

**Health Ministry Announced on Wednesday That the Number of Deaths From the Coronavirus Pandemic in Iran Increased to 134,238 With 185 More Iranians Killed by the Deadly Virus Over the Past 24 Hours**

# IRAN NEWS

**TEDPIX, the Main Index of Tehran Stock Exchange, Lost 845 Points to Close at 1.282m Points on Wednesday As Over 6.596b Securities Worth 50.228 Trillion Rials (About \$193m) Were Traded at the TSE**

**2 DOMESTIC**

**Tehran Ready to Up Contribution to UN Peacekeeping Missions**



> SEE PAGE 2

**3 DOMESTIC**

**Iran Urged to Invest in Mega Projects in Cuba**



> SEE PAGE 3

**4 INTERNATIONAL**

**Russia Says Some Troops Pull Back From Near Ukraine**



> SEE PAGE 4

**8 SPORTS**

**Man City Demolish Sporting; PSG Edge Real Madrid**



> SEE PAGE 8

## S. Korea Seeks To Resume Oil Import From Iran

TEHRAN (IRNA) - South Korean media outlets have reported that Seoul plans to resume crude oil import from Iran after three-year hiatus.

South Korea's Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced on Wednesday that Seoul and Tehran have held consultations to find a way out of years-long dispute over Iranian assets frozen in the South Korean banks as a result of the U.S.-imposed sanctions.

It is worth mentioning that more than 7 billion dollars of Iran's assets have been blocked for years in two banks in South Korea.

South Korean Yonhap News Agency reported that as multilateral talks to revive the 2015 Iran nuclear deal is entering final stage, Iranian banking and oil managers visit Seoul to hold talks with South Korean officials on stopped economic issues.

In the two-day visit that kicked off on Tuesday, the two sides discuss unfreezing of Iranian blocked money, as well as the possibility of resuming oil trade, as part of their efforts to prepare both countries for a situation that the US-imposed sanctions fade away. **See Page 7**

## Iraqi Delegation Due In Tehran to Sort Out Gas Export Problems

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Iranian Chairman of Iran-Iraq Chamber of Commerce Mr. Yahya Ale Eshaq says an Iraqi delegation is to visit Tehran to talk on ways of settling Iraq's debts for export of energy and electricity.

Speaking to ILNA, Ale Eshaq said one of the Iraq Electricity Ministry officials has talked about Iran's gas exports to Iraq as well as debts to Iran for export of energy to Iraq and has announced an Iraqi delegation probably will visit Tehran to settle the differences and paying the debts.

He said Iraqis are worried about the condition of Iran's gas because the domestic gas consumption in Iran rises and exports of gas to Iraq may face problem and they are looking for getting more gas from Iran. He said Iraqis think that decrease in gas exports to Iraq is due to Iraq's debts to Iran and for this reason they want to dispatch a delegation to Tehran to resolve the problem. **See Page 7**

## Washington Called for Political Statement on Commitment to JCPOA



LONDON (FT) - Iran has proposed that the U.S. Congress makes a "political statement" of its commitment to a nuclear accord with Tehran as talks in Vienna to revive the deal reach a critical juncture.

In an exclusive interview with the Financial Times, Hossein Amirabdollahian, foreign minister, said Washington had failed to address Iran's demand for guarantees that no party is able to abandon the deal, as the US did under former president Donald Trump in 2018. Tehran also wants all sanctions imposed by Trump to be lifted.

"As a matter of principle, public opinion in Iran cannot accept as a guarantee the words of a head of state, let alone the United States, due to the withdrawal of Americans from the JCPOA," Amirabdollahian said, using the acronym for the accord, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

Experts say it is virtually impossible for the Biden administration to provide the legal assurances Tehran demands. But Amirabdollahian said he had told Iran's negotiators to propose to Western parties that "at least their parliaments or parliament speakers, including the U.S. Congress, can declare in the form of a political statement their commitment to the agreement and return to the JCPOA implementation".

President Joe Biden wants to revive the 2015 deal, under which Iran agreed to curb its nuclear activity in return for the easing of sanctions. But while indirect talks between Washington and Tehran are taking place in Vienna, US and European officials have repeatedly warned that — given the nuclear gains Iran has made since 2019 — time is running out to save the accord.

Biden said the U.S. would return to the deal if Iran agreed to reverse the aggressive advances it had made to its nuclear program over the past three years, with the republic enriching uranium at its highest ever levels and close to weapons-grade.

Amirabdollahian said: "Iran's commitments are as clear as a mathematical formula. It is absolutely clear what we are supposed to do and how these measures will be verified through the IAEA [the UN nuclear watchdog]. Therefore the other side can have no concern; But we remain concerned primarily about the guarantees [that the US would not withdraw]."

Expressing Tehran's frustrations with Washington's position as weeks of talks in Vienna appear at risk of stalling, Amirabdollahian said: "We are facing problems during this period because the other party lacks a serious initiative." **See Page 7**

## ViewPoint U.S. Acting Against Humanity

For decades world arrogance mainly Westerners have weaponized "sanctions" and they use sanctions against the countries and nations to bring them down rather than resorting to waging war and using military force because this is an effective and cheapest means for war without suffering casualty. Of course this weapon may be ineffective against those countries which have strong economic infrastructures and in this case, the Westerners may be forced to resort to military force.

War by itself is not essentially good no matter in the form of military or other forms because it destroys nations and their wealth and infrastructures but war of sanctions is against humanity that the U.S. and its Western allies are leaders in this form of war.

In recent decades many countries and their nations have suffered due to sanctions either unilateral or the UN-approved ones and currently countries like Syria, Yemen and North Korea and to some extent the Islamic Republic of Iran are suffering from this type of crime which is fully against humanity.

On Monday an Iranian envoy to the United Nations denounced as "crime against humanity" the imposition of sanctions against the nation, saying such unilateral restrictive measures have put the lives of vulnerable people at risk by hampering their access to medicine.

Zahra Ershadi, deputy permanent representative of Iran to the UN, made the remarks at the UN Commission for Social Development.

She complained that illegal sanctions have made it very difficult for vulnerable groups in countries such as Iran to access basic medical items and thus put their lives at stake.

The Iranian envoy also said that the import of medicines as well as medical equipment and hygiene products have been severely hindered by restrictions on foreign exchange resources.

The illegal measures have a direct negative impact on the lives of the most vulnerable Iranian citizens, including women, children, and patients, she said, adding that many children have died as a result of such inhumane bans.

"As our president stated in his address to the UNGA session, unilateral sanctions against the Iranian people, particularly sanctions on medicine and humanitarian items, are criminal acts on par with crimes committed against humanity. Those who sanction countries should not go unpunished for such heinous crimes," Ershadi asserted. **See Page 7**

## Israel Trying to Sabotage Vienna Process

TEHRAN (PressTV) - With the talks in Vienna having entered a sensitive stage, the Israeli regime appears to be attempting to sabotage the diplomatic process between Iran and the P4+1 countries in Vienna on revitalizing the 2015 agreement, a report says.

The Noor News website, which is affiliated with Iran's top security body, the Supreme National Security Council (SNSC), sounded the alarm on Tuesday after an Israeli delegation held separate meetings with the United Nations nuclear watchdog's secretary-general and Russia's permanent representative to international organizations in Vienna.

"Zionists' clear and unexpected presence in Vienna is undoubtedly a prohibitive element in the way of the progress of the Vienna talks in the current sensitive circumstances," the website tweeted on Tuesday.

"The dialogue between the representatives of the Zionist regime and [Rafael] Grossi and [Mikhail] Ulyanov, whatever its objective might have been, is a step towards the inherently destructive role of this regime," it added.

The Israeli delegation that met Grossi and Ulyanov featured Joshua Zarka, an Israeli foreign ministry official, and David Nussbaum, the regime's envoy to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), among others.

Ulyanov described the meeting with the Israeli envoy as "a very good meeting and interesting conversation." Zarka thanked the Russian envoy "for a frank and important discussion."

The Israeli regime has invariably opposed Iran's peaceful nuclear activities. It acted as the driving force behind the former U.S. administration's departure from the deal in 2018.

Over the years, the regime has assassinated at least seven Iranian nuclear scientists and conducted several sabotage operations against the Islamic Republic's nuclear facilities.

In line with its attempts to cast Iran's nuclear program in a bad light, the regime's successive officials have been running a raucous propaganda campaign to sabotage the Islamic Republic's nuclear activities.

This is while the regime itself is the Middle East region's sole nuclear arms possessor that, thanks to US backing, has evaded joining the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). The meetings involving the Israeli officials came right after Grossi called the achieving of an agreement in Vienna "possible."

Ulyanov added that his meeting with the Israeli officials saw them discussing "a number of most topical issues, including in the context of the forthcoming session of IAEA Board of Governors." Observers warned that Tel Aviv might be trying to railroad the Board of Governors into adopting an anti-Iranian stance. **See Page 7**

## Figures by OPEC Sources Confirm Iran Oil Output Rises in 2021

Figures by the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) have confirmed a rising trend in TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iranian oil output last year despite sanctions imposed on the country by the United States, shows a report by Iran's official IRNA news agency.

The Tuesday report by IRNA cited figures provided to the OPEC by secondary sources showing that Iranian crude oil output had reached an average of 2.4 million barrels per day in 2021, up 21% from 2020.

The figures showed that the rising trend continued into this year as output increased to 2.503 million bpd in January, up 21,000 bpd against December data.

Iranian oil output in 2021 was 10% higher than OPEC's average production over that year, said the report.

The figures come against the backdrop of reports and official statements suggesting that Iran's crude oil exports hit three-year highs in 2021 despite continued American pressure on the country's energy sector.

Some industry sources have estimated that Iran's exports rose to 1.65 million bpd in March 2021 while others believe that exports began to rise to over 1 million bpd for a first time in US sanctions era in December last year. **See Page 7**

Sokhan Gostar Institute

# IRAN NEWS

PRIVATE ENGLISH NEWSPAPER IN IRAN



Advertisement Department  
021-44253335-39

www.irannewsdaily.com  
info@irannewsdaily.com

@irannewsdaily @irannewsdaily



# Leader to Speak Today on Occasion of Tabriz Uprising

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei will deliver a speech today (Thursday) on the occasion of the 1978 uprising of the people of Tabriz.

