

The Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Line Group (IRISL) Has Se The First Ship Carrying Iran-Made Export Goods to Venezuela, Which Is Also the Fourth Ship From Iran to the Destination of the Latin American Country

IRAN NEWS

Following the Worsening of the COVID-19 Pandemic in China and The Hospitalization of the Ambassador and 6 Colleagues at The Iranian Embassy, Foreign Ministry Inquired About the Health Status of Iranian Diplomats

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Eutelsat Confirms Suspension of IRIB Channels

TEHRAN (PressTV) - French satellite operator Eutelsat confirms that it has suspended all broadcasting services to the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) as well as three Russian channels.

In a statement on Thursday, Eutelsat said, "Pursuant to the Council of the EU Regulation 2022/2428 dated 12 December 2022, Eutelsat has ceased all Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB)-related broadcasting activity."

The statement added that the satellite operator as of Wednesday "ended all involvement in the broadcasting of three [Russian] channels Rossiya One, Pervyi Kanal and NTV, within the prescribed 7-day compliance period."

"Pursuant to the Council of the European Union Regulation 2022/2474 of 16 December 2022, these three channels as well as a fourth, RenTV, will be subject to sanctions if so confirmed by the Council by 1 February 2023, in accordance with the notice 2022/C 481 I/04 released by the Council on 19 December 2022," Eutelsat said. **See Page 7**

4 Mossad Spy Teams Busted, Their Members Arrested

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Intelligence Ministry says it has busted four operative teams affiliated with the Israeli spy agency Mossad which were planning to carry out terrorist attacks in some parts of the country.

In a Thursday statement, the ministry said all members of the teams have been arrested.

It added that the criminal Zionist regime has sought to take advantage of the recent riots in Iran and lead operative teams to conduct "hybrid" terrorist operations in the country but all the terrorists have been arrested before any act.

The ministry noted that it has also obtained information about a Mossad ringleader in one European country, saying more details will be given immediately after the completion of investigation.

Iran's Intelligence Ministry announced last week that it has identified and arrested members of a spy network who were planning to sabotage the country's defense industry through front companies and security marketing.

Iran Economic Growth At 3.3% in H1 Fiscal Year



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Figure by the Statistical Center of Iran (SCI) show that the country's economy expanded by 3.3% in the first half of the calendar year that started in late March compared to the same period last year.

Figures published on SCI's website showed that the non-oil sector of the Iranian economy had also expanded by 3.4% year on year in the two quarters to late September.

The SCI had reported a year on year economic growth rate of 5.6% in the same quarter in 2021.

The latest data by the government statistics agency showed that Iran's gross domestic product (GDP) had reached a total of 3,870 trillion rials in March-September, up from 3,745 trillion rials reported in the same period last year.

The SCI uses 2011, when one US dollar was equal to 12,500 Iranian rials, as the base year for its calculation of GDP data. That comes as the current market price of the US dollar in Iran is nearly 390,000 rials.

SCI figures showed that Iran's mines and manufacturing sector, which includes the country's massive oil and gas production activities, grew by 5% in the six months to late September against the same period in 2021.

Agriculture contracted by 2.2% while the service sector expanded by 2.6% year on year over the March-September period, showed the figures.

The Central Bank of Iran (CBI) also published its GDP figures on Wednesday which showed that Iran's economy had grown by 3.6% in the quarter to late September, up from a 1% year on year growth reported in the same quarter in 2021.

Meanwhile Iran's Ministry of Industry, Mine and Trade said that Iran's non-oil exports in the first 8 months of the current Iranian calendar year have grown by 4.4% in value but decreased 16% in weight comparing to the same period which shows that exports of industrial and hi-tech products have increased considerably.

Reacting to a report published in Persian newspaper, the ministry refuted the report and reiterated that the amount of exports of non-oil products from the Customs Administration has been 70.4m tons worth of \$32.4m in the first eight months which shows 16% decline in weight and 4.4% in value.

The ministry claimed that the country has started target-oriented exports and it minimizes exporting crude materials and for this reason we see decline in the weight of exports.

Russia and Iran Are Building a Trade Route That Defies Sanctions

LONDON (Bloomberg) - Russia and Iran are building a new transcontinental trade route stretching from the eastern edge of Europe to the Indian Ocean, a 3,000-kilometer (1,860-mile) passage that's beyond the reach of any foreign intervention.

The two countries are spending billions of dollars to speed up delivery of cargos along rivers and railways linked by the Caspian Sea. Ship-tracking data compiled by Bloomberg show dozens of Russian and Iranian vessels—including some that are subject to sanctions—already plying the route.

It's an example of how great-power competition is rapidly reshaping trade networks in a world economy that looks set to fragment into rival blocs. Russia and Iran, under tremendous pressure from sanctions, are turning toward each other—and they're both looking eastward, too. The goal is to shield commercial links from Western interference and build new ones with the giant and fast-growing economies of Asia.

"This is about establishing sanctions-proof supply chains all the way through," says Maria Shagina, an expert on sanctions and Russian foreign policy at the London-based International Institute for Strategic Studies.

The emerging trade corridor would allow Russia and Iran to shave thousands of kilometers off existing routes. At its northern end is the Sea of Azov, which is bracketed by the Crimean Peninsula, Ukraine's southeastern coast—including the Russian-occupied port of Mariupol—and the mouth of the River Don.

Earlier this month, listing his country's gains from the war in Ukraine, President Vladimir Putin said the Sea of Azov "has become an inland sea" for Russia.

From there river, sea and rail networks extend to Iranian hubs on the Caspian Sea and ultimately the Indian Ocean. Putin has flagged the importance of that end of the corridor, as well.

At an economic forum in September he underlined the need to develop the ship, rail and road infrastructure along the route that "will provide Russian companies with new opportunities to enter the markets of Iran, India, the Middle East and Africa, and will facilitate supplies from these countries in return."

Shagina estimates Russia and Iran are investing as much as \$25 billion in the inland trade corridor, helping to facilitate the flow of goods the West wants to stop. "The two countries are playing a cat-and-mouse game," she says. "They will explore all loopholes to transport banned products and weapons." **See Page 7**

IAEA Chief May Visit Iran in January

LONDON (Dispatches) - International Atomic Energy Agency Director General Rafael Grossi may visit the Iranian capital, Tehran, in January to hold talks with Iranian officials regarding the Islamic Republic's nuclear energy program, as well as bilateral cooperation between Iran and the UN nuclear watchdog, Politico reported on Thursday, citing two European diplomats familiar with the matter.

The American newspaper added that Grossi would try during the visit to persuade Iran to cooperate with the IAEA as part of the agency's investigation into Iran's nuclear program.

Iranian officials suggested that Grossi be invited to the Islamic Republic on Sunday during a meeting with IAEA experts, according to Politico.

A group of IAEA experts arrived last Sunday in Tehran within the framework of an investigation being conducted by the agency. They wound up discussing the implementation of the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) with Iranian officials.

Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian and the High Representative of the EU for International Relations and Security Policy, Josep Borrell met on Tuesday in Amman to discuss the progress of talks aimed at resurrecting the 2015 nuclear agreement. **See Page 7**

Israel Unable to Withstand Iran's Crushing Response

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's Army chief plays down Israel's military threats, saying the regime is unable to take an Iranian response to any hostile act that it may carry out given the political tensions it faces inside the occupied territories and its sense of insecurity in the broader region.

Addressing a meeting with senior Army commanders, Major General Abdolrahim Mousavi said Iran is closely and constantly monitoring all the enemy's moves, and that the Armed Forces are fully ready to counter any threat at the earliest.

"We will give a crushing response to any place from which an attack might originate against the security of the Islamic Republic and its interests or help is provided to the Zionist regime," he added.

He said Israeli officials have resorted to saber-rattling following the intensification of political divisions and the emergence of an internal legitimacy crisis, on the one hand, and the feeling of insecurity in the region, on the other. **See Page 7**

Tehran Blasts U.S. Intervention In Iran's Domestic Affairs

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Foreign Ministry has slammed the United States for making interventionist statement on the occasion of Yalda Night, saying Washington is "shedding crocodile tears" for Iranians with its long list of inhumane measures against the nation.

"The U.S., which supports riots and terrorism and imposes sanctions and maximum pressure against the people of Iran, sheds crocodile tears for Iranians on the night of Yalda," spokesman Nasser Kanaani tweeted.

Earlier, the U.S. State Department spokesman Ned Price seized the opportunity of the arrival of the Winter solstice, which is celebrated across Iran as the "Yalda Night", to once again bring the Islamic Republic's response to recent foreign-backed riots into question.

"We mourn with the people of Iran, and we reiterate our commitment to the Iranian people," the American official claimed, urging the Iranian authorities "to listen" to the people.

Kanaani said the United States has been -- foremost among the Western countries -- lending support to "anarchy and terrorism." **See Page 7**

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Iran, Oman FMs Hold Phone Talk on Int'l, Regional Issues

TEHRAN (MNA) – Iranian and Omani foreign ministers held a phone conversation on Thursday on the latest international and regional developments.

Hossein Amirabdollahian and his Omani counterpart Sayyid Badr Albusaidi also discussed issues of mutual interest during the phone conversation.

The two ministers stressed the need to continue negotiations over those issues in line with the interests of the two countries as well as the whole region.

China Determined to Support Iran Sovereignty, Territorial Integrity

IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Chinese ambassador to Tehran Chang Hua said Beijing considers ties with Iran “strategic” and “decisively” supports and respects Iran’s national sovereignty and territorial integrity.

“China decisively supports Iran against foreign intervention and for preserving its national sovereignty, territorial integrity, and national dignity,” the ambassador said on Wednesday during an event in southeastern Iran.

He highlighted that China sees ties with Iran from a strategic point of view, reaffirming Beijing’s determination to expand its partnership with Iran based on bilateral agreements as well as the 25-year comprehensive cooperation agreement between the two countries.

He made the remarks at the inauguration ceremony of the Chinese consulate in Bandar Abbas, southern Iran’s Hormozgan Province.

The opening of the consulate is described as an opportunity to actively implement the 25-year deal and China’s ambitious Belt and Road Initiative, a global infrastructure development strategy to invest in nearly 150 countries and international organizations. The BRI, originally named, “One Belt, One Road,” is an international development strategy as China looks to expand its influence worldwide by improving trade routes. As of December 2021, China had expanded its’ BRI—which includes infrastructure developments across land corridors, in ports, across maritime routes, as well as over-land



links (bridges, tunnels, etc.) — into 142 countries. Developing diplomatic relations with Iran is crucial to China’s ability to implement the BRI.

