

Tajikistan's Culture Minister Says Her Country Is Intent on Expanding Cultural Ties With Iran As She Reiterates the Need for Holding Increased Number of Cultural Events Between the Two Persian-Speaking Nations

IRAN NEWS

Head of Majlis Commission for the Internal Affairs and Councils Criticized French President Emmanuel Macron's Meeting With An Anti-Iran Personality, Adding That Such Action Is a Definite Interference in Iran's Affairs

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IRGC Attack Terrorist Positions in Iraq's Kurdistan

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) has once again targeted the positions of terrorist groups operating near the country's western borders in Iraq's semi-autonomous Kurdistan region.

The IRGC's Ground Force pounded the positions of terror groups with multiple rocket launchers, precision-strike weapons and drones, according to a report published by Fars news agency.

The report comes as the commander of the IRGC's Hamzeh Seyed al-Shohada Base said security forces have arrested more than 100 elements of groups of separatists and terrorists, including the so-called Komala Party and the Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan (PDKI), who had a role in the recent riots in Iran.

Brigadier General Mohammad Taqi Osanlou said that Iran's northwestern borders are generally secure but the enemy has managed in a few cases to sneak weapons through the frontiers to stoke riots in Iran. Such attempts have, however, been met with fierce reactions from the Iranian security forces.

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Tehran Warns IAEA Over Anti-Iran Resolution



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Foreign Ministry spokesman says a delegation from the UN's nuclear watchdog will visit Tehran soon to continue talks aimed to find a solution to the remaining technical issues related to Tehran's nuclear program.

Speaking at a press conference on Monday, Nasser Kanaani confirmed that an Iranian delegation has traveled to Vienna recently and held talks with officials of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

He said the Islamic Republic would continue its "constructive" efforts with the aim of resolving the safeguards issues, adding that the two sides "agreed to take the next steps."

"Within this framework, it has been agreed that a delegation from the IAEA will travel to Iran," he explained. "This trip will take place in the near future and talks between Iran and the agency will continue."

He said that the act of issuing an anti-Iran resolution at the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)'s Board of Governors will not help resolve problems on 'safeguards' issues.

In response to a question about whether the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has provided the documents of those who have created riots and violence in Iran to other countries, he said that behavior of these countries will certainly be monitored by Iran, the issue of which will be prosecuted judicially within the framework of rules and regulations.

Earlier this month, Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian noted that there was "consensus" between Iran and the IAEA, as he announced the Iranian delegation's trip.

He said some of the IAEA's issues are linked to the negotiations on the revival of the 2015 nuclear deal. Amirabdollahian criticized as "hasty" and "unconstructive" the attempts made by the U.S., Britain, France and Germany to pass an anti-Iran resolution at the IAEA's Board of Governors (BoG). Some sides, he said, are trying to derail Iran's technical talks with the IAEA.

"Issuing a resolution at the BoG does not help resolve the technical and safeguard issues," he said, adding, "We are against such a process."

Last month, the spokesman for the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) criticized the IAEA for issuing politically-motivated reports about Iran's nuclear activities, saying such statements have on numerous occasions portrayed a tarnished and negative image of the country at the international level.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Kanaani pointed to the EU's anti-Iran statement and stated that the country is, unfortunately, witnessing the hasty and unconstructive behavior of European countries and it is a matter of regret to say that, as technical talks are ongoing with the Agency, the country is witnessing such illogical measures by European countries, so that issuance of anti-Iran resolution at IAEA's Board of Governors will cause problems ahead of Iran's technical cooperation with the Agency.

In response to a question on Iran's artillery attack on Iraq's Erbil, he stated that Iran will not remain silent about the threat to its territorial security especially border threats and separatist groups, and will defend its security with utmost all power.

Elsewhere in his remarks, the Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesman pointed to the talks between Iran and Saudi Arabia and stated that talks between the two countries with Iraqi mediation are underway.

In response to a question about the sale of weapons by Iran to Russia for use in the war with Ukraine, Kanaani said that Iran has not sent any equipment and weapons to Russia for use in the war in Ukraine so that Iran's defense cooperation with Russia is within the legal framework.

Iran has presented its positions many times, he said, adding that Iran adheres to the policy of active neutrality regarding Ukraine, due to the good relationship with the two countries. "We tried to bring the two sides back on the right track to resolve differences."

Iran emphasizes friendly relations with other countries, the issue of which has been put atop agenda of the 13th government under President Raisi.

Iran is not a member of any military alliance, but when it sees its national security in danger, it will react harshly. Iran tries to play a positive role in the case of Ukraine, he added.

Regarding the Vienna negotiations, he said that Iran has taken giant steps in this respect to reach a final agreement with the world's six major powers. Iran has taken constructive initiatives to advance the dialogue process and conclude the agreement.

Efforts to maintain the course of negotiations continue, he continued.

With regard to the issue of Lebanon, he said that Iran-Lebanon cooperation is friendly, so that imposition of unilateral policies against Lebanon is not legal.

Regarding the delineation of maritime borders between Lebanon and the Zionist regime, Kan'ani said that Iran's view of the Zionist regime is clear, so that Iran does not attach legitimacy to the regime, but it welcomes any event that leads to the realization of the rights of the Lebanese people. The Zionist regime only understands the language of Resistance, and the Resistance has provided Lebanon with a good capacity.

Gov't to Help Oil Industry to Boost Production Capacity

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The Cabinet's Economic Coordination Board made decisions to increase production in the field of oil and gas by using the capacities of the private sector.

In this meeting, which was held night under the chairmanship of President Ebrahim Raisi, the plan of the Oil Ministry for the development of eight new petro refineries in the southern coasts of the country by the private sector was brought up and it was decided that the National Development Fund will use its legal capacities to finance these projects.

With the implementation of the mentioned plans, the refining capacity of Iran's crude oil and gas condensate will be doubled to the current level.

The issue of settlement of the government's debts to the National Development Fund by handing over the right to exploit common fields of Iran and neighboring countries to this fund was raised with emphasis on priority fields and it was decided that the Ministry of Oil should make the necessary arrangements in this regard.

In this meeting, the plan of Oil Ministry to increase the production capacity of crude oil was also discussed and it was decided that the government should help in providing sufficient financial resources for the investment of the National Oil Company in this field.

Tax Revenues Expected To Surpass \$15b by Next March

TEHRAN (MNA) - Iran's annual tax income is anticipated to reach 4.54 quadrillion rials (about \$15.655 billion) by the end of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20, 2023), head of Iranian National Tax Administration (INTA) announced on Monday.

Making the remarks in the ninth edition on the national conference of Resistance Economy with the title of "Tax System; Fair and Intelligent", Davoud Manzour said Iran's tax revenue stood at 3.06 quadrillion rials (about \$10.551 billion) in the past year.

Stating that the tax system is considered one of the main ways to strengthen the economy, Manzour clarified: "The biggest damage to the country's economy, especially in the sanctions era, is the pressure that is placed on the financing of the government and makes the government unable to perform its duties."

The official went on to say that tax as a clean and stable source of income is the best way to finance the government to provide services and play its role and social responsibility.

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Assadi's Wife Recounts Jailed Iranian Diplomat's Ordeal

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The wife of Assadollah Assadi, an Iranian diplomat arrested in Germany in 2018 over trumped-up charges and currently serving a 20-year-long prison sentence in Belgium, has recounted the excruciating ordeal his husband has gone through and the inhumane circumstances under which he has been kept in prison in the two European countries.

Assadi's wife made the revelation in a series of posts on her Twitter account on Sunday, making public part of the inhumane behavior of the so-called European human rights advocates towards him during his detention in Germany and Belgium.

Citing the Iranian diplomat's hardships during 101 days of detention in Germany, she said he was kept in a bunker for a total of 28 days with no access to water while being deprived of hygiene services.

"In the bunker (28 days in total), I was denied access to water and had to request it via a phone, and if the guards came on time, which was often late, they would give me water in a paper cup through the hatch door," she quoted her husband as saying.

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Lebanon Slams Israeli Airstrikes on Syria

BEIRUT (Dispatches) - Lebanon has condemned in the strongest terms the latest Israeli airstrikes against an airbase in central Syria after the Tel Aviv regime's warplanes violated the Arab country's airspace to carry out the act of aggression.

The Lebanese Foreign Ministry in a statement voiced solidarity with the Syrian Arab Republic after the aerial raids, which targeted Shayrat Airbase southeast of Homs on Sunday evening, saying Beirut reserves the right to lodge a complaint with the United Nations in connection with the deadly attack.

"The ministry reaffirms that such attacks constitute a blatant violation of international laws and principles, and a violation of Lebanon's sovereignty by infringement upon its airspace by Israeli warplanes to carry out attacks," read the statement.

"The airstrikes also pose a direct threat to the safety of civilian navigation in Lebanese airspace and to international peace and security."

"The ministry reserves the right to file a complaint with the United Nations in New York as soon as all security data are available," it said.

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Int'l Congress of Imam Khamenei Quranic Thought

TEHRAN (MNA) – Iran's capital hosted the International Congress of Imam Khamenei Quranic Thoughts yesterday. The congress aims at promoting the Theory of the Revolutionary System in Ayatollah Khamenei's Quranic Narrative. Mehdi Jamshidi, who is a leading scholar of the Islamic Revolution, is among the key attendees of the event. The themes of this conference are the personality and Quranic life of Ayatollah Khamenei, the authority of the Quran, Quran and the Ahl al-Bayt (PBUT), Quranic sciences, interpretation and teachings of Quran, translation, contemplation, and familiarity with the Quran, recitation and memorization of Quran, Quranic activities, Quranic lifestyle, Quran and civilization, as well as Quranic principles for the 'Statement of the second step of the Islamic Revolution.

Leader Sends Delegation To Zahedan, Orders Probe Into Recent Violence

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN – Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei has ordered an investigation into the recent incidents that took place in the southeastern province of Sistan and Baluchestan.

Speaking in a meeting with a number of scholars on the recent events in Sistan and Baluchestan on Sunday, Mohammad-Javad Hajj Ali Akbari, the head of a delegation from Ayatollah Khamenei, said the Leader was saddened and concerned regarding the incidents and ordered them to be carefully investigated.

He said that the Leader called for taking necessary measures based on the results of the investigation.

Hajj Ali Akbari also said there will be no appeasement with criminals and those who foment insecurity.

"There will be no appeasement with those who have harmed the national and provincial security and committed crimes, and they must be punished and tried because the society's security is a red line for all governments."

Late in September, Zahedan, the capital of Sistan and Baluchestan province which is home to Iran's Baluch minority, saw an attack on a police station and a mosque.