The Supreme Leader's speech will take place at about 10:25 a.m. local time and will be broadcast live. Through his video speech, Ayatollah Khamenei will talk to the people of East Azarbaijan Province, northwestern Iran.

Uprising of the people of Tabriz, the capital city of the province, occurred on February 18, 1978.

## Tehran Ready to Up Contribution to UN Peacekeeping Missions

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's permanent ambassador to the United Nations says the country is fully prepared to increase its engagement in the world body's peacekeeping operations through various means.

Majid Takht Ravanchi made the remarks before the UN's Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations on Tuesday.

Addressing the body, the envoy reiterated the Islamic Republic's strong commitment and support to the UN peacekeeping missions as the "flagship" activity of the United Nations.

"In this regard, my Government stands ready to increase its contribution to the peacekeeping operations logistically and militarily by deploying troops, military observers, police, and civilians," noted the official.

The Islamic Republic first announced its preparedness to contribute to the United Nations' peacekeeping missions by providing security forces and logistical support in 2016.



Back then, Iran's former UN envoy, Gholam-Ali Khoshrou, underlined the need for strict adherence to the UN Charter's principles in any peacekeeping operation and the host countries' responsibility towards protection of the civilian lives.

Takht Ravanchi laid emphasis on the same imperatives as well as "non-use of force except in self-defense and impartiality."

"Therefore, any military intervention by the United Nations or by any foreign forces under the pretext of protection of civilians should be avoided," the ambassador asserted.

"We strongly believe that the respect for principles of sovereign equality, political independence, territorial integrity of all States and non-intervention in matters that are essentially within their domestic jurisdiction should also be upheld in this regard."

## Iran's Homegrown Omicron Vaccine Shows 100% Effectiveness in Animal Studies

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's Shifa Pharmed Industrial Group has announced the success of its Omicron-targeted vaccine in animal studies, saying the vaccine showed 100% effectiveness against the highly contagious COVID-19 variant.

In a statement, Shifa Pharmed Industrial Group, which produced the homegrown COVIran Barekat vaccine against the coronavirus, said it began to develop a new vaccine targeting the Omicron variant soon after the first case of infection with the variant was reported in the country.

"Preliminary results of studies on this updated vaccine indicate 100% effectiveness against the Omicron variant by this new and safe vaccine in animal studies," the statement read.

Shifa Pharmed pointed to the spread of the variant at an unprecedented rate, saying the company has already begun the mass production of its Omicron-targeted vaccine.

It added that it has also presented the protocol for conducting the clinical trial of the vaccine to Iran's Food and Drug Administration and the Medical Ethics Committee to obtain the necessary permits.

Iran has so far administered more than 138 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines, fully vaccinating nearly 54 million people, including 21 million who have received three shots. The vaccines have been either domestically produced or imported from other countries.

The country has been fighting one of the deadliest coronavirus outbreaks since the virus emerged in the country in early 2020. So far, over 6,876,000 people have tested positive for the highly infectious disease in Iran, with 134,238 deaths reported as of Wednesday.

Late last month, Iran's Health Minister Behrang Amini announced the start of a new wave of the coronavirus outbreak in the country as hospitals reported a growing number of referrals with infections related to the Omicron variant.

"Unfortunately, we should declare that we have practically stepped into the sixth wave with the rise in hospitalization and outpatient cases," Amini wrote on Twitter on January 27.

New cases and deaths have increased since then. On Wednesday, 16,310 new infections were recorded and 185 people lost their lives.

## Iranian Exports to Iraq Increase 15% Compared to Last Year

TEHRAN (IFP) - A member of the board of directors of the Iran-Iraq Joint Chamber has said in the first 10 months of this year, \$7.280 billion worth of goods were exported to Iraq.

Hamid Hosseini said for the first time, during that period, Iraq exported \$920 million worth of goods to Iran, showing a 15 percent rise compared to last year.

According to the official, the imports from Iraq were done out of the frozen Iranian assets in the neighboring country.

He said that before this, Iraq's exports to Iran were about \$ 100 million a year, adding with this amount of imports by Iran, Iraq's rank was raised from the

twenty-sixth importer to the sixth place.

Hosseini noted that importing goods from Iraq means that trade is not one-sided and Iraq also benefits from establishing trade relations with Iran, and this will help develop trade ties between the two countries.

He said the recent decrease in Covid cases and the increase in commodity prices have been conducive to the rise in exports, but there are still problems for exporting technical and engineering projects and participating in tenders in Iraq.

Hosseini expressed hope Iran will be able to use the current possibilities to develop trade with Iraq.

## JCPOA Has Turned Into "Empty Shell" for Tehran



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Iran's top security official has said that the United States and its European allies have failed to live up to their commitments under the 2015 Iran deal and left the deal an empty promise for Iran.

In a tweet on Wednesday, Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council Ali Shamkhani said the agreement, officially called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), has become an "empty shell" for Iran given its inability to keep sanctions away from the country.

"The U.S. and Europe have failed the test of fulfilling their commitments in the JCPOA. Now, the JCPOA has turned into an empty shell for Iran in the economic and sanctions removal areas," Shamkhani said.

He added that Iran will not engage in any negotiations with "oath-breaker America" and "idle Europe."

Washington left the JCPOA in 2018 and began to implement what it called the "maximum pressure" campaign of sanctions against the Islamic Republic, depriving the country of the economic benefits of the accord, including the removal of sanctions, for which Iran had agreed to certain caps on its nuclear activities.

# Iran-Pakistan Mutual Coordination Increasing

ISLAMABAD (IRNA) - The commander of the Islamic Republic of Iran Border Guards says security of the joint border of the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan is satisfactory as compared to the past adding that mutual coordination has been increasing in this regards.

Brigadier General Ahmad Ali Goudarzi said on the sidelines of the visit of Iranian interior minister said during the visit of Ahmad Vahidi we have come to know that both Iran and Pakistan must protect their borders through close interaction and cooperation.

Referring to his visit to Karachi a month ago to observe the International Barracuda-XI Exercise in the Arabian Sea hosted by the Pakistan Maritime Security Agency said that it helped the two countries to enhance their cooperation in maritime sector.

The commander of Iran's border guards said frequent meetings will facilitate the economic affairs of both countries, especially in the maritime sector, as well as address the problems of fishermen, who sometimes enter other country's waters by mistake and later detained.

He added regarding the fight on trafficking, various meetings have been held and have produced satisfactory results.

Brigadier General Ahmad Ali Goudarzi went on to say that it seems that the security and economic officials of both countries are now more willing to cooperate and solve problems than in the past.

## Aluminum Ingot Output Rises 24% in 10 Months

TEHRAN (MNA) - Production of aluminum ingot in Iran rose 24 percent during the first ten months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21, 2021-January 20, 2022), as compared to the same period of time in the past year.

The country's ten-month aluminum ingot output stood at 453,436 tons, while the figure was 364,783 tons in the same time span of the previous year.

As previously announced by Iranian Mines and Mining Industries Development and Renovation Organization (IMIDRO), the production of aluminum ingot in Iran rose 61 percent during the previous Iranian calendar year 1399 (ended on March 20, 2021), compared to the figure for the preceding year.

The country's aluminum ingot output stood at 446,800 tons in the previous year.

Iran's major aluminum producers had managed to produce 278,318 tons of the product in the Iranian calendar year 1398.

The country's aluminum ingot production in the Iranian calendar year 1398 had declined eight percent in comparison to the figure for its preceding year.

IMIDRO data show that among the country's top producers, Iranian Aluminum Company (IRALCO) had the best performance in the previous year producing 185,000 tons of aluminum ingots.

Aluminum ingot production in the country reached 41,000 tons in the last month of the previous year (February 19-March 20, 2021), registering a 38 percent rise compared to the 30,000 tons in the preceding year's same period.

## Iran Joins Producers of Automated External Defibrillator

TEHRAN (MNA) - CEO of Iranian Defense Ministry's Electronics Industries Rear Admiral Amir Rastegari said that Iran joined the club of manufacturers of the automated external defibrillator (AED).

Speaking on Wednesday in the inaugural ceremony of the 2nd Indigenizing Electronic and Microelectronic Parts Exhibition and unveiling ceremony of two automated external defibrillators (AED) and knee joint prostheses made by experts of SAIran Electronics Company, he said, "Currently, nine companies in the world are producing this device and SAIran Medical Equipment Industry, as world's 10th company, has joined the group of manufacturers of this technological product."

Iran needs about 5,000 automated external defibrillators per year, he said, adding that the device is used in public centers such as metro stations, stadiums, cinemas, shopping malls, airports and various organizations and can automatically guide a person who lacks speciality in medicines to help patients with cardiac arrest.

## Final Agreement Depends on West's Responsible Behavior

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian in a message referred to his phone call with High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell saying that reaching the final agreement depends on Western party's responsible behavior.

In his Twitter message released on Tuesday, Amirabdollahian said that he had discussed the latest developments regarding the Vienna Talks with Borrell.

Stressing the importance of redlines for Iran, he hailed the process of talks in Vienna, saying that important issues have still remained.

Iran's initiatives have made the agreement available but reaching the final agreement depends on the Western party's responsible behavior.

## Al-Zawraa Stadium in Iraq Built Relying on Iranian Engineering

TEHRAN (MNA) - The head of Iran's Trade Promotion Organization (TPO) inaugurated Al-Zawraa Stadium, in Iraqi capital city Baghdad, which was built by Iranian engineers, TPO portal published on Wednesday.

During his visit to Iraq, Alireza Peyman-Pak inaugurated the 16,000-seat Al-Zawraa Stadium, which represents the knowledge of Iranian engineers and the result of increasing the exports of technical engineering services, and visited various parts of it.

The TPO head's trip to Iraq is aimed at boosting trade ties between the two countries.

As stated by the chairman of Iran-Iraq Joint Chamber of Commerce, Iran is planning to boost its annual trade with neighboring Iraq to \$20 billion.