China sees ties with Iran from a strategic point of view, the Chinese Ambassador said, reaffirming Beijing’s determination to expand its strategic partnership with Iran based on agreements between leaders of the two countries as well as the 25-year comprehensive cooperation agreement between China and Iran.

The remarks came days after a joint statement by China and states of the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) on Friday made controversial claims about three Iranian islands in the Persian Gulf.

The statement affirmed support for efforts, including the initiative and endeavors of the United Arab Emirates, to reach a “peaceful solution to the issue of the three islands through bilateral negotiations in accordance with the rule of international law and to resolve this issue in accordance with international legitimacy”.

The strategically-positioned islands of Abu Musa, the Lesser Tunb, and the Greater Tunb have always been part of Iran, the proof of which can be corroborated by countless historical, legal, and geographical documents in Iran and other parts of the world.

Enemies Failed to Reach Anti-Iran Purposes

KERMANSHAH (IRNA) - Interior Minister Ahmad Vahidi has said that enemies of Iran have failed to reach their goals to create division among the Iranian people, despite all the attempts they had made.

Speaking on Thursday at a ceremony to bid farewell to the governor general of the western province of Kermanshah and introduce his successor, the interior minister said that the enemies have been seeking to create division in Iran and made attempts to cause hopelessness and dissatisfaction.

However, he added, they failed to reach their goals despite all the attempts they made during the latest unrest in Iran, including efforts to bring terrorist and separatist groups to the country.

Vahidi said that the enemies are doing all those measures, because they are unhappy with Iran’s progress and independence.

Syria Calls Boosting Economic Ties With Iran Necessary

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Syrian Prime Minister Hussein Arnous has deemed as necessary the promotion of economic ties between Syria and Iran to counter the existing challenges and unilateral sanctions imposed by the West against the two countries.

The Syrian prime minister was speaking on Thursday during a meeting in Damascus with Iranian cleric Hassan Akhtari, the chairman of the Syrian-Iranian People’s Friendship Association, Syrian state news agency, SANA, reported.

They discussed ways for the expansion of ties between the two countries in various fields including economy.

Arnous and Akhtari stressed that Iran and Syria should further develop their ties in an effort to boost their economies and counter unilateral sanctions imposed by the West.

The Syrian prime minister said that his country welcomes joint ventures with Iran and the presence of Iranian companies keen on making investment in Syria.

Iran, Saudi FMs Meet on Sidelines of Jordan Conference

TEHRAN (IFP) - Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian says he held a meeting with his Saudi counterpart, Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud, on the sidelines of a conference in Jordan.

In a tweet posted in Arabic language, Amirabdollahian said the Saudi foreign minister said during the session that the kingdom was ready for a continuation of negotiations with Iran.

The chief Iranian diplomat did not elaborate on the content of the discussions.

He said he also sat down for talks with foreign ministers of other neighboring Arab countries, including Oman, Qatar, Iraq and Kuwait.

Iran and Saudi Arabia have held several rounds of negotiations in the Iraqi capital, Baghdad, in an effort to hammer out their differences and mend their troubled ties.

As the talks were progressing, a new diplomatic standoff broke out between the two sides as Tehran accused Riyadh of having a hand in a set of anti-government protests and deadly riots in Iran by supporting terror groups and launching a media war against the Islamic Republic.

Saudi Arabia cut off diplomatic ties with Iran in January 2016 after Iranian protesters, enraged by the Saudi execution of prominent Shia cleric Sheikh Nimr Baqir al-Nimr, stormed its embassy in Tehran.

Iran has been criticizing the kingdom for pursuing what it calls a confrontational foreign policy toward the Islamic Republic.

Appeal Court of Hamid Nouri To Begin on January 11

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Heibatollah Nazhandi, a legal consultant to the family of Hamid Nouri, said that the appeal court of Mr. Nouri will begin on January 11.

Hamid Nouri, an Iranian national, is being held in a Swedish prison.

The lawyers of Mr. Nouri in November basically questioned the legal legitimacy of the Swedish court.

The court of appeal will consider the reasons of both sides of the case as of January 11 to January 26, Nazhandi said.

He said that the appeal will last until the end of 2023 when the case is finalized.

Iran Has One of Strongest Democracies In Region



TEHRAN (IRNA) - Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian has rejected as unacceptable Europe’s interference in Iran’s internal affairs, saying the country has one of the strongest democracies in West Asia.

Amirabdollahian made the comment in a phone conversation with his Spanish counterpart José Manuel Albares Bueno on Thursday.

The top Iranian diplomat criticized Western states for their move to push for the removal of Iran from the UN Commission of the Status of Women earlier in December, saying that the measure indicates efforts to destroy chances of talks.

Amirabdollahian noted that Iran has one of the strongest democracies in West Asia, adding that it is unacceptable for the country that Europe views issues in a one-sided way and continues to interfere in Iran’s affairs.

He also congratulated the Spanish government and people on the New Year, wishing that 2023 will be a year filled with peace and stability for all people around the world.

The Iranian foreign minister also expressed that his country’s relations with Spain would further develop in the New Year.

The Spanish foreign minister, for his part, expressed his views on issues of mutual interest and congratulated Iranians on the New Year.

He stressed that Madrid will make efforts to continue negotiations and develop ties with Iran.

Taliban Urged to Reverse Ban on University Education for Female Afghans

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman has expressed regret about a recent decision by the Taliban-run administration in Afghanistan to close universities to female Afghan students, calling on the de facto government’s authorities to reverse the ban.

Nasser Kanaani made the remarks on Thursday, a day after female university students in Afghanistan were banned entry to campuses following a directive from the Taliban that women would be suspended from higher education across the country until further notice.

“The Islamic Republic of Iran, as a neighbor of Afghanistan which is interested in peace, stability and development in the country, is saddened to hear the news obstacles to girls and women’s higher education in Afghanistan,” Kanaani said.

Tehran Warns Zelensky Over His Claims

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The spokesman for the Iranian Foreign Ministry has roundly rejected “unfounded” allegations that Tehran provided Moscow with a fleet of drones to be used in the Ukraine conflict, saying that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky should learn from the fate of the leaders who counted on support from the United States.

Nasser Kanaani said on Thursday that the Islamic Republic of Iran has repeatedly responded to baseless accusations of Ukrainian authorities that the Russian army has employed Iranian unmanned aerial vehicles in its military campaign in the country, reiterating that his country has not and will not provide any weapons or military equipment to the sides involved in the Ukraine crisis.

“We have always respected the territorial integrity of other countries, including Ukraine. Mr. Zelensky should know that Iran may run out of strategic patience regarding such unsubstantiated accusations,” Kanaani pointed out.

“Mr. Zelensky had better learn from fate of the

leaders who relied on the US support,” the Iranian diplomat underlined.

Zelensky repeated his allegations regarding Iranian arms delivery to Russia to be used in the Ukraine war during his speech to the US Congress on Wednesday evening.

“When Russia cannot reach our cities by its artillery, it tries to destroy them with missile attacks, and allies with Iran,” the Ukrainian president claimed, describing Iran as a “critical threat to our infrastructure.”

“It is just a matter of time before they strike your other allies if we don’t stop them now,” he further claimed.

Several minutes later, Zelensky made allegations about the deployment of Iranian drones in the Ukraine war.

Dismissing the accusations that Iran has supplied UAVs for use in the Ukraine war, the Iranian defense minister said such rumors are based on unfounded claims.

The minister added that Iran and Russia have been involved in military cooperation since long ago and have not begun to form such interactions for the utilization of Iranian drones in the Ukraine war.

Iran Sees No Limits in Boosting Ties With Luxembourg

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian said on Thursday that his country sees no limits in expanding relations with Luxembourg.

Amirabdollahian spoke on the phone with his Luxembourgian counterpart Jean Asselborn, with the two diplomats discussing key issues of mutual interest.

The Iranian foreign minister referred to the “positive” talks with his Luxembourgian counterpart in September on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly, and stressed the importance of continuing bilateral negotiations in the future.

Jean Asselborn, on his part, highlighted the importance of relations between the two countries and expressed his views on issues of mutual interest.

Iran Voices Readiness to Boosting Ties With Netherlands

TEHRAN (MNA) - Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian voiced the country’s readiness to further develop cooperation with the Netherlands in various fields.

Amirabdollahian and Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs Wopke Hoekstra held a telephone conversation on Thursday to discuss bilateral and international issues.

Referring to the long history of relations between Iran

and the Netherlands, Amirabdollahian announced the readiness of Iran to further develop cooperation between Tehran and Amsterdam in various fields.

Iran FM also congratulated the Dutch government and nation on Christmas.

Dutch minister, for his part, announced his country’s determination for bilateral talks with Iran on political and consular issues.

Existing National Unity Broken Enemy’s Might

ORUMIYEH (Dispatches) - Arguing that unity among tribes and religions is among Iran’s pride, intelligence ministers said, “existing national unity has broken the enemy’s might.”

Hojjatolislam Khatib who was speaking in the inauguration ceremony of a provincial security official said national unity and territorial integrity have always existed in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

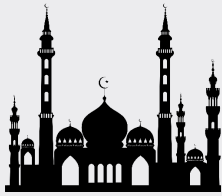
“During the recent unrests the western intelligence services and mass media used all their capabilities to blow and attack against powerful Iran, its sacred system and its always-ready-at-the-scene nation, its sagacious Supreme Leader and people’s resistance, but once again they faced defeat,” he added.

Khatibzadeh added that the enemies resorted to a full-scale complicated war in recent unrests, inclusive of their entire communication and media facilities, which equals a media world war against Iran.

“The enemies resorted to hallucinating people, forging news, and using all their might to present a fake image and promote aggression, terrorism, and looting public properties as their top priorities,” he said.

The intelligence minister reiterated that they nurtured unrests and assisted the separatist grouplets, created a psychological war aimed at regime change against the sacred system of Islamic Republic of Iran.

“But the might of the country’s security and armed forces, and the sagacious leadership of the Supreme Leader, once again urged the enemies to face a severe defeat,” he stressed. He also condemned the enemies’ propagation of JCPOA, and their claiming themselves innocent in fomenting unrests in Iran, emphasizing, “Those efforts of the enemies is a sign of Islamic Republic of Iran’s might, and the Iranians’ national unity to support this sacred political system.”



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	12:03
■ Evening (Maghreb)	17:16
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	05:42
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	07:12

87. They said: "We broke not the promise to thee, as far as lay in our power: but we were made to carry the weight of the ornaments of the (whole) people, and we threw them (into the fire), and that was what the Samiri suggested.

