

Head of the Presidential Office
Gholam-Hossein Esmaeili Has
Said That the Attempts to Approve
An Anti-Iran Resolution on Human
Rights Issues Have Their Roots
In Political Motivations

IRAN NEWS

Reza Fatemi Amin, Minister of
Mining Industry, Mine, and Trade,
Announced the Visit of the President
Of Belarus to Iran in the Last Month
Of the Current Year in the
Iranian calendar (Mid-March 2023)

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Measures Taken at Fordow, Natanz Sites Based on IAEA's Rules

TEHRAN (MNA) – The Head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) says that the new measures taken at Fordow and Natanz sites are based on the rules and regulations of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

Pointing to Iran's response to the resolution issued at IAEA's Board of Governors, Mohammad Eslami said that the AEOI has created a new capacity in Fordow and Natanz nuclear plants in line with the implementation of the law of Strategic Action Plan on the Removal of Anti-Iran Sanctions for Protecting People's Rights.

Of course, all these measures were taken within the framework of rules and regulations of the IAEA, he emphasized.

The gas injection of new chains has started in Natanz nuclear facility, Eslami said, restating that enriching capacity in Fordow nuclear plant has increased from 20 percent to 60 percent using the existing capacity.

With the effective steps taken in this regard, the Organization will replace the centrifuges of the new generation and 6th generation with the first generation of centrifuges, Eslami continued.

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Annual Inflation Rate Up 1.1% To 44% in November

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The inflation rate rose in Iran by 1.1% in the month to late November to reach an annual figure of 44%, according to figures by the Statistical Center of Iran (SCI).

SCI data published yesterday showed that the consumer prices index (CPI) in Iran had risen to 43.3% and 47.4% for urban and rural households respectively in the year to November 21 compared to the same previous period.

The SCI reported a month-on-month inflation rate decline in Iran of 0.9% while its calculation of the CPI on a point to point scale, which compares two same months in back-to-back years, showed inflation had risen to 48.1% in the calendar month to late November compared to the same month in 2021.

Iran has experienced high but controlled levels of inflation in recent years mainly because of the economic impacts of US sanctions on the country and a continuous spread of the coronavirus pandemic.

Iran's annual CPI dropped to levels around 40% in April but it started to rise again after the government removed subsidies earmarked to imports of grains and basic goods. Experts say prices in Iran have also soared because of international supply and demand issues.

FM Says Foreign Plot to Disintegrate Iran Failed



IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - The conspiracy that aimed to create a terrorist war and eventually break apart Iran failed, Hossein Amirabdollahian, the Iranian foreign minister said in his second press conference in Tehran on Wednesday.

Addressing a number of journalists from Iranian and foreign media in the presser, Amirabdollahian said that a foreign conspiracy to instigate a civil war and finally divide Iran has failed.

He said that there are documents for the plot which show that the enemies sought to ignite a civil and terrorist war with the final goal of dividing Iran.

The foreign minister said that the western countries fomented riots in the country by deceiving a group of youths while they also armed terrorists in the neighboring Iraqi Kurdistan region.

He said that in talks with the Iraqi side, they promised to secure their borders in the Kurdistan region by the deployment of Iraqi troops at shared borders with Iran but that has not been done yet.

"As long as there is a threat to us from a neighboring country within the framework of international law and the UN Charter, our armed forces will continue their actions to ensure the maximum national security of the country. We in the diplomatic and security apparatus of the country will continue the talks with the Iraqi authorities to get over this stage," the top Iranian diplomat said.

He also pointed out that the West with its negative human rights record is in no position to talk about Iran's human rights situation.

"The fact that more than 50 policemen and our security forces were martyred by rioters with firearms and rocks, and several thousand policemen and our security defenders were injured, is a sign of respect for human rights and showing restraint by Iran's police and security forces [during the riots]," Amirabdollahian continued.

He pointed out that riots and newly-imposed sanctions were aimed at pressuring Iran to give up its demands at the talks but the Americans must have now realized that Iran does not cross its red lines.

Amirabdollahian further said that Iran wants to continue nuclear talks to revive the JCPOA and remove the sanctions to maximize the Iranian nation's interests with might.

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Civilians Urged to Stay Away From Terror Bases In Iraqi Kurdistan

TEHRAN (PressTV) - A senior commander of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) has called upon ordinary Iraqi people to evacuate areas close to the hideouts of separatist terrorists in the Arab country's semi-autonomous Kurdistan region, as his force launched fresh strikes on the positions of the militants.

IRGC Ground Force Commander Brigadier General Mohammad Pakpour stated that the force's Hamzeh Seyed al-Shohada base kicked off on Tuesday a new round of missile and drone attacks against the bastions of armed terrorist groups and mercenaries of the global arrogance in Pardi region deep inside Iraqi Kurdistan.

The commander went on to note that the command centers and hideouts of the so-called Kurdistan Freedom Party (PAK) have been pounded because of the separatist group's support for the latest deadly riots in northwestern Iran, stressing that its main positions were destroyed by precision-strike missiles.

The high-ranking IRGC commander highlighted that Iranian forces will continue their operations until threats being posed by the terrorists are eliminated and they are disarmed.

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Taiwan Firm Halts Business With Iran

TAIPEI (Dispatches) - A Taiwanese technology company has halted its business in Iran while it investigates whether it violated international sanctions, as the U.S. ramps up scrutiny of Iran's military and weapons production amid the Russia-Ukraine war.

The Hill has learned that ATEN International has immediately stopped accepting orders from Iran and exporting its products to the country following concerns raised by the nonprofit group United Against Nuclear Iran (UANI). The U.S. has put numerous sanctions in place to try to target entities and individuals related to Iran's drone program, in particular as Iran is supplying Russia with drones to use in its war against Ukraine.

"We have seen Iran directly support Russia's efforts to kill Ukrainians," national security spokesperson John Kirby told reporters on Tuesday.

The concerns include that ATEN's products, including its "Keyboard-Video-Mouse" computer terminal, was bought by the Iranian IT company Raymond Computers, which appears to be in commerce with Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, opening the company up to possible violations of U.S. sanctions.

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Syria Territorial Integrity Highlighted in Astana Meeting

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Russia, Turkey, Syria, and Iran have emphasized the need for full implementation of agreements on northern Syria and compliance with the independence and territorial integrity of the war-torn country.

The four countries involved in the 19th international meeting on Syria in the Astana Format, which was held in Kazakhstan's capital, issued a statement condemning constant aggression by the Zionist regime against the Arab country, underlining the necessity for full implementation of all existing accords on northern regions of Syria, reviewing the situation of de-escalation zone in Idlib, and agreeing upon making more efforts to normalize the stable condition in the country.

In the final statement, which has been issued after two days of negotiations, the countries guaranteeing the Astana Format reiterated their firm adherence to preserving national sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Syria.

The four states ruled out all plots to separate parts of the Arab country, stressing that security and stability in northern Syria will achieve merely on the basis of defending national sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country.

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Zionist Regime Martyrs a Military Advisor of IRGC in Syria

TEHRAN (IRNA) - One of military advisors of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps Aerospace in Syria was martyred by agents of the Zionist regime of Israel, the IRGC public relations office announced through a statement.

Colonel Davood Ja'fari was killed on Tuesday morning by an explosive bomb put by the Zionist regime's agents beside a road in the vicinity of the Syrian capital.

According to the IRGC statement, the fake and criminal regime of the Zionists will surely receive strong response.

President Calls on Independent States to Have Constructive Ties

IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - President Ebrahim Raisi, in a meeting with the Belarusian prime minister, called on independent states to have constructive ties to overcome the imposed sanctions.

Roman Golovchenko, the Prime Minister of Belarus who arrived in the Iranian capital on Tuesday, held a meeting with Iranian President Raisi on Wednesday morning.

During the meeting, Raisi noted that relations between the two countries have always been friendly, adding that in recent meetings of the two countries' high-profile officials, expanding mutual cooperation has been stressed.

Developing and strengthening the relationship among countries that have been subjected to cruel sanctions for trying to maintain their independence is one of the most effective ways to neutralize and get out of sanctions, he underscored.

Despite unprecedented and outrageous sanctions, Iran has made significant progress in all spheres, including in the economic field, he added.

Today, Tehran and Minsk enjoy diverse and significant capacities to develop bilateral interactions, he further noted.

Iran's President went on to say that the serious determination of the two countries' high-ranking officials to enhance the level of mutual ties can remove possible obstacles to the expansion of interactions.

For his part, the Belarusian prime minister said that relations between the two countries have always been friendly.

Tehran and Minsk have cooperated constructively in the international arena, he added.

Today, political coordination between the two countries is at the highest level, he said, noting that the time to expand bilateral economic ties has come.

Earlier on Tuesday, First Vice-President Mohammad Mokhber said that the development of economic relations between Tehran and Minsk is being pursued at various fields, including transit, energy, and industry.



Mokhber met and held talks with Belarusian Prime Minister Golovchenko here in Tehran.

Iran and Belarus are determined to develop relations in various fields, including economic area, Mokhber said, adding that one of the main issues that were decided at this meeting is to enable the private sector of the two countries to be formed by the Chambers of Commerce of Iran and Belarus.

Stressing the roadmap for economic development between Tehran and Minsk, he underlined that the two countries have great capacities in the areas of trade, transit, energy, and industry, while also the two sides can work together in the field of information exchange and technical knowledge.

Describing the determination of the two countries to promote political and economic relations, he highlighted that the political relations between Iran and Belarus are at a good level, but it is not proportional to economic relations and it has been decided to bring economic relations to a good level.

Referring to the unilateral sanctions by the arrogance, especially the U.S. and the West, Mokhber added that given the experience which existed in Iran to manage the country under sanctions conditions, these experiences could be exchanged between Tehran and Minsk.

Describing the political relations between Iran and Belarus as a deep-rooted and a very good one, Mokhber stated that during the meeting the two sides decided to promote the level of economic relations to the same extent as that of the political ties.

Golovchenko, heading a politico-economic delegation, arrived in the Iranian capital on Tuesday to discuss ways to develop ties.

New Chapter of Standard Cooperation Between Tehran, Ankara

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Turkey-Iran collaboration on the CE marking will open a new chapter of cooperation between standard organizations of both countries.

The CE marking (an acronym for the French *Conformite Europeenne*) certifies that a product has met EU health, safety, and environmental requirements.

