

**The United Nations Security Council
Is Scheduled to Hold Its Regular
Meeting on December 19 to Discuss
The Implementation of the UNSCR
2231 and the 2015 Nuclear Deal**

IRAN NEWS

**Tehran's Interim Friday Prayers
Leader Ayatollah Kazem Sedighi
Says That the Iranian Nation Has
Turned the Arrogant Threats Into
Opportunities and Foiled Their Plans**

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Drugs for Chemical Victims Hardly Found

LONDON (IRNA) - Deputy foreign minister for legal and international affairs who is in Hague, the Netherlands, in a meeting with the director general of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) complained about the scarcity of medicine for chemical weapons victims in Iran.

Reza Najafi in his meeting with OPCW head Fernando Arias referred to the unjustly imposed US sanctions against Iran, reiterating that those sanctions have even led to a lack of access for the victims of the chemical weapons to the required facilities and medicines.

He meanwhile emphasized that imposing such inhumane sanctions is in direct contrast with the articles of the chemical weapons ban treaty and other international laws, and needs to be terminated as soon as possible.

Najafi meanwhile appreciated the OPCW director general for the efforts he has already made to provide full access of the Iranian victims of chemical weapons to required medicine and facilities, and to annul the unjustly imposed sanctions at least in this field,...

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Enemy Targeting Iran Security Because of Its Progress

TEHRAN (MNA) - The Commander-in-Chief of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Major General Hossein Salami said the enemy has targeted Iran's security because it is angered by the country's progress.

Speaking at an event in the southern city of Shiraz, Fars Province, on Thursday, the IRGC chief said the enemies and the Global Arrogance continue their animosity against the Islamic Republic of Iran.

General Salami said the main reason for their animosity is their displeasure with Iran's advancement. "They cannot tolerate the progress of the Islamic Iran in the world that's why they seek to sow division in the hearts of our youths," he underscored.

He attached great importance to preserving security as the main basis for people's welfare and peace, saying that because of the importance of security in the country, the enemies have targeted it. "We believe that security should accompany progress, welfare and peace and we work towards that goal (maintaining security)."

Salami went on to warn the enemies that the IRGC and the Basij will not allow anyone to undermine the people's peace and tranquility, telling the enemies that the IRGC and Basij will come to them along with the youth they think they have fooled.

Enemies Committed Scandalous Miscalculations by Recent Riots



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - President Seyed Ebrahim Raisi said on Thursday that the enemies of the Islamic Revolution of Iran who have been disappointed by the people of Kurdistan had committed a scandalous miscalculation.

Speaking at the inauguration ceremony of the Sanandaj Water Supply Project, Raisi said that the enemies of the Islamic Republic of Iran had been disappointed by the People of Kurdistan.

He further said that these enemies had committed scandalous miscalculation to the extent that they thought they could deal Iran a blow by provoking unrests and riots.

"But they realized that such deep rooted tree could not be shaken by such fragile moves," he emphasized.

The President further said that every inch of Kurdistan province's soil witnesses the resistance of the people of Kurdistan.

He stated that the ongoing projects for the development of Kurdistan should be completed faster and noted that one of the demands of the people of this province is the operationalization of the Tehran-Hamadan-Sanandaj railway project, which is being followed seriously.

Raisi, in a meeting with different sections of the people in the Sanandaj Freedom Hall on Thursday, stated that success had been achieved. Today I will be friendly, warm-hearted, and diligent. Resistant people of Kurdistan province and Sanandaj said: The opening of the Hamedan-Sanandaj railway project will facilitate commuting, and we are trying to make it happen faster.

Referring to his visit to Saqqez airport a few months ago, he said: The backlog of this airport is being done, while I have emphasized that no new project should be defined or planned until these {unfinished} projects are completed.

The President also pointed to the inauguration of the water supply project in Sanandaj and said: "With the inauguration studios Minister of Energy, the Governor General of Kurdistan, the representative of the Leader in Kurdistan, the follow-up of parliament members, contractors, and the has ended, and we are happy that the dear people of Sanandaj can benefit from clean and fresh water."

Operating the Azad Dam water transfer system to the Sanandaj treatment plant, meeting with the people, and meeting with the clerics and elites of the province are the most important plans of the President's one-day trip to Kurdistan province.

Raisi, inaugurated the 'Azad Dam water transfer project in his provincial tour to Kurdistan. Energy Minister Ali Akbar Mehrabian also attended the ceremony. -----

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Iran-China-Russia New Triangular in Multilateral Diplomacy

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - A senior Russian diplomat says his "productive" talks with his Iranian and Chinese counterparts on issues of common interest are indicative of the emergence of a new triangular in multilateral diplomacy.

Russia's Permanent Representative to International Organizations in Vienna Mikhail Ulyanov made the comment in a post on his Twitter account on Thursday.

"The permanent missions of China, Iran and Russia held productive trilateral consultations on issues of common interest," he said.

Doesn't it look like a new triangular in multilateral diplomacy- China, Iran and Russia? In fact this format can easily enlarge. There are many (if not majority of) states who are in favor of multilateralism and against attempts to keep unilateral world alive at all costs.

"Doesn't it look like a new triangular in multilateral diplomacy- China, Iran and Russia?" the top Russian diplomat tweeted, emphasizing that such a format "can easily enlarge."

Ulyanov added that many countries are in favor of multilateralism and oppose unilateralism.

"There are many (if not majority of) states who are in favor of multilateralism and against attempts to keep unilateral world alive at all costs," he said.

Since the United States' withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), in 2018 followed by subsequent sanctions aimed at crushing the Iranian economy, Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei has underlined the necessity of pressing ahead with efforts to neutralize the sanctions and counter the US unilateralism.