Surah 20. Ta-ha (87)

Tehran, Dushanbe Urged to Move Towards PTA

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Head of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Mine and Agriculture (ICCIMA) says Iran and Tajikistan due to their commonalities as well as capacities should define and implement the preferential trade agreement (PTA) as it is what the private sectors should demand.

Speaking in a forum on trade and investment opportunities between Iran and Tajikistan which was held in Mashhad in the presence of a Tajik trade delegation, Gholam-Hossein Shafei said that one important thing that private sectors of Iran and Tajikistan should demand their governments seriously is to provide a ground for preferential trade agreement between the two states that it is supported by the commonalities and facilities of the two countries and their historic trade exchanges.

He emphasized that in the past years Tajikistan has been one of Iran's important trade partners among its neighboring states but in some periods and due to some reasons the trade between the two countries has highly declined, although in recent one year and due to some developments and strong determination of governments, the economic exchange volume has significantly grown.

Shafei reiterated that the capacity for economic cooperation between the two states is more than what currently is and stipulated that presence of both states in two important economic blocs of Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) and Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) is an open chapter for leap in the economic cooperation of these two states and therefore, officials of Iran and Tajikistan can move in direction of improving exchanges and developing ties considering this important capacity.

He then pointed to abundant water resources of Tajikistan and said that regarding water resources restrictions in Iran and agro potentials in Tajikistan, both countries can cooperate in extraterrestrial cultivation to meet their demands.

Shafei noted that such issues are talked and pursued with countries like Brazil and Venezuela while capacities in the neighboring country Tajikistan has been ignored.

He also pointed to the issue of transportation and role of this field in Iran-Tajikistan ties, adding that there are many unwanted hurdles in way of Iran's exports to Tajikistan and sometimes problems in transportation have considerable



impact on both countries' trade ties and therefore the issue of transportation and the issue of providing required infrastructures in this field should be put on the agenda of both states.

He then thanked Iran-Tajikistan Joint Chamber of Commerce for accelerating implementation of MoU which was signed between presidents of both states for forming joint employers' council.

Meanwhile Head of Tajikistan Chamber of Commerce Mr. Jamshid Jomeh Khanzadeh in a videoconference addressing the meeting pointed to the trade exchanges between Iran and Tajikistan and expressed hope that they can develop the level of cooperation with using all facilities and capacities of Iran and Tajikistan.

He noted that trade and economic cooperation between Iran and Tajikistan is deep-rooted in the historical, cultural and lingual as well as brotherly ties of both states. He termed Iran as one of the most influential and advanced economic and industrial country, stipulating that several companies in Tajikistan have been set up with cooperation of Iranian economic activists and this shows the success and progress of Iran's private sector in the sphere of international economic cooperation.

Jomeh Khanzadeh further emphasized that a good condition has been provided for investment in Tajikistan, noting that with the adopted policies in the county for boosting economic development, a good climate has been provided for investment and invited his Iranian brothers to take advantage of the current condition for effective presence in Tajikistan's economic scene.

Meanwhile in the meeting Iran's ambassador to Tajikistan Mr. Mohammad Taghi Saberi, for his part, said that Iran has asked for revoking visa between the two countries and Tajiks are studying Iran's proposal and he hopes it would bear fruit.

Taghi Saberi who was talking online said that in new round of ties between Iran and Tajikistan, some good actions have been taken to deepen cooperation between the two states especially in the field of economy.

He went on to say that the trade volume between the two states has improved since 2019 but the capacity for economic cooperation between the two states is more than the current level. He also pointed to the launch of direct flight between Tehran and Dushanbe and said that these flights are considered as good capacity and expressed hope the number of flights would rise.

China's Monthly Exports To Iran Up by 39%

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - China customs figures show that the country's monthly exports to Iran in the month of November amounted to \$935 million, showing an increase of 39%.



China's customs announced that the country's trade with Iran in the 11 months of this year has grown by 11 percent compared to the same period last year and has reached \$14.6 billion.

China's trade with Iran in the months of January to November 2021 was announced to be \$13.1 billion.

According to the report by Chinese customs, the country's imports from Iran in the 11 months of this year increased by 5% compared to the same period in 2021 and reached \$6.05 billion. China imported 5.75 billion worth of goods from Iran between January and November last year.

China's exports to Iran in the months of January to November 2022 also grew by 17% and reached \$8.55 billion. In the same period of the previous year, China had exported \$7.33 billion worth of goods to Iran.

The balance of trade between the two countries in the 11 months of this year was \$2.5 billion dollars in China's favor.

Growth in Mineral Reserves and Rise in Productivity on the Agenda of NICICO



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – The CEO of National Iranian Copper Industries Company (NICICO), referring to naming the current year in the copper field as "Year of Smartizing Copper Industry", announced jihadi goal setting for a long leap in the copper industry.

Speaking in the first conference on innovation and technology of Shahr-e Babak Copper Complex with the title of "Mes Inno" (Copper Innovation), the CEO of NICICO Mr. Ali Rostami expressed his satisfaction over this conference with the slogan of innovation and completing the puzzle of production, and said that the created ground for the direct contact in the field of industry and knowledge-based companies is an appropriate opportunity for expressing and meeting the needs and necessities of developing industry by the companies.

Emphasizing smartization in the industry, Mr. Rostami said that today competition in the field of industry in the world is defined in smartization and productivity and this necessitates the entry of the national industry to this field and paying heed to this necessity.

He then pointed to the half-a-century history of copper industry in Iran and said that with having five decades of experience in the copper field, it was expected the country to turn into a knowledge and technology producing country than a consumer of technology and knowhow in this industry.

Rostami then pointed to naming of the year to smartizing the copper industry and announced the goal setting for a long leap in the copper industry and implementing the first smart mine in the country.

He went on to say that the first long leap in the copper industry is the increase in the mineral copper reserves through exploratory drilling in the mineral panel. He reiterated that reinforcing this sector in line with productivity proportionate the national reserves capacity has been out on the agenda.

He then explained goal setting in the field of extraction and said that increasing extraction from 200m tons to 800m tons in four years is of the main and important plans of the company.

Dr. Rostami then pointed to Iran's fifth place in world rankings in terms of having copper minerals, adding that Iran's 18th place in the field of copper production is not satisfactory.

Over 10m Liters of Fuel Smuggled From Iran Per Day

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Head of the Iranian Oil Ministry's fuel department says more than 10 million liters of motor fuel are smuggled from the country every day.

The figure announced by Jalil Salari on Thursday is equivalent of at least \$10 million in lost exports revenues for Iran.

The figure is also around 7% of the daily demand for gasoline and diesel in the country.

"Currently, (domestic) production and demand are in balance and the issue is with smuggling for which we should come up with a solution in order to have a stable fuel supply," said Salari.

The deputy Iranian oil minister said some 6-7 million liters of diesel fuel are smuggled out of Iran per day as he put the daily figure of gasoline smuggling from the country at 4 to 5 million liters.

Iran's diesel fuel prices are the cheapest in the world at \$0.011 per liter while the country offers gasoline to motorists at \$0.053 per liter, the third cheapest in the world after Venezuela and Libya. That comes as prices in neighboring countries, where a bulk of the smuggled fuels is used, are more than 10 times the prices charged in Iran.

In a decision announced in late September, the Iranian Oil Ministry cut monthly gasoline quotas assigned to motorists from 250 liters to 150 liters to clamp down on the smuggling of fuel.

Trade With Caspian Sea States Gains Pace

TEHRAN (MNA) – Iran's trade (excluding crude oil exports) with Caspian Sea littoral states reached 4.62 million tons worth \$2.49 billion during the first eight months of the current Iranian year (March 21-Nov. 21).

According to the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration, Iran's trade with Caspian Sea littoral states reached 4.62 million tons worth \$2.49 billion during the first eight months of the current Iranian year, registering a 17.47% rise in value, but a 5.2% fall in terms of weight compared to the similar period of last year.

Russia was Iran's main trading partner among the Caspian states with 2.63 million tons (up 23.73%) worth \$1.48 billion (up 8.36%) during the period under review. It was followed by Azerbaijan with 517,497 tons (down 9.42%) worth \$484,993 million (up 32.87%), Turkmenistan with 924,553 tons (down 0.16%) worth \$311,820 million (up 35.58%), and Kazakhstan with 560,878 tons (up 30.62%) worth \$209,164 million (up 39.11%), Financial Tribune reported.

Iran's exports exceeded 2.64 million tons worth \$1.33 billion during the period, registering a 7.56% and 29.44% rise in weight and value respectively.

Some Dams in Iran Stand At Less Than 37% Capacity

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - A lawmaker in Iran has expressed concern over the critical water situation, saying that "some dams have reached less than 37% of their capacity."

Hadi Beiginejad, member of Iranian parliament's energy commission, told ISNA website in Tehran Thursday that the country is not in a good situation in terms of water resources, adding that even the claim that 37% of dams are full may not be true.

"Based on the research I did, some reservoirs for some dams are much less than 37%," he underlined.

On the other hand, according to latest official statistics of Iran Water Resources Management Company, two important water supply dams, namely Lar in Tehran and Ekbatan in the western city of Hamedan, have only two percent reserves.

First Announcement

شناسه آگهی: ۱۴۳۰۰۵۵

TENDER NO.:
08-21-0140008



National Iranian South Oilfields Company (NISOC) intends to purchase the following goods

Items	Material Description	Quantity
01	TUBING, API GRADE L-80, SEAMLESS "HYDRIL CS" THREAD, RANGE2 AS PER API 5CT/ISO11960, PSL: 2 SIZE(OD), WEIGHT(PPF), AS SPECIFIED MARKING: COLD DIE STAMPED IN ACCORDANCE WITH API 5CT NOTE: LEVEL OF INSPECTION: 1(L.O.I: 1) "QCP/MP5 DOCUMENTS ARE ESSENTIAL TO REVIEW & CONFIRM" "ITP DOCUMENT IS ESSENTIAL FOR TECHNICAL EVALUATION" 2-7/8 IN., 6.5 PPF	1000 LE

Vendors who intend to participate in aforesaid tenders are requested to send their "Intention To Participate" letter via fax to the following number along with their resume according to Qualitative Assessment Form no. 1, available at: www.nisoc.ir, not later than 14 days after the second announcement, otherwise, their requests for participation in the tender will be disregarded.

The applicants should have relevant background in supplying the required goods and capability to provide and submit a bid bond of 30,457/30 EURO or 8,250,000,000 RIAL, in favor of NISOC.