Head of the National Standard Organization of Iran Mehdi Eslampanah said on the sideline of the general assembly of the Standards and Metrology Institute for the Islamic Countries (SMIIC) that cooperation between Ankara and Tehran concerning standard issue will help improve trade ties.

Eslampanah underlined that goals determined by presidents from Turkey and Iran should be facilitated via cooperation between Turkish and Iranian standard organizations.

Naming Turkey as an important target market for Iranian tradesmen, he said that collaboration in a bid to remove obstacles such as CE marking is a big step towards facilitating bilateral trade.

The Iranian official called on his Turkish counterpart Mahmut Sami Şahin to play more active role in achieving preplanned objectives of the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) and Regional Insurance Services Company (RISCOM) in order to pave the way for regional countries to take advantage.

Head of Turkey Standard Institution, for his part, expressed readiness for joint venture in terms of CE marking as well as improving regional trade.

The two standard organizations of Iran and Turkey can coordinate in order to develop their standard levels to adapt to the European standard.

Westerners Put Interests Above Human Rights

TEHRAN (IP) - Deputy Foreign Minister for Political Affairs said that the West supports terrorism and violates human rights whenever it suits its interests.

Ali Bagheri made the remarks in a meeting with ambassadors and heads of political missions of ASEAN member states on Monday, November 21st, in Tehran.

In the meeting with the ambassadors of Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei Darussalam as well as the chargé d'affaires of the Philippines and Thailand, Bagheri pointed to the potential for cooperation among Asian countries. He said ASEAN has a proper capacity to promote economic cooperation.

Bagheri noted that economic cooperation institutionalizes regional stability and peace and eliminates any excuses for foreign meddling in regional affairs.



The Iranian deputy foreign minister then pointed to the political and self-centered approach adopted by Western governments toward international issues, saying the fight against terrorism and narco-trafficking and protecting human rights are not valuable from the viewpoint of Western governments, but are part of their foreign policy toolbox. For this reason, Bagheri added, the West will support terrorism and violate human rights whenever it suits its interests.

For their part, each of the ASEAN members' ambassadors and diplomats underlined the need for strengthening bilateral and multilateral cooperation. They said promoting cooperation between ASEAN member states and Iran will stabilize the long-term interests of all sides.

Iraqi Kurdistan Officials Unwilling to Enhance Security

BAGHDAD (IRNA) - Iranian Ambassador to Iraq Mohammad Kazem Al-Sadegh said that the officials of the Iraqi Kurdistan region can uproot anti-Iran terrorists, but they did not show such a willingness.

Al-Sadegh told IRNA that the Kurdish officials consider the issue of the separatists as an ethnic matter and seemingly they do not want to drive away the terrorist groups from other Kurds. The Iranian side handed over some 76 documents of activities of the armed groups to the Iraqi officials in Baghdad and Erbil, Kurdistan region, and they asked for a 10-day deadline to propose a schedule to meet the Iranians' demands, the ambassador added.

According to the diplomat, the issue of a ground operation by Iran against the terrorist groups in Kurdistan is not on agenda, but we urged the Iraqi government to control borders, because those areas are not under supervision of Baghdad. We asked the Iraqi government to set a timeline for disarmament of the armed opponents, and return them to camps, he noted.

The Iraqi government accepted two demands and demanded a deadline for the disarmament, the ambassador said. Jabar Oudeh Javad al-Maamori, member of the Kurdistan Islamic Union, told Baghdad Al-Youm that more than 5k armed forces are present in Iraq's Kurdistan region, and that they are being paid by foreigners.

Al-Maamori also said that the presence of the militants in this region is illegal, adding that their activities in the region causes foreign intervention and civilians should pay heavy price for their presence.

Mohammad-Sadegh Sedghian, a political analyst, told Iraq's al-Ahd TV network that Iranian Kurds from Germany, Sweden and Denmark enter Iraqi Kurdistan region to train armed forces, and that some of military opposition leaders of Iran are there since 1991.

Iran-IAEA Interaction Path Open

TEHRAN (IRNA) - The Spokesman for the Iranian Parliament National Security Commission Abolfazl Amouie said that official and informal talks are going on between Iran and the IAEA, adding that the path of interaction between Iran and the IAEA is open, but measures like issuing a resolution destroy the cooperation between Iran and the IAEA secretariat.

Amouie said that the JCPOA in 2015 was actually a balance between the commitments and each party must carry out their missions separately.

In paragraph 26 of the JCPOA it was emphasized that if the Islamic Republic of Iran assesses that the other party does not fulfill its obligations, it has the right to take compensatory measures, he added.

Iran's action in reducing JCPOA obligations is implemented exactly according to paragraph 26 of the JCPOA, the issue related to the reduction of JCPOA obligations is included both in the JCPOA text and as an appendix in UN Security Council Resolution 2231.

He termed the reaction of the Western and European parties to Iran's compensatory measures as illogical, saying that Iran is witnessing that the Europeans are abusing political bodies, including the IAEA Board of Governors and are trying to increase political pressure on Iran.

Accordingly, such resolutions are an unnecessary and harmful action on cooperation between Iran and the IAEA, and will definitely face the reaction of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Amouie stated.

Iran is to take peaceful measures within the framework of the country's nuclear program, which will be reported by the inspectors to the IAEA, and within this framework, the Islamic Republic of Iran will respond to the resolution.

Stressing the fact that Iran-IAEA cooperation should be free of any pressure and accusations, he said that the Islamic Republic of Iran has already given a written response regarding the alleged locations and has reiterated that is ready to elaborate on the ambiguities.

IME Posts Monthly Trade of 10m Tons of Commodities

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Iran Mercantile Exchange (IME) IME in last Iranian calendar month of Aban witnessed trade of 10,206,807 tons of commodities with a total trading value of more than \$2.5b on its physical market.

According to a report by the IME's International Affairs and PR, the exchange saw on both domestic and export pits of its oil and petrochemical trading floor, trade of 1,767,000 tons of commodities valued at nearly \$963m.

The IME's customers purchased on this floor 452,000 tons of vacuum bottom, 509,633 tons of bitumen, 394,914 tons of polymeric products, 203,100 tons of lube cut, 139,208 tons of chemicals, 36,575 tons of sulfur, 26,432 tons of oil and 1,100 tons of insulation.

Furthermore, the exchange saw trade of more than 8,322,000 tons of commodities worth more than \$1.5b on its metals and minerals trading floor.

Items traded on this floor included 5,778,000 tons of cement, 1,462,000 tons of steel, 657,000 tons of iron ore, 338,500 tons of sponge iron, 35,610 tons of aluminum, 4,740 tons of zinc, 41,892 tons of copper, 1,000 tons of molybdenum concentrate, 66 tons of precious metals concentrate and 40 kg of gold bars.

It's worth noting that the IME also traded 2,416 vehicles on its automobiles trading floor.

Last was the IME's side market on which the exchange traded 71,779 tons of commodities.



Standard Bodies of Iran, Qatar to Expand Cooperation

TEHRAN (MNA) - Head of the Institute of Standards and Industrial Research of Iran (ISIRI) Mehdi Eslam-Panah has said his organization is going to expand cooperation with its Qatari counterpart in order to accelerate achieving the goal of \$5 billion annual trade between the two countries.

Eslam-Panah made the remarks after a meeting with Head of Qatar General Organization for Standards and Metrology Nawaf Ibrahim Al-Hamad Al-Mana on the sidelines of the 17th General Assembly of Standards and Metrology Institute for Islamic Countries (SMIIC) in Istanbul, IRIB reported on Wednesday.

"Close cooperation in the fields of standardization, conformity assessment, qualification, and metrology can help in achieving the five-billion-dollar trade turnover goal between Iran and Qatar," the official said.

In the meeting, Eslam-Panah emphasized the continuation of effective and bilateral communication as a prerequisite for strengthening and expanding cooperation between the two sides.

Referring to a memorandum of understanding (MOU) that the Iranian side has prepared to be signed with Qatar's standard organization in the near future, he said the draft of the MOU has been sent to Qatar and expressed the readiness of the Institute of Standards and Industrial Research of Iran to implement this MOU as soon as possible.

The Qatari side also announced the readiness and willingness of the Qatar General Organization for Standards and Metrology to create positive changes to expand trade exchanges between the two sides.

Navy to Unveil New Indigenous Naval Attack Helicopters, Drones

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iranian Navy Commander Rear Admiral Shahram Irani says his force will soon unveil new homegrown naval attack helicopters and long-range drones, stating the major military achievements will join the country's naval fleet in the near future.

Speaking to reporters at a press conference in the capital, Tehran, Irani stated that the helicopters will be of great assistance in carrying out maritime operations and will be used for escorting vessels. He added that the advanced unmanned aerial vehicles will also enable the Iranian Navy's offshore units to cover areas within an operational radius of at least 2,000 kilometers.

Irani highlighted that Iranian naval units are now present in the Indian Ocean, the Atlantic Ocean as well as the Pacific Ocean, and are safeguarding merchant containers and oil tankers owned or leased by the Islamic Republic during their missions in international waters. The top commander emphasized that the Iranian Navy enjoys the capability to fly hundreds of drones at once to carry out various missions.

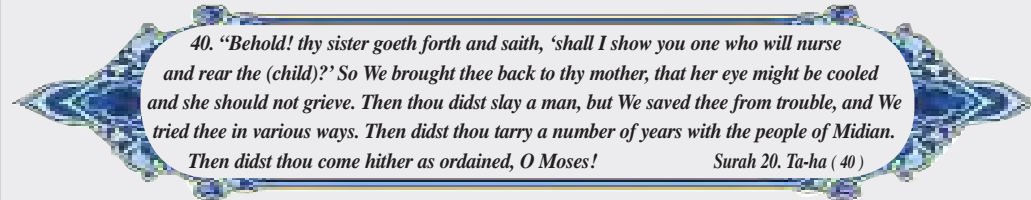
"In the next few months, we plan to conduct joint exercises in the northern tip of the Indian Ocean with the participation of countries with which we have signed bilateral or multilateral agreements," the commander of the Iranian Navy said.