Under that strategy, Iran has tried to adopt an East-oriented economic policy, expanding its ties with neighboring and other Asian countries and striving to become self-sufficient in key domains.

Iran and China signed a landmark 25-year comprehensive strategic partnership agreement in March last year in defiance of the U.S.'s unilateral sanctions.

The deal officially documents the Sino-Iranian Comprehensive Strategic Partnership that had been announced during a visit by Chinese President Xi Jinping to Tehran in 2016. It sets the outlines of the two countries' cooperation in political, cultural, security, defense, regional, and international domains for the next 25 years.

Iran Gas Exports To Turkey Up 70% y/y In October

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Figures by the European Union's statistical office (Eurostat) show that supply of natural gas from Iran to Turkey rose by 70% year on year in October.

Eurostat figures covered in a Wednesday report by Iran's official IRNA news agency showed that Iran had exported 671 million cubic meters (mcm) of natural gas to Turkey in October.

Iran had supplied 395 mcm of gas to Turkey in October 2021, said the EU agency.

Iranian exports accounted for 21% of the total foreign gas supply delivered to Turkey in October, according to Eurostat figures.

Total Iranian gas exports to Turkey reached 7,751 mcm in the 10 months to October, down slightly from the same period last year when supplies had topped 7,785 mcm, the figures showed.

Iran is one of the three main suppliers of natural gas to Turkey along with Russia and Azerbaijan. A 25-year gas supply contract between the two countries is expected to expire in 2026.

Tehran and Ankara have started initial talks for a new contract that could allow Turkey to significantly increase its gas imports from Iran.

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Iran Thwarted Hybrid War Waged by 47 Foreign Spy Agencies

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The head of Basij volunteer forces says the Islamic Republic of Iran successfully managed to thwart hybrid war planned by 47 foreign spy agencies during the recent foreign-backed riots in the country.

Addressing an event in the capital Tehran, Brigadier General Gholamreza Soleimani spoke about recent deadly riots in the country, which claimed many innocent lives, including those of security forces.

"Forty-seven spy agencies launched an all-out hybrid war against the Islamic Republic of Iran," he said, adding that "disappointed with face-to-face war," the enemy opted for "hybrid war" using media and psychological operations to deceive the Iranian nation into going with their tide.

"The riots were supposed to start from the second week of [the Iranian calendar month of] Mehr [early October] concurrent with the opening of schools and universities but it started earlier after an incident," he said.

Riots broke out immediately after 22-year-old Mahsa Amini collapsed at a police station and died in hospital three days later despite full medical care.

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Iran to Ease Ban On Apple iPhone 14

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran will allow a limited registration of Apple iPhone 14 phones on the country's mobile network despite an outright ban imposed some six months ago on the imports the American-made phone models.

A spokesman of the Iranian trade ministry (MINT) said on Thursday that owners of iPhone 14 phones will be able to register and use their phones in a near future.

Omid Qalibaf said the decision will mostly affect Iranian passengers who import limited number of iPhones for personal use.

He reiterated that the MINT will maintain a ban imposed in May on imports of American mobile phones, adding that those phones will not be able to receive any services on the Iranian mobile network.

"We have not imported any ... American phone (model) on a mass commercial scale," said Qalibaf.

Reports in May suggested that the MINT had stopped registering new orders for imports of Apple phones on its online system.

That came after the ministry included Apple phones in its Goods Category No. 27 list which covers products whose imports into Iran has been suspended until further notice.

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Iran Condemns School Terrorist Attack in Afghanistan

TEHRAN (IP) - The Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Afghanistan condemned Wednesday terrorist attack at a school in Aybak in northern Afghanistan's Samangan Province.

At least 16 people were killed, and 24 others wounded Wednesday by a blast at a School in Afghanistan's northern city of Aybak.

The Wednesday deadly explosion at the Al-Jihadi school in Aybak, the center of Samangan province, which killed and injured several children and teenagers, has sparked widespread condemnation locally and internationally. The Iran Embassy strongly condemned the terroristic attacks at the school at the time of prayers.

Iran Fully Ready to Counter Any Foreign Threat

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The chief commander of the Iranian Army say the country's Armed Forces are fully prepared to take on any foreign threat that could be facing the Islamic Republic.

"The sailing vessels of the Iranian Navy are currently engaged in defending the Islamic Republic's interests in high seas," Major General Abdolrahim Mousavi said during a ceremony held in the capital Tehran.

"The Ground Force's [military] units are stationed on the country's borders in complete readiness. Our Air Defense Force is also observing and surveilling the country's [air]space 24 hours; and our Air Force [too] is constantly patrolling Iran's skies," the commander added.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Mousavi underlined the necessity of the nation's vigilance in foiling plots regarding the enemies' "hybrid war" against the Islamic Republic.

The adversaries' means of targeting the country could be simply a bullet composed of their "voice, image, and discourse," the general stated.

"Sometimes, this bullet fired during the war strikes and leaves destructive impacts without us realizing it."



The commander was apparently referring to the all-out psychological warfare that anti-Iran media outlets have been waging against the Islamic Republic in recent months.

The media campaign gathered pace during the recent foreign-backed riots that began engulfing the country following the death in police custody of Mahsa Amini, a young Iranian woman.

"Iran's visionary and observant people have, however, come to recognize the enemies' plots well," General Mousavi said.

The commander expressed confidence that the nation and the Army's cooperation under the "smart leadership" of Leader of the Islamic Revolution Seyyed Ali Khamenei stands to increasingly contribute to the strength of the defense forces and the country's further progress.

French Envoy Summoned Over Interventionist Resolution, Remarks

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's foreign ministry on Wednesday summoned the French ambassador in Tehran over the adoption of an "interventionist" anti-Iran resolution at French National Assembly and "unacceptable" remarks by the country's top diplomat.