Tender documents including the materials thorough technical specifications and Qualitative Assessment Forms can be accessed via: www.nisoc.ir-material-procurement-management-tab

ONLY ACCEPTABLE DELIVERY TERM IS D.D.P., NISOC'S WAREHOUSE, AGHAJARI, IRAN

PAYMENT TERM IS C.O.D., SUBSEQUENT TO NISOC'S MATERIAL APPROVAL

NO ADVANCE PAYMENT WILL BE PAID

FOREIGN PURCHASING DEPARTMENT

Bldg. No. 104, Material Procurement Management Complex, Kouy-e-Fadaeian Islam (New Site), Ahvaz, Iran
Tel. No.: 061 34 12 35 89 Fax No.: 061 34 45 74 37

Public Relations

www.shana.ir www.nisoc.ir <http://iets.mporg.ir>

Rwandan Army Conducted Military Ops in DR Congo

KINSHASA (Dispatches) - Rwanda's army "engaged in military operations" against DR Congo's military in the country's troubled east, according to a report by a group of independent United Nations experts seen by AFP.

The experts said there was "substantial evidence" of direct Rwandan army intervention and of Rwandan support for the region's M23 rebels, in such forms as weapons, ammunition and uniforms.

The report comes as the Democratic Republic of Congo has repeatedly accused Rwanda of backing the M23. The militia has captured swaths of territory in the DRC's restive east since it emerged from dormancy late last



Putin Says Russia Wants End to War

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - President Vladimir Putin said that Russia wants an end to the war in Ukraine, and all armed conflicts end with diplomatic negotiations.

"Our goal is not to spin the flywheel of military conflict, but, on the contrary, to end this war," Putin said. "We will strive for an end to this, and the sooner the better, of course."

Speaking a day after Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy's visit to the White House, Putin told reporters: "I have said many times: the intensification of hostilities leads to unjustified losses."

Russia has persistently said it is open to negotiations - prompting intense scepticism from Ukraine and its ally the United States, who suspect it wants to buy time after a series of defeats and retreats in the 10-month war.



Kremlin Says Biden, Zelensky Refusing to Hear Russia's Concerns



MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russia accused Ukraine and the United States of turning a deaf ear to its concerns after Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy made a historic visit to Washington.

Zelenskiy enjoyed a hero's welcome on a lightning trip on Wednesday in which US President Joe Biden committed nearly \$1.8 billion in military supplies including, for the first time, the Patriot missile defence system. "We can say with regret that so far neither President Biden nor President Zelenskiy have said even a few words that could be perceived as potential readiness to listen to Russia's concerns," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters.

Officials in Moscow over recent months have repeatedly said they have not ruled out talks with Ukraine.

They have blamed the closure of diplomatic channels on Zelenskiy, who has said he will not negotiate while President Vladimir Putin is in power.

"Not a single word was heard warning Zelenskiy against the continued shelling of residential buildings in towns and villages in Donbas and there were no real calls for peace," Peskov said.

"This suggests that the United States is continuing its line of de facto fighting an indirect war with Russia to the last Ukrainian," he added.

Zelenskiy's snap visit came hours after Putin said Moscow would next year continue developing its military potential and the combat readiness of its nuclear forces.

The Russian leader described the conflict in Ukraine as a "shared tragedy" but placed blame for the outbreak of hostilities on Ukraine and its allies, not Moscow.

Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu meanwhile visited troops "on the frontline" of Moscow's Ukraine offensive, with footage showing Shoigu inspecting barracks and walking through trenches.

The ministry did not say where or when the inspection took place.

Ukraine fears a rising onslaught of missiles and has faced a slew of attacks from drones, many bought by Russia from Iran, as Moscow pummels power plants and other civilian infrastructure just as the country shivers in the winter cold.

Zelenskiy flew in secret to the United States straight after a risky visit to the frontline in Bakhmut, where Ukrainian and Russian troops have both endured heavy tolls over the past two months.

He wore his trademark green military fatigues as he held talks with Biden at the White House and addressed lawmakers.

He repeatedly thanked the US for its support and handed Congress a Ukrainian flag fresh from the battlefield.

"Against all odds and doom-and-gloom scenarios," Zelenskiy said in a speech that drew a standing ovation, "Ukraine is alive and kicking."

"Your money is not charity," he added. "It's an investment in the global security and democracy that we handle in the most responsible way."

In the southern region surrounding the recently recaptured town of Kherson -- which has been shelled persistently by Russian forces -- officials said they had uncovered a grave with six people showing "signs of torture" near a private home.

In eastern Ukraine, an AFP reporter visited the frontline village of Bogorodychne, from which the Russians had been pushed out.

Its pre-conflict population of around 1,000 people had been reduced to Yuri Ponomarenko, 54, who returned several weeks ago, and "a mother and son who never left," he said.

Turkey Praises Sweden But Says More Needed for NATO Membership

ANKARA (Dispatches) - Turkey praised Sweden for responding to its security concerns but stressed more was needed to win Ankara's full backing for Stockholm's stalled NATO membership bid.

Sweden and Finland broke with decades of military non-alignment and applied to join the US-led defense alliance in response to Russia's February invasion of Ukraine.

Turkey and Hungary are the only NATO members yet to ratify the Nordic neighbors' applications.

Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu told his visiting Swedish counterpart Tobias Billstrom that the new right-wing government that swept to power in Stockholm in October was more receptive to Ankara's demands.

But he also stressed that "the steps that we want have still not been taken."

"We don't ignore the positive steps taken but there are still important ones to take," Cavusoglu said.

Billstrom's visit was planned before Sweden's Supreme Court provoked Turkish anger by blocking the extradition Monday of a top reporter Ankara implicates in a failed 2016 coup attempt.

Cavusoglu called it "a very negative development" on Tuesday. He tempered those remarks slightly in a joint media appearance with Billstrom in Ankara.



Shanghai Hospital Warns of Tragic Battle as COVID Spreads

SHANGHAI (Dispatches) - A Shanghai hospital has told its staff to prepare for a "tragic battle" with COVID-19 as it expects half of the city's 25 million people will get infected by the end of next week, while the virus sweeps through China largely unchecked.

After widespread protests against strict mitigation measures, China this month began dismantling its "zero-COVID" regime, which had taken a great financial and psychological toll on its 1.4 billion people.

China's official death count since the pandemic began three years ago stands at 5,241 - a fraction of what most other countries faced - but now looks bound to rise sharply.

China reported no new COVID deaths for a second consecutive day for Wednesday, even as funeral parlour workers say demand for their services has increased sharply over the past week.

Authorities - who have narrowed the criteria for COVID deaths, prompting criticism from many disease experts - confirmed 389,306 cases with symptoms.

Some experts say official case figures have become an unreliable guide as less testing is being done following the easing of restrictions.

Infections in China are likely to be more than a million a day with deaths at more than 5,000 a day, a "stark contrast" from official data, British-based health data firm Airfinity said this week.

Airfinity said it examined data from China's regional provinces, noting that cases are rising quicker in capital Beijing and southern province Guangdong.

The Shanghai Deji Hospital, posting on its WeChat account late on Wednesday, estimated there were about 5.43 million positives in the city and that 12.5 million in China's main commercial hub will get infected by the end of the year.

"This year's Christmas Eve, New Year's Day, and the Lunar New Year are destined to be unsafe," said the private hospital, which employs some 400 staff.

Taliban Minister Defends Ban on Women's University Studies

KABUL (Dispatches) - The minister of higher education in the Taliban government on Thursday defended his decision to ban women from universities - a decree that had triggered a global backlash.

Discussing the matter for the first time in public, Nida Mohammad Nadim said the ban issued earlier this week was necessary to prevent the mixing of genders in universities and because he believes some subjects being taught violated the principles of Islam. He said the ban was in place until further notice.

In an interview with Afghan television, Nadim pushed back against the widespread international condemnation, including from Muslim-majority countries such as Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Qatar. Nadim said that foreigners should stop interfering in Afghanistan's internal affairs.

Earlier on Thursday, the foreign ministers of the G7 group of states urged the Taliban to rescind the ban, warning that "gender persecution may amount to a crime against humanity." The ministers warned after a virtual meeting that "Taliban policies designed to erase women from public life will have consequences for how our countries engage with the Taliban." The G7 group includes Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, the United States and the European Union.

Nadim said universities would be closed to women for the time being, but that the ban could be reviewed at a later time.

A former provincial governor, police chief and military commander, Nadim was appointed minister in October by the supreme Taliban leader and previously pledged to stamp out secular schooling. Nadim opposes female education, saying it is against Islamic and Afghan values.

In Afghanistan, there has been some domestic opposition to the university ban, including statements of condemnation by several Afghan cricketers. Cricket is a hugely popular sport in Afghanistan, and players have hundreds of thousands of followers on social media.

Despite initially promising a more moderate rule respecting rights for women and minorities, the Taliban have widely implemented their interpretation of Islamic law, or Sharia, since they seized power in August 2021.

They have banned girls from middle school and high school, barred women from most fields of employment and ordered them to wear head-to-toe clothing in public. Women are also banned from parks and gyms. At the same time, Afghan society, while largely traditional, has increasingly embraced the education of girls and women over the past two decades.



Key Trump Allies Refused to Answer January 6 Panel Questions

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - Key allies of former U.S. President Donald Trump invoked the Fifth Amendment and refused to answer any substantive questions when they appeared before the congressional committee investigating the January 6, 2021, attack on the Capitol, records show.

The panel released the transcripts of 35 interviews with witnesses on Wednesday as it prepares to make public the final report of its January 6 probe.

Close Trump allies - including right-wing operative Roger Stone, former National Security Advisor Michael Flynn and lawyer John Eastman - spent almost the entirety of their interviews with the panel invoking the Fifth Amendment, which protects against self-incrimination.

The amendment, part of the US Constitution's Bill of Rights, shields people from being compelled to be witnesses against themselves.

While some former officials in Trump's orbit and the former president himself defied the committee's subpoenas, risking criminal charges, others appeared before the committee but effectively offered no information.

Today, the Select Committee made public 34 transcripts of witness testimony that was gathered over the course of the Select Committee's investigation.

In a public hearing of the panel earlier this year, the committee's vice chair, Congresswoman Liz Cheney, noted witnesses' refusal to give meaningful answers in interviews.

"Roger Stone took the Fifth. General Michael Flynn took the Fifth. John Eastman took the Fifth," she said. "Others like Steve Bannon and Peter Navarro simply refused to comply with lawful subpoenas, and they have been indicted."