Back in mid-July, Iran's Navy upgraded its force by incorporating a special division tasked with transporting and operating various drones. The first drone carrier division of Iran's Navy, which is comprised of different surface and subsurface units, was unveiled in a ceremony in the international waters of the Indian Ocean.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	11:51
■ Evening (Maghreb)	17:12
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	05:22
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	06:50



40. "Behold! thy sister goeth forth and saith, 'shall I show you one who will nurse and rear the (child)?' So We brought thee back to thy mother, that her eye might be cooled and she should not grieve. Then thou didst slay a man, but We saved thee from trouble, and We tried thee in various ways. Then didst thou tarry a number of years with the people of Midian. Then didst thou come hither as ordained, O Moses!"

Surah 20. Ta-ha (40)

Iranian Ships Facing Problems In Russian Ports

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Secretary of the Shipping Association of Iran Mr. Masoud Polmeh says Iranian ships face problems in Russian ports and they have major problems in load and unload of vessels.

Speaking to ILNA, Polmeh pointed to the pile of goods in northern ports and problems of Iranian vessels for ply between Astrakhan and Salianka Ports of Russia, noting that issue and problem of Iranian ships are totally different in Astrakhan and Salianka Ports. He added that Iranian vessels in Astrakhan face problems during docking and unloading and these problems lead to prolongation of stop in Astrakhan Port and this makes the number of services of ships reduce from two in a month to one in a month.

He added that this has caused problem for dispatch of cargo from Russian port to Iran or vice-versa and resolving this problem needs a serious economic diplomacy because this is not a technical problem and it is only managerial one and it needs the economic diplomacy. He added that as cold looms, the problem will worsen and this should be resolved very fast.

Polmeh reiterated that this problem is mostly for Iranian vessels, admitting that Iran-bound vessels face less problem because some of them transit Iran and the problems are mostly for Russia-bound vessels.



He added that but in Salianka Port, Iranian ships face both technical and managerial problems as it goes cold, the condition will worsen and vessels will face with shallow depth in the port. He added that Salianka Port is under management of the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Line (IRISL) and since the Iranian shipping line has invested in this port, it is natural Khazar Sea Shipping Line does its load and unload operations in Salianka Port.

He said that if Iran uses Russian ships for its transportation it will not face any problem in Astrakhan Port but Iranian sides will suffer losses and the cost of marine transportation will increase. He admitted that the management in Astrakhan looks patriotically and prioritizes Russian vessels.

He noted that at Makhachkala Port there is the problem of political geography of Dagestan and this position has created restrictions for the logistical activities in this port.

He then pointed to the pile of goods in northern ports and said that it is because of the mentioned reasons and the number of shipping services in the northern routes have decreased and goods have been piled.

Polmeh said that they need at least 100 ships with Iranian flags or under Iranian ownership for trade in the Caspian Sea and currently there are 43 vessels in these routes and it is almost 43% of the required capacity and 23 ships belong to IRISL and 20 belong to the private sector company and age of some of ships are very old and their maintenance costs is very high.

Tehran, Minsk Emphasize Developing Trade-Economic Cooperation

TEHRAN (MNA) – While stressing on expanding trade cooperation between Iran and Belarus, Chairman of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA) called for setting up a joint working group between the two countries.

He made the remarks on Tuesday evening in a meeting of Iran and Belarus Trade-Economic Forum and emphasized the need for launching a joint trade and economic committee between chambers of commerce of the two countries.

In addition to placing special emphasis on the significance of taking advantage of capacities of diplomacy and developing economic relations of countries, Gholamhossein Shafei proposed identification and removal of problems ahead of expansion of bilateral trade between Iran and Belarus through the establishment of joint working groups.

The two countries of Iran and Belarus enjoy high potentials to broaden their bilateral trade once preliminary grounds are provided for the conclusion of Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between Iran and Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), he added.

The economic relations between Iran and Belarus have been positive since decades ago, he said, and called on senior officials of the two countries to take effective steps for further development of trade and economic activities between the two states.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Shafei pointed to the Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA) and said that signing interim Preferential Trade Agreement between Iran and Eurasian Economic Union has opened a new chapter in the development of Iran's trade ties with regional countries especially Belarus.

This is while that talks between officials of the two countries in the field of implementation of Free Trade Agreement has been finalized, so that implementation of FTA between Iran and EAEU member states can remove many trade barriers as well, the Chairman of ICCIMA added.

He went on to say that the two countries of Iran and Belarus can cooperate with each other in the fields of agriculture, farming aquatic animals, home appliances, automotive, healthcare and pharmaceutical sectors, knowledge-based medical equipment and transport.

Iran and Belarus can enhance their trade and economic relations using goods bartering deal, Shafesi emphasized.

Tehran, Caracas Agree for Export of 100,000 Iranian Cars

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Director General of American Bureau of Trade Promotion Organization of Iran says Iran has reached agreement with Venezuela for exporting over 100,000 cars to Venezuela in five years.

Speaking to ILNA, Zahra Abeiri said that Tehran and Caracas have signed an agreement for export of 100,000 cars to Venezuela

in five years, and in recent days, 1000 cars have been exported to Venezuela and Tehran is planning for sending 2,000 more cars. He added that the 1000-car batch was exported to Venezuela after receiving major part of money for the cars.

She then touched upon the latest details of trade between Iran and Venezuela and said that bilateral cooperation is in the fields of energy, scientific and technology, health and medicines, education, agriculture, tourism, petrochemical and industries.

Abeiri then pointed to the agreements between the two countries for improving electricity system in Venezuela, adding that dispatch of medicines especially in medical treatment of cancer, exchange of scientific co-operations, investment of over 40 Iranian companies in Venezuela, approval of protocols which are aimed at advancing the process for exchange of products with animal and plant roots, are of other fields of cooperation between the two states.



She went on to say that in the 20-year document which was signed between Iran and Venezuela during President Nicolas Maduro visit to Tehran in June, both sides drew up bilateral co-operations for the next two years. She stated that both oil-rich countries are under the U.S. sanctions and both are also the OPEC members and can

have effective cooperation for making ineffective the sanctions, adding that Venezuela with over 33m hectares of cultivable land and abundant water resources have problems in agriculture.

Abeiri then pointed to the hurdles in way of progress in trade of both states, noting that long distance, technological weakness, lack of industrial tools are of the known problems in way of boosting trade, and these problems have made considerable amount of cultivable lands in Venezuela remain intact.

On the barter trade with Venezuela, he said that there are unique and individual capacities in this field that by planning by the government these capacities can be used. She then pointed to the fields for boosting cooperation like exporting technical services and gas condensates.

Abeiri added that Venezuela has asked for 200,000 cars from Iranian auto-maker SAIPA and both sides keen to launch the production line for SAIPA cars in Venezuela and soon it will happen.

Iran Knowledge-Based Companies Able to Cooperate With Russia

TEHRAN (MNA) – Iran's Minister of Communications and Information Technology (ICT) said that Iran's knowledge-based companies are able enough to cooperate with Russia.

Issa Zarepour made the remarks in a meeting with Alexander Shoitov, Deputy Minister of Digital Development, Communications, and Mass Media of the Russian Federation.

Referring to the agreement reached in his previous trip to Russia, he said some provisions of the agreement have been operationalized.

Some other parts of the agreement should be followed up to be put into action, he further noted.

There are knowledge-based companies in Iran that have the proper capacities to commence cooperation with the Russian sides, he stated.

It is recommended that a permanent joint working group be set up to pursue the issues so that the implementation of the agreements can be accelerated, he underlined.



Water Reserves Behind Tehran Dams At Lowest Level in 50 Years

TEHRAN (IFP) - An Iranian official warns that the available water reserves behind dams supplying water to the capital, Tehran, the country's most populous city, have decreased to the lowest level in half a century, urging the public to help save water.

Nader Tabrizi, a senior official with the water management department in Tehran, told Tasnim News Agency that the capital city of over 8.5 million has witnessed little downpours since last year, leading to a decline in the volume of water reserves behind dams.

He called on the people to decrease water consumption by 20 percent to help overcome the scarcity.

Iran — a semi-arid country — is heading fast toward severe water scarcity, along with other states in the Middle East and those in North Africa.

A host of threats are posed to Iran's water supply, including climate change, population growth, mass migration, and resource mismanagement.

Downpour levels have sharply plummeted in Iran over the past years, leaving many regions suffering from drought.

Foreign Companies Eager to Invest In Iran Airport Market

GANAWEH (IRNA) - A senior official at Iran Airports and Air Navigation Company announced here on Wednesday that the foreign countries are very willing to make investment in Iran's airport market.

Hassan Amjadi made the remarks in a meeting held in a southern Iranian city.

At his remarks, Amjadi referred to China as one of those foreign countries which are eager to be present in Iran to invest in airport market.

He added that construction of a new airport in Bushehr in south of the country is among the projects introduced to the foreigners.

Elsewhere, a provincial official in Bushehr described construction of airports as a tool for fostering development.

Iran Attends Tourism Managers' CICA Meeting

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Chairpersons of tourism organizations of the member states of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA) have taken part in a virtual meeting hosted by Tajikistan.

The participants, including a representative from Iran, discussed the outlook of expanding cooperation in terms of tourism industry, calling for enhancement of coordination among member states of the CICA in the meeting hosted by Dushanbe, capital city of Tajikistan.

The committee of development of tourism industry in Tajikistan said that top managers of the tourism agencies from Iran, Palestine, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, China, Iraq, Jordan, Thailand, Turkiye, Secretariate of the CICA and Tajikistan took part in the assembly.

The partakers called for expansion of collaborations in tourism industry among CICA member states especially following the COVID-19 pandemic, emphasizing the need for joint efforts to rejuvenate the industry via exchanging tourists among the member states.

The CICA states also agreed upon supporting the tourism industry and providing each other with reciprocal backings.

In the event, the member states of the CICA reviewed new methods to provide services regarding tourism industry in order to find ways to overcome challenges.

Chi Fang, Deputy Executive Director of CICA Secretariat, expressed gratitude to Tajikistan for hosting the important event in tourism industry, which is one of the main economic sectors that has been affected severely by the pandemic.

She stressed the importance of promoting sustainable tourism in the region, creating job opportunities for locals, enhancing mutual understanding and friendship among people as well as preserving natural and cultural heritage of tourism destinations.

The CICA has 27 member states and 12 observers, including some international organizations such as the United Nations, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the Arab League as well as countries like Malaysia, Indonesia, Vietnam, Japan, Ukraine and the United States.