The ministry said in a statement that it conveyed to Nicolas Roche Iran's "strong protest" against "baseless" accusations made by French officials while also condemning and rejecting such intervention as "unacceptable."

It also slammed as unacceptable remarks made by French Foreign Minister Catherine Colonna during the Monday session of the parliament.

The Islamic Republic of Iran regrets that France and some European countries are using the issue of human rights as a tool and treating it with double standards, the statement noted.

"It is necessary for these countries to rectify their wrong approach which is in blatant violation of the principle of sovereignty in international law," it added.

The ministry also said that such countries lack "authority and competence" to claim advocating human rights because of their resort to force and unilateral approaches, which is in violation of the rights of nations.

Iran's official protest comes as the French National Assembly passed a resolution on Monday, condemning what it termed "crackdown on non-violent demonstrators."

West Seeking Securitization of Iran Case

TEHRAN (MNA) - Member of the Iranian Parliament National Security and Foreign Policy Committee said that the West by raising the issue of human rights parallel to the nuclear issue in the IAEA is seeking securitization of the Iranian case.

Referring to the Human Rights Council resolutions against the Islamic Republic of Iran, Ebrahim Rezaee said in an interview that the issue should be viewed from two aspects.

"First, such an action is in line with the policy of putting pressure on Iran initiated in the last two months," said Rezaee. "By adopting a pressure policy on Iran, the West intends to force Iranians to make concessions on the issues available on the nuclear talks table."

"Second, the intention of the West is the securitization of the Iran case. The West, by raising the issue of human rights parallel to the nuclear case in IAEA, is seeking securitization of Iran's case in different realms including increasing investing risk in Iran and harming the security of corridors," noted the Iranian

member of the Parliament.

Rezaee said, "The fact that 25 countries have voted for the resolution against Iran and 22 have voted against or declined to vote for it, indicates that firstly, the Americans have lost their authority in consensus building in international arenas, and secondly that the meeting lectures showed that many have come to realize the nature of US and western manners and are upset by their double standard approach on human rights."

He also pointed out that the experience of cooperating with the IAEA during the past years has indicated that these agencies do not possess a legal or technical approach of their own but completely follow western policies in their decisions.

Stressing the fact that Iran definitely will not allow the intervention of their chosen Fact-finding Committee, Rezaee clarified that Iran will constitute a national Fact-finding Committee for the recent events within the country and solve internal issues by resorting to internal capacities.

Tehran, Dhaka Eager to Cooperate On Pilgrimage



TEHRAN (MNA) – Iran and Bangladesh welcome the expansion of cooperation in Hajj and pilgrimage areas.

Bangladesh Ambassador to Iran Gousal Azam Sarker and Supreme Leader's representative in Hajj and pilgrimage affairs Hojjatoleslam Abdolfattah Navvab held a meeting in Tehran.

During the meeting, both sides exchanged views on Bangladeshi pilgrims who make pilgrimages to the holy shrines situated in Iran.

We call for good relations and unity between Islamic countries, Sarker said, adding that Iran and Bangladesh work together in various international and regional organizations, including the OIC.

There is an opportunity to develop tourism, including in the field of pilgrimage between the two states, he further noted.

Hojjatoleslam Abdolfattah Navvab, for his part, referred to the attempts of the enemies of Islam to sow discord among Muslims, stressing that the Islamic world, by acting in unison, can take effective steps towards comprehensive progress.

He pointed to the Arbæen pilgrimage procession ceremony as the biggest gathering of people in the world and as an example of Islamic rituals which can play a key role in uniting the Islamic world.

Iran, Qatar FMs Hold Phone Talks

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Foreign ministers of Iran and Qatar on Thursday held a phone conversation, discussing bilateral ties, among other things.

Iran's top diplomat Hossein Amirabdollahian praised Qatar for its successful hosting of the FIFA World Cup.

He also thanked his Qatari counterpart Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani for the Doha government's cooperation in order for the fans of the Iranian football national team attending Qatar for the international competitions.

The Qatari official, on his part, hailed the performance of the Iranian footballers and expressed gratitude towards Iran for its support to his country during the World Cup.

Iran's national team was eliminated from the FIFA World Cup 2022 after they lost to the US 0-1 on Nov. 29 in their third and final match of Group B in which they also played against Wales and England.

Iran defeated Wales 2-0 on November 25, but lost to England 2-6 in a match held four days earlier.

Iran Navy to Be Equipped With Super-Heavy Submarines

QOM (IRNA) - The Islamic Republic of Iran Navy is scheduled to be equipped with super-heavy submarines in the near future, an Iranian navy commander said.

Commodore Babak Baluch, the deputy chief of Iran's navy for coordination, made the remarks during the Friday Prayers sermon in Qom, noting that the Army of the Islamic Republic of Iran possesses an honorable and powerful position in respect of defending territorial waters and influencing regional and international developments.

The Islamic Republic of Iran Navy has played a key role in the sacred defense, the era of construction and prosperity of the Islamic Revolution, he said, adding that the navy succeeded in identifying and monitoring the enemy's military might and movements during the eight-year war between Iraq and Iran.

The Iranian navy did not allow the Baath regime to halt the export of Iranian oil through the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz, the commander noted.

Following the sacred defense, the navy has tried to maintain the existing systems and upgrade the equipment relying on up-to-date know-how to manufacture modern vessels, Baluch added.

In compliance with the guidelines of the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution, the naval forces have paid heed to the significance of the security of oil tankers and tried to safeguard the free movement in the Persian Gulf waterway along with enhancing maritime diplomacy in cooperation with the neighboring and regional countries, he mentioned.

According to the coordinator, important news on the achievements and the strategic might of the Islamic Republic of Iran Navy will be released in the near future.