Bannon, a top Trump adviser, was sentenced to four months in prison in October for refusing to cooperate with the committee.

Early this week, the panel recommended criminal charges against Trump, arguing that he violated the law in his campaign to overturn the 2020 elections. Trump repeatedly made false allegations of voting fraud, which lawmakers say culminated in the events of January 6.

Trump's supporters stormed and ransacked the Capitol in an effort to prevent the certification of President Joe Biden's victory.

How North Korea Built a Fearsome Missile Arsenal

SEOUL (Dispatches) - North Korea could hit almost anywhere on earth with a ballistic missile, analysts say, a capability it has honed alongside a wide variety of shorter-range weapons with comprehensive testing that includes a record-setting number of launches in 2022.

In March and November, North Korea sent ballistic missiles soaring more than 6,000 km (3,700 miles) into space. The high-flying trajectories showed a weapon designed to hit another continent, or even deliver multiple warheads.

Pyongyang has also test-fired at least three intermediate-range ballistic missiles (IRBMs) over Japan, including an Oct. 4 flight where the missile - possibly a variant of the intermediate-range Hwasong-12 - landed about 3,200 km beyond Japan in the Pacific Ocean.

There are many questions over just how reliable and capable the North's biggest missiles are: it has yet to fully demonstrate some key technologies for ensuring a nuclear warhead survives its fiery decent through the atmosphere and at least some launches appear to have ended in failure.

But analysts say North Korea's flurry of testing shows it is fine-tuning missiles that could be used in a war, and that it has little interest in giving them up.

North Korea says its ballistic missile development is a legitimate exercise of its right as a sovereign state to defend itself from external threats, including hostile U.S. policy

It has said it rejects U.N. Security Council resolutions banning missile and nuclear programmes as an infringement of its sovereign rights. It has also said it has the right to space exploration as a sovereign country.

Although long-range weapons get more attention, North Korea has been pouring resources into shorter-range systems too, analysts say.

After historic denuclearization talks between leader Kim Jong Un and U.S. President Donald Trump fell apart in 2019, Pyongyang rolled out new and increasingly capable short-range ballistic missiles (SRBMs), many of which can maneuver to confound missile defenses.

Short-range weapons help it prepare for a potential confrontation with its neighbors, especially South Korea, analysts say, which hosts about 28,500 American troops. In North Korea's testing program, short-range missiles seem to have been the most successful.

The North has also tested other advanced weapons, including "hypersonic" missiles, SRBMs for "tactical" nuclear attacks and new submarine launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs).

South Korea and the United States have warned since early 2022 that North Korea may resume nuclear testing for the first time since 2017. Analysts say that could help it perfect smaller nuclear warheads that can fit on a range of missiles.

"Kim announced plans to develop weapons systems ranging from tactical nuclear weapons to a nuclear-powered submarine and is ticking the boxes on his weapons wishlist through a series of tests," Hwang Ildo, of Seoul's Institute of Foreign Affairs and National Security, said in a recent report.

The warheads of tactical nuclear weapons have less explosive power but are meant for battlefield use, attacking specific targets relatively close to the launch point.

Targeting U.S. bases in South Korea with such weapons makes sense because the North Korean military does not have enough conventional warheads to meaningfully damage such facilities and prevent a conventional U.S. strike on North Korea, said Duyeon Kim, a North Korea expert at the U.S.-based Center for a New American Security.



Global Economy Bets On China Learning To Live With COVID

LONDON (Dispatches) - Those who believe the world economy can avoid the hardest of landings next year are watching China closely to see whether its move to loosen pandemic restrictions will help that scenario come about or end up wrecking it.

The knock-on effects of ditching "zero-COVID" remain highly uncertain given China's patchy vaccine coverage, fragile health structures and the lack of clarity about the real extent of infections as COVID-19 cases start to surge.

The World Bank on Tuesday cut its China growth outlook for this year and next, listing the impact of the abrupt loosening of strict COVID-19 containment measures alongside other factors including its shaky property sector.

Bank of Japan Governor Haruhiko Kuroda cited the resurgence of virus cases in China as putting downward pressure on the global economy, while Taiwan listed the spread of COVID-19 in China as one big uncertainty facing its economy.

Yet the consensus view remains that if China can get a grip on what U.S. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen this month called the "very complex problem" of switching its COVID-19 stance, this would boost both its domestic economy and the global one.

That would in turn bolster the belief of policymakers in Group of Seven (G7) countries that their interest rate hikes will end up taming inflation and that any recessions that result will be relatively shallow and shortlived.

"If you look forward six months to the exit of the COVID wave ... we'll be getting to a point where China just like everyone else gets to live with COVID," said Mike Gallagher, director of research at Continuum Economics.

"The big strategic play is towards reopening. It is just going to be very bumpy."

One such bump could be if global supply chains are disrupted again as Chinese workers start to fall sick in large numbers, reigniting inflation elsewhere just as central bankers see signs it has finally started to peak.

But equally, those inflationary pressures could be cancelled out if China's woes led to softer global demand for commodities.

"It's hard to say ... how those two will offset each other," Fed Chair Jerome Powell told reporters last week after the U.S. central bank's latest interest rate hike.

"It's a risky situation," he said while adding it "doesn't seem like it's likely to have a material overall effect on us." The New York Fed's Global Supply Chain Pressure Index, launched about a year ago, already edged higher in October and November in a moderate reversal of a persistent loosening of global supply bottlenecks seen through most of 2022. But some argue that the fact that the rest of the world's economy has long since re-opened and started producing goods means that any supply snags due to China this time around would not be as pronounced as they were last year.

Much will depend on the policy response of Chinese leaders who have pledged to support the slowing economy and to cushion the impact of rising COVID-19 infections.

Fitch Ratings Chief Economist Brian Coulton said he expected a rise in infections to cause initial disruptions to activity early next year due to sickness absences and social distancing.

"However there should be a stronger recovery in activity from the middle of next year," he said.



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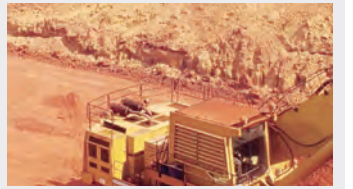
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Indonesia Says to Ban Bauxite Exports Next Year

JAKARTA (Dispatches) - Indonesia will ban exports of bauxite next year, President Joko Widodo said today, in his latest move to boost domestic processing industries.

The country was in 2020 the world's fifth biggest producer of bauxite — which is used in making aluminum — with close to 21 million tons, according to the US geological survey. Most of the exports went to China. "Starting in June 2023, the government will impose a ban on bauxite ore exports and boost the domestic bauxite processing and refining industries," Widodo told journalists. He said the government aimed to replicate the development of nickel processing in the archipelago after it stopped exports of the raw mineral in 2020.



EU Approves €28b German Renewable Energy Scheme

BRUSSELS (Dispatches) - The European Commission said today it had approved the German government's €28 billion support scheme for renewable energy, which is aimed at rapidly expanding use of wind and solar power.

The policy, which replaces an existing renewables support scheme, runs until 2026 and is designed to deliver Germany's target to produce 80 per cent of its electricity from renewable sources by 2030.

The European Commission said the scheme was "necessary and appropriate" to promote renewable energy and cut planet-heating emissions, and that its positive environmental impact outweighed possible distortions of competition.

"The German Renewable Energy Act 2023 scheme will contribute to further decarbonise electricity production," EU competition policy chief Margrethe Vestager said in a statement.

The scheme pays a premium to renewable energy producers, on top of the market price they receive for selling their power. Small generators can receive a feed-in-tariff providing a guaranteed price for their electricity.

Expanding clean energy production will be key to meeting Germany's goal to eliminate its net greenhouse gas emissions by 2045 — as well as partially filling the energy supply gap caused by Russia cutting off most of the gas it sends to Europe this year.

Berlin's response to Europe's energy crunch has attracted criticism from some EU countries. Concerns focussed on Germany's broader plan to spend up to €200 billion in subsidies to shield consumers and businesses from soaring energy costs — a sum that many other states cannot afford, and which some said would distort competition in the European Union's single market.

The Commission said Berlin's renewable state support was limited to the "minimum necessary" and included safeguards to minimize competition distortions. Companies must bid for the aid in government tenders.

To avoid compensating companies twice, Germany will also phase out existing support for renewable producers in times of negative power prices by 2027.

World Bank Cuts China Growth Outlook on COVID, Property Woes

BEIJING (Dispatches) - The World Bank has cut its China growth outlook for this year and next, citing the impact of the abrupt loosening of strict COVID-19 containment measures and persistent property sector weakness.

The Washington-based lender, in a report released on Tuesday, said it expected China's economy to grow 2.7% in 2022, before recovering to 4.3% in 2023 as it reopens following the worst of the pandemic.

The bank's expected expansion for 2022 would be well below the official target of around 5.5%.

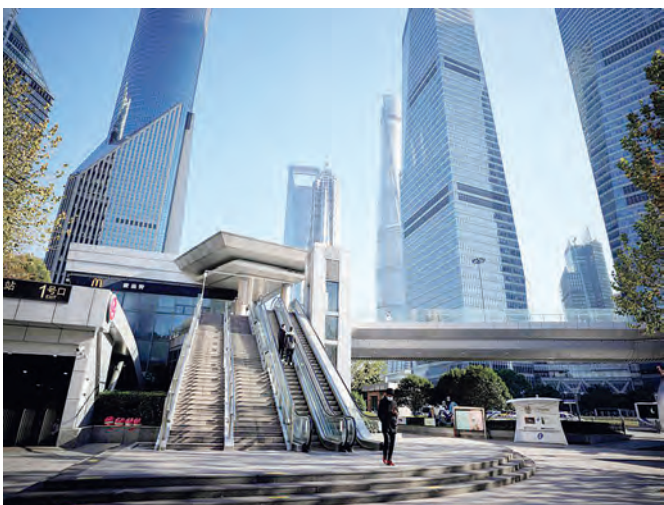
In September, the World Bank forecast China's growth at 2.8% this year and 4.5% next year.

"China's growth outlook is subject to significant risks, stemming from the uncertain trajectory of the pandemic, of how policies evolve in response to the COVID-19 situation, and the behavioral responses of households and businesses," the bank said in its report.

"Persistent stress in the real estate sector could have wider macroeconomic and financial spillovers."

China also faces highly uncertain global growth prospects and heightened geopolitical tension, the lender said.