Iran, Kazakhstan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, South Korea, China, Russia, India, Palestine, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Azerbaijan Republic and Thailand are among the main member states of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia.

Iran Exports Over 2 Tons of Goods to Iraq Via Mehran Border

ILAM (IRNA) - Iran has exported 2.35 million tons of commodities to the neighboring country of Iraq through Mehran international border in northwest of western Iranian province of Ilam during the first eight months of the Iranian calendar year started on March 21, a provincial official announced on Wednesday.

The figure shows 84 percent increase in weight while being compared with that of in the preceding year, head of Ilam Customs Administration Rouhollah Gholami said.

During the mentioned period, worth of the exported products to Iraq has been about 1.9 billion dollars which indicated 72 percent growth after being compared with the previous year, the official underlined.

He further referred to ceramic, metal, petrochemicals, cement, plastics, car, etc. as the main products dispatched to Iraq.

Mehran in Iran's Ilam Province is 230 km away from Baghdad and is Iran's closest border city to Iraqi capital.

Kazakhstan Rejects Criticism of Presidential Election

ASTANA (Dispatches) - Kazakhstan has dismissed international criticism of its presidential vote, in which incumbent Kassym-Jomart Tokayev secured a landslide re-election victory.

The foreign ministry said late on Monday that a report on the ballot by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) “lacks objectivity”.

It contains “biased conclusions, demonstrating a complete unwillingness to recognize the development of the internal situation” in the energy-rich Central Asian country, he said.

The ministry also accused the report of “unsubstantiated and unconfirmed allegations”.



Migrant Boat Docks in Crete After Dramatic Rescue

PALATIOCHORA (Dispatches) - A rusty fishing boat carrying around 500 migrants docked at the Greek island of Crete esday after being dramatically rescued during near gale-force winds.

An AFP photographer saw the banged-up vessel crammed with men, some of whom peered from holes cut into the hull, apparently to keep those in the hold from suffocating.

Hellenic Red Cross rescuers and health workers readied to help the passengers disembark and take them to the nearest hospital after the boat reached the small Cretan coastal town of Palaiochora.

“Approximately 500 migrants” were on board, tweeted Greek Migration Minister Notis Mitarachi.



Putin, Castro Pledge To Deepen Ties



MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russian President Vladimir Putin and his Cuban counterpart Miguel Diaz-Canel unveiled a monument in a north Moscow square on Tuesday to Cuban revolutionary leader Fidel Castro, pledging to deepen their friendship in the face of U.S. sanctions against both countries.

Castro, who took power in 1959, is not commemorated by statues in his homeland because, his brother Raul said after his death in 2016, he wanted to avoid a personality cult.

But Putin evoked his memory as he told Diaz-Canel the two countries needed to build on the “solid foundation of friendship” established between Castro and Soviet leaders.

“It’s a real work of art - dynamic, in motion, moving forward. It creates the image of a fighter,” Putin said of the statue, which portrays Castro gazing into the distance with hands on hips.

Diaz-Canel said through a translator: “I think it reflects the personality of Fidel in the struggle, as we find ourselves in struggle today.”

Russia is looking to strengthen political and economic ties with other countries opposed to what it calls U.S. hegemony. Cuba has been under a U.S. economic embargo since 1962 after the Communist revolution led by Castro.

Addressing the Russian parliament, Diaz-Canel showed his solidarity by directly endorsing Moscow’s stated pretext for sending its troops into Ukraine.

“The reasons for the current conflict in this zone must be sought in the aggressive policy of the United States and the expansion of NATO towards Russia’s borders,” he said.

Ukraine and its Western allies reject that argument as a specious justification for an illegal war of occupation.

Under Castro, Cuba was a close ally of Moscow and found itself at the center of one of the gravest crises of the Cold War when, in 1962, the United States detected the construction of Soviet launch sites on the Caribbean island for firing ballistic missiles capable of hitting U.S. cities.

The resulting standoff, known as the Cuban Missile Crisis, brought the United States and the Soviet Union close to the brink of nuclear war.

Asked about possible parallels, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said: “The crises are different, although both then and now we are talking about a clash between us and the collective West led by the United States.”

He added: “The experience of the Caribbean crisis has been studied and will continue to be studied, but this will not be the main thing in the talks” between Putin and Diaz-Canel.

Russian Strikes Cripple Power Capacity in Ukraine

KYIV (Dispatches) - President Volodymyr Zelenskyy appealed to Ukrainians to conserve energy amid relentless Russian strikes that have halved the country’s power capacity, as the United Nations health body warned of a humanitarian disaster in Ukraine this winter.

Authorities said millions of Ukrainians, including in the capital Kyiv, could face power cuts at least until the end of March due to the missile attacks, which Ukraine’s national grid operator Ukrenergo said had wreaked “colossal” damage.

Temperatures have been unseasonably mild in Ukraine this autumn, but are starting to dip below zero and are expected to drop to -20 Celsius (-4 Fahrenheit) or even lower in some areas during the winter months.

Russia’s targeting of Ukrainian energy facilities follows a series of battlefield setbacks that have included a pullout of Russian forces from the southern city of Kherson to the east bank of the mighty Dnipro River that bisects the country.

“The systematic damage to our energy system from strikes by the Russian terrorists is so considerable that all our people and businesses should be mindful and redistribute their consumption throughout the day,” Zelenskyy said in his nightly video address.

Ukrenergo’s chief Volodymyr Kudrytskyi said on Tuesday that practically no thermal or hydroelectric stations had been left unscathed, though he dismissed the need to evacuate civilians.

“We cannot generate as much energy as consumers can use,” Kudrytskyi told a briefing, adding that after a brief cold snap on Wednesday temperatures were expected to rise again, providing an opportunity to stabilise the power generating system.

The World Health Organization (WHO) said hundreds of Ukrainian hospitals and healthcare facilities lacked fuel, water and electricity to meet people’s basic needs.

“Ukraine’s health system is facing its darkest days in the war so far. Having endured more than 700 attacks, it is now also a victim of the energy crisis,” Hans Kluge, WHO’s regional director for Europe, said in a statement after visiting Ukraine.

Workers are racing to repair damaged power infrastructure, according to Sergey Kovalenko, the head of YASNO, which provides energy for Kyiv.



France Shocked Over Stabbing Death of Tax Inspector

PARIS (Dispatches) - The French government expressed shock after a tax inspector was stabbed to death as he was trying to audit the books of a business owner in the north of the country.

The murder victim, a 43-year old civil servant for the tax authorities, was found dead on Monday, killed “most likely by repeated stabbing”, the prosecutors’ office in the northern French city of Arras said.

The suspected killer, a 46-year-old antiques dealer, was then believed to have killed himself with a firearm, it said.

The suspect, described by the local mayor as “an ordinary guy”, locked up the tax inspector and a female colleague during a tax audit of his business, it said.

“The republic is weeping for one of its own,” Budget Minister Gabriel Attal said. He said it was “revolting” that a public servant was killed “because he did his job”.

The inspector arrived Monday afternoon at the antique dealer’s home, accompanied by a colleague, to check his accounts.

Attal said usually agents were sent on tax check missions on their own, but this time there was backup because there had been tensions during previous visits to the antique dealer’s business.

Prosecutors said the businessman tied them up and stabbed the inspector, leaving the colleague “terribly shocked” but otherwise unharmed, the prosecutors’ office said. A union for tax officials said the case showed that its members had a “potentially dangerous” job. The dealer, a divorced father of two, moved four years ago to the hamlet of Bullecourt, its mayor Eric Bianchin told AFP.

He bought a farm from where he sold bric-a-brac which he picked up at auctions and yard sales around the area.

He was “an ordinary guy”, the mayor said, describing him as “helpful, and well-integrated in the village” of some

A neighbor, Geoffrey Fournier, described the presumed killer as “discreet” and “apparently hard-working”, whose business “seemed to be doing OK”.

Malaysia King to Choose PM in Post-Election Crisis

KUALA LUMPUR (Dispatches) - Malaysia’s king said he will pick the next prime minister, after the leading two contenders failed to win a majority in last weekend’s election and his proposal for the two to work together was turned down.

The vote resulted in an unprecedented hung parliament, with neither opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim nor former premier Muhyiddin Yassin winning the simple majority needed to form a government.

To break the stalemate, King Al-Sultan Abdullah suggested the two rivals work together to form a ‘unity government’, Muhyiddin said, but added that he will not work with Anwar. Muhyiddin runs a Malay Muslim conservation alliance, while Anwar runs a multi-ethnic coalition.

The Saturday election and the ensuing turmoil prolongs political instability in the Southeast Asian nation, which has had three prime ministers in as many years, and risks delays to policy decisions needed to galvanise an economic recovery.

The king had given political parties until 2 p.m. (0600 GMT) on Tuesday to put together alliances needed for a majority.

But the candidates failed to do so after the incumbent Barisan Nasional coalition refused to align with either.

It is now up to the constitutional monarch, who plays a largely ceremonial role but can appoint whoever he believes will command a majority.

“Let me make a decision soon,” the king told reporters outside the national palace. He also asked Malaysians to accept any decision about the government formation.

The king later met with Anwar and Muhyiddin, and summoned lawmakers from the Barisan Nasional coalition for a meeting on Wednesday.

Anwar told reporters that the king, in their meeting, expressed his desire to form a strong government “that is more inclusive in terms of race, religion, or region” and one that can focus on the economy.

Anwar’s progressive coalition won the most number of seats, but an Islamist party - which is part of Muhyiddin’s bloc and has touted sharia law - made huge gains, raising fears in Malaysia -- which has significant ethnic Chinese and ethnic Indian minorities following other faiths.

Malaysian police cautioned the country’s social media users to refrain from posting “provocative” content on race and religion after the divisive election.

The political uncertainty hit the Kuala Lumpur stock market, which fell for a second day on Tuesday. Election gains by the Islamist party added to investors’ fears, notably over policies on gambling and alcohol consumption.



Blinken Says No Plans For Saudi Crown Prince to Visit Washington

DOHA (Dispatches) – U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said there were “no plans” for Saudi Arabia’s Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman to visit Washington while it reviews relations with the Persian Gulf state.

The 37-year-old prince -- widely known as MBS -- has been at the center of diplomatic turmoil with the United States and other powers since the grisly 2018 killing of journalist Jamal Khashoggi by Saudi agents.