The assailants torched a fire engine, an emergency station, and a bank there, but according to authorities, their attempts to trigger an ethnic sedition in the region fell flat thanks to the timely presence of security forces.

The attacks, claimed by the so-called Jaish al-Adl terrorist group, left at least 19 people, including police officers, dead and 20 others injured.

Sistan and Baluchestan – which borders Pakistan – has witnessed several terror attacks targeting both civilians and security forces in recent years.

Terrorist groups carrying out attacks against Iranian interests in southeastern and southwestern parts of the country have known links to a number of repressive regimes in the Persian Gulf region.

Iranian Students' Enrollment In Embassies' Schools Illegal

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Education Minister Yousef Nouri said that enrolling Iranian students in foreign embassies schools in Iran is against the Islamic Republic of Iran's laws.

Nouri said that the foreign embassies' schools are exclusively for the children of those embassies' employees, and the Education Ministry has forwarded letters in this respect both to the embassies and to Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran in that respect.

Nouri said that the Education Ministry has not issued any permit to such schools of any type, and their schools must therefore be exclusively at the service of the children of their own embassies, and their citizens in Iran.

The education minister said that the schools of foreign countries' embassies must act in accordance with the protocols of the education ministry of the country where they are.

The minister, furthermore, stressed, "Studying of Iranian students in the schools of foreign embassies is illegal."

MPs React to Azeri President Remarks

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iranian members of parliament reacted to Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev's recent remarks.

Iran's parliamentarian, Seyyed Alborz Hosseini said that making such remarks on the territorial integrity of the neighboring states is not good for the diplomatic position of the Azerbaijan Republic's President.

The legislator termed the remarks as "unreal", adding that the region needs peace more than ever.

Iran's parliamentarian, Mohammad Reza Mirtajeddini referred to the baseless comments of the Azerbaijan Republic's President, saying that how much this president is unaware of history.

Ahmadi Bigash stated that as an Iranian parliamentarian member, "I warn the President of Azerbaijan Republic to leave wrong and pipe dreams and do not rely on the imaginary backing of Western allies and Zionist Regime."

"A grandson can't deny [the actions of] his grandfather; so, the remarks of the Azerbaijan Republic's President have no basis," said Iran's First Deputy Parliament Speaker Ali Nikzad in Iran's Majlis (Parliament) when a lawmaker criticized the recent remarks made by the President of Azerbaijan Republic.

Iran Strongly Condemns Istanbul Terrorist Incident

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The Iranian Foreign Ministry condemns a "terrorist incident" that killed several people in a busy shopping street in Turkey's commercial hub of Istanbul.

"We strongly condemn whatever act of terrorism that targets the country and people of Turkey," spokesman Nasser Kanaani said.

"We stand by the side of the friendly and brotherly government and people of the Turkish republic," he added, wishing speedy recovery for those who were wounded in the tragic incident.

The remarks came after a heavy explosion ripped through the Turkish city's Istiklal street, which was packed with people at the time of the blast.

As many as six people were killed and at least 81 others injured in the blast. Authorities later said a government ministry worker and his daughter were among the dead. Five people were in intensive care in hospital, two of them in a critical condition.

No person or group has claimed responsibility for the apparent attack.

Venezuela, Iran Plan to Set Up Maritime Bridge

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Venezuelan and Iranian officials are holding the 9th joint economic commission in order to deepen bilateral ties by the use of a "maritime bridge," as the first phase of export of Iran-made cars is underway. According to Venezolana de Televisión (VTV), the two countries are convening in Tehran to discuss strategic cooperation and improve relations in the 9th joint economic commission.

Venezuela's Transportation Minister Ramon Velasquez Araguayan, presiding the Venezuelan delegation to the commission, declared that the cooperation is a tool in the hands of both countries to pave the way for implementing their 20-year agreement, which was signed by President Ebrahim Raisi and his Latin American counterpart Nicolas Maduro in June.

The Venezuelan minister noted that some seven joint committees from his country's governmental sector and Iran's private sector discuss issues concerning agriculture, industry, science, technology, electricity, energy, oil and so on.

Velasquez Araguayan also underlined that we face big projects and challenges to create real relations based on brotherhood and reciprocal assistance in order to strengthen mutual relationships and pursue our freedom-seeking dreams.

The minister also said that a maritime bridge will be created with the aim of developing bilateral trade between Tehran and Caracas, EFE news agency reported.

Gabriela Jimenez Ramirez, Vice President of the Department of Science, Technology, Education and Health of the President of Venezuela, wrote on her Twitter account that scientific agreements with Iran are a part of the policy of reciprocal learning and building another possible world.

Iran and Venezuela as two independent countries, which are suffering from the illegal sanctions imposed by the United States, started effective collaborations in order to nullify the embargo.

The administration of President Raisi has changed the policy of relying on the interaction with the West states and focused on contributing to countries, which have similar policies.

The determination of a 20-year period for expansion of exchanges between Caracas and Tehran indicates that the two countries are seeking to deepen strategic ties regardless of the fact that what kind of administrations would lead management of these nations.

PBO Mastermind of Administrative and Executive System

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN – President Seyed Ebrahim Raisi described the Plan and Budget Organization as the mastermind of the country's administrative and executive system and stated, "It is necessary that both plans and budgets are taken into consideration in this organization and the important issue of monitoring is one of the neglected tasks of the Plan and Budget Organization, which should be followed without compromise"

Speaking on Monday at the Plan and Budget Organization in a meeting that was held to supervise the organization, President Raisi said, "The Plan and Budget Organization is the mastermind of the country's administrative and executive system, which turns data analysis into planning for the optimal performance of other components and departments".

He listed the provision of quality public services at the lowest cost as one of the other duties of the Plan and Budget Organization and added, "Designing the country's governance system and monitoring its

performance for all-round progress is the responsibility of the Plan and Budget Organization".

The President said that plan and budget are two important components of this organization and said, "The requirement for the implementation of justice is a document that can divide the privileged, less-advantaged and the disadvantaged".

The said, "One of these important and central macro indicators is increasing growth and productivity. At the time of adjusting and allocating the budget to an organization, it should be checked whether this organization has the necessary productivity in accordance with the budget allocated to it".

Raisi further mentioned the important issue of supervision as one of the neglected functions and duties of the Plan and Budget Organization and stated, "If the supervision role of this organization is properly taken into account in addition to setting the program and allocating and presenting the budget, many violations will be avoided".

Stating that monitoring does not mean negation of trust, but the continuation of trust, the President emphasized, "Courageous and uncompromising

monitoring of the performance and spending of funds in all institutions by the Plan and Budget Organization is emphasized by the Popular Administration".

The President also advised this organization not to rely solely on the government's income in planning and to consider people's resources and foreign investments as well.

Raisi considered operational budgeting and budget allocation based on performance as another necessity of this organization and said, "In this context, the budgetary performance of the institutions is a suitable lever that can be used to ensure the realization of plans and put the country on the right track".

Raisi stated, "Managers also have the duty to pay attention to the ways of generating income in the institutions, in addition to planning for spending the budget received from the Plan and Budget Organization".

The President emphasized on securing credit for the approved plans of the first round of provincial trips by stating that some of the projects and resolutions of the first round of provincial trips are awaiting the allocation of funds and credit from this organization.

Sanctions Help Form Defense Industry Research in Iran

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Vice President and Head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran Mohammad Eslami has emphasized that sanctions played a role in promoting the Islamic Republic to form defense industry research.

The vice president said in a meeting prior to a national conference on the place of science and technology in the Sacred Defense (eight-year Iraq-Iran war) in Tehran on Monday, noting that sanctions prompted technical and industrial groups active in the defense sector to turn requirements into their agenda and the situation caused the formation of defense industry research.

Following the onset of the war in 1980, some countries imposed sanctions on Iran; so, the Islamic country needed to pursue self-sufficiency, he argued.

Studies and researches ended up paving the way for producing defense products, for instance the know-how of manufacturing rockets were developed and then, maritime missiles were produced, the AEOI chief said.

Those people who succeeded in developing short-range drones during the sacred defense continued the process and could improve the know-how to a powerful point, he added.

Eslami went on to say that in terms of telecommunications, the Iranians could develop the sector in order to decode enemies messages, and that they joined the telecommunications organization after the conflict and improved defense-oriented industry.

On maritime industry and speedboats, the official mentioned that the sacred defense played a key role in today's advancements in this sector and that Iran can manufacture submarines and destroyers.

Scientific, Technological Cooperation With Venezuela to Increase

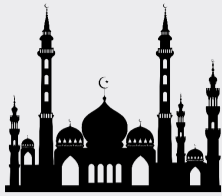
TEHRAN (IRNA) - Deputy science minister for international affairs said in a meeting with visiting Venezuelan vice president for scientific, technological, educational, and health affairs that bilateral cooperation in scientific, research and technological fields need to be increased.

The Deputy Science Minister Vahid Haddadi-Asl who was speaking with Venezuelan Vice President Gabriela Jimenez on the sidelines of the 9th Joint Economic Cooperation Commission of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, emphasized that the two countries' comprehensive cooperation need to be boosted.

In the meeting in the presence of the two countries' officials, including the Venezuelan transportations minister, who is his country's head of the joint commission, Venezuelan vice president for scientific, technological, educational, and health affairs, deputy Iran foreign minister for economic affairs, it was agreed that the next round of the meeting will be held in Caracas.

The Venezuelan vice present, too, in the meeting referred to her talks and exchange of viewpoints with the Iranian Science, Research and Technology Minister Mohammad Zolfi-Gol last summer in a videoconference, when she was her country's science minister and once again appreciated the Iranian science minister for hosting the Venezuelan delegation.

She also expressed hope that in his meeting with the Iranian science minister, scheduled for the upcoming Tuesday the agreements for evermore expansion of bilateral cooperation will be reached.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	11:48
■ Evening (Maghreb)	17:17
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	05:14
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	06:41

24. "Go thou to Pharaoh, for he has indeed transgressed all bounds."
25. (Moses) said: "O my Lord! expand me my breast;

Surah 20. Ta-ha (24 - 25)

Home Appliance Production Doubled

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – A member of board of directors of Association of Home Appliance Manufacturers of Iran says during the recent years and with support of Ministry of Trade, Mine and Trade, production of home appliance has increased from 8m to 16m sets.

Speaking in a brainstorming meeting of minister of industry, mine and trade with active associations in the industry, mine and trade sectors, Mr. Alireza Mohammadi Daniali said that the main problem of the national industry is command pricing and nobody knows this type of pricing has been copied from which successful global model.

He emphasized that industrial strategy should be under the shadow of macro-economic strategy but command pricing leads to destruction of industry and economy.