Iran, Venezuela Oil Ministers Discuss Energy Cooperation

TEHRAN (MNA) –Oil Minister Javad Owji and his Venezuelan counterpart in a phone conversation on Thursday night discussed the Tehran-Caracas bilateral cooperation in the field of energy.

The latest developments in the global oil market were another topic discussed between Owji and the Venezuelan Minister of Industries and National Production and Minister of Petroleum Tareck El Aissami.

Several months ago, Iran and Venezuela signed different agreements and MoUs during Owji's visit to Caracas. The documents signed between the two countries include the fields of expansion and production in oil and gas fields, upgrade and modernization of refineries and utilization of refinery capacities, and training human resources and expertise in oil, gas, and petrochemical industries.

On October 16, Owji announced the launch of the first refinery built by Iran overseas called El Palito refinery in Venezuela.

Owji said that refinery has the capacity of refining 100,000 barrels of crude oil from the country's fields.

Judiciary Tries Damage Control Over Major Hacking Leak

TEHRAN (IP) - Despite repeated denials by IRGC's Fras news agency about a recent hack of its data servers, Iran's judiciary has started an investigation into damaging leaks.

Prosecutor General of Tehran Ali Alghasi-Mehr said that the probe into the cyberattack against Fars news, a cultural propaganda machine with close links to Iran's Revolutionary Guard, is because a significant database of personal information of journalists and employees has been leaked.

However, it seems that the investigation has been launched because the authorities are not sure what has been hacked and what database has been breached.

A new word has been coined to refer to the large amount of data leaked from the hack: Farsgate.

A 123-page document, a copy of which Iran International obtained, is among the material the hacktivist group Black Reward uncovered. The document which includes both hearsay and excerpts from domestic and foreign-based Persian media was made in one copy only for the eyes of the IRGC chief commander Hossein Salami. Earlier in the week, Black Reward also released some audio files from a meeting between Qasem Qoreyshi, the deputy commander of the paramilitary Basij and media representatives.

Black Reward announced on Friday, November 25, that it had attacked the database of Fars News Agency claiming that it deleted nearly 250 terabytes of data from all the servers and computers of the website and obtained confidential bulletins sent by the news agency to the office of the Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei. The report revealed a lot of recent orders by Khamenei about the ongoing protests that have engulfed the country since mid-September following the death of the 22-year-old Mahsa (Jina) Amini in the custody of morality police. Now, after several batches of information were leaked to the media, the authorities have started a damage control campaign to seize back the narrative, as most of the data prove that the Islamic Republic is frustrated and weary over its inability to end the protests.

Zionists Backers in No Position to Talk About Human Rights

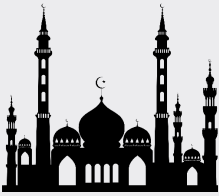
TEHRAN (MNA) – The Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesman said the backers of occupying, terrorist and racist Zionist regime of Israel are in no position to comment on human rights in other places.

"From an ethical perspective, the criminals against other nations and full backers of the terrorist, racist and occupying Zionist Israeli regime are in no position to talk about human rights situation in other places," Nasser Kanaani said in a post on his Twitter account on Thursday.

The Iranian spokesman added that human rights is a sacred concept and the Islamic Republic of Iran considers its promotion as an Islamic, humane, legal and moral necessity.

The violators of human rights should stop using human rights as a political means by looking at their disgraceful record of human rights.

The American government and many western regimes must be condemned for their shameful records of human rights violations.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)

■ Evening (Maghreb)

■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)

■ Tomorrow's Sunrise

11:54

17:10

05:29

06:58

52. He replied: "The knowledge of that is with my Lord, duly recorded: my Lord never errs, nor forgets,-

53. "He Who has, made for you the earth like a carpet spread out; has enabled you to go about therein by roads (and channels); and has sent down water from the sky." With it have We produced diverse pairs of plants each separate from the others. Surah 20, Ta-ha (52 - 53)

Iran, Kyrgyzstan Can Cooperate On Agro, Mining

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Ambassador of Kyrgyzstan to Tehran Turdakun Sydykov during his visit to South Khorasan Province met with business activists of the province and discussed ways of cooperation between the two countries especially in the fields of agriculture and mining.

In the meeting with business activists of the South Khorasan Province at Birjand Chamber of Commerce in Birjand, the capital of the province, Kyrgyz Ambassador Mr. Sydykov said that his embassy is working to attract Iranian tourists and traders as Kyrgyzstan has provided special facilities for visas for Iranian traders upon their arrivals and Iranian citizens can get their visas upon arrival at the Bishkek Airport or get the visas online.

He added that in order to ease the travel of citizens and traders of both countries, the Bishkek-Mashhad flight has been launched for two months a year.

He noted that Kyrgyzstan is a small country with 6 million population which is not attractive for foreign investors but it is a member of several regional or international economic organizations which can offer great opportunities to traders.

Sydykov further said that Kyrgyzstan has been a Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) since 2016 where Russia, Kazakhstan and Armenia with population over 180m are the other members. He added that in this union, transfer of goods, capitals, work force and services are allowed, it means, the produced goods in Kyrgyzstan can be sold in all EAEU countries without paying and tariff.

He then pointed to Kyrgyzstan's membership in the WTO and said that this helps Kyrgyzstan sell its goods to China with population over 1.5b as its organic agro products get popular year in year.

He then invited all Iranian economic activists and entrepreneurs to set up joint industrial companies in Kyrgyzstan for selling their final products in the EAEU and EU countries. He went on to say that the trend for foreign investors has been eased in Kyrgyzstan as the country has one forex and free market system and its value added tax is less than 12% and it is lower than other EAEU states.