President Joe Biden visited Saudi Arabia in July, and his administration has faced new criticism since it was revealed this month that the United States granted the prince immunity from prosecution as the head of the Saudi government.

Speaking after talks with Qatar’s Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani, Blinken said: “With regard to MBS, there are no plans for him to travel to Washington.”

Blinken also reaffirmed the administration’s case for granting immunity. A federal court sought the government’s opinion after Khashoggi’s fiancée Hatic Cengiz started legal proceedings.

Blinken told a press conference the US administration had followed “longstanding legal practice” that a head of state or government, or foreign minister, was “entitled to immunity”.

“This is a determination that we’ve made in dozens, hundreds of cases over the years. And in every case, we simply follow the law,” he said.

“The opinion that we provided does not speak in any way to the merits of the case nor the current status of the bilateral relationship.

“Our review of that relationship is ongoing,” insisted Blinken, who arrived in Doha on Monday, a day after the prince was at the football World Cup opening ceremony.

The killing of Khashoggi, a Saudi insider-turned-critic, in the kingdom’s Istanbul consulate temporarily turned Prince Mohammed into a pariah in the West.

His lawyers had argued he qualifies for the kind of immunity US courts afford foreign heads of state and other high-ranking officials.

The Amnesty International rights group has called the US immunity decision “a deep betrayal.”



To Make Yourself Understood Online, Use Emojis Instead of Words

TOKYO (Dispatches) - On social networks, in our emails... emojis are used everywhere. And their rates of use are increasing: on Discord more than 7,600 emojis are used every second. More than 436 billion emojis have been posted on the messaging service since its launch in 2015.

To better understand internet users' passion for these pictograms, Discord surveyed 16,000 people over the age of 16. More than 70 per cent of them said that emojis help build connections among people. And this is the case whether they are friends, family members, classmates or even colleagues.

Younger generations are particularly fond of these small symbols representing facial expressions, activities, objects, animals and foods. They believe they help them be more honest and expressive in their digital exchanges. For example, 69 per cent of millennials say they communicate their emotions more easily with emojis than with words, as well as 65 per cent of Gen Z respondents.

And this was exactly the goal that Shigetaka Kurita had in mind when he invented them in the late 1990s. At the time, texts were limited to 250 characters on early messaging services, and it was difficult to convey emotions and their nuances, as the Japanese interface designer explained in the documentary series "Emoji-Nation."

Since then, emojis have become an essential component in our digital exchanges, in some cases even taking over from written language. In 2015, the Oxford Dictionary decided to choose , the face with tears of joy, as its word of the year. A decision that may have surprised traditionalists, but that attests to how the way we interact and communicate continues to evolve. "Texting can feel impersonal, but emojis let you put some of yourself into the conversation," says Connor Blakley, founder and CEO of YouthLogic, in the Discord report.

Although they're everywhere on the web, in forums, messenger apps and more, emojis are constantly being reinterpreted. Nearly eight in 10 respondents say their meaning varies depending on who they send them to. Foodies may use the carrot emoji to refer to the orange root vegetable loved by rabbits love, while anti-vaxxers use it to talk about the Covid-19 vaccination, in order to avoid social network moderation policies.

Everyone can interpret and use emojis slightly differently. The phenomenon is such that 44 per cent of the web users surveyed by Discord say they have a go-to set that they rely on. But these personal preferences don't stop them from appreciating the thousands of other little graphic icons that exist. In fact, emojis even have a positive effect on the emotional state of the person who receives them: 72 per cent of respondents agree that receiving emojis makes them smile when they feel sad.

A finding that comes as no surprise to Neil Cohn, a cognitive scientist and expert on visual communication and language. "Despite being graphics, we often perceive emojis like faces. And the sight of another's smiling face is often enough to make us do the same," he said in the Discord report.

Emojis are thus a form of language in their own right, as they allow us to express ourselves through images that represent aspects of our everyday reality, not unlike hieroglyphics thousands of years ago. Like their Egyptian ancestors, emojis contribute to the organisation of our social interactions. Indeed 43 per cent of respondents said that they provide more validation than a text or verbal statement.



First U.S. Coral Insurance Marks the Rise of the Reef Brigades

HONG KONG (Dispatches) - Conservation group The Nature Conservancy's vision for the future of coral protection involves speed boats, and a global army of snorkellers and divers deployed when tropical storms and hurricanes damage reefs.

On Monday, the global 'Reef Brigades' plan came closer to reality when it bought an insurance policy on behalf of the state of Hawaii, the first U.S. coral insurance contract, which will provide funds for repair work, building on similar policies taken out in the Caribbean.

"To date, conservation has really relied on philanthropy and government grants," Eric Roberts, a senior risk and resilience program manager at The Nature Conservancy (TNC), said. "By using insurance, we're also tapping into the private sector for this work."

Apart from being a precious nursery for fish, coral reefs that fringe developed coastlines can limit flooding by providing a barrier against ocean storm surges, meaning insurers have every interest in protecting them.

"Even with just the flood risk reduction value, usually that's enough to make a business case to say, yes, we need to protect these reefs," Roberts said.

The Reef Brigades recover reef fragments, store them in ocean or shore-based nurseries, and then re-attach them, using cement or epoxy, when it is safe at a cost ranging from \$10,000 per hectare to \$1.5 million per hectare when new corals grown in a nursery are required.

For the premium of \$110,000 in Hawaii's contract announced on Monday, that state will get up to \$2 million of insurance protection for its coral reefs until the end of December 2023.

The policy covers the majority of Hawaii, from the Big Island to Kauai, and begins paying out at 50 knots of wind.

Higher wind speeds trigger higher payouts as a percentage of the value of the policy, up to its limit. The idea is that the payouts are available for restoration work within seven days of a storm. With this kind of policy – a "parametric" policy – there is no need for a damage assessment.

The idea of insuring reefs was first tested three years ago by the Mexican state of Quintana Roo.

Just offshore from some of the country's most famous Mayan ruins, local tourism businesses and the government bought an insurance policy to cover their share of the Mesoamerican Reef.

Environmental group the MAR Fund later took out a policy on the rest of the Mesoamerican Reef, including elsewhere in Mexico, Belize, Guatemala and Honduras.

The policies paid out for one storm in Mexico in 2020 and another in Belize this November. Quintana Roo paid 6 million Mexican pesos (\$307,850) to renew its policy last July.

"Yes, it can be a lot of money," Secretary of Ecology and Environment Josefina Huguette Hernández Gómez said, but it was worth it.

"The cost is higher when you have the loss of biodiversity or corals than what you pay in insurance," she said.

Willis Towers Watson, which worked on the MAR Fund policy and the Hawaii policy, said it is actively working on a coral reef policy for Fiji, and policies for coral reef bleaching, run-off due to excessive rainfall, and lost fishing days due to climate change-induced storms.

The need for the work to be rolled out globally is clear.

"An unprecedented coordinated global effort among public, private and philanthropic sectors will be required for reefs to survive beyond the end of this century," a 2020 reef insurance feasibility study by The Nature Conservancy concluded.



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Romanian Gov't to Hike Pensions by 12.5% From January

BUCHAREST (Reuters) - Romania's ruling coalition will hike state pensions by 12.5% from January and make cash payments to low-income pensioners throughout the year to help the country's most vulnerable cope with surging inflation, party leaders said.

The cash payments will vary in size for pensions under 3,000 lei (\$622.55) per month, the leaders of the three governing coalition parties agreed.

In addition, pensioners with under 1700 lei per month will receive social vouchers worth 250 lei every two months, a measure first approved this year.



Italy Gov't Approves 2023 Budget With 35b Euros to Lift Economy

ROME (Dispatches) - Italy's new right-wing government signed off on its first budget, a package focusing on curbing sky-high energy bills and cutting taxes from next year for payroll workers and the self-employed.

Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni hopes the spending boost will speed a recovery in the euro zone's third largest economy, which the Treasury has forecast will contract in the current quarter and the first quarter of next year.

The budget bill was approved at around half-past midnight (23:30 GMT), Meloni's office said, after a three-hour cabinet meeting. It now goes to parliament, which must pass it by the end of the year.

The measures total almost 35 billion euros (\$35.84 billion), with Rome planning to fund around 60% of the package by driving up next year's budget deficit to 4.5% of gross domestic product (GDP) from 3.4% forecast in September.

Other sources of funding include an increase in a windfall tax on energy companies that have benefited from the surge in oil and gas prices, the Treasury said in a statement.

With a tax rate rising from 25% to 35% until July 2023 and calculated on profits instead of revenues, the new levy follows a framework proposed by the European Commission and replaces a scheme which has triggered criticism and refusals to pay from numerous energy firms.

The budget tightens the terms of the "citizens' wage" poverty relief scheme for the unemployed, which the rightist coalition says discourages people from seeking work.

Next year, able-bodied people of working age will only be able to draw the benefit for a maximum of eight months, ahead of complete abolition of the citizens' wage from Jan 1, 2024.

The budget allocates over 21 billion euros next year to help firms and households pay electricity and gas bills.

To boost pay packets, it sets aside some 4.2 billion euros to cutting the "tax wedge" - the difference between the salary an employer pays and what a worker takes home - with the benefit going to low income workers.

The package also introduces fiscal incentives aimed at encouraging the hiring on open ended contracts of women under 36, fixed-term workers and people drawing the citizens' wage.

With inflation biting, Italy's economy is forecast to grow just 0.6% next year after a figure of 3.7% this year, according to the latest Treasury estimates, which are more upbeat than those of many independent forecasters.

Implementing one of Meloni's flagship fiscal proposals, the budget extends a 15% single tax rate for the self-employed to annual income of up to 85,000 euros, compared with the current ceiling of 65,000 euros.

With a view to building a huge bridge connecting Sicily to the Italian mainland, a long-time pet-project of Italy's right, to oversee the project the bill relaunches a dedicated state-backed company that had been put into liquidation.

One of the most contentious measures in the budget is an amnesty on tax arrears of up to 1,000 euros stemming from before 2016. Critics say such amnesties, which are not uncommon in Italy, encourage people not to pay their taxes.

Bank of Korea to Hike Rates a Modest 25bps

BENGALURU (Dispatches) - South Korea's central bank will scale back its tightening pace on Thursday and hike rates by a modest 25 basis points amid signs of slowing domestic growth, despite high inflation and an aggressive U.S. Federal Reserve, a Reuters poll found.