Daniali blamed the smuggling and fake products as the main problems of the home appliance industry and noted that fortunately good move has started by the industry ministry in the field of smuggling and fake products but its total elimination needs a national determination.

He added that despite the double fold rise in home appliance production, recession dominates this industry and country needs some solutions to come out of this deadlock.

He reiterated that the ministry pays for the idealistic policies that some part of the ruling establishment pursues it and in fact these policies are a rent-seeking opportunity which national economy gives the political sector.

Meanwhile an expert in the field of home appliance industry told IRNA that recent riots in the country have deepened the existing recession in the home appliance market. He said that internet disrupt or low internet speed has not so much affected the



production trend in the companies because orders are received by the phone or emails but when the purchasers cannot afford to buy, the products are stored in the warehouses and it will lead to the deepening of current recession.

He noted that in the past two years the pandemic was the main reason for the recession in the market but the producers and vendors took some initiatives and tried to sell their products in the virtual space.

He went on to say that because of gradual trust of people to this sort of sales, the market was revived and people got used to buy their products by internet rather than physical presence in the stores and this also helped the number of smuggled goods is reduced in this virtual market.

He noted that the current condition in the country and recent riots have pushed the people to buy gold or dollars and therefore they do not pay attention to the home appliance market and therefore recession in the home appliance market has deepened more than before.

He predicted a tough time for this industry and production sector by the end of the current year. He noted that recent incidents and recession has forced companies to reduce their products, adding that the home appliance production capacity can meet the demands of the country and neighboring countries.

Iran Seeking to Boost Exports to China

TEHRAN (MNA) – Referring to the presence of the Iranian firms participating in the 5th China International Import Expo (CIIE) in Shanghai, an Iranian diplomat said Iran seeks to promote its products via this exhibition for export to China.

More Iranian companies have participated in the 5th China International Import Expo (CIIE) in Shanghai to promote their products and brands through the platform, as people-to-people exchanges between China and Iran have been connected by the Silk Road since ancient times, an Iranian diplomat said.

Hamid Adeli, a commercial counselor from the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Beijing, told the Global Times that it is his first time attending the CIIE intensively, but some Iranian companies participated for the fourth time.

A total of 11 companies from Iran attended the expo this year, from the agriculture, consumer goods, and healthcare sectors, according to Adeli. "I think that the CIIE is a very good opportunity for Iranian products, for Iranian enterprises to... export to China," he said.

As an official of the trade promotion organization of Iran, Adeli said that the exhibition is the most important platform to promote products.

He noted that "other countries try to boost their exports, but China is trying to enhance imports," adding that China is trying to do this with two purposes - strengthening international trade and increasing domestic consumption to help economic growth.

"China provides this platform as a public good, and that not only helps China but also other countries and regions to engage and participate in production in global factories," Adeli said.

Many Iranian companies don't have enough information about this market yet. The CIIE exhibition can give Iranian companies good information and opportunities, Adeli said. He plans to introduce more agricultural products to China such as oranges, tangerines, and sweet lemons, as well as citrus, honey, and dairy products.

Iran, Venezuela Plan for Big Projects in Challenge to U.S.

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran and Venezuela, both petroleum-rich OPEC members, have found solidarity in coordinated geopolitical, economic, and military maneuvers against shared common enemy the United States, which has subjected them to a regimen of economic sanctions for years.

Ties between the nations were close under Venezuela's maverick president Hugo Chavez, but strengthened further under Nicolas Maduro, who has sought a lifeline from Iran to pull his country's economy back from the brink.

While Venezuela enjoys what are believed to be the world's largest petroleum deposits, years of maintenance issues in the face of US sanctions have dramatically hampered its production and refining capabilities.

In June of this year, Venezuela and Iran signed a 20-year cooperation plan which involves Iranian assistance in repair and maintenance of existing Venezuelan refineries, as well as other technical and engineering expertise. The two nations also signed a deal whereby Iran will deliver four oil tankers to Venezuela through the Iranian company SADRA. Weekly flights between Caracas and Tehran commenced in July.

Currently, Venezuela lacks both the investment capital and the expertise to resurrect its once formidable oil industry. With Russia's Rosneft sidelined by US sanctions, the Maduro government has looked to Iran to step into the gap.

Iran has sent fleets of fuel-laden tanker ships to alleviate Venezuela's crises before, and also helped to export Venezuela's crude in the face of crippling US sanctions.

In 2020, Iran launched a new supermarket, Megasis, in Venezuela. Perched on the eastern edge of Caracas, the 200,000 square foot megastore sits next to Venezuela's largest slum, Petare, where it stocks a dazzling array of over 2,500 Iranian products, many considered novelties to its new customers.

With constant flow of tankers, cargo ships and planes between the two countries, the supermarket is a small piece in a growing mosaic of bilateral and possibly multilateral projects.

The budding relationship, however, has alarmed Washington which deems it as part of asymmetric

warfare against the West, where the interests of Venezuela, Iran, China, Russia and Cuba align.

On Sunday, Venezuelan Minister of Transport Ramón Velásquez announced the establishment of a "sea bridge" in order to expand bilateral trade between Tehran and Caracas.

Velásquez is currently leading a large delegation on an official visit to Iran to attend their joint economic commission meeting.

They met with the participation of seven joint committees consisting of the Venezuelan public sector and the private sector of Iran to debate issues related to agriculture and industry, science and technology, electricity, energy and oil.

"We have big projects as well as big challenges to create real ties of brotherhood, cooperation and mutual assistance to strengthen bilateral relations in order to realize our dreams of living freely," he was quoted as saying.

Iranian and Venezuelan delegates attend a joint commission meeting in Tehran on Sunday.

Velásquez also announced the shipment of 1,000 cars built in Iran to Venezuela, stating that they were among 80,000 requests registered for the products of an Iranian car manufacturer in his country.

"We have a very high demand for Iranian car products, where we were able to register about 80,000 requests in the first stage," he said.

With the exports, Iran is staking out a niche in South America's automotive marketplace which has a lot of space for growth and expansion, given the uneasy relationship of some of the countries of the region with the United States.

It follows the Iran-Venezuela 2022 Expo Fair held on Sept. 14-18 in Caracas where President Maduro announced the assembly of four Iranian models at Venirauto car manufacturing plant, a joint venture between the Venezuelan government and major Iranian automaker Iran Khodro.

The shipment from Iran's Bandar Abbas port on Sunday, however, consisted of Saina and Quik models built by Iran's second largest carmaker Saipa.

"We are activating the sea bridge between Tehran and Caracas that allows the total flow of goods and products to feed the economies of both countries," Velásquez said at the ceremony.



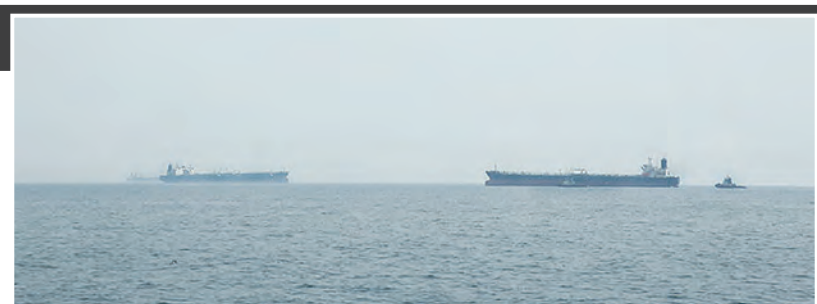
Iran Crude Price up for Asian Market

TEHRAN (Shana) – The National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) has raised the official crude oil selling price for Asian customers in December.

The international affairs department of NIOC increased the price of light crude oil, heavy crude oil, and Forouzan crude for December by \$5.35, \$1.85, and \$1.95 higher than the average Oman/Dubai oil prices.

The average price of Oman/Dubai crude oil is the benchmark in West Asia.

Iran has set the official selling price of light crude oil in the northwest European market 35 cents lower than Brent, and the price of heavy and Forouzan crude oil in this market is \$4.4 and \$4.3 lower than Brent, respectively.



Iran Ready for

Mining Cooperation With ECO Countries

ISFAHAN (IRNA) - An official in Iran's Ministry of Industries, Mine and Trade (MIMT) says the country is ready to engage in mining and metals projects in member states of the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO).

The head of MIMT's local branch in Iran's central province of Isfahan Amir Hossein Komeili said on Monday that Iran will be ready to contribute to projects aimed at discovery, extraction, and processing of minerals in ECO countries.

Komeili made the remarks in a meeting of ECO mining experts in Isfahan, a province that is home to some of the largest mines and metals companies in Iran.

Iran is a founding member of the 10-member ECO which includes major mining countries in the Central Asia region.

Tea Output Exceeds 26,000 Tons

TEHRAN (MNA) - Iranian farmers have managed to produce 26,171 tons of dry tea in the current Iranian calendar year (started on March 21), Head of Iran's Tea Organization (ITO) Habib Jahansaz told ISNA.

The official noted that so far 116,000 tons of tea leaves have been purchased from the country's tea farmers, from which the mentioned amount of dry tea has been produced.

According to Jahansaz, the government pays 25 percent of the value of the purchased tea to the farmers, and the rest is paid by tea processing factory owners.

He put the country's annual tea consumption at about 100,000 tons, of which about 25,000-30,000 tons is supplied through domestic production and the rest through imports.

The demand in the domestic market indicates that there is a good potential to increase tea production in the country, he said.

The official further noted that Iran has also exported 20,000 tons of tea during the first seven months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21-October 22).

Tea harvest season in Iran starts in farmlands across the northern provinces of Gilan and Mazandaran in early May. More than 55,000 families grow tea over 28,000 hectares of farmland in the two provinces, accounting for 90 percent of the country's total tea production.

In late December 2019, Jahansaz named Azerbaijan, Iraq, and Afghanistan as the top destinations for Iranian tea exports.

Iran also exports tea to India, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Canada, Australia, Spain, the Czech Republic, and Georgia.

Iran Plans to Build 8 New Petro-Refineries

TEHRAN (MNA) - Iranian Oil Ministry is planning to establish eight new petro-refineries in collaboration with the private sector, aiming to double production in the oil and gas sector's downstream sector.

The ministry's plan was announced in a meeting of the Government Economic Coordination Headquarters on Monday, IRNA reported.

In this meeting, chaired by President Ebrahim Raisi, the Oil Ministry's plan for the development of the mentioned petro-refineries in the southern coasts of the country was proposed and it was decided that the National Development Fund (NDF) would participate in the financing of these projects using its legal capacities.

During the gathering, the ministry's program for increasing the country's crude oil production capacity was also discussed and it was decided that the government should help in providing sufficient financial resources to the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) in this regard.