Yahya Al-e Eshagh made the remarks in a business forum between Iran and Iraq's Kirkuk province back in December 2021, saying that Iranian and Iraqi governments are determined to develop regional cooperation in all areas.

"Despite all events that are happening in the region, the relationship between the two countries of Iran and Iraq are on the upward trend," the official said.

## Hospital Data Shows Omicron Can Infect Lungs

TEHRAN (IFP) - A senior Iranian health official says observations show the Omicron strain of the coronavirus is able to infect the lungs as well, although it mainly affects the upper respiratory tract.

Alireza Zali, the director of the Tehran Coronavirus Taskforce, said Wednesday that there are currently cases among the hospitalized COVID-19 patients that are suffering from infection in the lungs as a result of Omicron.

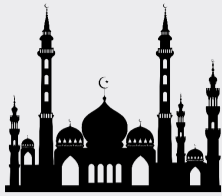
He said Omicron usually manifests itself by flu-like symptoms since the virus replicates primarily in the upper part of the respiratory system and tends to be less sticky in the lung tissue compared to the previous variants.

The assumptions, however, that Omicron does not affect the lungs at all are wrong, said the official.

Studies abroad and at home suggest that the lungs could be infected in the course of infection with Omicron, especially if there is a heavy load of virus in the airways, Zali said.

The Omicron variant spreads more easily than the original virus that causes COVID-19 and the Delta variant.





## PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	12:18
■ Evening (Maghreb)	18:06
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	05:23
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	06:47

5. It is a Revelation sent down by (Him), the Exalted in Might, Most Merciful.  
6. In order that thou mayest admonish a people, whose fathers had received no admonition, and who therefore remain heedless (of the Signs of Allah..

Surah 36. Ya-sin (5 - 6)

## Iran Urged to Invest in Mega Projects in Cuba

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

**TEHRAN – Iran's Ambassador to Cuba Mr. Mohammad Hadi Sobhani has urged Iran to invest in mega projects in Cuba saying that Iran can invest in the renewable energies in Cuba because Havana is to provide 25% of its required energies through renewable energies by 2030.**

Speaking in an online webinar on reviewing trade capacities between Iran and the Latin American states, Sobhani said that Cuba is the only Communist country in the western hemisphere, adding that although China and Vietnam are also considered Communist states but Cuba still has a closed security system and it has not opened like China and Vietnam. He added that of course since two years ago some issues have been discussed and happened in Cuba's economy that it can be an opportunity for increasing cooperation between Tehran and Havana.

He said one of the economic problems of Cuba is the U.S. sanctions which have been imposed for six decades and these sanctions were intensified during the U.S. President Donald Trump era. Sobhani noted that the Covid pandemic led to the slump in Cuba's revenues because Cuba is a tourist destination and tourism incomes account for 70% of Cuba's GDP but since two years ago and with the pandemic, the number of tourists to Cuba has sharply decreased and it has caused economic pressure on different walks of the life in Cuba.

Sobhani noted that another economic problem of Cuba is restriction in transfer of banking havalas from the U.S. and currently 2m Cubans are living in Florida in the U.S. and this restriction regarding havalas has decreased annual revenues of Cuba by \$8b.

He went on to say that of course major part of the economic problems in Cuba is mismanagement and Cubans have recently realized it and they are currently interested in increasing the participation of the private sector in economic affairs. He said of course Cuban officials are sensitive to the word of private and refrain from using this word and they mostly use the word non-government instead of the private.



On the opportunities for cooperation between Tehran and Cuba, Sobhani said that both Iran and Cuba are under sanctions and they can cooperate in the club of the sanctioned countries and there is strong determination among the officials of Iran and Cuba for enhancing cooperation.

He referred to the cooperation of Iran and Cuba in the field of biotechnology and said both countries have good experience in cooperation in this field for almost two decades, adding that Cuba was the first country which felicitated the victory of the Islamic Revolution and transferred the technology of producing vaccine to Iran.

Sobhani went on to say that Cuba is a thirsty and import-centered market which can be a very good market for exports of different types of Iranian goods, saying that the country welcomes imports of petrochemical products, fertilizers, foodstuff like dairy and fishery products and there are good opportunities for cooperation with Cuba, and Iran and Cuba can cooperate and create joint companies in fields of exporting engineering services.

He said Cuba has very good capacities in producing different types of medicines and one of the major pharmaceutical achievements of Cuba is treatment and prevention of the Alzheimer's that Iran can import it from Cuba.

He reiterated investment in the energy sector can be a very good opportunity and Iran needs government investment in mega projects of Cuba and the government should play its role. He said Iran can invest in the field of renewable projects and especially in the solar energy in Cuba because Cuba wants to use 25% of its energy by 2030 through using renewable energies.

## Brazilian Agriculture Minister Due in Tehran

TEHRAN (MNA) – The Brazilian Minister of Agriculture was to arrive in Tehran late yesterday to expand and broaden cooperation with Iran in the field of agriculture.

Tereza Cristina will visit Iran for a period of four days at the head of a delegation consisting of public and private sectors at the official invitation of the Iranian Minister of Agriculture Seyyed Javad Sadatinejad.

In addition to holding high-profile talks between Iranian and Brazilian ministers of agriculture, the private sectors of the two countries will discuss expanding cooperation in relevant fields.

Moreover getting acquainted with the capabilities and potentials of Iran's agriculture industry, she will also visit the historic Iranian city of Shiraz.

## Tehran, Baku to Resume Direct Flights Next Month

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The next positive step in Azerbaijani-Iranian relations will be taken in early March, Azerbaijani Ambassador to Iran Ali Alizada tweeted, News.Az reported.

According to the ambassador, direct flights between Azerbaijan and Iran will be resumed in early March this year.

On Feb.15, 2022, the Prime Minister of Azerbaijan Ali Asadov signed a decision to amend the decision on measures to extend the special quarantine regime and remove some restrictions.

Under the decision, citizens of 17 countries and citizens of other countries permanently residing in the mentioned 17 countries, as well as stateless people in those countries will be allowed to enter and leave the Republic of Azerbaijan by air.

## Karaj Hosts Kyrgyz Trade, Investment Opportunities Meet

TEHRAN (MNA) – Kyrgyz Embassy in Tehran held a meeting on "Kyrgyz Economy Day: Trade, Economy and Investment Opportunities" in Karaj, Alborz province on Tuesday.

The meeting was held in cooperation with the Embassy of Republic of Kyrgyzstan to Iran and Alborz Province Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture.

In this meeting, more than 50 investment projects in the Republic of Kyrgyzstan were introduced to Iranian traders and businesspersons in the fields of hydroelectricity, tourism and agriculture.

In this ceremony, Kyrgyz ambassador to Iran submitted a comprehensive report on making investment in Kyrgyzstan and mechanism taken by Kyrgyz government in line with supporting Iranian investors in this country.

Kyrgyz envoy also requested Iranian entrepreneurs to make investment in infrastructural and socio-economic projects of Kyrgyzstan with the aim of developing regions of this country.

Accordingly, representatives of Iranian trade circles were interested in making investment in lucrative market of Kyrgyzstan given the activity of free economic zones in this country.

The ceremony was held concurrent with the 30th establishment anniversary of diplomatic ties between Iran and Kyrgyzstan.

## 300m of FDI Absorbed From UAE

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Head of Iran Trade Promotion Organization Alireza Payman Pak says during interactions in recent months Iran has attracted some \$300m of foreign investment from the UAE which will come into effect in four or five months.

Speaking in the meeting of the Dialogue Council of the Government and the Private Sector, Payman Pak said this year the country has increased its commercial attaches from five to ten, and regarding the next year's budget, the organization is determined to increase the figure to 30 and one will be in the UAE.

He admitted that one commercial attaché alone is unable to create any surge in developing exports and the organization attaches special attention to the private sector. Therefore, the organization tries to set criteria and standards for the appointment of the efficient commercial attaches and the established trade centers in the countries, he added.



He then pointed to his recent visit to the UAE to support trade and the economic activists, adding that during the visit he held talks for resolving the shipping transportation problems as well as the financial exchanges whose results will be announced soon.

He reiterated that in recent months due to the interactions the country has attracted some \$300m of foreign investment from the UAE which will come into effect in five months.

Payman Pak said that the main issue regarding the appointment of the commercial attaché is the right choice, adding that the process for selecting has started and the organization will not accept any recommendation.

On the deployment of Iran's commercial attaché in the UAE, he said that due to the special budget allocated, the organization can dispatch the commercial attaché to the UAE from the beginning of the next year but it is not in rush because it wants to have the right and efficient person for the job.

In the beginning of the meeting, director of the secretariat of the council Mr. Mohsen Ameri pointed to the \$15b trade volume of Iran and the UAE and said there are at least five problems in the realm of trade with the UAE and the organization is to have talks and interactions with government officials and activists in the private sector. He called for resolving the problems to ease the trade with the UAE.

Then Head of Iran-UAE Joint Chamber of Commerce Mr. Erfan Shakeri, for his part, said that the country needs a commercial attaché from the trade material who is dominant in the trade issues and aware of problems of the traders to help economic activists and producers and exporters to solve their problems.

He also urged the agriculture ministry to train farmers in order to improve the health and quality of the products for exports in order that the exported goods are not rejected and sent back to the country.

Shakeri announced readiness of the chamber for cooperation with exporters to the UAE and resolve their problems. He said farmers need to get familiar of how to use fertilizers as well as good packing for their exports.

## Guidi and His "Little Italy Orchestra" at the Fajr Music Festival.

IRAN NEWS ART DESK

TEHRAN - The Italian Embassy in Tehran hosted this week, in partnership with the International Committee of the Fajr Music Festival, a contemporary jazz tour by Giovanni Guidi, Italian pianist and composer, and his "Little Italy Orchestra".

The musicians, for the first time outside of Europe since the beginning of the pandemic, held two musical performances of a very original version of contemporary jazz music, composed by Guidi himself, amid a very warm reception by the Iranian public.