South Korea's economic growth was fast losing momentum at latest measure as higher living costs erode household income and crimp demand, pressuring the Bank of Korea (BoK) to strike a balance between inflation and growth.

Still, with inflation well above the central bank's 2% target at 5.7% in October, along with aggressive tightening from the Fed, the Bank of Korea still has a bit more to do before pausing.

All but one of 30 economists in the Nov. 15-21 poll forecast the BoK would raise its policy rate by 25 basis points to 3.25% on Thursday. One expected a 50 basis point hike.

If the majority view prevails, the BoK will take rates to the highest level since 2012.

"The combination of still-elevated inflation, and a hawkish U.S. Federal Reserve means that the central bank's rate-hike cycle has further room to run," noted Krystal Tan, economist at ANZ.

"Amid climbing concerns about growth and the credit market, the case for hiking at a more gradual pace has strengthened further."

Nearly 60% of respondents, 17 of 30, forecast another hike by 25 basis points by end-March, taking rates to 3.50%. Eleven forecast rates would climb to 3.75% by then. The remaining two expected no change from 3.25%.



German Producer Prices Fall

BERLIN (Dispatches) - German producer prices posted their first monthly fall in two and a half years in October, according to data released on Monday, raising hopes that double-digit inflation in Europe's largest economy could be nearing its peak.

Producer prices of industrial products fell 4.2% on the month, due primarily to dips in prices for electricity and distributed natural gas, the Federal Statistical Office reported. Analysts polled by Reuters had forecast a rise of 0.9%.

This is likely to be welcome news, even if only at the margins, for the European Central Bank, which has been raising rates aggressively to tame price pressures.

Producer price growth has fed into overall inflation at a faster pace in the past year than normal, so any broader reversal in pipeline pressures could reinforce expectations for consumer price growth to peak in the fourth quarter.

But underlying inflation, now around 5%, has shown little sign of easing, and detailed October data released last week showed broad and mounting price pressures.

"The underlying inflation pressure, using whichever metric you want to look at, does not show signs of stabilisation - so there is really nothing for the doves in this reading," Danske Bank economist Piet Haines Christiansen said.

Commerzbank's Ralph Solveen said the figures "give cause for hope the inflation rate for consumer prices will also soon reach its peak. However, this does not mean that the inflation problem is over."

A survey conducted by the Ifo economic institute showed that many German businesses were not through with passing on their soaring costs to customers.

Turkey Sees Economy Maintaining Growth Trend Despite Challenges

ANKARA (Dispatches) - The government expects the Turkish economy to maintain its growth trend in the coming period despite global challenges, Treasury and Finance Minister Nureddin Nebati said.

"We expect the economic growth trend to continue in the coming period, maintaining a balanced outlook. We will witness the strengthening of macroeconomic fundamentals and the permanent establishment of financial and price stability together," Nebati told Daily Sabah in an interview on Sunday.

Turkey is one of the rare countries that is not experiencing a recession risk, the minister said, attributing it to the policies taken within the scope of the new economic program.

"The most important reason for this is that our economy, on the one hand, maintains a strong growth trend, and on the other hand, it maintains a balanced composition of growth," he added.

The government has been prioritizing low interest rates to boost exports, production, investment and create new jobs as part of the economic program called the Turkey Economy Model, which aims to lower inflation by flipping the country's chronic current account deficit to a surplus.

"While we continue to increase our employment and exports by making investments and value-added products with the Turkey Economy Model, we are closer to our development goal than ever before," Nebati said.

The Turkish economy has been growing for the last eight quarters and expanded by a better-than-expected 7.6% year-over-year in the second quarter on strong domestic demand and exports.

The rate, which Nebati said came despite Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the weakening global economy, made Turkey one of the fastest-growing economies in the G-20 and Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

"The investments in machinery and equipment, which carried the uninterrupted growth process to the 11th quarter as of the second quarter of 2022, are a strong and concrete sign that our economy is progressing by increasing its productivity," the minister said.

Nebati also cited the strong contribution of annual exports, which he said reached \$253.1 billion as of October, buoyant service exports and tourism revenues, which are expected to exceed even the pre-pandemic period by the end of the year.

He said employment increased by 5.5 million people as of September compared to the period when the pandemic was most severe, and by 1.3 million in the last year.

Qatar Seals 27-Year LNG Deal With China

DOHA (Dispatches) - QatarEnergy has signed a 27-year deal to supply China's Sinopec with liquefied natural gas in the longest such LNG agreement to date as volatility drives buyers to seek long-term supplies.

Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February, competition for LNG has become intense, with Europe in particular needing vast amounts to help replace Russian pipeline gas that used to make up almost 40% of the continent's imports.

European companies looking to buy LNG needed to look at how Asian buyers were approaching their own negotiations and were willing to lock into long-term deals, QatarEnergy chief Saad al-Kaabi told Reuters, shortly before signing the Sinopec deal.

"Today is an important milestone for the first sales and purchase agreement (SPA) for North Field East project, it is 4 million tonnes for 27 years to Sinopec of China," Kaabi said.

"It signifies long-term deals are here and important for both seller and buyer," he said in an interview in Doha, adding that the deal was the LNG sector's largest single sales and purchase agreement on record. The North Field is part of the world's biggest gas field that Qatar shares with Iran, which calls its share South Pars.

QatarEnergy earlier this year signed five deals for North Field East (NFE), the first and larger of the two-phase North Field expansion plan, which includes six LNG trains that will ramp up Qatar's liquefaction capacity to 126 million tons per year by 2027 from 77 million.

It later signed contracts with three partners for North Field South (NFS), the second phase of the expansion. Monday's deal, confirmed by Sinopec, is the first supply deal to be announced for NFE.



"This takes our relationship to new heights as we have an SPA that will last into the 2050s," Kaabi said.

"It sends a message that a lot of Asian buyers are actually approaching us to have a long term deal because they see the volumes of gas that are coming in the future are less and less."

Kaabi said negotiations with other buyers in China and Europe that want to have security of supply were ongoing.

Qatar is already the world's top LNG exporter and its North Field expansion project will boost that position and help guarantee long-term supplies of gas to Europe as the continent seeks alternatives to Russian flows.

"The recent volatility has driven buyers to understand the importance of having long-term supply that is fixed and that's reasonably priced for the long term," Kaabi said.

Pakistan's Credit Default Swap Shoots Up to 92.53%



KARACHI (Dispatches) - The cost of insuring exposure to Pakistan's five-year sovereign debt rose by 1,224 basis points over the weekend, hitting the highest-ever level of 92.53%, a brokerage's data showed on Monday, The News reported.

The rate at these levels reflects a certain default. Analysts said the country's sovereign dollar bonds would remain vulnerable until the political standoff between the government and the Imran Khan-led PTI settles.

"The situation on the ground is challenging but not as grave as reflected by the current Credit Default Swap (CDS) rate," an analyst said. "The margin for any misadventure was thin, for sure."

Pakistan's economy is in upheaval, and its foreign reserves are quickly running out. The central bank's foreign exchange reserves stand at \$7.959 billion as of November 11 and are enough for less than six weeks' worth of imports.

Despite the recent rollover of Chinese debt and fresh infusions from the World Bank (WB), and the Asian Development Bank (ADB), forex reserves have been declining.

As talks with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) over the ninth review of the loan facility come to a stalemate, its external financial strains are increasing.

Friendly nations have not made any definite funding pledges. After exports, remittances are the second-largest source of income, but those are declining too.

Along with the deteriorating economic fundamentals, Pakistan's political instability forced the foreign debt markets to see its bonds as risky and politically unstable sovereigns for months.

According to former finance minister Dr Salman Shah, political instability has heightened anxieties for Pakistan and, in turn, hiked debt insurance premiums for the country's bonds.

Shah claimed that the market was waiting for the government to take some action to alter how foreign investors saw Pakistani bonds.

Iran Exports to Iraq Rebound

TEHRAN (MNA) - New trade data show Iran’s exports to Iraq are rising after they plummeted in the first half of the current Iranian year (started March 21).

Iran’s exports to neighboring Iraq stood at \$7.03 billion during the first seven months of the current Iranian year (March 21-Oct. 22), according to a board member of the Iran-Iraq Chamber of Commerce.

“Exports during the seventh month of the year [Sept. 23 to Oct. 22] stood at \$647 million, which was higher than the monthly average of \$600 million registered in the first half of the year,” Hamid Hosseini was also quoted as saying by Fars News Agency.



QatarEnergy Boss Says World Cup Tension Will Not Impact German Business

DOHA (Dispatches) - QatarEnergy chief Saad al-Kaabi said that business with German firms would not be impacted by political tensions over criticism of Qatar’s hosting of the World Cup, which has raised the ire of officials in the Persian Gulf Arab gas exporter.

Kaabi told Reuters he was shocked by German Economy Minister Robert Habeck’s widely reported remarks last week, which were confirmed on Monday by his ministry, that awarding Doha the tournament was a “stupid idea and can’t really be explained otherwise than by corruption”.

Doha has faced mounting criticism, mostly from Europe, over its treatment of foreign workers and LGBT rights ahead of the World Cup that began on Sunday. It has denied discrimination and pointed to labor reforms, while organizers previously denied allegations of bribery to win hosting rights.

“The comments that Mr. Habeck again, has come out with, are not helpful for the relationship, but our business will move on,” said Kaabi, who is also minister of state for energy.

Qatar’s foreign minister accused Berlin of “double standards” in a newspaper interview earlier this month. In October his office summoned the German ambassador to object over critical comments by Germany’s interior minister.

The ruling emir of one of the world’s top gas exporters, which Europe has looked to help tackle an energy supply crunch, has also publicly lashed out at mounting international criticism of Qatar, calling it “ferocious slander”.

QatarEnergy and German utility firms have been thrashing out long-term liquefied natural gas (LNG) deals for much of this year as Berlin looks for alternatives to Russia, which is Germany’s biggest gas supplier.

“The companies in Germany have excellent leadership and then we have a great relationship,” Kaabi said, adding it was his job to insulate QatarEnergy from politics and that its talks were with companies and not the government.

“You see commercial deals like the one we signed today with China are 27-year deals. They outlast CEOs like me, they outlast ministers like me and they also outlast



governments,” he said, referring to a supply deal with Sinopec announced on Monday.