Last week, Chinese leaders pledged to step up policy adjustment to support the slowing economy, to cushion the impact on businesses and consumers of a surge in COVID-19 infections at a time when a weakening global economy is hurting exports.



Taiwan's Export Contraction Raises Global Economy Concerns

TAIPEI (Dispatches) - Taiwan's total November export orders saw their sharpest contraction since the height of the financial crisis, in a foreshadowing of the health of the global economy.

Taiwan is a global supplier of electronics, in particular state-of-the-art semiconductors, and the drop off in orders adds to evidence that demand for technology products is weakening across the globe.

Orders from overseas dropped 23% in November, according to data released by the Economics Ministry on Tuesday, the biggest fall since March 2009 when the world was being battered by the financial crisis.

The plunge was much worse than the near 13% drop economists surveyed by Bloomberg News had forecast.

Global sentiment has been hit by inflation and central bank interest rate hikes as well as concerns over the health of China's economy.

The "baseline" forecast from Oxford Economics "now anticipates a global recession starting in Q4 2022 and

comprising three straight quarters of negative per capita world GDP growth," said a note from the advisory firm.

South Korea and China also reported forecast-beating falls in exports last month.

Global recession concerns are also being heightened by China's abrupt decision to cancel its strict zero-COVID-19 policy.

Nearly three years of strict lockdowns and a strategy of stamping out any infections had taken a toll on the world's second-largest economy and deepened global supply chain issues.

The switch to living alongside the coronavirus should see China eventually reopen to the world, helping to revive growth both in the country and globally.

But the manufacturing hub is likely to first go through a series of painful months as the coronavirus sweeps through the world's most populous nation, impacting productivity and generating further supply chain disruptions.

Australian Economy on Edge

SYDNEY (Dispatches) - The post-pandemic slump in Australian housing is set to deepen next year as hundreds of billions of dollars of mortgage debt fixed at record low rates in 2020 and 2021 mature, forcing borrowers to refinance at punishingly high interest rates.

Repayments on an estimated A\$370 billion (\$245.79 billion) of home loans could spike by as much as two-thirds at a time when real incomes are already shrinking due to surging inflation, dealing a body blow to house prices and the economy's main engine of growth - consumer spending.

Home values in Sydney have fallen 12% so far this year and Eliza Owen, head of Australian research at property consultant CoreLogic, expects further losses as more distressed properties are listed for sale. "While most borrowers are expected to be able to continue servicing their mortgages, there could be more motivated selling, if mortgage arrears rise from record lows," said Owen.

Homeowner Francesca Lemon knows the pain - repayments on her variable-rate mortgage have already risen by A\$1,200 per month this year, forcing her back to work despite a long-term medical condition so that her family can keep up with debt.

"It's very frustrating and people are already struggling to survive. The cost of paying your mortgage is literally going up for everyone by thousands of dollars," said the 31-year-old Lemon.

Australia's big four banks - Commonwealth Bank of Australia, Westpac, National Australia Bank and ANZ - account for 75% of the country's mortgage market.

The Reserve Bank of Australia (RBA) has raised interest rates every month since May, taking them from an all-time low of 0.1% to a decade-peak of 3.1%.

Policy makers are all too aware that mortgage payments will surge to record highs next year when fixed rate loans expire, and cited it as one reason for being the first major central bank to slow the pace of tightening.

The RBA fears 15% of the borrowers on variable rates could see their cash flows turn negative, assuming that interest rates rise to 3.6% in line with market expectations.

Lemon has managed to obtain a lower rate from another lender last month, helped by a surge in competitive refinancing demand. Yet, those who bought at the peak of the market could well slip into negative equity and be left with no other option but to sell.

Buyers' agent Lloyd Edge says some cautious mortgage holders have been selling up before their fixed-rate loans expire.

"I think there's going to be a lot of other people where this is going to be the situation, but they don't realize it yet."

Hundreds of thousands of Australians took advantage of the ultra low rates during the COVID pandemic to enter one of the world's least affordable housing markets.

Fixed-rate loans - usually with a two or three-year maturity - accounted for over 40% of the new loans during COVID, up from 15% previously.

The rate hikes already delivered will add around A\$1,000 a month in repayments to the average A\$600,000 mortgage, a deadweight for a population that holds A\$2 trillion (\$1.3 trillion) in home debt.

World Bank Grants \$1.69b For Funding Pakistan's Flood-Hit Areas

ISLAMABAD (Dispatches) - The World Bank has approved financing of \$1.69 billion for flood relief projects in Pakistan, read a statement issued.

"World Bank's Executive Board approved \$1.692 billion in financing for five projects to support people living in flood-affected areas of Sindh Province in Pakistan," an official statement said.

Funds will be distributed on the five projects to support rehabilitation, housing reconstruction and the restoration of crop production for vulnerable communities in the southern province, one of the country's worst-affected regions by recent vast floods.

The funds will also support maternal and child health services.

"Sindh was the province worst affected by the 2022 floods. There was huge devastation caused to the housing, health and agriculture sectors, and millions lost their livelihoods. Beyond the rehabilitation and reconstruction of damaged houses and infrastructure, our engagement in the flood response effort is an opportunity to strengthen resilience, and reform institutions and governance structures," the statement cited Najy Benhassine, the World Bank Country Director for Pakistan.

The World Bank will continue to support Pakistan's government and people in their efforts to recover from the recent flood emergency and build long-term resilience to similar climate-related shocks, it added.

Torrential rains and devastating floods have brought a third of Pakistan under water, aside from killing nearly 1,700 people, since mid-June.

Over 33 million people, mainly in Sindh and Balochistan, were affected by the extensive floods, with several houses, buildings, bridges, schools and roads being washed away.

A post-disaster needs assessment conducted by the government and development partners, including the Asian Development Bank, estimated total damage and losses are at more than \$30 billion, and recovery and reconstruction needs are at \$16.3 billion. Pakistan's already stressed economy took a further hit after severe floods submerged large swathes of the country, but overall this year had already been quite harsh for Pakistan.

The country has endured double-digit inflation for months, driven by soaring food and fuel prices while the value of the rupee against foreign currencies also dropped significantly.

Turkey to Be Freed From Cost-of-Living Scourge in 2023



ANKARA (Dispatches) - President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said inflation would go "upside down" in the coming months, as he pledged to free Turkey from the cost-of-living "scourge" in 2023.

Price increases in Turkey moderated in November, signaling that inflation pressures that have been plaguing consumers for about a year and a half might be finally easing.

Annual inflation dropped below 85% last month after touching a 24-year high in October. It is expected to decline sharply in the period ahead as a result of the base effect and falling energy prices globally.

"We will witness together how inflation will go upside down in the coming months," Erdoğan told a parliamentary group meeting of his ruling Justice and Development Party (AK Party).

"We want to make 2023 the 100th anniversary of our republic, the turning point of our liberation from the scourge of the cost of living."

Erdoğan stressed intensive efforts he said the government was undertaking to eliminate the causes other than cost increases leading to high inflation.

The president's remarks were echoed by Treasury and Finance Minister Nureddin Nebati, who earlier on Wednesday said inflation would fall much more noticeably in the coming months.

"Though high inflation has hurt all of us, we have broken its neck since last month with the positive developments and the measures we have taken," Nebati told an event in the Aegean province of Izmir.

"With the normalization of global energy prices, the implementation of policies aimed at increasing production and the improvement in expectations, we will together see that inflation will fall much more significantly in the coming months," the minister noted.

The government has endorsed low interest rates to boost exports, production and investment and create new jobs as part of an economic program, eventually aimed at lowering inflation by flipping the country's chronic current account deficit to a surplus.

Turkey is almost completely dependent on imports to cover its energy needs, which leaves it particularly vulnerable to rising costs that skyrocketed following Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Iran Condemns Theft of Syrian Natural Resources

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Iran's envoy to the United Nations has warned that the war against terrorism should not turn into a pretext to weaken the national sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria as well as a prelude to stealing the natural resources of the Arab country.

Iran's Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the United Nations Amir Saeed Iravani said at a UN Security Council meeting in New York on Thursday that the end of occupation and the full return of respect to the national sovereignty and territorial

integrity of Syria is the prelude to any political solution to the crisis in the country.

The Iranian diplomat also cautioned that any sort of military action in northern Syria will deteriorate the humanitarian situation in that region, adding that the illegal military presence of foreign forces in certain parts of Syria has created an ideal condition for terrorist acts; thus, the foreign boots on the ground must come to an end.



Recession, Rate Hikes Seen Jamming Brakes on Global 2023 Earnings Growth

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Corporate earnings growth is expected to slow in the year ahead in many countries as higher inflation and rising interest rates take an even bigger toll and companies brace for the likelihood of a global economic downturn.

U.S. companies are forecast to have the slowest full-year profit growth since 2020 and the start of the coronavirus pandemic. Some top equity strategists predict no profit growth or even a decline in earnings.

Investors have been watching estimates fall in recent months. S&P 500 fourth-quarter 2022 earnings now are expected to decline 1.1% year on year, which would be the first quarterly earnings fall since the third quarter of 2020, according to IBES data from Refinitiv as of Friday.

For the U.S. benchmark S&P 500, analysts project full-year 2023 profit growth of 4.7% following estimated growth of 5.7% for all of 2022, based on Refinitiv data.

Jonathan Golub, chief U.S. equity strategist at Credit Suisse Securities in New York, recently lowered his profit forecast and expects a decline in year-over-year S&P 500 earnings in 2023.

"Everything is about inflation," he said. "Companies' pricing power is about inflation and the cost of their wages is inflation."

Last Wednesday, the U.S. Federal Reserve raised interest rates by 50 basis points as expected to combat inflation, and Fed Chair Jerome Powell predicted more rate hikes next year even as the economy slips towards a possible recession.

The S&P 500 (.SPX) is down about 20% this year after falling into its second bear market since the 2020 global sell-off caused by the pandemic.

The S&P 500's forward 12-month price-to-earnings ratio has slipped to about 17 from 22 at the end of December 2021, but remains above the long-term average of about 16, according to Refinitiv data.

With valuations, much depends on whether the Fed can create a "soft landing," said Keith Buchanan, senior portfolio manager at Global Investments.

The S&P 500 consumer discretionary sector (.SPLRCD) is expected to have the highest year-over-year earnings growth in 2023, with a gain of 30.3%, while the energy sector (.SPNY) is expected to have the biggest year-over-year decline in earnings.

Rising rates have especially hurt technology and other growth shares this year. Tech sector (.SPLRCT) earnings are expected to gain just 4.3% in 2023 over 2022, and Golub and others said that may be too optimistic.