The aim of this program, which is expected to improve Iran's position in the global oil market in the coming years, is to increase the recovery factor of the country's existing fields while modernizing the country's oil extraction equipment.

Iran has been following new strategies to build more petro-refineries across the country and even to turn the country's existing refineries into petro-refineries, since due to the country's benefit from oil and gas resources, the development of petro-refineries is much easier and relatively cheaper in Iran than other countries in the world, and the country can play a role in regulating the price of petrochemical products in the world due to its proximity to energy sources and its capacity for the development of petro-refineries.

Back in August, Iran's Expediency Discernment Council tasked Oil Ministry to take the necessary measures for increasing the capacity of the country's petro-refineries to at least three million barrels per day (bpd) in the Seventh Five-Year National Development Plan (2021-2026).

Six Dead in Mid-Air Collision At Texas WWII Show

HOUSTON (Dispatches) - Six people were killed when a pair of World-War-II-era planes collided in mid-air at a show in Texas and crashed to the ground in a ball of fire, authorities said.

"According to our Dallas County Medical Examiner, there are a total of 6 fatalities from yesterday's Wings over Dallas air show incident," Dallas County Judge Clay Jenkins said Sunday on Twitter.

The incident at Dallas Executive Airport involved a Boeing B-17 Flying Fortress and a smaller Bell P-63 Kingcobra, the Federal Aviation Administration said Saturday.

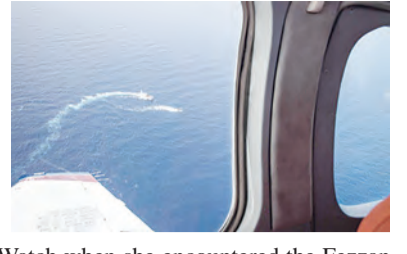


Violence Stalks EU-Libya Migrant Deal

ROME (Dispatches) - Leona Blankenstein couldn't believe what she was hearing when the Libyan coastguard threatened to blast her small plane out of the sky.

The German doctor was in a spotter aircraft for the rescue charity Sea-Watch when she encountered the Fezzan patrol boat as it picked up migrants in Maltese waters on October 25.

"Get away from Libyan territorial (waters), otherwise we'll shoot you by SAM (surface-to-air) missiles," warned the vessel, one of several Italy gave to Libya under a controversial EU-backed deal to stop migrants reaching Europe.



At Least Six Dead in Istanbul Street Explosion



ISTANBUL (Dispatches) - Six people have been killed and 53 injured after an explosion rocked Istanbul's popular pedestrian thoroughfare İstiklal Avenue, in an apparent bomb attack that Turkey's president described as an act of terrorism.

Speaking shortly before departing for Tuesday's G20 summit in Bali, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan spoke of a "treacherous attack", adding: "Those responsible will be punished."

Erdoğan said investigations were continuing but initial reports suggested an act of terrorism. "The first information provided to us by the [Istanbul] governor suggests this was an act of terrorism. We detected that a woman played a role. The work continues," he said.

The explosion occurred at about 4.20pm local time (1320 GMT) on Sunday, the Istanbul governor, Ali Yerlikaya, tweeted. While central Istanbul has been targeted by Kurdish separatists and militant Islamists in the recent past, the attack has so far not been claimed.

Five prosecutors were assigned to investigate the explosion, the state-run Anadolu news agency said.

The explosion shook buildings around the busy tourist area, rattling windows and sending flocks of pigeons into the air.

Videos posted online from the moment of the attack showed tens if not hundreds of terrified people running and trying to seek cover in nearby shops as a fireball billowed overhead in the distance from the middle of the street. Shoppers who had previously been strolling in the afternoon sun clutched each other in fear before turning to run away.

"When I heard the explosion, I was petrified, people froze, looking at each other. Then people started running away. What else can you do?" said Mehmet Akus, 45, a worker in a restaurant on the avenue.

"My relatives called me, they know I work on İstiklal. I reassured them," he told Reuters.

Other footage showed a few people scattered around the site of the explosion, in front of a large Mango store, with some rushing to help. Ambulances, fire engines and police were at the scene.

An hour after the explosion, parts of the avenue remained open to pedestrians, while shops were shuttered and police helicopters roared overhead.

At a police cordon to block off the area immediately around the explosion, fearful families and tourists tried to hurry away as security services locked down access to the section of the street leading to the city's central Taksim Square.

Turkey's media ombudsman, RTÜK, placed a temporary ban on reporting on the explosion, preventing broadcasters from showing the moment the blast struck or the immediate aftermath, "to avoid broadcasts that may create fear, panic and turmoil in society and may serve the purposes of terrorist organizations".

Social media users reported that access to Twitter was throttled. The Turkish parliament recently passed a sweeping new law prohibiting "disinformation", under which social media users or journalists accused of breaking it could be jailed for up to three years. The head of RTÜK, Ebubekir Şahin, warned citizens against spreading misinformation about the attack. "We are following the developments closely. Please do not rely on information from unclear sources. Let's get information from reliable sources. Let's not spread false information unknowingly," he said.

İstiklal Avenue is a crowded street popular with tourists and locals, lined by shops and restaurants.

The Istanbul mayor, Ekrem İmamoğlu, of the opposition Republican People's party (CHP), visited İstiklal Avenue following the explosion, which occurred less than 200 meters from the party's Istanbul headquarters. "I received information from our fire brigade teams on İstiklal street. They continue their investigations in the area in coordination with the police. Our healthcare workers are also working hard. I wish God's mercy once again to those who lost their lives, and I wish a speedy recovery to the injured," he tweeted.

Turkey was hit by a string of deadly bombings between 2015 and 2017 by Islamic State and outlawed Kurdish groups. They included a suicide bomber attack on the same street on 19 March 2016, which killed five people and injured 36. Turkish police later said the bomber had links to IS.

U.S. Seeks No Conflict With China

NUSA DUA (Dispatches) - U.S. President Joe Biden said his country will maintain open communication lines and seek no conflict with China, ahead of what are expected to be tense talks on a range of geopolitical issues at the G20 summit in Indonesia this week.

Biden and Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping are on Monday set to meet face-to-face for the first time since Biden took office, as bilateral relations languish at their worst in decades. Jake Sullivan, a national security adviser to Biden, told reporters the meeting could last "a couple of hours".

Biden, who landed in Bali island after meeting Southeast Asian and East Asian leaders in Cambodia, said the United States would "compete vigorously" with Beijing while "ensuring competition does not veer into conflict".

Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov also arrived in Bali from Cambodia earlier on Sunday.



Taliban Ban Afghan Women From Gyms and Public Baths

KABUL (Dispatches) - Gyms and public baths are now also off limits to Afghan women, the Taliban confirmed, days after banning them from parks and funfairs.

Women are increasingly being squeezed out of public life since the Taliban's return last year despite the hardline Islamists promising a softer version of the harsh rule that characterised their first stint in power that ended in 2001.

Most female character workers have lost their jobs -- or are being paid a pittance to stay at home -- while women are also barred from travelling without a male relative, and must cover up with a burqa or hijab when out of the home.

Schools for teenage girls have also been shuttered across most of the country since the Taliban's August 2021 return.

"Gyms are closed for women because their trainers were male and some of them were combined gyms," Mohammad Akif Sadeq Mohajir, spokesman for the Ministry for the Prevention of Vice and Promotion of Virtue, told AFP.

He said "hammams" -- traditional public bathing houses that have always been segregated by sex -- were now also off limits.

"Currently, every house has a bathroom in it, so it won't be any issue for the women," he said.

One video clip circulating on social media -- which could not immediately be verified -- showed a group of women, backs to the camera, lamenting the gym ban.

"It's a women-only gym -- the teachers and trainers are all women," a voice says, breaking with emotion.

"You can't just ban us from everything. Do we not have the right to anything at all?"

Activists have said the increasing restrictions on women are an attempt to stop them from gathering to organize opposition to the Taliban's rule.

Small groups of women have staged frequent flash protests in Kabul and other major cities, risking the wrath of Taliban officials who have beaten and detained them.

Ukraine's Kherson Races to Restore Power, Water

KHERSON (Dispatches) - Utility companies in Kherson were working to restore critical infrastructure damaged and mined by fleeing Russian forces, with most homes in the southern Ukrainian city still without electricity and water, regional officials said on Sunday.

The governor of Kherson region, Yaroslav Yanushevych, said the authorities had decided to maintain a curfew from 5 p.m. to 8 a.m. and ban people from leaving or entering the city as a security measure.

"The enemy mined all critical infrastructure objects," Yanushevych told Ukrainian TV.

"We are trying to meet within a few days and (then) open the city," he said, adding that he hoped mobile phone operators could resume service soon.

Ukrainian troops arrived in the centre of Kherson on Friday after Russia abandoned the only regional capital it had captured since its invasion began in February. The withdrawal marked the third major Russian retreat of the war and the first to involve yielding such a large occupied city in the face of a major Ukrainian counter-offensive that has retaken parts of the east and south.

The head of Ukrainian state railways said train services to Kherson were expected to resume this week.

Another regional official, however, said that while mine clearance was under way and authorities were working to restore critical services, in humanitarian

terms the situation in the city "remains very difficult".

"Most houses have no electricity, no water and problems with gas supplies," Yuriy Sobolevskiy, first deputy chairman of Kherson regional council, told Ukrainian TV.

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said in a video address on Saturday that "before fleeing from Kherson, the occupiers destroyed all the critical infrastructure: communications, water, heat, electricity".

While jubilant residents welcomed arriving Ukrainian troops in Kherson, Ukraine's general staff reported continued fierce fighting along the eastern front in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions.

Over the past 24 hours its forces repelled Russian attacks along several settlements in both regions, it said in its morning update, while reporting Russian rocket and artillery fire in the eastern areas of Bahmut, Avdiivka, Novopavlivka and Zaporizhzhia. Zelenskyy credited Ukraine's success in Kherson and elsewhere in part to stiff resistance in the Donetsk region despite repeated Russian attacks.

"There it is just hell - there are extremely fierce battles there every day," he said on Saturday.

Hundreds of residents lined the streets of Kherson on Saturday waving national flags, chanting "thank you, thank you" and decorating Ukrainian servicemen with blue and yellow ribbons.



Democrats Keep Control of U.S. Senate



PHOENIX (Dispatches) - Democrats held onto control of the U.S. Senate, handing a major victory to President Joe Biden and extinguishing hopes of the "red wave" that Republicans had expected leading into the midterm elections.