The QatarEnergy boss said Habeck had never voiced such criticism of Qatar to him directly. The German minister, who is responsible for Berlin’s energy portfolio, was in Doha in March and had said that long-term energy partnerships were being negotiated.

Sources had told Reuters that talks between Germany and Qatar had been fraught with differences over key conditions such as contract length and pricing.

Kaabi, in the interview with Reuters, dismissed such talk and said he would announce the details of each deal once signed.

“Whether it’s in Germany or Europe or wherever we sign, we’re going to sign deals. We are working very closely on deals in Europe and Asia and so on. And this rhetoric about people talking about things is just rhetoric,” he said.

WHO Identifying Potential Pandemic Pathogens

GENEVA (Dispatches) - The World Health Organization said it was thrashing out a new list of priority pathogens that risk sparking pandemics or outbreaks and need to be kept under close observation.



The WHO said the aim was to update a list used to guide global research and development (R&D) and investment, especially in vaccines, tests and treatments.

As part of that process, which started on Friday, the United Nations health agency is convening over 300 scientists to consider evidence on more than 25 virus families and bacteria.

They will also consider the so-called “Disease X”—an unknown pathogen that could cause a serious international epidemic.

“Targeting priority pathogens and virus families for research and development of countermeasures is essential for a fast and effective epidemic and pandemic response,” said WHO emergencies director Michael Ryan.

“Without significant R&D investments prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, it would not have been possible to have safe and effective vaccines developed in record time.”

The list was first published in 2017.

It currently includes Covid-19, Ebola virus disease and Marburg virus disease, Lassa fever, Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS) and severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), Nipah, Zika and Disease X.

For each pathogen identified as a priority, experts will pinpoint knowledge gaps and research priorities.

Desired specifications for vaccines, treatments and diagnostic tests can then be drawn up.

Efforts are also made to facilitate clinical trials to develop such tools, while efforts to strengthen regulatory and ethics oversight are also considered.

“This list of priority pathogens has become a reference point for the research community on where to focus energies to manage the next threat,” WHO chief scientist Soumya Swaminathan explained.

“It is developed together with experts in the field and is the agreed direction for where we—as a global research community—need to invest energy and funds.”

The revised list is expected to be published before April 2023.

Sovereign Investors Favor U.S., India as Top 2022 Investment Markets

LONDON (Dispatches) - India has emerged as the second most coveted investment market after the United States for sovereign wealth funds and public pensions funds in 2022, according to a study by asset manager Invesco published.

Sovereign investors, which now manage some \$33 trillion in assets, have also seen a rapid rise in allocations to private markets, though this development might start to slow with fixed income back in favor, the Invesco Global Sovereign Asset Management Study said.

“Over the last 10 years sovereign investors have invested with the wind at their backs thanks to the secular bull market that emerged from the global financial crisis,” said Rod Ringrow, Invesco’s head of official institutions.

Average annual returns for sovereign investors over the past decade stood at 6.5% and, for sovereign wealth funds alone, at 10% in 2021, Invesco found. However, 2022 could prove to be a turning point with higher inflation and tighter monetary policy hitting long-term expected returns.



While the United States remained the top destination, some sovereign investors were keen to rebalance portfolios, fearing they had become overly reliant on U.S. markets which left them vulnerable to the correction in equity markets seen this year, Invesco said. Back in 2014, the UK was the most desirable destination.

Emerging markets were set to benefit from the latest shift, the study predicted.

Among developing nations, India has overtaken China as the most popular emerging market, having climbed to No. 2 in 2022 from No. 9 in 2014.

“While this is partly because funds with dedicated Asian allocations are trimming their China exposure, investors have commended India’s positive economic reforms and strong demographic profile,” the study found.

China currently ranks in sixth place.

The past decade had also seen a steady increase in the creation of sovereign wealth funds with a dozen established in Africa, of which 11 have a strategic mandate to develop local economies, Invesco found.

Global Long-Term LNG Contracts Sold Out Until 2026

LONDON (Dispatches) - The global long-term LNG contracts before 2026 are sold out, top importer Japan says, amid heated competition for the fuel as Europe seeks to replace Russian pipeline gas supply.

The estimate of sold-out LNG deals emerged from a survey of Japanese companies conducted by the local trade ministry and cited by Bloomberg.

High spot LNG prices have priced out many Asian buyers this year as Europe has been bidding for supply and has become the primary destination of spot LNG supply out of the United States. At the same time, market volatility and uncertainties, and concerns about energy security, have prompted a growing number of buyers to seek long-term contracts.

The race for LNG supply could give rise to a second wave of U.S. LNG projects, but new supply will take time to develop, Kateryna Filippenko, Principal Analyst, Global Gas Supply, at Wood Mackenzie, said earlier this year.

But much of this new LNG supply, including from projects that have taken final investment decisions (FIDs) in previous years, is likely to come only after 2026.

Until around 2026, “Europe will have to compete with Asia for the marginal LNG molecule to satisfy demand – just as it is right now,” Filippenko noted.

“Competition between Europe and Asia for limited LNG will be intense until a new supply wave arrives after 2026. Prices will inevitably remain elevated until then.”

Japan, for its part, is a major LNG importer and is set to regain its status as the world’s largest LNG importer this year amid an unprecedented slump in Chinese LNG demand and imports.

Last year, China beat Japan to become—for the first time—the world’s largest importer of LNG. This year, China is set to give the ‘top importer’ title back to Japan amid lackluster Chinese demand due to the snap Covid lockdowns that have slowed industrial demand and economic growth.

Private investment in India was constrained for years by heavy indebtedness of companies and banks and by weak demand. But over the past two years, corporations and lenders have cut costs and raised equity capital, and companies have been able to spend on new capacity as demand has strengthened.

It has strengthened so much that productive capacity and working capital are now being used more intensively.

That, in turn, is driving the higher demand for credit, said Swaminathan Janakiraman, managing director at India’s largest lender, State Bank of India (SBI) (SBI.NS).

“The capex that is taking place is generating financing requirements across the industry and the services sector and to a small extent there is a shift in borrowings from bonds to loans,” said Swaminathan. “Corporate credit demand has been low for too long and it is time for a pick-up.”

FM Says...

FROM PAGE 1

As regards the accusations on Iran’s military assistance to Russian for use in the Ukraine war, he said that Iran delivered a few drones to Russia 11 months before the start of the Ukraine war, underlining that the Ukrainian side has not given any evidence that those drones were used in the war by Russia.

The foreign minister said that “we disagree with the American side on three issues” while the three European countries are mediating between Iran and Washington on those issues.

He added that the top EU diplomats, Josep Borrell and Enrique Mora, “are trying to find a solution in this field. One of these issues is solving the remaining issues with the nuclear agency, and the other issue is related to economic guarantees, and we tried to formulate this issue.”

He added that the final text to reach an agreement in the JCPOA talks must be stronger and include those three issues.

Amirabdollahian added, “The third thing is that in line with the economic guarantee, the game played by the western parties and the extension of sanctions to third parties is the reason for the continuation of the sanctions, with an agreed mechanism, they should be eliminated.”

“Security talks have been held between Turkish and Syrian authorities,” he added on the Middle East issues.

He also said that the 25-year strategic partnership between Iran and China entered the implementation phase last year, adding “The President’s trip to China is on the agenda.”

Measures Taken at...

FROM PAGE 1

As the Director-General of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Grossi stated in his speech, political pressure and issuance of the resolution against Iran is not the solution, so problems cannot be solved by inciting accusations, he said.

The International Atomic Energy Agency should deal with issues in a professional manner and in accordance with the 2015 agreement, he said, noting that the United States withdrew from Iran’s nuclear deal, JCPOA, in May 2018 unilaterally and breached all its obligations under JCPOA. Not only the United States failed to live up to its commitments, but also it did not allow other JCPOA parties including UK, Germany and France to live up to their obligations, the AEOI chief criticized.

Civilians Urged to...

FROM PAGE 1

Pakpour also urged the people living near the hideouts of separatist terrorists in the Iraqi Kurdistan region to stay away from the area.

Earlier, Iranian Ambassador to Baghdad Mohammad Kazem Alesadeq said the Islamic Republic had told officials from Iraq’s central government and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) that it was serious about its national security after a number of sensitive Iranian military centers had been targeted from the Kurdistan soil.

“Some of our vital military centers have been attacked from the Iraqi Kurdistan region’s soil and we have informed the Iraqi side, both the authorities of the Iraqi Kurdistan region and the central government in Iraq, of this issue. We [provided them] with maps and documents, and they understood this reality,” Alesadeq said in an exclusive interview with Iran’s Arabic-language television news network al-Alam TV.

Taiwan Firm Halts...

FROM PAGE 1

Raymond Computers, and its identified-owner, Ahsan Tajsangrani, do not appear to be listed on the Treasury Department’s sanctions list.

“While we are conducting an internal investigation to examine how and why our KVM (Keyboard-Video-Mouse) products were applied to military use in Iran, we will immediately stop accepting orders from Iran and the export of our products to Iran from now to indicate our sincere concern about this issue,” ATEN wrote in a response to UANI obtained by The Hill.

Syria Territorial Integrity...

FROM PAGE 1

They also condemned attempts made by states backing terrorist groups, including those who support separatists and back oil theft in Syria, and called for return of the oil revenues to the people of the conflict-stricken country.

The signatories to the statement further described the relentless attacks by the Zionist regime against Syria as violation of international laws as well as its national sovereignty and territorial integrity.

The representatives from Russia, Iran, Turkey and Syria ruled out unilateral sanctions on the Arab nation, which is in contradiction with the United Nations Charter, calling for lifting the embargo and increasing humanitarian aids for all Syrians without any discrimination or political precondition.

Rise in Indian Corporate Lending Signals New Investment Cycle

MUMBAI (Dispatches) - Indian lenders are expanding lending to local corporations at the fastest pace in more than eight years, a sign of a new private investment cycle starting in the world’s fifth-largest economy even as growth in large developed economies and China slows.

That international slowdown will limit the strength of the new Indian cycle, economists say.

Wales-U.S. World Cup Match Draws Peak of 13m UK Viewers

LONDON (Dispatches) - A peak of 13 million people tuned in to ITV's television and online coverage to see Wales clinch a draw against the United States in their opening game at the World Cup on Monday, the British broadcaster said.

From kick off to final whistle, the match was watched by an average of nearly 10 million viewers, it said, adding that the game contributed to its most watched Monday night since England's Euro 2016 exit against Iceland.