Morgan Stanley's chief U.S. equity strategist, Michael Wilson, warned in a note on Monday that "the market isn't always efficient in pricing major earnings downturns before they arrive."

European company earnings are forecast for a sharp slowdown in 2023 after a strong couple of years since the pandemic slowdown.

Many companies listed on the STOXX 600 regional index have been able to pass on higher costs through price hikes. But any global recession will pile pressure on consumers and rising interest rates could create a challenging environment for businesses.

Barclays head of European equity strategy, Emmanuel Cau expects earnings to provide a headwind for equities. The UK bank sees earning per share growth falling 12%.



"Following two and a half years of a very strong earnings rebound, base effects should be much more challenging into 2023," he said.

"Our analysis shows that both earnings and margins typically contract when global GDP (gross domestic product) growth ran below trend".

STOXX 600 companies are expected to report a rise of about 8% in earnings in the first quarter of 2023, based on Refinitiv IBES data as of Friday.

But they are expected to decline 4% in the second quarter of 2023, which would be the first quarterly decline since the fourth quarter of 2020.

But Mark Nichols and Mark Heslop, investment managers at Jupiter's European equities group, said that while the economic outlook in Europe is challenging, "the corporate outlook has some reasons for optimism."

They mentioned rising mobility in the world's second-largest economy, signs of supply disruptions easing and heavy investment to address climate change.

Jefferies strategists said any degree of stabilization in energy prices will have outsized effects on profits for European companies, easing real household incomes.

"Since there is still pent-up demand, this should deliver quite sizeable upside earnings surprises."

In Japan, strategists expect lower interest rates or higher economic growth will improve the outlook for corporate profits. In a recent Reuters poll, they said Japan's Nikkei 225 share average (.N225) will rally to 30,000 next year for the first time since September 2021.

Based on a Reuters analysis using 5,756 companies across the globe, with a market capitalization of at least \$1 billion each, earnings growth is seen slowing to about 4.0% in 2023 from 4.9% in 2022.

BlackRock in its 2023 global outlook said earnings expectations are not yet pricing in a recession.

Germany Pauses Purchases of Puma Tanks After Operational Problems



BERLIN (Dispatches) - Germany will not purchase any more Puma infantry tanks until they have proven themselves to be reliable, Defence Minister Christine Lambrecht said after several of the vehicles were put out of service during a recent military drill.

"The recent failures of the Puma infantry fighting vehicle are a major setback," Lambrecht said in a statement, adding that she had requested a report on the matter by the end of next week.

Shares in Rheinmetall, which manufactures the tanks together with Krauss-Maffei Wegmann, were down 7% after the minister's announcement.

"Our troops must be able to rely on weapon systems being robust and stable even in combat," Lambrecht said, while assuring NATO allies that they could continue to rely on Berlin to fulfill its readiness obligations as part of a joint task force from 2023.

A statement from the German defense ministry said the goal was to make the Puma tanks operational as soon as possible. Meanwhile, the German Bundeswehr military would use Marder tanks, the predecessor model to the Puma, from Jan. 1, in what a ministry spokesperson called a "fall-back solution".

Neither Rheinmetall nor KMW would comment on the issues with the Puma model.

The Spiegel magazine reported over the weekend that 18 Puma tanks intended for NATO's very high readiness joint task force next year were not operational after problems arose during a firing exercise.

Germany has vowed to boost defense spending and modernize its military in the wake of the Ukraine war, with Chancellor Olaf Scholz's government making 100 billion euros (\$106.10 billion) available for defense investments in this year's budget.

Italy's Rates Clash With ECB a Sign of Things to Come for Euro Zone

FRANKFURT (Dispatches) - Attacks by Italy's new government on the European Central Bank over its plans to raise borrowing costs may be a sign of things to come for a euro zone struggling with inflation and debt.

Top Italian ministers have lashed out at the ECB since it signaled a string of interest rate hikes and told governments to stop showering households and companies with subsidies or face an even "stronger monetary response".

This was a signal to investors that the ECB was not prepared to keep financing government deficits as it has done for a decade, and particularly since the coronavirus pandemic. During that period, public debts have ballooned.

It also showed the ECB did not fear penalizing the most indebted of the 19 euro zone countries, Italy among them, which tend to see their borrowing costs rise disproportionately when credit becomes more expensive.

"The ECB is clearly ready to take risks with fragmentation in the euro area," Gilles Moec, chief economist at AXA Investment Managers, said.

Italian finance minister Giancarlo Giorgetti, of the League coalition party, appeared to acknowledge that risk, saying on Saturday that ECB rate hikes "should in some way advise us to be even more careful with regard to public finances".

Governments should have seen the writing on the wall. The ECB has said for months that any subsidy aimed at helping households and companies deal with a cost-of-living crisis should be "temporary, targeted and tailored" or risk perpetuating inflation.

Most countries have offered broad support, however, helping ease utility bills from Lisbon to Helsinki and Athens, making tax cuts - and, in Spain, even offering free transport.



The ECB thinks these subsidies will lower inflation next year but cause it to be higher in 2024 than expected only a few months ago, justifying more rate hikes.

With all but two euro zone members likely to post deficits next year - budgets in France, Spain and Italy are all set to slip into the red by 4%-5% of GDP, according to Fitch Ratings - the stage is set for clashes.

With real incomes still falling, governments will argue that all they are doing is compensating their people for some of their loss of purchasing power.

And they can easily shift the blame: it was the ECB that missed the onset of inflation and let it surge to a record 10%, not fiscal policy.

"I have a hard time saying inflation is being caused by fiscal policy," Natixis economist Dirk Schumacher said. "Unlike in the U.S., governments in Europe aren't being particularly profligate."

While the political battle plays out, investors have already drawn their own conclusions.

With bigger deficits to refinance and the ECB raising interest rates while also winding down its bond purchases, markets have pushed up yields across the euro zone and particularly for the weakest borrowers, such as Italy.

"For countries like Italy, a combination of rapidly shrinking excess reserves and the need for private investors to step up and purchase their new bond issuance in 2023 might well prove very tricky," said Alfonso Peccatiello, founder of MacroCompass newsletter.

Of course the ECB could always douse any market fires by stepping up its bond purchases again.

It can re-route proceeds from bonds bought during the pandemic that are now maturing, or even print fresh money via its new Transmission Protection Instrument (TPI).

Israel Unable to...

FROM PAGE 1

"The Zionist regime is currently facing a political and security crisis and is under immense internal and external pressures. Corruption as well as financial and morality scandals gripping the regime's officials in addition to insecurity caused [for Israel] by the rising power of Palestinian fighter groups have all put the Zionist regime in a critical situation," Mousavi said.

The Army commander added that the internal rift, fear and insecurity have prompted the Israeli rime to step up both violence against the Palestinians and saber-rattling against Iran while being fearful of the Islamic Republic.

The Israeli regime is hated more than ever by the public opinion in the world due to its widespread violations of international law, crimes against the Palestinian people and continuous evil acts in the region, he said.

Eutelsat Confirms...

FROM PAGE 1

According to the statement, the satellite operator has also ensured that it is not involved in the broadcasting of RT News in Russia in line with the process of implementing or preparing for the implementation of the aforementioned measures.

As a result of the suspensions, Eutelsat said it will take a bottom-line hit of around 10 to 15 million euros (\$16 million) to its full-year revenues.

Eutelsat on December 7 notified Press TV of a plan to take the English-language news network off air, weeks after the European Union imposed sanctions on the Tehran-based broadcaster.

On November 14, the European Union imposed sanctions on a number of Iranian institutions and individuals, including Press TV, over alleged "rights violations" following the recent foreign-backed riots in the country.

Eutelsat is a French satellite operator providing coverage over the entire European continent, the Middle East, Africa, Asia and the Americas. It is the world's third-largest satellite operator in terms of revenues.

Russia and Iran...

FROM PAGE 1

That alarms the U.S. and its allies, as they seek to block transfers of Iranian drones and other military supplies they say are aiding the Kremlin's war in Ukraine.

"It is an area we're watching carefully, both that route and more generally the Iranian-Russian connection," said the Biden administration's top sanctions official, James O'Brien, after announcing new punishments last week that target executives at Russian Railways. "We are concerned with any effort to help Russia evade the sanctions."

"It's important to put the spotlight on it, to try to show the world that they can't hide."

Robert Malley, the Biden administration's Iran envoy, says any new trade corridor needs scrutiny, as part of what's become his top priority: stopping arms shipments between the countries. "That's an extraordinarily damaging, reckless decision they've made," Malley says. "It's important to put the spotlight on it, to try to show the world that they can't hide."

Ships sailing the Don and Volga rivers have traditionally traded energy and agricultural commodities—Iran is the third-largest importer of Russian grain—but the range is set to widen. The two countries have announced a raft of new business deals that cover goods including turbines, polymers, medical supplies and automotive parts. Russia also supplies nuclear fuel and components for Iran's reactor in Bushehr.

Russia needs to compensate for the sudden breakdown of its commercial ties with Europe, which before the war was its biggest trade partner, as well as finding workarounds for US and European Union sanctions.

"With European transport networks getting closed off, they're focused on developing alternative trade corridors which support Russia's turn to the East," says Nikolay Kozhanov, a Persian Gulf expert at Qatar University who served as a Kremlin diplomat in Tehran from 2006 to 2009. "You can impose controls over sea routes, but land routes are difficult to watch. It's almost impossible to track them all."

There are plenty of obstacles, and both Russia and Iran are spending heavily to overcome them.

IAEA Chief...

FROM PAGE 1

Over the past year and a half, efforts have been mobilized to revive the JCPOA deal after then-President Donald Trump, with encouragement from then-Israeli occupation Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, had America withdraw from it in 2018 - stating that the agreement was "a horrible one-sided deal that should have never, ever been made."

The original JCPOA was signed in 2015 by China, France, Germany, Iran, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States, as well as the European Union.

Tehran Blasts U.S...

FROM PAGE 1

"The allies and supporters of known terrorists had better shut their mouths and rather...think about resolving the intense crises facing their own people, their own country as well as the Zionist regime," the Iranian official said, referring to the Israeli regime, which is the U.S.'s main regional ally.

Kanaani also reminded that the U.S. was laying claim to caring about the Iranian people, while it has brought the Islamic Republic under "sanctions and maximum pressure."

The United States launched the "maximum pressure" campaign against Iran under former president Donald Trump. As part of the campaign, the U.S. left the 2015 nuclear agreement, and returned the draconian sanctions that the deal had lifted.