Biden, who struggled with low approval ratings ahead of Tuesday's elections, partly due to public frustration over inflation, said the late Saturday outcome made him look forward to the remainder of his term in office.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer described it as a "victory and vindication" for Democrats and their agenda. He accused the Republican Party of stoking fear and division during the campaign.

Republicans, however, remained close to seizing control of the House of Representatives as officials continued counting ballots.

It could take several days or more before the outcome of enough House races is known to determine which party will control the 435-seat chamber. Returns were still flowing in for several races, including many in liberal-leaning California.

As of late on Saturday, Republicans had won 211 seats, with 218 needed for a majority, ahead of the Democrats with 205.

"The American people rejected the anti-democratic, authoritarian, nasty and divisive direction the MAGA Republicans wanted to take our country," Schumer said after Senator Catherine Cortez Masto's re-election win in Nevada sealed control of the chamber for Biden's Democrats.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, 82, told ABC News that she does not have plans to leave Congress. There has been speculation she would resign, especially after her husband was attacked by an intruder at their San Francisco home last month. The Democrats would control the Senate, as they have for the past two years, with 50 of its 100 seats, as Vice President Kamala Harris holds a tie-breaking vote.

If Democratic Senator Raphael Warnock were to win the Dec. 6 Georgia runoff election against Republican challenger Herschel Walker, the Democrats' 51-49 majority would give them an additional edge in passing the few bills that are able to advance with a simple majority, instead of the 60 needed for most legislation.

"We're focusing now on Georgia. We feel good about where we are," Biden said on Sunday in Cambodia ahead of an East Asia summit. "I am incredibly pleased by the turnout."

Smart Farming Tech Offers Sprout of Hope in Greece



IMATHIA (Dispatches) - Eyes glued to his mobile phone, farmer Sotiris Mournos pores over the latest microclimate and humidity data about his fields on the plain of Imathia in northern Greece.

The high-tech farming techniques he uses are making slow progress in Greece's tradition-bound and struggling agricultural sector, but growers like him see them as key to their future.

Mournos, 25, employs a Greek smart-farming app to boost production of his family's cotton fields and fruit trees.

Using real-time data recorded by a weather station, he can analyse and correlate the impact of weather conditions on his nearly 25-acre cotton plantation.

"We've managed to reduce the use of fertiliser and irrigation... (and thereby to) increase the financial return" of the farm, said Mournos, who gave up studying computer science at university to devote himself to the family holding in the town of Platy.

Measuring the humidity or the nitrogen level in the soil helps to curb the excessive use of fertilisers and saves water, he notes.

As in many other southern European countries, Greece's agricultural sector is chronically short of water and smart farming could help deal with that problem.

The sector has also lost a major share of its available labor in recent decades, as young people snub farm work for better-paid jobs in services such as tourism.

Agriculture now represents just five percent of Greece's GDP, half what it was 20 years ago.

The government has budgeted €230 million over the next three years to revive the country's farming industry. Most of that derives from the European Union's Common Agricultural Policy innovation fund.

"Most young people in my village prefer other jobs and have given up working in the fields," Mournos told AFP.

But he is making a go at farming, aiming to work smart by using the farming app for several years now. It means he uses 40 per cent less fertilizer on his cotton field and can avoid using two pesticide sprays — altogether saving €9,000 — without affecting production rates.

Analysts say the farming app is not widely used in Greece although interest is gradually picking up.

But persuading farmers who may be less technologically minded than Mournos to embrace it faces myriad challenges.

A key hurdle is the small size of Greek farms — less than 10 hectares on average — and the country's largely mountainous terrain.

Greek farms are often family businesses or involve rented fields, making investment in tools and practices less appealing.

Meanwhile, an "endemic" lack of cooperation among farmers prevents them sharing costs, says Aikaterini Kasimati, an agricultural engineer at the University of Agronomy in Athens.

As a result, Greece lags far behind other European states in the use of smart farming, says Vassilis Protonotarios, marketing manager of Neuropublic, a company specializing in digital agriculture.

He said farmers could benefit from new technology without having to invest in expensive equipment or have "specialized digital skills".

Then, there is the difficulty of convincing farmers to try something new.

Organic farmer Thodoris Arvanitis says his colleagues are not interested in new technologies because they don't know enough about them and prefer long-used conventional methods.

War-Weary Ukraine Residents Chop Wood To Survive Winter



SIVERSK (Dispatches) - In the eastern Ukrainian town of Siversk, Valery drives a chainsaw through a tree trunk, like many others in the war-ravaged region stocking up for a cold winter.

"We try to survive thanks to wood," says the 39-year-old, who stayed behind to look after his mother after his wife and children fled to the capital.

"A basement (to hide from Russian strikes), a stove and wood — that's all we have," he says, not giving his surname.

Russian forces who invaded Ukraine in February pounded the district with missiles and rockets this summer, and unsuccessfully tried several times to capture it.

Though the town has so far held out, its heights and eastern flank have been disfigured by the strikes, and deep craters have been etched in the earth.

In one square, buildings including a school has been severely damaged.

Only a handful of the town's pre-war 12,000 residents remain today, battling life without gas or electricity.

"There's nothing else to do, so we chop down the trees as much as possible. There are lots here, so it should be enough" for the winter, Valery says.

The front line lies in a semi-circle, some 10 to 15 kilometres to the east of the town.

The constant to and fro of artillery fire between Ukrainian and Russian forces resounds throughout near-abandoned town.

"The only way to get through it is to drink wine before sleeping," Valery says.

"I'm stressed, it's difficult to cope."

Alla, a 68-year-old doctor who also stayed behind, says she helps distribute humanitarian aid from the local authorities and church when it arrives.

"There are also volunteers who bring in food for the animals" left behind to roam the town, she says. The physician says the fighting has destroyed her flat and one of her two houses in Siversk.

She has moved all the firewood from the destroyed house to the surviving one where she lives with her husband. Suddenly, a blast makes her jump.

"There goes the Vasilek," she says, as Ukrainian soldiers fire their Soviet 2B9 Vasilek mortar gun in the direction of Russian positions.

"It's hard to get used to all this firing," she says.

"But it's our choice. We stayed here, so we're trying to deal with it."

The main problem, she says, is the lack of communication with the outside world.

"We don't have a telephone signal. We did before, but not anymore. It's hard to reach someone," she says.

With no power in the area, residents have had to adapt to daylight hours, which end at around 5:00 pm.

"It gets dark early so we go to bed early. And we wake up early. That's how we live," she says.

In the town's heights, Volodymyr, Victoria and Mykola chat at the bottom of the building where they live. Axe in hand, Volodymyr is dicing up log for an outside oven.

"We chop up wood, put it in the oven and cook the buckwheat," he says, adding it's warmer outside near the stove than inside his unheated flat.

Sitting on a bench in a woolly blue hat and with her hands stuffed into her jacket pockets, Victoria grumbles.

"I live next door and we were put on the list to receive wood. They (the local authorities) took our names three months ago, but still we haven't received anything," she says.



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Black Sea Gas Field Still to Go Online Next Year

ISTANBUL (Dispatches) - Turkey's Black Sea gas field is on track to go online next year as promised and work has sped up to connect it to the national infrastructure, President Tayyip Erdogan said.

Addressing a natural gas pipeline opening in the northern Kastamonu province, Erdogan said drilling at 9 of the ten wells in the first phase of the seabed Sakarya gas field was complete. "Hopefully we'll start using this gas next year," Erdogan said via video. Turkey discovered natural gas off its northern coast in 2020 and since estimated volumes at 540 billion cubic metres (bcm).



Global Debt Levels Rose Substantially in 2021

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - Debt levels among low- and middle-income countries rose sharply in 2021, with China accounting for 66% of lending by official bilateral creditors, World Bank President David Malpass said, underscoring the need to reduce the debt of poorer countries.

The World Bank's annual report on global debt statistics, due out next month, makes clear that private sector creditors also needed to participate in debt reductions, Malpass told Reuters in an interview.

The Group of 20 major economies and the Paris Club of official creditors created a common framework for debt treatments in late 2020 to help countries weather the fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic, but its implementation has been halting.

The creditors of Chad reached the first agreement negotiated under the framework this week, but it leaves the country's longer-term debt sustainability in question because it does not include actual debt reduction, Malpass warned.

The World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and Western officials have become increasingly vocal about their frustration with China, now the world's biggest official bilateral creditor, and private sector lenders for not moving forward more quickly.

Preliminary data released by the World Bank in June showed the external debt stock of low- and middle-income countries rose, on average, 6.9% in 2021 to \$9.3 trillion, outpacing the 5.3% growth seen in 2020.

Malpass said the bank's forthcoming International Debt Statistics report was troubling, but gave no specific numbers.

"It shows that the amount of debt grew substantially ... and the amount owed to China is some 66% of the total for the official bilateral creditors," he said, adding that Chinese entities were also big commercial creditors.

"The report makes clear that debt reduction needs to extend broadly to include the private sector and China," Malpass said, adding that the overall debt issue would be a big topic at the upcoming meeting of G20 leaders.

"There will be a recognition of the severity of the problem,"

Malpass said, although he said there had been "little uptake" of his push for an immediate freeze in debt payments when countries sought relief under the G20 common framework and other reforms aimed at speeding up debt restructuring efforts.

IMF and World Bank officials say 25% of emerging market and developing economies are in or near debt distress, and the number rises to 60% for low- and middle-income countries. Climate shocks, interest rate increases and inflation had heightened pressures on economies still recovering from COVID.

Malpass said China had been a reluctant player in the slow-moving process to date. "They're mostly an observer," he said.

Malpass also called for faster work on a debt restructuring for Zambia, which first requested help under the common framework in early 2021.

"There's an urgency to getting it done so that the debt reduction can occur and Zambia can begin attracting the new investment that's needed," he said.

Moody's Ups Its Turkish 2022 GDP Growth Estimate to 5.3%

ANKARA (Dispatches) - International credit rating agency Moody's upgraded its forecast for Turkey's economic growth this year, marking its second revision in almost as many months.

In its Global Macro Outlook report, Moody's said it sees the Turkish gross domestic product (GDP) expanding by 5.3% this year. It left its forecasts for 2023 and 2024 unchanged at 2% and 3%, respectively.

The latest estimate marks an upward revision from the rating agency's report in late August when it upgraded its 2022 view to 4.5% from 3.5% after Turkey reported stronger-than-expected growth in the second quarter.

The economy expanded 7.6% year-over-year in the July-September period, according to official data, extending a hot streak on strong domestic demand and exports.

Moody's on Thursday lowered its growth expectations for 2023 as it warned the global economy was on the verge of a downturn amid extraordinarily high levels of uncertainty amid persistent inflation, monetary policy tightening, fiscal challenges, geopolitical shifts and financial market volatility.