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Head, Warner Help Australia Whitewash England

MELBOURNE (Dispatches) - Australia, fuelled by hundreds from Travis Head and David Warner, crushed England by 221 runs in the third one day internationals to sweep the series in front of largely empty stands at the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG) on Tuesday.

Head and Warner forged a 269-run stand, the highest opening partnership at the MCG, as Australia amassed 355-5, the highest total at the venue, after two rain interruptions had reduced the game into a 48-overs-a-side affair.

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SPORTS

THURSDAY NOVEMBER 24, 2022

Burrow Helps Bengals Get Revenge vs. Steelers

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - MJoe Burrow threw for four touchdowns and the visiting Cincinnati Bengals avenged a Week 1 loss to the Pittsburgh Steelers with a 37-30 win. Burrow completed 24 of 39 passes for 355 yards and a pair of interceptions. Three of his scoring strikes went to backup running back Samaje Perine, who entered the game for good early in the third quarter after starter Joe Mixon departed with a concussion.

Cincinnati (6-4) took the lead for good when Burrow flipped a 1-yard touchdown toss to Trenton Irwin with 7:02 left in the third quarter. Pittsburgh pulled within a point on Matthew Wright's 34-yard field goal less than three minutes later but didn't score again until Najee Harris' 1-yard plunge with 45 seconds left in the game.

Raiders 22, Broncos 16 (OT)

Derek Carr threw a 35-yard touchdown pass to Davante Adams in overtime as visiting Las Vegas beat Denver.

Carr finished 23-for-37 passing for 307 yards and two touchdowns, both to Adams, who had seven catches for 141 yards. Josh Jacobs rushed for 109 yards and Daniel Carlson kicked three field goals for Las Vegas (3-7).

Russell Wilson was 24-for-31 passing for 247 yards, Latavius Murray rushed for 49 yards and a score and Brandon McManus kicked three field goals for the Broncos (3-7).

Chiefs 30, Chargers 27

Patrick Mahomes and Travis Kelce connected for three touchdowns as Kansas City won its fourth straight game, beating host Los Angeles.

Mahomes completed 20 of 34 passes for 329 yards, and he also rushed four times for 23 yards for the Chiefs (8-2). Kelce hauled in a total of six catches for 115 yards. Justin Herbert led the Chargers (5-5) by completing 23 of 30 passes for 280 yards and two touchdowns. Both of Herbert's touchdown passes were caught by Joshua Palmer, who finished with eight catches for 106 yards.

Germany Examining Legal Action against FIFA Armband stance

DOHA (Dispatches) - Germany's football association (DFB) said Tuesday it was examining if FIFA's threat to impose disciplinary action against players who wear the "OneLove" armband at the World Cup tournament is legal.

The armbands had been viewed as a symbolic protest against laws in World Cup host Qatar, where homosexuality is illegal.

Captains of several European teams had planned to wear the rainbow-themed armband as part of a campaign for diversity during the tournament hosted by Qatar, but they have backed down over the threat of FIFA disciplinary action.

"FIFA banned us from showing a sign for diversity and human rights. They combined this with massive threats of sports sanctions without specifying what these would be," DFB spokesman Steffen Simon told AFP's sports subsidiary SID.

"The DFB is checking if this action by FIFA is legal," he added.

German daily Bild said the DFB could bring the case before the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS).

The Lausanne-based international sports court said however that the case should first be put to a FIFA appeal commission.

It added that "there is no precedence at the CAS for this kind of authorization refusal."

German fans have been vocal about their opposition to Qatar as a host for the World Cup, with supporters of several high-profile Bundesliga clubs including Bayern Munich and Borussia Dortmund urging boycotts.

But the German national team was also drawing fire for failing to take a stronger stand against FIFA's stance on the armbands.

Earlier Tuesday, major German supermarket chain REWE said it was ending its partnership with the German football association with immediate effect over what it described as FIFA's "scandalous attitude" in the escalating row over diversity.



Falcons 27, Bears 24

Cordarrelle Patterson set an NFL record with his ninth career kickoff return for a touchdown to lift host Atlanta over Chicago.

Atlanta (5-6) won the contest on a 53-yard go-ahead field goal by Younghoe Koo in the final minutes of the fourth quarter. Patterson, who was previously tied with Josh Cribbs and Leon Washington for the record, etched his name in the books with a 103-yard touchdown return in the second quarter. He also ran for 52 yards on 10 carries.

Quarterback Marcus Mariota paced Atlanta's offense with 131 passing yards, a passing touchdown and a rushing touchdown. Atlanta iced the game when Jaylinn Hawkins intercepted Justin Fields, who threw for 153 yards and also totaled two touchdowns for the Bears (3-8).

Bills 31, Browns 23

Josh Allen passed for 197 yards and one touchdown and Tyler Bass matched his career best with six field goals to help host Buffalo record a victory over Cleveland in a game played in Detroit due to the historic snowfall in the Buffalo area.

James Cook rushed for a career-high 86 yards and Devin Singletary also rushed for 86 yards and tacked on a score for the Bills (7-3), who halted a two-game losing streak. Stefon Diggs caught a touchdown pass for Buffalo. Bass matched the franchise record of six field goals for the second time in his career. The original mark was set in 1996 by Steve Christie.

Eagles 17, Colts 16

Jalen Hurts ran for a score and threw for another as Philadelphia edged host Indianapolis after trailing by 10 points in the fourth quarter to spoil the home debut of coach Jeff Saturday.

Hurts finished with 190 passing yards and 86 passing yards. His 22-yard touchdown pass to Quez Watkins trimmed the deficit, then Hurts' 7-yard touchdown run put Philadelphia (9-1) decisively ahead.



Guardiola Set to Sign New Man City Deal

LONDON (Dispatches) - Pep Guardiola is set to sign a new contract at Manchester City, according to media reports.

The Athletic said Guardiola had agreed a two-year contract extension committing him to the Premier League champions until 2025.

It added the agreement will be structured as an initial one-year deal, with both club and manager holding an option for a further season. That means either party could choose to end it sooner if they wanted.

Guardiola's current contract at the Etihad Stadium is due to expire at the end of the season.

Former Barcelona and Bayern Munich boss Guardiola, 51, has won nine major trophies, including four Premier League titles, since taking charge at City in 2016.

The Spaniard has already extended his contract twice during his time at the club.

Guardiola, 51, asked about his contract situation earlier this month, said: "Everything is under control, it's perfect, the decision will be made together with the club the moment it has to be made."

"When we have time, when the moment we feel it both sides, we take a decision."

City have yet to make an official announcement about Guardiola's contract status.



Messi Laments Five Minutes of Mistakes Against Saudis

LUSAIL (Dispatches) - Lionel Messi lamented Argentina's shock second half capitulation against Saudi Arabia on Tuesday but said he was not surprised by the threat from opponents 48 places lower in the world rankings.

"It's a situation that this group of players has never been through, it's been a while since we suffered such a tough blow, we didn't expect to start like this," Messi told Argentinian media after the 2-1 defeat in Group C.

Starting his fifth World Cup, Messi had opened the scoring with a 10th minute

penalty and Argentina had three goals disallowed for offside in a free-flowing first half.

But in the second half, "in five minutes of mistakes that we made, we went 2-1 down and then it was really tough and we lost organisation and started punting the ball," he said in comments broadcast by Todo Noticias.

Messi said his team knew Saudi Arabia, despite being the second-lowest ranked team in the tournament, could hurt them.

"We knew they were a team who would play if we let them...They did not surprise us, we knew they could do that."

Argentina now have to focus on beating Mexico and Poland in their next group games in search of the only major title that has eluded Messi in his otherwise glittering career.

"Obviously we have to win or win now. It's up to us to fix what we did wrong and get back to the basics of who we are," said Messi, whose team had been on a 36-match unbeaten run prior to the shock result at the Lusail Stadium in Qatar.

Saudi Arabia's Renard Not Dwelling on Crazy World Cup Win

DOHA (Dispatches) - Saudi Arabia's French coach Herve Renard warned his players not to celebrate for too long after their "totally crazy" 2-1 win against Argentina in their World Cup opener.

The Saudis bounced back from conceding an early Lionel Messi penalty to produce one of the great World Cup shocks thanks to a Saleh Al-Shehri equaliser and a sublime Salem Al-Dawsari winner at the Lusail Stadium in Doha.

"All the stars in the sky were aligned for us, but don't forget Argentina are still a fantastic team," said Renard.

"This is football, sometimes totally crazy things can happen," added the French coach, who previously led Zambia and the Ivory Coast to Africa Cup of Nations glory.

"We needed to get this result, it will be one for the (history) books, but as a coach I'm always asking for more from my players, so let's stay humble."

Al-Shehri said the team had never doubted they could topple the two-time champions.

"We don't care about the other team, if you believe in yourself you can achieve anything," he said.

As for enjoying the moment, Renard was eager to look ahead to the Saudis' next Group C matches against Poland and Mexico.

"(We can) just have a good celebration during 20 minutes and that's all, there are still two more games."

"When you come to the World Cup, you need to believe in yourself, anything can happen in football."



India Win T20 Series v New Zealand

NAPIER (Dispatches) - A depleted India won the Twenty20 series against New Zealand 1-0 after the rain-hit third match between the sides ended in a tie in Napier.

Chasing 161 for victory, India were 75-4 after nine overs when rain forced the players off the ground at McLean Park.

Even after the rain relented, play could not resume because of the wet outfield, and it turned out to be the par score under the Duckworth-Lewis method governing such weather-hit contest.

"We would have liked to win this game, but that is how it is," India captain Hardik Pandya said.

"We don't mind getting a trophy and going back with a win."

New Zealand were without regular skipper Kane Williamson who missed the match with a medical appointment leaving veteran Tim Southee to lead the side.

Opting to bat, New Zealand rode half-centuries from Devon Conway and Glenn Phillips to post 160 before being all out with two balls to go.

Arshdeep Singh removed Finn Allen in the second over to deal an early blow and then took a catch to send back Mark Chapman.

Phillips smashed 54 and Conway made 59 but New Zealand lost the plot in the last five overs, losing their last eight wickets for a mere 30 runs.

Mohammed Siraj was the pick of the Indian bowlers claiming 4-17, while fellow seamer Singh returned 4-37.