Sydykov also said that Kyrgyzstan government does its best for supporting foreign



investments and its law for supporting the investors has been approved by the parliament. He reiterated that this law provides equal condition for foreign and Kyrgyz nationals for trade, and export of capital is allowed. He stressed that currently there is no hurdle in way of trade cooperation between the two countries and urged South Khorasan Province economic activists and officials to share required information with Kyrgyzstan for future cooperation.

He praised the province and said that during his visits to some active production units, he learned that the province has great potentials. He noted that the province is rich in the field of minerals and the province has great potentials for cooperation especially in the fields of processing industries, agriculture, technology, IT, and announced readiness of his country for cooperation.

He then pointed to the 30th anniversary of diplomatic relation between Iran and Kyrgyzstan and said that presidents of both friendly countries exchanged felicitation messages.

Sydykov went on to say that Kyrgyzstan is jointly with Iran to hold a trade complex, exhibition and market for exporting goods of Kyrgyzstan and expressed hope during this event economic activists of both countries would sign agreements for cooperation and investment.

He then invited South Khorasan traders to attend this event next year for reviewing investment opportunities like inaugurating joint production companies.

He also invited Iranian economic activists to attend a conference on investment opportunities in Afghanistan which will be held next week.

He reiterated that Iranian entrepreneurs were the first who entered Kyrgyzstan market and held some exhibitions in this country and some of them are still active successfully in Kyrgyzstan.

He also said that Kyrgyzstan has good potentials in the field of hydro energy as water is one of the cheapest energies and Kyrgyzstan is cooperating with Afghanistan and Pakistan in transfer of electricity.

Meanwhile in the meeting Head of Birjand Chamber of Commerce Mr. Mohsen Ehtesham announced readiness of the province to dispatch a trade delegation to Kyrgyzstan, adding that Iranian traders have had colorful presence in Kyrgyzstan especially in exporting some products like detergents.

UNESCO lists Iran's Yalda Night as Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity

TEHRAN (IFP) - "Yalda Night," also known as "Shab-e Chelleh," observed both in Iran and Afghanistan, goes on the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

Yalda, an ancient Persian tradition, is the last night of the autumn and the longest of the year in the Northern Hemisphere. It falls on December 31 this year.

Iranians and other people in historically Persian-influenced regions, including Azerbaijan Republic, Afghanistan and Tajikistan, traditionally turn the "longest and darkest night" of the year into a jubilant occasion.

They get together with friends and family to eat, drink and read poetry, especially by iconic Persian poet Hafez, and the Shahnameh by Ferdowsi, another Persian poet, until well after midnight.

They usually have fruits, especially pomegranates and watermelons, and nuts.

Defense Ministry Holds 14th Quran Competition For Boys of Its Personnel Families

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – The 14th Quran Competition was held by Defense Ministry for boys under and over 16-year-old of its staff's families on Thursday at Abdolazim Hassani Shrine.

Deputy head of the public relations of Ideological-Political Organization of the Defense Ministry Hojjatoleslam Mohammad Baqer Ebrahimi said that the competition was held in four classes of tarteel (one way of recitation), qira'at (reading), concepts, adhan and recitations of chapters of 1,3,5, 20 and whole Holy Quran.



He added that the preliminary round of the competition was held in September and October with participation of 1200 competitors and 300 were qualified for the final stage.

He noted that the Quran competition for the wives of staff and female staff of the ministry was held by Defense Industries Organization and girls' completion by Iran Electronics Industries on November 24-25.

He went on to say that the competition for boys under and above 16 was hosted by Etkā Organization and the competition for male staff of the ministry was held by the Social Welfare Organization yesterday.

Hojjatoleslam Ebrahimi noted that the competition was held online in the past two years because of the pandemic and this year the completions were held in-person. He reiterated that the organizers want to use new ideas for promoting the Holy Quran for having at least 10m Quran reciters.

In the boys' competition on Thursday, Head of Ideological-Political Organization of the ministry Hojjatoleslam Shirazi said that there is no book like the Holy Quran as the book is the words of Almighty God and if the societies implement recommendations of the book, then man will have no problem in the world.

He reiterated that all the participants in the completions of this edition will visit Mashhad and Imam Reza (AS) Shrine.

Tehran, Ashgabat To Boost Electricity Exchange

ASHGABAT (IP) - In a meeting with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan, the Minister of Energy of Iran emphasized the joint efforts of the two countries to increase the volume of the electricity exchange contract along with the development of cooperation in the field of power plant construction.

Iran's Minister of Energy, Ali Akbar Mehrabian, during his visit to Ashgabat on Wednesday, in a meeting with Turkmenistan's Foreign Minister Rashid Muradov, stated that one of the strategies of the Iran government is to develop relations with neighboring countries, including Turkmenistan.

He further explained: "The meeting of the presidents of the two countries last year had an important impact on the development of Iran-Turkmenistan relations."

Referring to the 62% growth in the economic relations between the two countries, Mehrabian added: "We are trying to increase the volume of electricity exchange contracts along with the development of cooperation in the field of power plant construction."

In this meeting, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan also considered the goal of advancing bilateral cooperation and developing relations and greater coordination between the two countries.

"The development of diplomatic relations between Ashgabat and Tehran is of great importance to the authorities of Turkmenistan," Muradov said.

Referring to the establishment of positive interaction between Iran and Turkmenistan in the field of water and energy, Rashid Muradov described the areas of cooperation between the two countries as broad and stated that the growth of economic relations between the two countries is significant and said that these relations could be increased to 5\$ five billion dollars.

In this meeting, the two sides also emphasized the development of relations, the extension of cooperation agreements, increased electricity exchange capacity, and exchanged views on cooperation in the water sector.

Yearly High in Daily Household, Business Gas Usage

TEHRAN (pressTV) - Iran's state gas company the NIGC says daily natural gas consumption by households and businesses in the country reached a new yearly peak of 475 million cubic meters (mcm) on November 29.