It said declining activity in advanced economies, primarily in Europe and North America, would drive a sharp slowdown in 2023 global GDP growth. In 2024, global economic activity will accelerate but remain tepid, it said.

"Still, a period of relative stability could emerge by 2024 if governments and central banks manage to navigate their economies through the current challenges," it added.



Moody's expects real GDP growth in the Group of 20 (G-20) economies to decelerate to 1.3% in 2023, significantly lower than the previous estimate of 2.1%, and down from an estimated 2.5% growth this year.

In 2024, global economic activity will accelerate, but only at a below-trend 2.2% growth rate, it said.

Moody's said that the decisive end to the decade long era of low interest rates and quantitative easing had generated large financial losses in asset values around the world, raised dollar funding costs and widened credit spreads.

It said that so far, the adjustment to higher rates has come without a large systemic financial event with global implications, and its baseline forecasts assume that central banks will avoid a disorderly tightening of financial conditions.

U.S.-China Rivalry Risks Splintering Global Economy

PHNOM PENH (Dispatches) - The global economy is splitting into rival blocs, threatening a Cold War rerun that would leave almost everyone worse off, the head of the International Monetary Fund said.

U.S. and European efforts to redraw global supply chains make sense if they help eliminate the kind of reliance on a single supplier that proved so disruptive during the pandemic, according to Kristalina Georgieva, the fund's managing director. But if the two powers erect new trade barriers to gain an edge in their geopolitical contest, they could set off a destructive cycle that would hurt middle-class and poor households while leaving the wealthy unscathed.

"My concern is a deepening fragmentation in the world economy," Georgieva said in an interview with The Washington Post. "We may be sleepwalking into a world that is poorer and less secure as a result."

A world economy carved into opposing camps would shrink by 1.5 percent, or more than \$1.4 trillion in annual terms, according to the IMF. In Asia, the center of global value chains for electronics, apparel and industrial goods, losses in percentage terms would be twice as great, she said.

"I lived through the first Cold War on the other side of the Iron Curtain. And, yeah, it is quite cold out there," said Georgieva, who was born and raised in Bulgaria. "And to go in a second cold war for another generation is ... very irresponsible."

Annual trade between the U.S. and China is still sizable, topping \$600 billion. And the U.S. and Chinese economies are so intertwined that Georgieva sees a complete rupture as impossible.

But since former president Donald Trump began imposing tariffs on imports from China in 2018, talk of the U.S. "decoupling" from the world's second-largest economy has picked up. Both the United States and China have taken steps to become more self-reliant.

Under Chinese President Xi Jinping, for example, the government in Beijing has subsidized development of domestic high-tech industries with mixed results. President Biden has emphasized reducing U.S. dependence upon foreign suppliers for an array of products, including medical supplies, computer chips and rare earth materials, which are used to make smartphones, electric vehicles and fighter jets.

Treasury Secretary Janet L. Yellen is also making this push. This week she traveled to India, promoting what she calls "friend-shoring," or relying upon U.S. allies for critical materials rather than potential adversaries like China.

The underlying challenge since 2020 is that the pandemic, extreme weather events and the war in Ukraine have interrupted dozens of assembly lines. Shortages of personal protective equipment, semiconductors and natural gas have convinced U.S. and European officials that they need to pay more for redundant supply links.

UK Considering Big Increase in Energy Windfall Tax

LONDON (Dispatches) - British finance minister Jeremy Hunt is considering a big increase in a windfall tax on oil and gas firms and extending it to power generation firms as he tries to find ways to repair the country's public finances, sources said.

The idea is "under consideration" ahead of Hunt's announcement of a new budget plan on Thursday, a government source said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Under the plan, first reported by The Times, the levy would be increased to 35% from its current rate of 25%. It would also apply to electricity generators and run until 2028 instead of 2025 as currently scheduled.

The newspaper said the tax would raise a total of 45 billion pounds (\$53.3 billion) over the next five years.

A senior source at a North Sea producer, who was familiar with the government's plans, said it was vital that a tax investment incentive was also extended and that the government avoid more tax changes so "investors can have confidence and continue putting cash into major North Sea developments."

The chairman of Ithaca Energy, a newly listed North Sea oil and gas producer, said on Wednesday that removing incentives to invest in oil and gas would make the British offshore industry uneconomical.

Hunt and Prime Minister Rishi Sunak have warned of tough decisions on tax increases and spending cuts as they try to restore Britain's economy policy credibility following a bond market sell-off sparked in September by the now largely abandoned tax cut plans of former Prime Minister Liz Truss.

India Can Buy as Much Russian Oil as It Wants

NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - The United States is happy for India to continue buying as much Russian oil as it wants, including at prices above a G7-imposed price cap mechanism, if it steers clear of Western insurance, finance and maritime services bound by the cap, U.S. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said.

The cap would still drive global oil prices lower while curbing Russia's revenues, Yellen said in an interview with

Reuters on the sidelines of a conference on deepening U.S.-Indian economic ties. Russia will not be able to sell as much oil as it does now once the European Union halts imports without resorting to the capped price or significant discounts from current prices, Yellen added.

"Russia is going to find it very difficult to continue shipping as much oil as they have done when the EU stops buying Russian oil," Yellen said. "They're going to be heavily in search of buyers. And many buyers are reliant on Western services."

India is now Russia's largest oil customer other than China.

Final details of the price cap to be imposed by wealthy G7 democracies and Australia are still coming together ahead of a Dec. 5 deadline.

The existence of the cap would give India, China and other major buyers of Russian crude leverage to push down the price they pay to Moscow, Yellen said. Russian oil "is going to be selling at bargain prices and we're happy to have India get that bargain or Africa or China. It's fine," Yellen added.

Yellen told Reuters that India and private Indian oil companies "can also purchase oil at any price they want as long as they don't use these Western services and they find other services. And either way is fine."

The cap is intended to cut Russia's oil revenues while keeping Russian crude on the market by denying insurance, maritime services and finance provided by the Western allies for tanker cargoes priced above a fixed dollar-per barrel cap. A historical Russian Urals crude average of \$63-64 a barrel could form an upper limit.

The cap is a concept promoted by the United States since the EU first laid out plans in May for an embargo on Russian oil to punish Moscow for its invasion of Ukraine.

Yellen's remarks were made after India's foreign minister said last week that his country would continue to buy Russian crude because it benefits India.

Iraq Wants Stable Energy Prices



BAGHDAD (Dispatches) - Iraq is keen to maintain stable oil prices at not more than \$100 per barrel, Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani told reporter.

Iraq, a member of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), will have discussions with other members to reconsider and increase its production quota, he added in a briefing.

"Iraq is keen for stability of energy prices, we do not want prices to increase above \$100 and neither, at the same time, for them to fall in a way that affects the level of supply and demand," he said.

Sudani's cabinet took office in late October, ending more than a year of deadlock since a parliamentary election. He was backed for the post of prime minister by an alliance of Iran-aligned factions.

Sudani said Iraq was determined to keep mediating between regional rivals Saudi Arabia and Iran, which have been locked in proxy conflicts across the Middle East and started talks last year hosted by Baghdad to try to contain tensions.

"The concerned parties officially asked us to continue playing this role", Sudani said.

Frictions have grown recently between Saudi Arabia and Iran, which has been swept by more than two months of protests ignited by the death of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini.

Iran has accused foreign adversaries of fomenting the unrest.

Iran's intelligence minister told Saudi Arabia on Wednesday that there is no guarantee of Tehran continuing its "strategic patience," according to semi-official Fars news agency.

Turkish Theater Festival Hosts Iranian Play

TEHRAN (MNA) – Iranian play “My Imaginary Skirt” has made it to Bursa International Theater Festival for Children and Youth.

“My Imaginary Skirt” has taken part in International Children’s and Youth Theater Festival in Turkey.

The play is about an actor’s life. She describes her life and says because of an incident in her childhood, her black-and-white world

turned into a colorful one like a rainbow.

Behnaz Mehdikhah has written, acted, designed, and made the puppets of “My Imaginary Skirt”.

Organized by Bursa Metropolitan Municipality in cooperation with Bursa Culture, Art and Tourism Foundation, the 26th International Children’s and Youth Theater Festival is being held from 12-17 November in Turkey.



Farmers Fight to Save the Skin of the Earth

WINNIPEG (Dispatches) - In America’s dusty Corn Belt this spring, the land was drowning. In China’s Yangtze river basin, it’s bone dry. Farmers in both are fighting a losing battle to save the soil that produces our food.

Carolyn Olson figures she did everything she could to protect her 1,100-acre farm near Cottonwood, Minnesota. She grows three-foot-high tall-grass buffer strips around her fields to protect the soil and in winter plants crops to provide ground cover.

But torrid rainstorms in May washed away so much soil during planting season that she expects the crop to suffer.

“When you get that much rain, almost four inches in about an hour, even your best practices fly out the window,” said the 55-year-old, whose farm has been in her husband’s family since 1913.

By contrast, there’s not enough water in the vast Yangtze basin, which produces a third of China’s crops. Scientists are resorting to firing rockets into clouds to “seed” them with rain artificially in the hope of replenishing soil drained of nutrients by sizzling temperatures.

It’s no silver bullet, though.

From the United States and China to Kenya, human efforts to preserve soil are proving no match for increasingly extreme weather, which is damaging the living system and depleting its ability to produce food, according to Reuters interviews with dozens of farmers, scientists and other soil specialists.

Soil erosion could lead to a 10% loss in global crop production by 2050, according to the UN’s Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). With the world’s population forecast to rise by a fifth to nearly 10 billion by then, malnutrition and famine is set to affect more and more people.

Few places are in deeper crisis than the pasturelands of northern Kenya, where ever-deepening drought has denuded the land of vegetation, exposing the soil to damage and confounding efforts to adapt farming methods.

“The soil left there is very vulnerable, like the skin of the Earth ... you’re not wearing clothing when the sun’s beating down,” said Leigh Ann Winowiecki, a Nairobi soil scientist at CIFOR-ICRAF, a research center on the benefits of trees for people and landscapes.

U.N. scientists say it can take up to 1,000 years for nature to produce 2-3 cm of soil, making preservation critical.

Plants grow by absorbing sunlight and carbon dioxide. They cycle the carbon into the soil, feeding microorganisms that in turn create the conditions for more plants to grow.

Extreme weather, some of it caused by climate change, not only damages crops but also erodes the soil and depletes nutrients such as carbon, nitrogen and phosphorus from the complex ecosystem, according to specialists.

This leads to land degradation - the decline of its ability to sustain plant life, and by extension animal and human life.