The first concert, entitled "Little Italy", was held at Vahdat Hall on February 14, and presented as a highlight of the 37th Fajr Music Festival.

"Little Italy is a tale, a story of migration in music. It narrates countless stories of those Italians who set out into the unknown in search of fortune, opportunities or simply dignity. It is the story of young women and men who left everything, risked everything, lost everything or found everything", were the words used by Giovanni Guidi in commenting his musical program.

The second concert, an acoustic piano performance entitled "100 love letters", was held at the residence of the Italian Ambassador in Tehran, Giuseppe Perrone, as a tribute to prominent Italian writer, poet and film director Pier Paolo Pasolini on the 100th anniversary of his birth.

"Giovanni Guidi's musical tribute to Pasolini, a prominent Italian intellectual who established a special bond with Iran, the land he chose to shoot his movie 'The Flower of the One Thousand and One Nights', is particularly telling about the robust historic relationship between Italy and Iran. It exemplifies the importance attached by the Italian Embassy in Tehran to highlighting the spectacular cultural interaction existing between the two countries", commented Ambassador Perrone.

The acoustic piano performance, specially composed by Guidi to commemorate Pasolini's extraordinary impact on Italian culture and society, was broadcast live on Instagram and will soon be available on the Italian Embassy's Instagram (@ItalyinIran) and YouTube (Italian Embassy in Tehran) channels.



## Iran Opens Passenger Airport in Greater Tunb

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) has launched a passenger airport in the strategic island of Greater Tunb in the Persian Gulf.

A Tuesday report by the IRIB News said that IRGC and Iranian civil aviation officials had travelled to the Greater Tunb onboard a first passenger flight to the island to open a new runway in its Imam Ali airport.

With a surface of just over 10 square kilometers, the Greater Tunb is one of the three Iranian islands that overlook the Strait of Hormuz on the mouth of the Persian Gulf.

Nearly a fifth of the global crude oil supply passes through the Strait of Hormuz which is controlled by Iran and the neighboring Oman.

Iran has repeatedly rejected territorial claims by the United Arab Emirates about the Greater Tunb and the two other nearby islands.

Head of Iran's Civil Aviation Organization (CAO) Mohammad Mohammadi Bakhsh said the new runway Greater Tunb's airport will facilitate travel to the island from major business hubs in southern Iran, including from Bandar Abbas. He said CAO had issued all permissions required for take-off and landing of the passenger planes in the airport.

The official added that the airport will soon accommodate round the clock flights to various destinations across Iran. The Imam Ali Airport in Greater Tunb was launched by the IRGC in 2010. The airport's new runway is 2,150 meters long and is capable of handling small passenger planes like ERJ-145.

The facility is located some 130 kilometers (80 miles) from an international airport in the Iranian port city of Bandar Abbas on the Persian Gulf coast.



## Ethiopia Lifts Wartime State of Emergency

ADDIS ABABA (Dispatches) - Ethiopia's parliament on Tuesday lifted a state of emergency imposed last November when Tigrayan rebels threatened to advance on the capital, the foreign ministry said, easing restrictions earlier than expected.

"The House of Peoples' Representatives of #Ethiopia has approved today the lifting of the six-month state of emergency," the ministry said on Twitter.

The vote by lawmakers followed a proposal by Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's cabinet last month to ease the state of emergency, which was initially supposed to last until May.



## France Expected to Announce Mali Troop Withdrawal

PARIS (Dispatches) - French President Emmanuel Macron this week will announce that French troops will be withdrawn from Mali and redeployed elsewhere in the Sahel following a breakdown in ties with the country's military regime, concurring sources say.

Several security sources, speaking on condition of anonymity, told AFP that Macron's announcement to end the nine-year French mission in Mali will coincide with a European Union-African Union summit in Brussels on Thursday and Friday.

France initially deployed troops in 2013 to beat back advancing jihadist fighters in northern Mali.



## Russia Says Some Troops Pull Back From Near Ukraine



MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russia said some of its troops were returning to base after exercises near Ukraine and it mocked repeated Western warnings about a looming invasion, but NATO said it had yet to see any evidence of de-escalation.

Russia did not say how many units were being withdrawn, and how far, after a build-up of some 130,000 Russian troops to the north, east and south of Ukraine that has triggered one of the worst crises in relations with the West since the Cold War.

The development drew a guarded response from Ukraine and its Western allies, but prompted a rally on financial and oil markets. Western military analysts said it was too soon to be sure of the extent of any de-escalation.

The Kremlin sought to portray the moves as proof that Western talk of war had been both false and hysterical. "February 15, 2022 will go down in history as the day Western war propaganda failed. Humiliated and destroyed without a single shot fired," Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said.

NATO's chief welcomed signals from Russia in the past two days that it may be looking for a diplomatic solution but urged Moscow to demonstrate its will to act.

"There are signs from Moscow that diplomacy should continue. This gives grounds for cautious optimism. But so far we have not seen any sign of de-escalation on the ground from the Russian side," NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg told reporters.

He said Russia often left military equipment behind after exercises, creating the potential for forces to regroup.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said there were signs of a diplomatic opening but "the intelligence that we're seeing today is still not encouraging".

Ukraine's Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said Kyiv would only believe that Russia was moving to de-escalate the situation if it saw for itself that Russian troops were being pulled back.

"If we see a withdrawal, we will believe in a de-escalation," Interfax Ukraine quoted him as saying.

Russia has always denied planning to invade, saying it can exercise troops on its own territory as it sees fit. It has been pressing for a set of security guarantees from the West, saying it fears NATO is encroaching on its Western flank.

In a separate development, Russia's lower house of parliament voted to ask President Vladimir Putin to recognize two Russian-backed breakaway regions in eastern Ukraine as independent, the house speaker said.

Recognition of the self-declared Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics could kill off the Minsk peace process in east Ukraine, where a conflict between government forces and Moscow-backed separatists has killed 15,000 people.

It was not clear how Putin would respond.

## Trudeau Invokes Emergency Powers To Starve Protesting Trucker of Funds

OTTAWA (Dispatches) - Canada is planning to impose emergency measures not used for more than 50 years to cut off funding for truckers responsible for nationwide protests that have gridlocked the nation's capital for weeks.

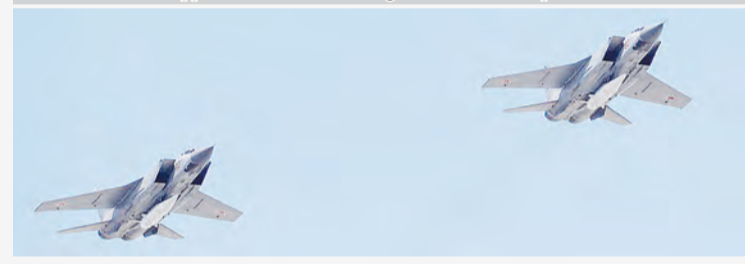
Prime Minister Justin Trudeau became only the second Canadian leader in peacetime to invoke the Emergencies Act, which gives Ottawa broad powers to end three weeks of protests across the country that have hit cross-border trade, angered the United States and brought the center of the capital to a halt.

"This illegal occupation needs to end ... the measure of success will be, can we get our supply chains back? Can we end the disruption to livelihoods of people who rely on trade to the United States?," Trudeau told reporters.

Trudeau acted after concluding that law enforcement could not cope with the protesters, especially in Ottawa, where police have largely stood and watched truckers and demonstrators bring the city to a standstill.



## Russia Sends Hypersonic-Armed Fighter Jets to Syria for Naval Drills



MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russia has deployed MiG-31K fighter jets with hypersonic Kinzhal missiles and long-range Tupolev Tu-22M strategic bombers to its air base in Syria for naval exercises, Interfax news agency reported on Tuesday, citing the defense ministry.

The aircraft dispatched to Russia's Hmeimim air base will take part in exercises in the eastern Mediterranean, part of a surge of Russian military activity amid a standoff with the West over Ukraine and security in Europe.

Moscow announced on Jan. 20 that its navy would stage an array of exercises involving all its fleets from the Pacific to the Atlantic, drawing on 10,000 servicemen, 140 warships and dozens of planes.

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's Damascus has been a staunch ally of Moscow since Russia launched an air strike campaign in Syria in 2015. Apart from the Hmeimim air base, Russia also controls the Tartus naval facility.

Russia sent fighter jets with Kinzhal missiles for the first time last year after expanding the runway at the base to handle such aircraft, said Rob Lee, a military analyst at the U.S.-based Foreign Policy Research Institute.

He said the deployments pointed to Russia's growing military presence in the Middle East and its ability to operate in different regions and to project power.

Russian media have said the Kinzhal hypersonic missile can hit targets up to 2,000 km (1,243 miles) away. It is one of several strategic weapons unveiled by Russian President Vladimir Putin in March 2018.

## Myanmar Military Committed War Crimes in Karenni State

YANGON (Dispatches) - The Myanmar military has murdered civilians, and used them as human shields, in a series of atrocities in eastern Karenni State that may amount to war crimes, prominent human rights group Fortify Rights said in a new report published on Tuesday.

The group says it documented attacks on churches, residential homes, camps for displaced people and other non-military targets that took place in the state, also known as Kayah State, between May 2021 and January 2022.

At least 61 civilians were killed during that time, it said. The report comes as foreign ministers from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) prepare to meet in Cambodia with no progress in a five-point consensus agreed with the military last April that was supposed to end the violence.

Fortify Rights said it was time ASEAN gave its support to a global arms embargo.

"The Myanmar junta is murdering people with weapons procured on the global market, and that must stop," Ismail Wolff, Regional Director at Fortify Rights said in a statement. "Clear and definitive action is needed to compel the Myanmar junta to rethink its attacks on civilians. The UN Security Council must urgently impose a global arms embargo on the Myanmar military, and it would be strategic and sensible for ASEAN to support it."

The Fortify Rights report is based on testimony from 31 eye-witnesses and survivors, as well as

verified photo and video evidence.

It includes new details on the Christmas Eve killings in Hpruso Township, in which at least 40 civilians, including a child and two Save the Children staff, were killed.