NIGC's head of Dispatching Control Center Gholamreza Kushki said that household and business gas usage in Iran would reach above 500 mcm per day on Saturday as a new cold spell is expected to hit the country.

Kushki said consumption in the sector is expected to rise to a record high of around 550 mcm per day next week.

Iran is the fourth largest consumer of natural gas in the world after the US, Russia and China. Statements by government authorities show that gas usage in the country of 85 million people is almost equivalent to that of the entire continental Europe in current figures.

Total gas consumption in Iran, including usage at power plants and industries, normally reaches more than 850 mcm per day during peak days in winters.

Iran's nominal gas production is around 1 billion cubic meters per day, according to NIGC figures.

Goods Transited From Western Iran Up Four-Fold

TEHRAN (MNA) - Commodities transited from Customs of Iran's Kermanshah have seen a four-fold hike during 8 months, according to a provincial customs official.

The head of the Kermanshah Customs Administration said that customs in the province have witnessed revenue of around 359.4 billion toman in the eight months of this year.

The figure accounts for an increase of 500 percent compared to the same period last year, the official further noted.

The amount of goods has grown by 400% in terms of value compared to the same period a year ago and has surged by 1,328% in terms of tonnage, he stated.

Some Foreign Firms Refusing to Sell Iran Drugs Due to U.S. Sanctions

TEHRAN (IFP) - The head of Iran's Food and Drug Administration says some foreign companies refuse to sell Tehran the required medicines under the pretext of the sanctions imposed on the country by the US.

Speaking at a meeting of representatives of international institutions in Tehran, Heydar Mohammadi praised the role of global institutions in facilitating Iran's purchases of medicines and powdered milk.

"Currently, over 98 percent of the drugs needed in the country are produced domestically. If the country's pharmaceutical industry did not have such ability, it was unclear what fate would await the country with all the unfair sanctions in place," he said.

The American sanctions on Iran do not directly target imports of medicines but the financial mechanisms to buy them.

Iranian authorities have repeatedly said Washington's strict bans on Tehran's foreign banking transactions have made it impossible for the country to access critically needed medicine and medical equipment over the past years.

In May 2022, Alena Douhan, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Negative Impact of Unilateral Coercive Measures on the Enjoyment of Human Rights, called for the removal of unilateral sanctions on Iran.

She said delivery of medicines and medical equipment to Iran was "severely undermined" by the effects of sanctions on finance, trade, shipping, insurance and over-compliance on the part of foreign businesses and suppliers.

Iran, JICA Implement Projects on Natural Resources

YASUJ (IP) - The prioritized projects in the first phase of the collaborative forest and pasture management field were implemented in Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad Province of Iran in cooperation with the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA).

Considering the importance of the Karun River, by selecting areas from five provinces of the main branches of the Karun River; (Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari, Kohgiluyeh and Boyer Ahmad, Isfahan, Lorestan and Khuzestan provinces), the collaborative forest and pasture management and comprehensive management project has been carried out with the cooperation of the JICA team from Japan and Iran's natural resources and watershed management organization.

JICA is the name of an independent international government organization in Japan that helps the Japanese government and developing countries in the field of development. The JICA office operates in three areas: Environment, natural disasters, and domestic industry development in Iran.

"Abdol Mirfardi," the deputy head of watershed management of the General Directorate of Natural Resources of Kohgiluyeh and Boyer Ahmad Province, on Thursday said: "Cultivation of medicinal plants" and "Provision of supplies and production of handicrafts" as prioritized projects in the first phase of implementation of The joint project with "JICA" in 2022.

Pope to Visit DR Congo, S. Sudan in Early 2023

VATICAN (Dispatches) - Pope Francis will visit the Democratic Republic of Congo and South Sudan early next year, a trip previously postponed due to problems with his knee, the Vatican said.

The 85-year-old pontiff will visit Kinshasa during his trip to DRC from January 31 to February 3.

He will then be joined by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, and the Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, Iain Greenshields, in heading to Juba in South Sudan from February 3-5.

It will be the pontiff's fifth visit to the African continent since being elected head of the worldwide Catholic church in 2013.



Chinese Papers Go Black in Mourning for Jiang Zemin

BEIJING (Dispatches) - Chinese newspapers turned their front pages black on Thursday and flags were put at half mast in mourning for the death of former president Jiang Zemin, whose death has prompted a wave of nostalgia for the more liberal times he oversaw.

Jiang died in his home city of Shanghai just after noon on Wednesday of leukaemia and multiple organ failure. He was 96. A date has yet to be set for his funeral.

The front page of the ruling Communist Party's official People's Daily devoted its whole front page to Jiang, and carried a large picture of him wearing his trademark "toad" glasses.



Biden, Macron Condemn Russia Invasion of Ukraine



WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - U.S. President Joe Biden and French President Emmanuel Macron presented a united front on Ukraine on Thursday at the White House, and Biden said he would talk to Russian President Vladimir Putin, if he was willing to end the invasion.

Biden has resisted talking to Putin since the Russian leader launched the invasion in February, while Macron has kept lines of communication with Putin open.

"I'm prepared, if he's willing to talk, (to) find out what he's willing to do," Biden told a joint news conference with Macron.

But Biden said he would only do this in consultation with his NATO allies and would do nothing that would harm Ukrainian interests. "I'm not going to do it on my own," he said.

Biden is playing host to Macron for the first state visit since the U.S. president took power in early 2021. Besides pledging support for Ukraine, the two leaders sought ways to ease some economic tensions in Oval Office tensions.

Biden pledged to Macron to make changes to U.S. legislation that passed the Congress this year that European nations fear will harm their economies. Bills aimed at boosting U.S. renewable energy and the semiconductor industry have "glitches" that can be addressed, Biden said.