One-third of the world’s total land area is already degraded by erosion, nutrient depletion or in other ways, according to the United Nations.

Ronald Vargas, a soil scientist and secretary of the FAO’s Global Soil Partnership, said extreme weather was accelerating soil degradation already set in train by deforestation, over-grazing by livestock and improper use of fertilizer.

“Land degradation is a vicious cycle. Once you have degraded soils, and you have these bad (weather) events, then you have very bad second consequences,” Vargas said.

On the FAO’s projected loss in global crop production, he added: “This 10% represents a real issue to food security.”

The American Midwest, parched for rain this summer, is actually getting wetter over time.

Rainstorms over three days in mid-May washed away up to three tonnes of dirt per acre in two dozen Minnesota counties, according to data from the Daily Erosion Project, an Iowa State University initiative to estimate soil loss.

Rachel Schattman, assistant professor of sustainable agriculture at the University of Maine, said the U.S. Midwest and Northeast were especially vulnerable to land erosion because they were receiving more extreme amounts of rain than normal, a trend expected to continue through the end of the century.

In the Yangtze river basin, wetter weather would be welcome. Farming belts in the region, stretching from Sichuan in the southwest to Shanghai on the east coast, received 40% less rainfall than normal over the summer and baked in record-high temperatures.

Liu Zhiyu, an official at the Chinese water ministry, said in August that a third of the soil in six key farming provinces along the upper and middle reaches of the Yangtze was drier than is optimal as a result of the drought. In around a tenth of the rural counties in those provinces, soil was suffering from “severe water depletion”.

China’s cloud-seeding program offered some relief, with 211 operations launched in August alone to induce rainfall over 1.45 million square km of parched farmland, but experts say it’s no long-term solution.

“Artificial rainfall can only be the icing on the cake,” Zhao Zhiqiang, vice-director



of China’s weather modification office, said at a media briefing in September. He did not say whether the operations were successful.

Similarly, other measures such as digging thousands of new wells and encouraging farmers to switch crops to boost yields have limited impact.

Farmers around the shrunken Poyang Lake in Jiangxi province told Reuters that all kinds of crops were severely underdeveloped as a result of the lack of rainfall. Hu Baolin, a 70-year-old from Xinyao village, said his rapeseed hadn’t even flowered, and his pomelo fruit was a third of its usual size.

In the farming district of Hukou in Jiangxi, many sesame, corn, sweet potato and cotton plantations have dried up, said a 72-year-old resident who only gave his surname Chen as he picked over a baked field for rice to take home to feed his chickens.

Some experts are optimistic that the world can step back from peril, in some places at least.

The FAO drafted an action plan this year that seeks to improve and maintain the health of 50% of global soils by 2030, adopting practices like crop rotation and agroforestry, a land-use system that plants trees in and around crop and pastureland.

Cristine Morgan, chief scientific officer at the North Carolina-based Soil Health Institute said soils could regenerate if farmers applied better methods more broadly. “We always think something new is going to save us,” Morgan said. “But we really just need to change our behavior.”

Options include not tilling soil to reduce erosion, and planting off-season cover crops to prevent erosion and nutrient loss. The practices are only used on 25% and 4% of U.S. farm acres respectively, according to estimates from BMO Capital Markets, which said that overhauling growing systems created up-front costs for farmers, with yield losses in early years.

In Kenya, though, the damage is dire.

“The soil never used to be this sandy when I was young,” said Maliyan Lekopir, 50, a cattle and goat farmer in the Samburu region, kicking dirt up in the air.

“This place used to be so beautiful. Giraffes, zebras, gazelle used to graze next to our goats. Now all the animals are gone and the streams have dried up.”

Indeed the land is desiccated in the country, where prolonged droughts have become more common since 2000, with the current one the worst in four decades.

More than 60% of the country’s total land is deemed highly degraded, and more than 27% very highly degraded, according to Kenya’s environment ministry, taking into account factors such as vegetation cover and its ability to resist erosion. This is despite efforts by green groups encourage farmers to use no-till or minimum-till agriculture and employ agroforestry.

None of the children playing in Lekopir’s village in northern Kenya remember a real rainy season. They’ve grown used to raising camels and dodging the growing web of dusty gullies, none of which were present during Lekopir’s youth.

The drought has made the water sources this village relies on increasingly stagnant, making kids sicker, Lekopir said. To keep the remaining cattle and goats alive, herders often have to walk hundreds of miles in search of water or pasture.

Grass has disappeared from much of Kenya’s vast pastures, leaving the land prone to future compaction or erosion, said soil scientist Winowiecki at CIFOR-ICRAF.

So much soil has eroded in Kenya, India and many other places around the world that the ground’s seed bank - grass seeds ready to sprout once rain falls - has also been depleted, meaning restoring some areas would require manually reseeded it, said Tor-Gunnar Vagen, CIFOR-ICRAF’s principal scientist.

“The whole system is at a tipping point. Climate change is just accelerating all of that.”

Assadi’s Wife...

FROM PAGE 1

“Naturally, water was important to me, because in addition to drinking water, I needed water for cleansing in the toilet and ablution for prayers,” he said.

“I was only allowed to brush my teeth once in the morning during day and night. Only once was I allowed to wash my hands with soap; only once was I allowed to dry my hands with a towel.”

Assadi was also said to have been stripped of his personal belongings and was kept under psychological pressure from the guards with his privacy being constantly intruded on.

“My glasses were confiscated in the bunker every evening and the next day, they returned them at my request. In recent days, I managed to get a pen and paper from them. The pen was also taken in the evening,” the Iranian diplomat said.

“In the conditions of being kept in the cell, I could take a shower with the door closed while bathing. But in the bunker, accompanied by the guard, I was taken to the distribution room (where clothes and hygiene items are stored) and there was a shower without a door, and I had to shower in front of the guard, and the guard was obliged not to take his eyes off [me].”

In some other tweets, Assadi’s wife pointed to lengthy and coercive interrogations that the Iranian diplomat had gone through in police custody.

“Throughout the entire interrogation, they tried to fabricate evidence for their unjust accusation by telling blatant lies,” he was quoted as saying. “In a really condescending manner, in order for me to speak in line with their views during the interrogation, they tried to pressurize me through all strictures and prepare me for a forced confession.”

Assadi’s case, according to legal experts, is based on sham and unsubstantiated charges and smacks of political propaganda against the Islamic Republic.

Belgian authorities in June 2018 said the country’s police had intercepted a car carrying homemade explosives, claiming that the Iranian diplomat handed the material to two people in Belgium. He was accused of plotting an attack against the anti-Iran Mujahedin-e-Khalq (MKO) terrorist outfit, a claim that has been strongly rejected by Iranian authorities.

IRGC Attack...

FROM PAGE 1

“The northwestern region of the country is inaccessible and mountainous. Over the past month, we have confiscated a considerable amount of weapons and ammunition from groups that were seeking to smuggle the arms and certain equipment into the heart of the country,” Osanlou said.

“Our demand concerning establishment of border security must be accommodated by the central government in Iraq. Our request is not only limited to the domestic security of the Islamic Republic of Iran but also includes the security of the Iraqi Kurdistan Region and Iraq. The anti-Iran terror groups operating in the Kurdish region or elsewhere in Iraq are considered a threat to the security of those areas as well. We have had discussions with officials from both the Baghdad government and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) over the matter,” the general said.

Since September 24, the IRGC has been targeting terrorist bases in Iraq’s Kurdistan region on a daily basis, amid reports that terrorists sought to ignite riots and unrest in Iran’s western border cities.

Iran has on countless occasions warned Iraqi Kurdistan’s local authorities that it will not tolerate the presence and activity of terrorist groups along its northwestern borders, saying the country will give a decisive response should those areas become a hub of anti-Islamic Republic terrorists.

Back in May, the IRGC struck and demolished positions of terrorist groups operating near the country’s western borders in Iraq’s northern Kurdish regional capital of Erbil.

Also in September last year, the IRGC launched an attack in northern Iraq, where it destroyed four bases belonging to hostile groups.

Tax Revenues Expected...

FROM PAGE 1

As announced recently by Mehdi Movahedi, head of INTA’s Education, Research, and Planning Office, Iran’s tax incomes during the first seven months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21-October 22) rose 63 percent compared to the same period of time in the previous year.

According to Movahedi, his organization has collected 2.709 quadrillion rials (about \$7.1 billion) of taxes during the seven-month period of this year, while the figure was 1.66 trillion rials (about \$5.75 billion) in the same time span of the past year.

During the first seven months of the present year, INTA has managed to realize the tax income plan for the current period by 102 percent.

In late October, the INTA head said the government’s average monthly tax collections have increased by 80 percent in the current Iranian calendar year as compared to the previous year.

According to Manzour, last year every month about 250 trillion rials (about \$864 million) of taxes were collected on average, while the figure has reached 450 trillion rials (\$1.55 billion) in the current year, Tasnim news agency reported.

According to the official, INTA has been taking serious measures for battling tax evasion so that the organization has discovered more than 170 cases over the past year and the violators have been faced with heavy penalties.

There are many methods of tax evasion and one of the most common is the creation of shell companies, he explained.

“Unfortunately, there are many problems in the regulations and laws regarding company establishment and there is no necessary strictness. We see such cases with regard to business cards and credit cards as well,” the official added.

Repeat Covid Infections Increase Risk of Health Problems

PARIS (Dispatches) - People who have had Covid more than once are two or three times more likely to have a range of serious health problems than those who have only had it once, the first major study on the subject said.

Multiple infections have surged as the pandemic rumbles on and the virus mutates into new strains, but the long-term health effects of reinfection have not been clear.

The US researchers said their new study published in the Nature Medicine journal was the first to look at how reinfection increases the risk of health problems from acute cases as well as long Covid.

The researchers analysed the anonymous medical records of 5.8 million people in the US Department of Veterans Affairs’ national healthcare database.

More than 443,000 had tested positive for Covid at least once between March 1, 2020 and April this year. Nearly 41,000 of that group had Covid more than once. Over 93 per cent had a total of two infections, while six per cent had three and nearly one per cent had four.

The other 5.3 million never contracted Covid.

When the researchers compared the health outcomes of the different groups, they found that “people who got reinfected have an increased risk of all sorts of adverse health problems,” Ziyad Al-Aly, an epidemiologist at Washington University in St Louis and the study’s senior author, told AFP. People with repeat infections were twice as likely to die prematurely and three times more likely to be hospitalised with illness than those who had not been reinfected, the study found.

Heart and lung problems were more than three times more common for people who had been reinfected.