A doctor who worked on the autopsies of those killed told the group that some of the bodies were so badly burned they were impossible to autopsy, but that his team was able to confirm that five of the bodies were women and one a girl under the age of 15.

"Some had their mouths stuffed with cloth, so we were pretty sure these people were gagged," the doctor told Fortify Rights. "Almost every skull was fractured and badly cracked ... [In some bodies], we could gather enough evidence to say they were burned to death alive."

In another case, Fortify Rights said the Myanmar army used an 18-year-old man, his uncle, and two other men as human shields during clashes with fighters from the Karenni People's Defence Force (PDF) in Moe Bye Township on the border with Shan state.

"The soldiers put their guns on our shoulders and shot PDFs, staying behind us," the man told Fortify Rights. "We were kept tied up and blindfolded. We were tortured a lot, in so many ways. They kicked our bodies, hit our heads with gun handles, and more." Fortify Rights said three of the men eventually escaped, but it was unable to confirm what had happened to the fourth.



## India's Hijab Dispute Reaches Its Most Populous State

LUCKNOW (Dispatches) - A dispute over restrictions on the wearing of the hijab by female students in a southern

Indian state has now reached India's most populous state of Uttar Pradesh, with a group of youngsters asking a college to ban the head covering.

Authorities closed colleges in Karnataka in India's south last week after a new uniform policy barred students from wearing headscarves in classrooms, leading to protests by Muslim students and counter protests by Hindu students.

Muslims have criticized the ban as another way of marginalizing a community that accounts for about 13% of Hindu-majority India's 1.35 billion people.

In Uttar Pradesh, in the country's north and bordering New Delhi, a group of more than two dozen young men reached the Dharma Samaj College in Aligarh district on Monday and handed a memorandum to its officials seeking a complete ban on the hijab within its compound.

They had saffron shawls around their necks - typically worn by Hindus - said the college's chief proctor, Mukesh Bharadwaj, adding he did not recognize the people. Currently, religious garb is not allowed in classrooms, but can be worn elsewhere on campus.

"Two years ago the same issue was raised and it has been raised again. We do not allow any type of religious uniform and we have a civil code of uniform for everyone," Bharadwaj told Reuters by phone on Tuesday.

"There is a changing room for girls and they can change their dress there before attending class," he said. "We are investigating the matter."

Uttar Pradesh, estimated to have as many people as Brazil, is ruled by a Hindu monk from Prime Minister Narendra Modi's party and is in the midst of a multi-phase election that ends next month. Hindu-Muslim disputes are often used for political gains in the state.









## Banco do Brasil Sees 2022 Profit Up 24%

SAO PAULO (Dispatches) - Brazilian state-controlled lender Banco do Brasil SA said in a filing on Monday that its 2022 net income is likely to rise by up to 23.7% from last year, despite a slower loan book growth.

Banco do Brasil forecast a recurring net income, which excludes one-off items, between 23 billion reais (\$4.4 billion) and 26 billion reais this year, compared to 21 billion reais in 2021.

The bank indicated it plans to weather Brazil's dim growth outlook with good asset quality, higher net interest income, and sales of financial services.

Loan-loss provisions were estimated between 13 billion reais and 16 billion reais, versus 13.1 billion reais in 2021. Latin America's biggest economy is likely to post little or no economic expansion this year, hurting consumers and companies.



## Tighter Oil Market Confirmed By IEA Demand Revision

LONDON (Dispatches) - An upward revision in historical oil demand by the International Energy Agency in its monthly report points to a tighter global market than the West's energy watchdog had previously estimated.

"Our balances are now more in line with observed market fundamentals, which underpin the view of traders. We believe the tighter balance for 2021 and 2022 is already reflected in the price of oil and the forward curve," the IEA told Reuters.

Oil prices have powered toward \$100 a barrel in 2022 as fuel demand recovers from a pandemic crash, in a rally that has driven up energy costs worldwide, forcing some businesses to cut output and draining cash from consumers' pockets.

The IEA on Friday revised up its baseline estimate of global demand by nearly 800,000 barrels per day (bpd), just under 1% of the 100 million bpd global oil market, after reassessing the petrochemicals demand in China and Saudi Arabia back to 2007.

Both countries consumed more of the light oil, known as natural gas liquids, that is produced in association with gas. The IEA said the revision helped explain the historical difference between observed and implied inventory changes.

While the Paris-based IEA did not alter its outlook on the pace of economic recovery, the bump in historical assumptions means 2021 demand outstripped supply by 2.1 million bpd.

The change also indicates demand for oil just about recovered to a pre-pandemic high of 100.3 million bpd in the fourth quarter, closer than in the previous forecast. A full demand rebound remains expected in the third quarter of 2022.

"What the demand revision means is that some ... looking at the IEA database as input for their analysis will see a tighter oil market, resulting in a different assessment how to position," Giovanni Staunovo, commodity analyst at UBS, said.

"Emerging markets account for more than 50% of oil demand, where data is less transparent and their demand keeps rising faster than in OECD countries. Unsurprisingly all energy agencies have different numbers," he added.

A gold standard of energy market forecasting whose figures countries and companies assess in informing billions of dollars of investment decisions, the IEA frequently revises its data.

Errors have occurred in supply and demand predictions in both the positive and negative directions in past years and have reached as high as 2 million bpd. "It's hard to make too much of a judgement on the reliability of the data and what it means," said Craig Erlam, senior market analyst at OANDA.

"What the reports do tell us though, as with the other data, is that the market is extremely tight and there's little evidence of that alleviating soon in the absence of Saudi Arabia pumping more or a nuclear deal that brings more than a million Iranian barrels back into the market," Erlam added.

The IEA last year outlined a groundbreaking new scenario by which the world could meet climate change targets and energy needs without any further investment in new oil and gas fields. Few countries committed to the IEA's recommendation to halt new fossil fuel projects and the agency has warned that investments in renewables has yet to meet the pace needed to compensate for falling investment in oil and gas.

## IMF Team Sees Malaysia's GDP at 3.1% in 2021, 5.75% in 2022

KUALA LUMPUR (Dispatches) - Malaysia's economy is set for a gradual recovery from the Covid-19 downturn, with real gross domestic product (GDP) growth at 3.1 per cent in 2021 and projected to accelerate to about 5.75 per cent in 2022, according to the preliminary findings of an International Monetary Fund (IMF) team.

The team, led by Lamin Leigh, reported that the growth would be supported by the authorities' impressive vaccine rollout and swift implementation of economic policy support measures.

"A more severe downturn (in 2021) was averted, thanks to the swift, substantial, and multi-pronged pandemic policy response targeted to support affected households and businesses.

"Growth in 2022 is projected at about 5.75 per cent, driven by pent-up domestic demand and continued strong external demand," he said in a statement.

Leigh said the pandemic crisis is set to leave implications that could linger over the medium to long run, citing the recovery would likely be uneven, with output remaining well below its potential level.

He said the team recommended additional near-term targeted fiscal support towards vulnerable and hard-hit segments of the economy and productive investments.

"In the near term, fiscal policy should continue to be nimble and increasingly targeted, with a focus on further buttressing the recovery, minimizing economic scarring, protecting the vulnerable segments of the population, and scaling up productive investments, in line with the authorities' spending priorities.

"A credible, specific, growth-friendly, and clearly communicated consolidation strategy should be implemented once the recovery is entrenched to rebuild fiscal buffers, preserve fiscal sustainability, and reduce fiscal risks, supported by robust fiscal governance practices," he said.

The findings also included that the accommodative monetary policy stance is appropriate and the financial sector support measures should continue to be more targeted and unwound as the recovery becomes entrenched.

"Coordinated and targeted structural reform policies would help address long-standing structural challenges, limit economic scarring, boost productivity, and address inequality and meet the aspiration of a 'Prosperous, Inclusive and Sustainable Malaysia'," Leigh added.



## Demand Shock Behind Global Bottlenecks Should Ease in Months

BRUSSELS (Dispatches) - Global trade bottlenecks are more the result of demand spikes than supply chain snags, with pressure likely to ease in the coming months, the World Trade Organization's chief economist said on Monday.

The WTO had thought in October that demand for goods would slow early in 2022. However, that was before the Omicron variant of coronavirus led to curbs on activity, including the postponement of the WTO's ministerial meeting.

Chief economist Robert Koopman said consumers had then continued to skew spending towards goods rather than services given they could not or preferred not to dine out or go on holiday.

Koopman said that for goods trade, excess demand likely explained two-thirds to three-quarters of apparent shortages.

"It still remains that this compositional shift in demand supported by the appropriately aggressive, quick fiscal and monetary policies, has resulted in this outcome where lots of people write about supply-chain disruptions," he told Reuters. Supply disruption was, he said, more obvious in the automotive sector, or for shippers adjusting to a production shift from China to the likes of Vietnam, Malaysia or Indonesia.

Koopman said leading U.S. indicators such as back-ups of ships at ports and prices of used cars were tapering and throughput at U.S. ports had picked up.

"I'm pretty confident that in the next three or four months we're going to see the inflationary pressures being reduced," he said, referring to the majority of traded goods and assuming no new geopolitical or health shock. Some companies have nonetheless warned that trade channels have become so clogged up it could be well into next year before they see business returning to normal.

The WTO will in March invite businesses, governments and trade experts to discuss global supply chain issues. Even if the problems were easing by then, there were still lessons to be learnt, Koopman said.

## Japan's Economy Rebounds on Solid Consumption

TOKYO (Dispatches) - Japan's economy rebounded in the final three months of 2021 as falling coronavirus cases helped prop up consumption, though rising raw material costs and a spike in new Omicron variant infections cloud the outlook.

Some analysts expect the economy to

contract again in the current quarter as rising Covid-19 cases and supply chain disruptions hit factory output, heightening challenges for policymakers in sustaining a fragile recovery.

The world's third-largest economy expanded an annualized 5.4 per cent in October-December after contracting a revised 2.7 per cent in the previous quarter, government data showed on Tuesday, falling short of a median market forecast for a 5.8 per cent gain.