"There are tweaks that we can make that can fundamentally make it easier for European countries to participate and or be on their own," said Biden, who said he and Macron had a long discussion about the topic.

Macron said it was important for the United States and its European allies to "re-synchronize" their approaches.

"France did not come here to ask for some kind of exception for its economy. We came to share how the consequences of this regulation impact us," he said.

In a joint statement issued after their Oval Office talks, the two leaders said they were committed to holding Russia to account "for widely documented atrocities and war crimes, committed both by its regular armed forces and by its proxies" in Ukraine.

They vowed to coordinate on their concerns regarding "China's challenge to the rules-based international order, including respect for human rights and to work together with China on important global issues like climate change."

Macron raised French and European concerns about subsidies in Biden's Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), a \$430 billion bill that offers massive subsidies for U.S.-made products and is aimed at addressing the climate crisis.

European leaders say the legislative package signed by Biden in August is unfair to non-American companies and would be a serious blow to their economies as Europe deals with the fallout from Russia's February invasion of Ukraine.

Meanwhile Thursday, NATO ministers met in Bucharest and pledged more aid to Ukraine to help against Russia's attacks on energy infrastructure as winter bites.

The alliance, of which the United States and France are founding members, was also discussing how to address challenges posed by China's military buildup and its cooperation with Russia, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said. Macron has said in the past that China should not be a focus for NATO.

The Macrons arrived in Washington on Tuesday for his second state visit to the United States since the French leader took office in 2017.

Biden, 80, and Macron, 44, have had many meetings at international gatherings but this was the most amount of time they have spent together. A glittering state dinner was planned, with 200 Maine lobsters flown in for the occasion.

Fifth Letter Bomb Defused in Spain

MADRID (Dispatches) - Bomb disposal experts defused a fifth letter bomb on Thursday as Spain stepped up security to confront a spate of explosive devices sent to high-profile targets, including the prime minister and the Ukrainian ambassador in Madrid.

Early indications suggest that all five of the packages were sent from within Spain, the country's Deputy Interior Minister told journalists.

Rafael Perez, the junior minister responsible for security, said the homemade devices were sent in brown packages containing a flammable powder and tripwire that would generate "sudden flames" rather than an explosion.

The packages were addressed to the heads of the institutions they were sent to.

Perez said one of the devices had detonated - injuring a security officer at the Ukrainian embassy in Madrid, three others were detonated by the security forces in controlled explosions and one had been kept intact for investigative purposes.

"It appears that they were all sent from within the country but we are basing this on early visual inspections without yet having an in-depth technical report," he said.

Perez said it did not yet appear necessary to convene the security committee that would evaluate stepping up Spain's terrorist threat level, which is already at the second-highest level following Islamist attacks around Europe in the past decade.

The Interior Ministry said in a statement that it had, however, ordered police to strengthen security around public buildings and particularly check postal deliveries carefully.

A source close to the investigation said that while the devices were homemade, "they were not something anyone could make", and investigators were now seeking to trace their contents to their origin.

Spain's High Court that specializes in terrorism has opened an investigation, a judicial source said.

News of the letter bombs broke on Wednesday lunchtime after police said a security official at the Ukrainian embassy in Madrid had been slightly injured after opening a package.



U.S. Preparing More Sanctions on North Korea

SEOUL (Dispatches) - The United States is working a new round of sanctions against North Korea, U.S. National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said, as Pyongyang forges ahead with banned missile development and signals a possible new nuclear test.

"We have a new set of sanctions measures coming forward as we speak," he told a conference in Seoul organized by the U.S.-based Center for Strategic and International Studies and the South Korean JoongAng media group.

Sullivan, who spoke via live video link, did not elaborate but said Washington was committed to using pressure and diplomacy to entice North Korea into giving up its nuclear arsenal.

The "North Star" of U.S. Joe Biden's North Korea policy is the denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula, and it remains steadfast in pursuing that goal while being flexible in working with partners on how to achieve it, he said.

He pointed to increased cooperation between the United States, South Korea, and Japan, which have increased joint military drills. The United States is also working on a more "visible" regional presence of its strategic assets, Sullivan said, referring to major weapons such as aircraft carriers and long-range bombers.

North Korea has said denuclearization is off the table, and accused the United States and its allies of pursuing "hostile" policies, including sanctions, that have left it no choice but to expand its military. Sullivan said Washington had no ill intent toward North Korea and is open to talks without preconditions.

"Pyongyang has rejected this sincere outreach," he said.

The last round of U.S. sanctions in October targeted two Singapore-registered companies and a Marshall Islands-registered firm that Washington said support Pyongyang's weapons programs and its military.

China Set to Loosen COVID Curbs

HONG KONG (Dispatches) - China is set to announce an easing of its COVID-19 quarantine protocols in the coming days and a reduction in mass testing, sources told Reuters, a marked shift in policy after anger over the world's toughest curbs fuelled widespread protests.

Cases nationwide remain near record highs but the changes come as some cities have been lifting their lockdowns in recent days, and a top official said the ability of the virus to cause disease was weakening.

Health authorities announcing the easing in their areas have not mentioned the protests - the biggest show of civil disobedience in China for years - which ranged from candle-lit vigils in Beijing to street clashes with police in Guangzhou.

The measures due to be unveiled include a reduction in the use of mass testing and regular nucleic acid tests as well as moves to allow positive cases and close contacts to isolate at home under certain conditions, the sources familiar with the matter said.

That is a far cry from earlier protocols that led to public frustrations as entire communities were locked down, sometimes for weeks, after even just one positive case.

The frustration boiled over last week in demonstrations of public defiance unprecedented in mainland China since President Xi Jinping took power in 2012. The unrest comes as the economy is set to enter a new era of much slower growth than seen in decades.