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Pele to Spend Christmas in Hospital as Cancer Worsens

SAO PAULO (Dispatches) - Brazilian football great Pele will spend Christmas in hospital, his medical team and family said, as he receives treatment for worsening cancer as well as kidney and heart problems. The 82-year-old "requires greater care related to renal and cardiac dysfunctions," said the Albert Einstein Hospital in Sao Paulo. It also reported a "progression" of his cancer, but said Pele was not in intensive care.

Billionaire Ishbia to Buy Suns for \$4b

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - Billionaire Mat Ishbia will buy the National Basketball Association's (NBA) Phoenix Suns and women's team the Phoenix Mercury for \$4 billion, ESPN reported. The deal would set a record in the league after Joe Tsai bought the remaining stake in the Brooklyn Nets in 2019 in a deal that valued the team at \$2.35 billion. The Suns did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Owner Robert Sarver announced plans to sell the team in

Siakam Powers Toronto Raptors Past New York Knicks

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Pascal Siakam scored a career-high 52 points and sank the go-ahead free throw with 2:01 left for the visiting Toronto Raptors, who snapped a six-game losing streak and ended the New York Knicks' winning streak with a 113-106 victory.

Siakam produced the eighth 50-point effort in the NBA this season. He was also the first player to score at least 50 points at Madison Square Garden since James Harden had 61 points for the Houston Rockets on Jan. 23, 2019.

Siakam also added nine rebounds and seven assists in helping the Raptors snap the NBA's longest active losing streak. Fred VanVleet had 28 points, including a 3-pointer on the possession following Siakam's go-ahead free throw. OG Anunoby scored 15 points and had the block that led to VanVleet's 3-pointer.

Julius Randle and RJ Barrett scored 30 points apiece for the Knicks, whose eight-game winning streak was the longest active run in the NBA.

Bulls 110, Hawks 108

Ayo Dosunmu rebounded a missed shot and scored at the buzzer to give visiting Chicago a win over Atlanta, the Bulls' second victory in as many nights.

The game was tied 108-108 with four seconds left. DeMar DeRozan shot an airball, but Dosunmu fielded the rebound and stuck it back for the winning points. DeRozan scored 28 points to lead Chicago, with Zach LaVine adding 22 and Nikola Vucevic getting 20 points and seven rebounds. Dosunmu scored nine.

Atlanta's Trae Young scored 34 points, his third straight game with 30-plus points. The Hawks also got 18 points and 11 rebounds from Onyeka Okongwu, who tied the game with a basket with four seconds left. Dejounte Murray had 15 points and 10 assists.

76ers 113, Pistons 93

Joel Embiid had 22 points, 10 rebounds, six assists and four blocked shots to lift host Philadelphia past Detroit.

Fury and Usyk Agree Unification Bout

LONDON (Dispatches) - Tyson Fury and Oleksandr Usyk have agreed to fight each other next in a world heavyweight title unification bout, according to veteran boxing promoter Bob Arum.

Fury defeated his British rival Derek Chisora for the third time in his career to retain his WBC title earlier this month.

He then called out Ukrainian hero Usyk, the IBF, IBO, WBO and WBA belt-holder, who was ringside at the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium.

Following that fight, the 34-year-old Fury forecast a clash with Usyk, either in Saudi Arabia or Britain, sometime in February or March.

"The two fighters have agreed to fight each other next," the 91-year-old Arum told Sky Sports on Tuesday.

"With Fury and Usyk we're dealing with two adults, not a lot of (rubbish) back and forth. Usyk is a good friend of mine, he's very intelligent and Tyson is Superman, both as an athlete and as an intellect."

The American, involved in some of Muhammad Ali's celebrated contests of the 1970s, added: "So they want the fight. Both of them want the fight and so there'll be very little, if any, (messing) around."

"Now the question is what's the date and what's the site. But that fight is definitely going to happen and it will happen in the first four months of next year."

Shakhtar to Demand €40m Damages From FIFA At CAS Hearing

PARIS (Dispatches) - Ukrainian club Shakhtar Donetsk will ask for compensation of up to €40 million from FIFA for a loss in player transfer sales at the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) on Thursday.

In June 2022, football's governing body said foreign players or coaches in Ukraine would be able to end their contract with a club in the country due to Russia's invasion earlier this year.

The likes of Brazilian winger Tete and compatriot Dentinho have departed the 13-time Ukrainian champions since the incursion in February.



Tobias Harris added 17 points and James Harden contributed 15 points and eight assists for the Sixers, who won their sixth in a row on a seven-game homestand. De'Anthony Melton scored 12, Georges Niang added 11 and Montrezl Harrell had 10 for the Sixers, who continue to play without Tyrese Maxey (fractured left foot). Jaden Ivey led the Pistons with 18 points, while Killian Hayes added 12 and Saddiq Bey had 11.

Nets 143, Warriors 113

Kevin Durant scored 23 points in 29 minutes as Brooklyn seized control early and easily extended its winning streak to seven games with a wire-to-wire rout of short-handed Golden State in New York.

Durant made 8 of 9 shots in the opening half, when the Nets scored a team-record 91 points. It was the third-most points in a first half in NBA history. Edmond Sumner added 16 points for the game for the Nets, who played without Kyrie Irving. The star guard tweaked his right calf in the team's walkthrough Wednesday afternoon.

James Wiseman scored a career-high 30 points for Golden State, which went 1-5 on a six-game road trip. Moses Moody and Patrick Baldwin Jr. added 17 apiece, but Jordan Poole was held to 13 as he shot 4 of 17 and missed 10 of 11 3-point tries.



PARIS (Dispatches) - World Cup winner Lionel Messi has reached a deal with Paris St Germain to stay with the club for at least the 2023-24 season, French daily Le Parisien reported.

The 35-year-old forward, seven-times winner of the Ballon D'Or, helped Argentina lift the World Cup trophy by beating France on penalties in the final on Sunday.

"In early December, in the midst of the World Cup, an agreement was reached (for Messi) to stay on for at least one more season," the paper said, citing no sources.

PSG were not immediately available for comment.

Paris St Germain President Nasser Al-Khelaifi said this month that Messi was happy at the Ligue 1 champions, adding that discussions about a contract extension would be held after the World Cup.

Messi, who has 12 goals and 14 assists for PSG in all competitions this season, moved to the French capital from Barcelona in 2021 on a two-year contract.



Tokyo Games Cost 20% More Than Organizer Reported

TOKYO (Dispatches) - Last year's pandemic-delayed Tokyo Olympics cost 20 percent more than the final figure reported by the organizing committee, according to an analysis by Japan's audit board.

A report issued late Wednesday found the Games cost 1.7 trillion yen (\$12.9 billion), up from the 1.42 trillion yen reported by Tokyo 2020 earlier this year.

The audit board said organisers had incorrectly failed to include some Olympic-linked government spending on items including anti-doping measures, athlete training, Japanese food at the athletes village and the Olympic stadium.

And its report urged the government in the future to "reveal the total costs in a timely manner when it is substantially involved in a major event."

The 2013 bid for the Tokyo Games estimated the event would cost just 734 billion yen,

but costs gradually ballooned, with a pandemic postponement adding to the bill.

Asked about the costs Thursday, government spokesman Hirokazu Matsuno told reporters "the government takes the points raised seriously and will respond appropriately", without offering details.

The Games were held a year later than planned because of the pandemic -- the first Olympics postponed in peacetime -- and spectators were banned from nearly all events, which were held under strict Covid-19 countermeasures.

Japanese prosecutors are currently investigating a string of bid-rigging allegations associated with sponsorship deals at the Tokyo Games.

On Thursday, a former executive of a major clothing company appeared in court on allegations of bribing a Tokyo 2020 official and admitted offering money to secure sponsorship rights for his firm, national broadcaster NHK said.

The corruption scandal has cast a shadow over the northern city of Sapporo's bid for the 2030 Winter Olympics.

Officials there this week announced they would stop holding promotional events for the bid and now hold a nationwide poll to gauge support.

Djokovic Needs To Be Playing At All Costs

DUBAI (Dispatches) - Nick Kyrgios believes Novak Djokovic "needs to be playing at all costs" and is happy the Serb will be allowed back into Australia to compete in the opening Grand Slam of the season in Melbourne next month.

Djokovic was banned from returning to Australia as a consequence of being deported earlier this year over his refusal to be vaccinated.

However, that decision has been reversed and the 21-time major champion will get the opportunity to vie for a record-extending 10th Australian Open crown in a few weeks' time.

Kyrgios was one of the most outspoken players advocating for Djokovic during his deportation debacle last January and the Australian world number 22 feels the 35-year-old's presence is essential at every event.

"I think Novak needs to be playing at all costs," Kyrgios told AFP at the World Tennis League in Dubai on Wednesday.

"He's one of the greatest of all time and as long as he's going to be playing and hanging around, we need him at these tournaments."

Djokovic's absence from two of the four majors in 2022 due to his vaccination status has made way for young talent to emerge.

Spanish teenager Carlos Alcaraz claimed a maiden Grand Slam title at the US Open and as a result became the youngest world number one in ATP history.

"I think, as a competitor, I want to see him there," Kyrgios said of Djokovic.

"And if I win a tournament, if you don't go through Novak, then you kind of know the tournament isn't really a tournament."



Rashford Strikes For Man Utd In League Cup

LONDON (Dispatches) - Marcus Rashford marked his return from World Cup duty with a brilliant solo goal as Manchester United advanced into the quarter-finals of the League Cup with a 2-0 win over Burnley while Premier League rivals Brighton were knocked out by third-tier Charlton.

United's first game since the World Cup was also their first since Cristiano Ronaldo's dramatic departure from Old Trafford and an announcement by owners the Glazer family that they were prepared to sell the football giants.

The Red Devils went ahead in the 27th minute through a close-range finish from Denmark's Christian Eriksen, who also featured at Qatar 2022.

Rashford, who scored three goals for England at the World Cup, doubled United's lead against second-tier Championship leaders Burnley, managed by former Manchester City star Vincent Kompany, just before the hour mark in superb style.

The England forward went on a run from inside his own half and into the visitors' box before drilling a shot low into the net.

"There is space in front of you and you're almost waiting for the right time to get a pass off but the gap opened and thankfully it went in," Rashford told Sky Sports.

This was Rashford's first match since England's agonising World Cup quarter-final loss to France, with the forward saying: "It was such a disappointing feeling to be knocked out and you have to pick yourselves up."

"There is no time to feel sorry for yourself. You need to pick up results and thankfully we did that today."

