian suffered "chest trauma" and fractures of his kneecap and thighbone in Monday's accident close to his home town, around 30 kilometres outside of Bogota. "We are starting the process of rehabilitation immediately to achieve the best possible results with our patient," said the clinic. Transport police said Bernal ran into the back of a bus as it pulled up at a stop, suffering "multiple lacerations." Pictures shared on social media showed the reigning Giro d'Italia champion lying on the ground surrounded by teammates. The back of a bus with a huge dent in it is visible in the picture. Noted climber Bernal is considered amongst the very best road racers in the world and is a hero in Colombia, where he had been training ahead of the new season. Scheduled to race July's Tour de France as Ineos leader, the collision could derail Bernal's entire 2022 campaign. He was due to begin his season on February 10 at the four-day Tour de La Provence.

Oblak Tests Positive For Covid-19

MADRID (Dispatches) - Atletico Madrid goalkeeper Jan Oblak has tested positive for Covid-19, the Spanish club announced. Oblak "has tested positive for Covid-19," Atletico said in a brief statement. "Our goalkeeper remains isolated, strictly complying with the recommendations of the health authorities," the club added.



and several German media outlets claim he has already told Bayern he does not want to stay. Sule is said to be mulling offers from Chelsea, Newcastle United and Barcelona. Sule would be the third defender to leave Bayern in the last 12 months, after David

Sule Poised to Leave Bayern Munich

BERLIN (Dispatches) - Bundesliga leaders Bayern Munich are set to lose Niklas Sule at the end of the season, with the Germany defender reportedly having turned down a contract extension. The towering 26-year-old's deal ends in June and several German media outlets claim he has already told Bayern he does not want to stay. Sule is said to be mulling offers from Chelsea, Newcastle United and Barcelona. Sule would be the third defender to leave Bayern in the last 12 months, after David

Alaba's transfer to Real Madrid and Jerome Boateng's switch to Lyon. Club president Herbert Hainer last weekend said the club had "made an offer to Niklas" to renew his contract. "Now it's up to him to accept or not to accept that," he said. Sule has made 158 appearances for Bayern since they signed him from Hoffenheim in 2017 for €20 million (RM94 million) and he is set to be a key player for Germany at the World Cup in Qatar, which kicks off in November. He was part of the squad which won the Champions League in 2019/20, but missed the first six months of that season after suffering a torn cruciate ligament knee injury for the second time in his career.

Hector Wins Last Giant Slalom Before Beijing

VIENNA (Dispatches) - Sweden's Sara Hector claimed her third victory of the season in a women's World Cup giant slalom with an ice-cool performance in the second run in Kronplatz, Italy. Hector, who extended her lead in the discipline's World Cup rankings to almost 100 points, now heads to the Beijing Olympics full of confidence after finishing on the podium in the last five giant slaloms. The 29-year-old clocked a combined best time of two minutes 03.63 seconds to beat Slovakian Petra Vlhova, who had won the first run, by 0.15 seconds. France's Tessa Worley, a double world champion in giant slalom, took third place, 0.52 off the pace as American Mikaela Shiffrin paid dearly for a mistake in the steep part of the second run to finish fifth, 0.81 seconds behind Hector. Hector also made a mistake, losing speed as she went off the ideal trajectory, but she stayed composed and powered down the final part to seal an impressive win. The Swede leads the giant slalom World Cup rankings with 462 points to second-placed Worley's 367. Shiffrin is third on 361 points and Vlhova fourth on 331. In the overall World Cup standings, Shiffrin, who was hoping to take a 74th overall career victory, leads with 1,026 points but Vlhova is now 17 points behind. The women's giant slalom at the Olympics is scheduled for Feb. 7.



Suns Down Jazz For 7th Straight Win

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Devin Booker scored 33 points while Chris Paul added 27 points and 14 assists to lead the Phoenix Suns to a 115-109 victory over the Utah Jazz. Paul poured in 15 points in the fourth quarter as Phoenix came back from a five-point deficit early in the period. He also had nine rebounds in the game plus an uncharacteristic seven turnovers. Bismack Biyombo chipped in 16 points and 13 rebounds off the Phoenix bench. Cameron Johnson finished with 20 points as the Suns won their seventh straight game. Jordan Clarkson scored 22 points to lead the Jazz, who lost for the eighth time in their past 10 games. Utah's Trent Forrest added a career-high 17 points, the first time in his 67 career NBA games that he scored in double figures. Meanwhile Darius Garland posted one of three double-doubles for Cleveland, which frittered away all of a 15-point fourth-quarter lead before Garland's 3-pointer with 1:23 left gave the hosts Cleveland Cavaliers the lead for good in a 95-93 win over New York Knicks. The 3-pointer was the only one of the game for Garland, who finished with 13 points and 12 assists as the surging Cavaliers won for the seventh time in eight games. Kevin Love had 20 points and 11 rebounds off the Cleveland bench, and Evan Mobley added 15 points and 12 boards. RJ Barrett scored 24 points for the Knicks, who have lost four of their past five. Julius Randle had 18 points but missed a turnaround desperation 3-point attempt from near half-court at the buzzer. Meanwhile Nikola Vucevic scored 26 points and grabbed 15 rebounds as Chicago Bulls earned a narrow road 111-110 win over Oklahoma City Thunder despite nearly blowing a 28-point, third-quarter lead.