The increase was driven largely by a 2.7 per cent rise in private consumption, which accounts for more than half of Japan's gross domestic product (GDP). The expansion compared with market forecasts for a 2.2 per cent gain.

Capital expenditure rose 0.4 per cent, against market forecast for a 0.5 per cent increase. External demand added 0.2 per cent point to GDP growth in October-December, compared with market forecasts of a 0.3 point contribution.

Japan ended state of emergency curbs to combat the pandemic from October last year, which, coupled with a decline in Covid-19 cases, helped lift consumption through the end of 2021.

But a spike in Omicron cases forced the government to impose loose curbs on most areas and keep borders closed, which likely dampened consumption since the outset of this year.

Rising Omicron infections have also forced some manufacturers to halt production, causing output disruptions and delivery delays at auto giants such as Toyota Motor Corp.

Some analysts expect Japan's economy will decline in the current quarter as chip shortages, supply snags and slowing Chinese growth weigh on output, adding to the expected weakness in consumption.

## Iraq's \$27b TotalEnergies Deal Stuck Over Contract Wrangling

BASRA (Dispatches) - A \$27 billion deal between France's TotalEnergies and Iraq that Baghdad hoped would reverse the exit of oil majors from the country has stalled amid disputes over terms and risks being scrapped by the country's new government.

Iraq has struggled to attract major fresh investments into its energy industry since signing a flurry of post U.S.-invasion deals over a decade ago. The Iraqi government has cut oil output targets repeatedly as international oil companies that signed those initial deals leave due to poor returns from revenue sharing agreements.

TotalEnergies agreed last year to invest in four oil, gas and renewables projects in the southern Basra region over 25 years. The deal, signed by Iraq's oil ministry in September 2021, followed a visit from French President Emmanuel Macron.

The ministry, however, did not have agreement on the deal's financial details with all the government departments that needed to approve it, three Iraqi oil ministry and industry sources involved or familiar with the negotiations told Reuters, and it has been mired in disputes ever since.

Following a parliamentary election, the deal now needs approval from a new Iraqi Cabinet, including new oil and finance ministers, who won't be in place until at least the end of March. Iraq's oil ministry denied yesterday that there were any issues in implementing the agreement with TotalEnergies, saying in a statement that the deal "needs time."

Iraq expected the deal to be completed sometime from March onwards, an Iraqi oil ministry spokesperson told Reuters earlier.

TotalEnergies said it was progressing towards closing the deal but added, "The agreements remain subject to conditions to be met and lifted by both sides."

The terms, which have not been made public or previously reported, have raised concerns from Iraqi politicians, and according to sources close to the deal are unprecedented for Iraq.

A group of Shia lawmakers wrote to the oil ministry in January demanding details of the deal and asking why it was signed without competition and transparency, according to a copy of the letter seen by Reuters.

Parliament could force the oil ministry to review or scrap the deal. Under the draft terms, TotalEnergies is relying on getting \$10 billion of initial investment to fund the wider project via oil sales from the Ratawi oilfield, one of four projects in the broader agreement, according to the sources.

The Ratawi field is already pumping 85,000 barrels of oil per day and rather than TotalEnergies receiving its share, the revenue is going into government coffers. TotalEnergies is due to get 40 per cent of the revenue from Ratawi's oil sales, Iraqi oil sources involved in negotiations told Reuters.

## Asia-Pacific Region Will Need Over 17,600 New Aircraft by 2040



SINGAPORE (Dispatches) - Traffic growth of 5.3 per cent per annum and accelerated retirement of older less fuel-efficient aircraft will see the Asia-Pacific region require 17,620 new passenger and freighter aircraft by 2040, according to Airbus.

"Nearly 30 per cent of these will replace older less fuel-efficient models," the European aircraft manufacturer said in its latest report released here.

It said in a region that is home to 55 per cent of the world's population, China, India and emerging economies such as Vietnam and Indonesia would be the principal drivers of growth in Asia-Pacific.

The report said the region's gross domestic product (GDP) would grow at 3.6 per cent per year compared to the world average of 2.5 per cent and double in value by 2040.

"The middle class, who are the likeliest to travel, will increase by 1.1 billion to 3.2 billion and the propensity for people to travel is set to almost triple by 2040," it said.

According to Airbus, of the 17,620 aircraft in demand, 13,660 are in the small category like the A220 and A320 family.

It said in the medium and long-range categories, Asia-Pacific would continue to drive demand with some 42 per cent of global requirements.

"This translates to 2,470 medium and 1,490 large category aircraft," it said.

It said cargo traffic in Asia-Pacific would also increase at 3.6 per cent per annum, well above the global 3.1 per cent average, and would lead to a doubling in air freight in the region by 2040.

Globally, Airbus said express freight boosted by e-commerce would grow at an even faster pace of 4.7 per cent per year.

It said overall, reflecting that strong growth over the next 20 years, there would be a need for some 2,440 freighters, of which 880 will be new-build.



## Ankara Reportedly Aims to Expel Hamas Military Leaders

TEHRAN (MNA) – A Turkish newspaper claimed that the country intends to expel Hamas military leaders, but Hamas' political activities in the country will continue.

Hürriyet Newspaper wrote that Ankara has been holding secret talks with a number of countries in the region for about a year and a half, perhaps with the aim of finding a new residence for Hamas members.

Ankara has informed Hamas that the movement members' who hold military positions will not stay in Turkey and the country will not provide military assistance to Hamas, but Hamas' political activities in the country will continue, according to the report.



## Hopes for Recovery in Focus at Asia's Biggest Airshow

SINGAPORE (Dispatches) - Asia's biggest airshow takes place in Singapore this week with the aviation sector hoping 2022 marks a turning point in a region where tough curbs have left coronavirus-battered airlines struggling to recover.

The event, which takes place every two years and kicks off on Tuesday, brings together hundreds of airlines, plane manufacturers and other industry players to display their latest equipment, network, and strike deals.

But the pandemic -- which has been the biggest crisis to ever strike the sector -- will cast a long shadow, with industry leaders focused on the question of whether air travel will finally pick up in the Asia-Pacific.

While the United States and Europe have eased restrictions and demand has rebounded, Asia lags far behind, with foreign tourists barred and mandatory quarantines still in place in many countries.

There are positive signs for 2022 -- several places, such as Australia, New Zealand and the Philippines, are lifting bans on overseas visitors -- but industry figures warn there is a long way to go.

"We've seen the recovery come in very, very strong in North America and Europe when the restrictions were eased," Anand Stanley, the Asia-Pacific chief for European plane-maker Airbus, told a forum before the airshow.

"Asia still has to follow that track. We still have semblances of a quarantine-based regime, border closures. This has to be lifted so that the freedom of movement returns and in turn the demand returns."

Data highlights the slow pace of recovery -- the region's airlines carried 16.7 million passengers last year, just 4.4 percent of volumes seen in 2019, according to the Association of Asia Pacific Airlines (AAPA).

With the Asia-Pacific rebound nascent and Singapore currently battling a fierce Omicron wave, the four-day airshow is likely to be muted with about 600 companies taking part, down from over 900 at the last edition in 2020.

Participants will be required to take daily virus tests, while the public have been barred from attending a series of aerial displays as authorities look to cut infection risks, with the aerobatics instead to be live-streamed.

Nevertheless, key players such as Boeing, Airbus and engine-maker Rolls-Royce will still be attending, and the show will be a rare opportunity to hold in-person



meetings with customers to drum up new business.

Leck Chet Lam, managing director of the airshow's organizer Experia, said the event remains a platform for finding solutions "so that we can be ready for the recovery".

"We are starting to see green shoots in the industry... Passenger travel numbers are up, flight frequencies are up," he said.

For the industry, the only way for Asia to chart a course to such a recovery is if governments in the region finally drop restrictions and pivot towards living with Covid-19.

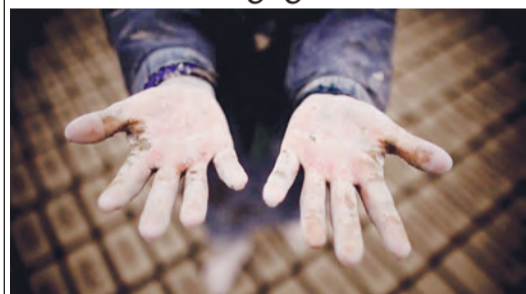
"We need governments to get their act together," said Alex Feldman, US aircraft-maker Boeing's Southeast Asia chief.

They have to "coordinate and simplify the requirements for safe travel", he added. But Shukor Yusof, an analyst with Malaysia-based Endau Analytics, said he doubted a recovery would start this year.

"There are still many obstacles for airlines to surmount," he told AFP.

"There's been little effort to streamline air travel and worse to formulate a new doctrine to deal with a post-Covid landscape."

## Estimated One Million Afghan Children Engaged in Labor



LONDON (Dispatches) - An estimated one million children are currently engaged in child labor in Afghanistan as family incomes have plummeted in the past six months, according to a study by Save the Children.

A survey of 1,400 households across seven provinces of Afghanistan found that 82 percent of Afghans have lost income since the collapse of the former Western-backed government and transition of power to the Taliban last August.

The research by the Britain-based NGO released on Monday said 18 percent of the families surveyed reported that they had no choice but to send their children out to work.

"According to Save the Children's analysis, if just one child in each of these families is being sent to work, then more than one million children in the country are engaged in child labour," the report said.

Afghanistan, as repeated continuously by humanitarian NGOs and the United Nations, is in the grip of a humanitarian disaster because of frozen international aid and lack of access to assets held abroad, after the Taliban took over the government.

Jobs and liquidity in the country have dried up and many government workers have not been paid for months in the country, which was almost entirely dependent on foreign donations under the previous government.

More than 80 percent of those surveyed by Save the Children reported a loss of income, with slightly more than a third having lost all of their household income.

Almost one third said they receive less than half of what they earned before the Taliban came to power.

The huge spike in prices caused by the economic crisis has left many families unable to afford food, according to the study, which said about 36 percent of families reported that they are purchasing food in the market on credit.

Almost eight percent said they were begging or relying on charity to feed their families, the research said.