Neuville Wins

Season-Ending Rally Japan

ACHI (Dispatches) - Belgium's Thierry Neuville won the season-ending Rally Japan on Sunday after a puncture ended nearest rival Elfyn Evans's challenge, while world champion Kalle Rovanperä finished 12th.

Evans started the day 4.0sec behind overnight leader Neuville and closed the gap to just 0.6sec after a strong performance in the opening stage. But a collision in the morning session forced Evans and co-driver Scott Martin to change a tyre on their Toyota, sending them tumbling out of contention and handing Neuville a clear run at victory.

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Fans, Trophy and Teams Arrive in Qatar

DOHA (Dispatches) - One week from kickoff, the World Cup trophy returned to Qatar on Sunday, teams and fans started arriving and safety barriers went up across Doha ahead of one of the most controversial football tournaments ever.

The trophy which will be presented to the winning team on December 18 returned from a world tour in time for next Sunday's opening game when hosts Qatar take on Ecuador.

Durant Fuels Nets Win Without Irving

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - Kevin Durant and the Brooklyn Nets clamped down defensively in a 110-95 NBA victory over the Los Angeles Clippers, their fourth win in the five games since Kyrie Irving was suspended.

As the Nets' resurgence continued despite turmoil, the Boston Celtics notched a sixth straight victory, Jayson Tatum's 43 points and 10 rebounds fuelling a 117-108 win over the Pistons in Detroit.

Star guard Irving was suspended for at least five games by the Nets after using social media to publicize a film widely condemned as anti-Semitic.

Although he has now sat out five games, Nets coach Jacque Vaughn said before Saturday's contest that Irving would not return for Sunday's clash with the Lakers.

"We're obviously missing (Irving) and we've got to look where those points are going to come from," Durant said after the Nets opened their Southern California sojourn with a hard-fought victory. "I think guys are doing that as a group."

Durant excelled on both ends of the floor, scoring 27 points with six rebounds, three assists, two blocked shots and two steals.

Reserve Seth Curry scored 14 of his 22 points in the fourth quarter as the Nets finally put the back-and-forth battle away.

Durant, 34, is the first player to start a season with 13 straight games scoring at least 25 points since Michael Jordan had 16 25-point games to open the 1988-89 campaign.

He's made sure the Nets have weathered the absence of Irving, as well as the continuing struggles of Ben Simmons, who came off the bench and scored just one basket.

Durant said defense keyed the win.

"We hung our hat on just staying in front of our man and making them shoot tough shots over us," he said after the Nets held Clippers star Paul George to just five-of-12 shooting and 17 points.

Center Ivica Zubac scored 16 points and grabbed 15 rebounds and Marcus Morris added 13 as the Clippers kept the pressure on until the Nets put together a late 18-2 scoring run.

"Even though we didn't make shots (early) I felt like we were generating good shots, too, so eventually they were going to start to fall," Durant said.



Defense has been a focus since Vaughn took over when Steve Nash was sacked this month — part of a tumultuous stretch for the club that included the furor surrounding Irving.

While the likely date of seven-time All-Star Irving's return remains unknown, his situation appeared to be heading toward a resolution after both NBA commissioner Adam Silver and Nets owner Joe Tsai said this week they'd had productive talks with the player.

In Detroit, the Celtics overcame the injury absences of second-leading scorer Jaylen Brown, Al Horford and Malcolm Brogdon to beat the Pistons for the second time in four days.

A tight first half ended with the Pistons up by two points, but Tatum came alive in the second half, scoring 28 points after the break.

Back-to-back three pointers from Tatum gave Boston a 106-97 lead midway through the fourth, then teammate Marcus Smart came up with a steal and drove for a layup as Boston took control and improved to 10-3.

Elsewhere, the Miami Heat spoiled the season debut of LaMelo Ball with a resounding 132-115 victory over the Charlotte Hornets.

Former Rookie of the Year Ball had missed Charlotte's first 13 games with a sprained left ankle.

He scored 15 points in 28 minutes on court, but he and the Hornets were no match for a Miami team led by 31 points from Max Strus.

In Philadelphia, Joel Embiid scored 42 points and grabbed 10 rebounds to lead the 76ers to a 121-109 victory over the Hawks, avenging a defeat in Atlanta on Thursday.



Dzeko Double Sends Inter Into Fourth

BERGAMO (Dispatches) - Inter Milan recovered from a goal down to earn a 3-2 win at Atalanta in Serie A today, with striker Edin Dzeko netting twice to send the visitors into provisional fourth place.

Atalanta winger Ademola Lookman put the hosts ahead in the 25th minute when he converted a spot kick into the top right corner after Duvan Zapata had been brought down.

Inter levelled 11 minutes later through Dzeko after Lautaro Martinez nodded the ball into the six-yard box for the Bosnia striker to finish with a clever backheel.

Simone Inzaghi's visitors took the lead when Dzeko's strike from close range deflected off Atalanta defender Joakim Maehle into the net after 56 minutes.

Inter went 3-1 up just after the hour when home defender Jose Luis Palomino headed the ball into his own net after Martinez nodded on a corner from Hakan Calhanoglu.

Palomino made amends in the 77th when he cut the deficit with a diving header from a corner.

Inter moved up one spot to fourth on 30 points, two points ahead of fifth-placed Juventus.

Australia to Face Switzerland in Billie Jean King Cup Final

GLASGOW (Dispatches) - Australia captain Alicia Monk said a first Billie Jean King Cup since 1974 is "for the taking" after seeing off hosts Great Britain in a nail-biting finish to reach the final against Switzerland.

The Brits had defied the odds with a whitewash of Spain on Thursday to reach the last four for the first time in 41 years in front of a home crowd in Glasgow.

But Australia's experience paid off as the final doubles clash went to a champions tie-break won by Storm Sanders and Sam Stosur.

The seven-time winners missed out on the title in 2019, when they lost in front of a home crowd to France.

"We've got the team to get through tomorrow," said Monk.

"We're still making up for the final we lost a couple of years ago, we know what that feels like. But we're optimistic, we're a team, we've got great support, so it's ours for the taking."

Sanders dampened the enthusiasm of the Glasgow crowd as she saw off Heather Watson 6-4 7-6 (7/3) to take the opening rubber.

But Harriet Dart followed up her victory over 13th-ranked Paula Badosa by upsetting world number 33 Ajla Tomljanovic 7-6 (7/3) 6-2 to take it to the wire.

Doubles duo Alicia Barnett and Olivia Nicholls have been the revelation of the week for the hosts on their international debut, but they were just unable to conjure a third victory, losing out 7-6 (7/1) 6-7 (5/7), 10-6.

"God we were close," said British captain Anne Keothavong.

"I'm just gutted for everyone right now but also I think we have to try and keep things in perspective. What a fantastic week it really has been for the team."

Switzerland are aiming to go one better than losing last year's final to Russia as the 11-time champion Czechs were humbled.

Viktoria Golubic saw off Karolina Muchova 6-4, 6-4 before Belinda Bencic won the battle of the number ones against Karolina Pliskova 6-2, 7-6 (8/6).

Kane Heading to World Cup in Peak Condition



LONDON (Dispatches) - England captain Harry Kane will be in the best physical and mental condition when he embarks on his second World Cup finals campaign this month, Tottenham Hotspur manager Antonio Conte said.

Kane scored his 12th Premier League goal of the season in a 4-3 win over Leeds United on Saturday in his 22nd consecutive start for Spurs in this campaign.

The 29-year-old's workload in recent weeks has stoked fears of potential fatigue in Qatar, but Conte said the striker will be raring to go when England begin their group campaign against Iran on Nov. 21. "We are talking about a really world-class striker," Conte told reporters. "He can continue to improve and to become stronger and stronger. Now he's arriving at this World Cup in the best physical condition and also mental condition."

"I think he feels a lot of responsibility because he's the captain of England. I consider England to be one of the best teams in the world, one of the candidates to have an important tournament."

"In this period, especially the last 13 games, Harry played a really important role. Harry honestly deserves great praise because he is always an important player, but in this period a lot of weight was on his shoulder and he played in a fantastic way."

Southgate Says Players Can Make Best Period For England

LONDON (Dispatches) - England manager Gareth Southgate called on his players to shut out the noise ahead of this month's World Cup, and focus instead on the opportunity they have to become the greatest team in the country's history with victory in Qatar.

Southgate's side reached the semi-finals of the 2018 World Cup and the final of last year's European Championship, but England have failed to win a major trophy since lifting the World Cup on home soil in 1966.

England begin their group campaign against Iran on Nov. 21 and also face the United States and Wales in Group B.

"With the players we want to talk to them about the excitement of going to a World Cup," Southgate said.

"We understand the need to comment on the off-field things that surround this tournament, but we want the players to feel that enthusiasm that they've had since kids. We want to fuel that."

"We want them to transition from a hectic club schedule to thinking about England. We want to talk to them about the fact that this, whatever happens over the next four weeks, has been the second-best period for English football. We can make it the best."

The World Cup will give England's players a chance to prove themselves in international football, with Borussia Dortmund midfielder Jude Bellingham among those seeking a breakthrough on football's biggest stage.

Southgate heaped praise on the 19-year-old midfielder, saying he is showing maturity beyond his years.

"Mature in how he works, how he trains, how he speaks," Southgate said. "He competes — it is probably the thing we love about him more than anything else."



Pakistan Mourns T20 World Cup Defeat

ISLAMABAD (Dispatches) - Hunched over phones, packed into heaving grandstands, and crowded around restaurant TVs, cricket-crazed Pakistanis suffered collective heartbreak on Sunday as they watched their team go down to England in the Twenty20 World Cup final.

Jos Buttler's England held Pakistan to 137-8 in Melbourne, then chased it down with six balls to spare.

Shamsa Khizan was among the ranks of fanatical female fans in the front rows before a towering screen in a park in the smoggy capital Islamabad.

Over the course of the afternoon, their howls of encouragement grew fainter, then fell silent. As they dispersed in hushed disappointment, Khizan told AFP she was left with a "hollow mind".

Pakistan has "guts, potential and talent", the 24-year-old lawyer said, but "England no doubt played very beautifully".

"To lose a game is a part of the game," she said, her voice warbling with raw emotion. "I'm still proud."

Pakistan last faced England in a World Cup final in 1992, when captain Imran Khan led the team to victory in the ODI event, cementing himself as a sporting legend and springboarding his political career.

Pakistan is currently languishing in political and economic turmoil -- in part owing to Khan's tenure as prime minister which ended in April -- and the England showdown seemed a rare chance to buoy the national mood.

"The entire nation was behind the team," lamented 27-year-old Imran Masood as the crowds left the park.

"We had that same feeling of the 1992 World Cup."