Chris Nyamandi, Save the Children's director in Afghanistan, said that he never saw anything like the current desperate situation in the country.

"We treat frighteningly ill children every day who haven't eaten anything except bread for months," he said.

"There is no shortage of food here -- the markets are full. Yet children are starving to death because their parents can't afford to pay for food," Nyamandi also said.

"Governments must find a way to unlock vital funds and unfreeze financial assets to prevent the crisis from spiralling any further," he added.

## Italy Woos UNESCO With Magical Espresso Coffee Rite

NAPLES (Dispatches) - A shot of dark, velvety coffee is more than just a quick caffeine hit: Italy's espresso is a prized social and cultural ritual the country considers a national heritage worthy of UNESCO status.

Italians knock back some 30 million espressos a day, from Venice to Sicily, in porcelain cups or little glasses, with or without a splash of milk -- and see each one as a gesture of friendship.

"The espresso is an excuse to tell a friend you care," says Massimiliano Rosati, owner of the Gambrinus cafe in Naples, which helped prepare the bid for a place on the UN's list of the world's intangible heritage.

"They are drunk every day, at any hour. It's a shared moment, a magical moment," he told AFP.

The gleaming machine behind the marble counter clanks and hisses as the barista tamps the ground coffee into the portafilter, clicks it into place and flicks a switch to shoot near-boiling water through it.

To be the real deal, the espresso has to have a "round, substantial and velvety" taste and "hazel-brown to dark-brown foam, characterised by tawny reflexes", according to the Italian Espresso Institute.

It must have a long-lasting aroma which has "notes of flowers, fruits, toasted bread and chocolate", says the institute, set up in 1998 to safeguard espresso.

The bid for heritage status has been sent by the agricultural ministry to Italy's national UNESCO commission, which must submit it to the UN body's headquarters in Paris by March 31.

Italy already boasts a series of living traditions and customs on the list, from truffle hunting to the art of the Neapolitan pizza maker, the Mediterranean diet and traditional violin craftsmanship in Cremona, the birthplace of Antonio Stradivari.

Drinking an espresso "is a rite, it's a bit sacred", said retired teacher Annamaria Conte, 70, as she walked into Gambrinus from the vast Piazza del Plebiscito square near the seafront in Naples.

## Washington Called for...

FROM PAGE 1

Diplomats and analysts say the EU-brokered negotiations had been more constructive in recent weeks. A senior U.S. official said last month that the negotiations in January "were among the most intensive", adding that "we made progress narrowing down the list of differences to just the key priorities on all sides". But the official warned that "we only have a handful of weeks left to get a deal" because of Iran's nuclear advances.

The other crucial issue for Iran is the scale of sanctions relief any agreement would provide. Amirabdollahian said that Iran wanted the negotiations to lead to the "total lifting" of sanctions. The challenge, however, was that the Biden administration was only willing to remove the economic sanctions authorised by Trump, he said.

"This is not all we are looking for. That Trump unilaterally and unjustly imposed sanctions on real and legal entities in Iran under some allegations as Iran's missile programme, regional issues or human rights is not acceptable," Amirabdollahian said. "This is also one of the challenges which remains on the negotiating table in Vienna."

Amirabdollahian said U.S. officials had sent "many messages" to have direct talks with Iran, but ruled out any such move. "Our last response to Americans and intermediaries was: any direct dialogue, contact and negotiation with the U.S. would have very huge costs for my government," the foreign minister said. "We are not ready to enter into the process of direct talks with the U.S. if we do not have a clear and promising outlook to reach a good agreement with sustainable guarantees in front of us."

He added that Tehran had indicated to the U.S. that if Washington's "intentions are genuine, you should take some practical and tangible steps on the ground before any direct talks and contacts can take place". This could include unfreezing billions of dollars of Iranian petrodollars stuck in foreign central banks because of Trump's sanctions or a presidential executive order to lift some of the sanctions, he said.

Amirabdollahian said that in "general, we are optimistic". "We also welcome a good deal in the shortest time however this deal must uphold the rights of the Iranian people," he said.

## Iraqi Delegation Due...

FROM PAGE 1

Touching upon a report claiming that Qatar increases gas export to Iraq and Iran is losing Iraq's gas market, Ale Eshaq said that currently Iraq is facing gas supply problem and Iran tries to resolve its domestic consumption problem in order to export gas, adding that such reports are published aimed only at destroying the ties between Iran and Iraq.

He said Iraqis are currently in talks with Qatar because they want to supply energy through different channels to meet their domestic demands and it does not mean that now that Qatar gives gas to Iraq, Iraqis will stop purchasing gas from Iran and Iran is losing Iraq gas market. He reiterated that Iraqis' problem is why Iran's exports to Iraq are not enough.

Ale Eshaq reiterated that some countries want to export gas and electricity to Iraq but they are unable due several geographical and feasible problems.

He noted as Iran is after diversifying its imports and exports market, Iraqis are the same and they provided their needs through different markets.

## U.S. Acting...

FROM PAGE 1

"As the representative of a country whose people are subjected to the most brutal form of economic terrorism and illegitimate unilateral coercive measures by the United States, I call for the complete and immediate lifting of all unilateral coercive measures including sanctions in order to ensure the full achievement of economic and social development and enable the targeted countries to repair their economies while guaranteeing the well-being of their people in the aftermath of the pandemic."



She further noted that despite the sanctions, the Iranian government has managed to provide poor and vulnerable people with special financial packages and social and economic rehabilitation programs, in addition to devising economic support measures, especially for small businesses.

The government, she said, has also prepared medical treatment programs for about 4 million legal and illegal Afghan refugees. Iran has repeatedly denounced the sanctions as an act of "economic war", "economic terrorism", and "medical terrorism".

The Islamic Republic of Iran has been challenging with the U.S. sanctions from its very first day of its establishment but the pressures have been increased since 2018 when former U.S. President Donald Trump pulled out of the JCPOA and reimposed and even stepped up sanctions.

Despite these efforts, the Islamic Republic of Iran has endured the sanctions and to some extent has thwarted them but it has had negative impact on the daily life of people especially in the medicines.

Syria has been under sanctions since 2011 and its people are suffering from its effects. Yemen is the other country which badly suffers from sanctions. And now the West led by the U.S. threatens to sanction Russia over the Ukraine crisis.

As long as countries fail to have strong economic infrastructures and fail to cut dependence on trade with the West and their currencies, the U.S. and its allies will use sanctions as their main weapon to bring the countries down and this inhumane tool will be used against the nations.

Americans in recent decades have realized that they are better to use sanctions rather than their troops against the countries without having casualty and military expenditure, and countries to defend themselves need to strengthen their infrastructures and cutting their dependence on the West to make sanctions ineffective.

As long as governments and nations remain dependent on the West and its economy specially its banking system, the U.S. crimes against humanity, namely sanctions, will continue and people in the countries will suffer from this brutality which happens under the guise of defending so-called human rights.

The Islamic Republic of Iran in recent years have done its best to cut its economic dependence to the West by focusing trade and economic exchanges with its neighbors and those countries which are defiant to the West threats and are independent in making decisions.

## S. Korea Seeks...

FROM PAGE 1

Prior to the U.S.'s cruel sanctions on the Islamic Republic, Iran ranking 4th in the world in terms of holding 175.53 billion barrels of proven oil reserves, was the main exporter of crude oil to South Korea.

Since May 2019, South Korea has stopped oil purchase from Iran following the US sanctions and Washington's refusal to issue exemption certificate to this end.

Bloomberg media company reported that seemingly Iran is stepping towards returning to international oil market officially after more than three years.

According to informed sources, officials from the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) visit at least two refineries in South Korea in order to discuss crude re-export.

An Iranian delegation comprised of officials from the Central Bank of Iran (CBI), Iran's Oil Ministry and the NIOC visit Seoul on February 15-16 to discuss issues related to financial and oil problems.

South Korea imported 18.5 million barrels of crude oil per month from Iran prior to re-imposition of US sanctions in 2018.

## Figures by OPEC...

FROM PAGE 1

The United States imposed sanctions on Iran's crude exports in November 2018 after pulling out of an international accord on the country's nuclear program.

Iranian crude sales hit a rock bottom in 2019 after Washington toughened the sanctions in May that year by cancelling waivers given to some major oil consumers.

The IRNA report estimated that Iranian oil and gas sector would grow by nearly 20% in the calendar year to late March 2023.



**Switchboard:**  
(+98) (21) 44253448  
**Public Relations Tel:**  
(+98)(21) 44253450  
Editorial Board: 44253449  
**Public Relations Fax:**  
(+98)(21) 44253395  
**Advertising Department:**  
Tel/Fax:(+98) (21) 44253335-9/44253234  
**Website:**  
http://www.irannewsdaily.com

**E-Mail Address:**  
info@irannewsdaily.com  
**ISSN 1024-6053**  
**P.O. Box:** 15875-8551  
**Address:** No 13, Pajouhesh St.,  
Golestan II St, Golestan St.Marzadaran  
Blvd., Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran  
**Printed by:**Honar Sarzmin Sabz  
**Distributed by:**  
Cities of Iran Cultural and  
Artistic Institute  
**Managing Director:** Fereydoon Taherpour Asl

## Czech Rider Ends Six Years of Hurt With Victory

MUSCAT (Dispatches) - Czech rider Jan Hirt took the overall honors in the Tour of Oman after Colombian sprint specialist Fernando Gaviria won the sixth and final stage for his second win of this year's race.

Hirt's victory ends a six year hiatus for him -- he won the 2016 Tour of Austria -- with the 31-year-old taking control after Monday's challenging stage which climaxed on the summit of the Green Mountain.

## Auger-Aliassime Wins Maiden ATP Title in Rotterdam

ROTTERDAM (Dispatches) - Three years after making his ATP main draw debut in Rotterdam, Felix Auger-Aliassime's career came full circle when he lifted his maiden tour title with a 6-4 6-2 victory over Greek top seed Stefanos Tsitsipas in the final.

A title win has been a long time coming for the 21-year-old Canadian who has fallen at the final hurdle eight times before. Having beaten Andrey Rublev in the semi-final in three sets, he needed only 78 minutes to defeat Tsitsipas.

# Man City Demolish Sporting; PSG Edge Real Madrid

LISBON (Dispatches) - Manchester City are on course for the Champions League quarter-finals after Bernardo Silva's brace inspired a masterful 5-0 rout of Sporting Lisbon in the last 16 first leg on Tuesday.

Pep Guardiola's side produced a swaggering display at the Jose Alvalade Stadium to kill off Sporting before the second leg in Manchester on March 9.

Riyad Mahrez opened the scoring and Silva bagged the second before Phil Foden made it three by the 32nd minute.

With City at their imperious best, Portugal forward Silva struck again on his return to his homeland and Raheem Sterling's gem rounded off the demolition after the interval.

City are unbeaten in their last 13 games in all competition, a hot streak that now includes 12 wins.

Sterners tests will await City later in the competition but this was a significant statement of intent that will have been heard all around Europe.

With City nine points clear at the top of the Premier League in their pursuit of a fourth title in five years, there is no questioning Guardiola's domestic preeminence.

But Champions League success has been harder to come by.

Guardiola insisted this week that critics of his flawed European record over the last decade are "jealous" of his achievements.

Yet the Spaniard hasn't won the Champions League since 2011 with Barcelona, while City are still waiting to lift the trophy for the first time.

City's Champions League history is littered with unexpectedly premature exits, but they came painfully close last season, losing 1-0 to Chelsea in the final in Porto.

Back on Portuguese soil to launch a knockout stage campaign they hope will climax with silverware in the final in Saint Peterburg, City's sublime performance underlined their desire to go one better this time.

City were originally due to face Villarreal before a UEFA error forced a re-draw that pitted them against Sporting instead.

It looked an easier tie on paper and so it proved as Sporting, in the last 16 for only



the second time, were out-classed from start to finish.

In other match of the night, Kylian Mbappe struck in the fourth minute of injury time to give Paris Saint-Germain a precious 1-0 win over Real Madrid in the first leg of their heavyweight Champions League last-16 tie.

It looked as though Real would escape with a draw after weathering a first-half onslaught from PSG before Lionel Messi had a penalty saved by Thibaut Courtois just after the hour mark at the Parc des Princes.

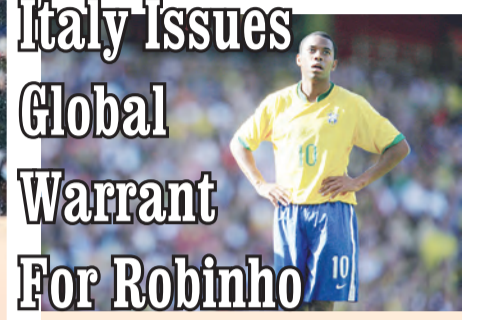
In the last minute of stoppage time, Mbappe burst into the box from the left and between two defenders before finishing past Courtois for his 22nd goal this season.

Tipped to move to Madrid when his contract in Paris expires at the end of the season, Mbappe's last-gasp strike means his current club have the edge heading into the return at the Santiago Bernabeu on March 9.

The France World Cup-winning striker may have focused much of the attention coming into this tie amid the speculation about his future but the array of attacking talent elsewhere could not be overlooked.

Messi was coming up against Madrid for the first time since leaving Barcelona, for whom he scored a record 26 goals in the 'Clasico' over his years at the Camp Nou.

Real also knew all about the threat of Angel Di Maria, who won the Champions League with the Spanish giants in 2014.



Italy Issues Global Warrant For Robinho

ROME (Dispatches) - Italian prosecutors issued an international arrest warrant for former Brazil forward Robinho and asked for his extradition following confirmation of his conviction for gang rape, news agencies reported.

Judges at Italy's top court, the Court of Cassation in Rome, last month upheld a nine-year sentence for the footballer's part in an attack on a young woman in January 2013, when Robinho was playing for AC Milan.

Today, prosecutors in Milan forwarded the request for extradition and the arrest warrant to the ministry of justice, Italy's ANSA and AGI news agencies reported.

Neither prosecutors nor the ministry immediately responded to an AFP request for comment.

Jacopo Gnocchi, the lawyer for the victim, told AFP it made no difference to his client whether Robinho served his sentence in Italy or Brazil.

"The main thing is he serves it, particularly for the crime committed, to protect women," he said.

## Formula One to Hold Three Sprint Races in 2022

PARIS (Dispatches) - Formula One approved a plan to hold three sprint races instead of six in 2022 at an F1 Commission meeting on Monday, the FIA said in a statement.

The move will see the sprint format used at races in Imola's Emilia Romagna Grand Prix and the Austrian and Brazilian Grands Prix, the FIA said in a statement.

The sport was set to roll the format out across six events this season after having trialled it at three grands prix last year.

But the plan met opposition from Mercedes, Red Bull and Ferrari, who wanted an increase in the cost cap to account for the increased number of sprint events.

The plan for three sprint events was unanimously approved, the FIA said. It follows a compromise proposed by Formula One bosses, keeping the cost cap intact but scaling back the number of sprint events to three.

The Formula One Commission also agreed a change to the points structure for the sprint races, with a maximum eight points on offer and points awarded down to eighth place.

The sprint is a shorter 100km race that will be held on Saturdays. Placings in the sprint will decide driver positions on the starting grid for Sunday's main race.

Qualifying is brought forward to Friday and decides the starting order for the sprint race.

However, following complaints raised last year, the fastest driver in Friday's qualifying will be awarded 'pole position' for the sake of the record books, even if they end up lower down in Saturday's sprint race. Friday's placings in qualifying will have no bearing on actual grid positions on Sunday.

The Commission also approved changes to the sporting regulations to avoid a repeat of last season's rain-hit Belgian Grand Prix, when the result was declared and half-points awarded after completing only the minimum number of laps behind the safety car.

# Djokovic Prefers to Skip Events to Being Forced Into Job



LONDON (Dispatches) - World number one Novak Djokovic has claimed he is not anti-vaccination but would rather skip Grand Slams than be forced to get a Covid jab.

The Serbian was deported in extraordinary circumstances on the eve of last month's Australian Open where Rafael Nadal won a record 21st Grand Slam trophy to move ahead of Djokovic and Roger Federer on the all-time men's list.

Djokovic was asked in an interview with the BBC, published today, if he would sacrifice taking part in events such as Wimbledon and the French Open over his stance on the vaccine.

"Yes, that is the price that I'm willing to pay," Djokovic said, referring to giving up his chance to become the leading men's Grand Slam winner.

Djokovic said he did not want to be associated with the anti-vax movement,

but supported an individual's right to choose. "I was never against vaccination," he said, adding he had received vaccines as a child. "But I've always supported the freedom to choose what you put in your body."

"The principles of decision making on my body are more important than any title or anything else," he said.

"I'm trying to be in tune with my body as much as I possibly can."

Djokovic arrived in Melbourne in January for the first Grand Slam of the year claiming he had obtained a medical exemption to enter the country without being vaccinated as he had recently recovered from Covid-19.

But Australian border officials said he did not meet requirements to be exempted from strict vaccination rules, his visa was cancelled and a protracted legal appeal failed.

In his first interview since leaving Melbourne, Djokovic said he hoped vaccination requirements would change and that he could "play for many more years".

Djokovic said he was keeping an open mind about being vaccinated in the future "because we are all trying to find collectively, a best possible solution to end Covid."

## Norway Claims Fifth Biathlon Gold Medal in Winter Olympics

BEIJING (Dispatches) - Norway roared back to pull off a stunning win in the men's 4x7.5km biathlon relay at the Beijing Olympics following a sensational collapse on the final shoot by Eduard Latypov of the Russian Olympic Committee (ROC).

The middle two legs of the race looked like a victory parade for the ROC team, but a disastrous series of misses by Latypov destroyed their chances of gold, allowing Vete Sjaastad Christiansen to swoop in and claim the win for Norway.

"We had the margins on our side, combined with Vete performing at his best. We're so grateful," an elated Johannes Thingnes Boe said after securing his second relay gold of the Games, and his third overall.

"We never gave up, but we were so far behind I thought we were just fighting for the bronze," said Sturla Holm Laegreid, Norway's lead-off man.

Christiansen crossed the line 27.4 seconds ahead of Quentin Fillon Maillet of France, with Latypov coming home 17.9 seconds further back for a disappointing bronze medal finish.

Maillet was all the happier with his silver as it made for a total of five biathlon medals at one Olympics, more than any other athlete.

Freezing temperatures of minus 15 Celsius prompted organisers to start the race 2-1/2 hours earlier than planned, and the competition began in blazing afternoon sunshine with blustery winds increasing the chill in the air.

In all, 21 teams of four set out, with each racer skiing three 2.5km laps and shooting twice, once from the prone position and once from standing.



## Global Players' Survey Gives Thumbs-Down to Two-Year World Cup

PARIS (Dispatches) - Footballers around the world have given a resounding red card to FIFA's proposal to hold the World Cup every two years, according to a survey by players' global union Fifpro.

The findings, released on Tuesday, showed 75% of more than 1,000 male players questioned over the global governing body's plans to shake-up the international calendar were in favour of retaining the tournament's current four-year cycle.

In Europe and Asia 77% of players supported maintaining the status quo, against 63% from the Americas. In Africa the figure dropped to 49%, with the remainder split between holding the competition every two or three years.

"While a clear majority of players support the current frequency of the World Cup, a demand exists, particularly in smaller and medium-sized markets, to further develop and strengthen national team competitions," Fifpro said.

When asked to pick their preferred competition 81% singled out their domestic league or the World Cup "in its current four-year cycle".

Fifpro general secretary Jonas Baer-Hoffmann said the survey showed "most footballers around the world have a clear preference to play the World Cup every four years".

He said the results also underlined the importance of domestic league competitions to players. "These leagues are the bedrock of our game and we have to do more to strengthen them both for the sake of players and the overall stability of professional football."

Another key finding he pointed out was that "only 21 percent of them believe that their voice is respected and that their well-being is adequately considered in the context of international football governance".