On Thursday night, Shanghai train commuters reported wirelessly receiving an unsolicited document onto their phones saying that life in China would only get better if there was a full lifting of lockdown and that Xi step down - an apparently new tactic amid a heavy police presence in some cities ahead of the weekend.

Less than 24 hours after violent protests in Guangzhou on Tuesday, authorities in at least seven districts of the sprawling manufacturing hub, said they were lifting temporary lockdowns. One district said it would allow schools, restaurants and businesses including cinemas to reopen.

Cities including Chongqing and Zhengzhou also announced easings.

The sense of official momentum towards a landmark shift built on Thursday as Vice Premier Sun Chunlan, who oversees COVID efforts, told a meeting of frontline experts that the Omicron variant was weakening in its ability to cause disease, allowing China to improve prevention efforts.

"After nearly three years fighting against the epidemic, our country's medical and healthcare system has withstood the test," she said in remarks published by the official Xinhua news agency.

"The vaccination rate of the entire population exceeds 90% and public health awareness and quality has been improved significantly," she said.



Russia Accuses U.S. of Direct Ukraine War Role

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov accused the United States and NATO of playing a direct and dangerous role in the Ukraine war and said Washington had turned Kyiv into an existential threat for Moscow which it could not ignore.

Russia's top diplomat, speaking on Thursday during his annual news conference in Moscow, also accused the United States and NATO of trying to ratchet up tensions in the South China Sea and of trying to subvert any regional bodies designed to promote dialogue, such as the OSCE in Europe and ASEAN in Asia.

And he defended a Russian campaign that has used air, drone and missile strikes to destroy Ukrainian infrastructure, attacks that Kyiv and the West have called war crimes.

"We disable energy facilities (in Ukraine) that allow you (the West) to pump lethal weapons into Ukraine to kill Russians," Lavrov said.

"So don't say that the U.S. and NATO are not participants in this war - you are directly participating. Including not only with the supply of weapons, but also with the training of personnel - you train the (Ukrainian) military on your territory."

Lavrov's stance, revisiting familiar Russian talking points, is rejected by the West which says Moscow, which invaded Ukraine on Feb. 24, is the belligerent one. Western powers say they are arming and training Kyiv to help it recapture its own land and that Ukraine does not have territorial designs on Russian land.

Russia, which dominated Ukraine before the Soviet Union broke up in 1991, calls its intervention in its neighbor "a special military operation" to safeguard Moscow's security.

Lavrov delivered his anti-Western tirade as Russia's invasion of Ukraine ground through its tenth month with fighting raging in the east and officials in parts of Ukraine still battling to restore electricity knocked out by Russian strikes.

Lavrov accused the West of trying to use the conflict to destroy Russia. "Talk of the West being interested in some kind of peaceful settlement does not impress us," he said.



Biobots Made From Roundworms

LONDON (Dispatches) - Tiny, automated robots are exploding with potential — they have the unique ability to conduct microscale tasks, such as targeted drug delivery, cell manipulation, perform diagnostic tests, and even, perhaps one day, non-invasive surgery.

In a recent study published in *Advanced Science*, a team from South Korea are turning to roundworms called *Caenorhabditis elegans* (*C. elegans*) for the next generation of biobot designs.

“*C. elegans* are small animals with an elongated body,” said Jeong Jae Wie, a professor in the Department of Organic and Nano Engineering at Hanyang University, Seoul, and one of the study’s corresponding authors. “They look like a snake or an earthworm reduced to a very small size, ≈ 1 mm in length at most [...] and have genes similar to humans.”

Biobots are not new, and a range of examples exist within the scientific literature, such as a cockroach implanted with an electrical circuit for applications in search and rescue, or cells capable of delivering a drug payload.

While an interesting concept, there is a need for living, miniature biobots that are controlled without battery packs, integrated electrical circuits, or sophisticated software. “Accordingly, we aimed at the development of guiding sub-millimeter-scale biobots through [...] environmental changes,” added Wie’s collaborator, Seung Goo Lee of the University of Ulsan.

In their study, the team tracked the slender, sinusoidal movements of *C. elegans* through a magnetically configured terrain, physically guiding them without the need for chemical or electrical stimuli. “We avoided chemical and electrical stimulations with the animals’ welfare in mind,” said Sun Min Kim from Inha University, and another of the study’s lead authors.

C. elegans have sensory neurons located in their head, body, and tail which help them respond to changes in their environment — the researchers call this their mechanosensing ability. “It is an essential ability among living creatures to protect themselves from danger by sensing the applied stress, strain, substrate rigidity, and adhesiveness of their surrounding environments,” wrote the team.

In a barrier-free environment, the movement of *C. elegans* is seemingly random, driven by a need to find prey or avoid toxins. In the past, this natural behavior could be modified by first paralyzing the worms' nerve cells with ivermectin followed by local irradiation of specific muscle cells to instigate crawling in a desired direction.

But in the current study, the team induced movement in the roundworms using micropillar arrays, which act as guiding barriers, made from magnetic particles mixed into an elastomer polymer resin. The resin can change its morphology based on the applied magnetic field and microbarriers were designed with spacings similar in size to the 40–60 μm body of adult *C. elegans*.

“For physical guidance of biobots using their mechanosensing ability, we needed to design an optimal geometry of the microtopography, such as interbarrier spacings, cross-sectional shape, width, length, and height of microbarriers,” said Wie. “These dimensions — with and without magnetic actuation — should be felt as sort of spatial confinements on the scale of the *C. elegans*.”

The *C. elegans* were indeed shown to perceive these changes in the microtopography of the microbarriers, changing their movement to navigate through their environment. Key to their on-demand movements is the regulation of interpillar spacings and pillar height according to magnetic flux density.

“Linear movement was guided by designing the microtopography of the microbarriers such that the spacings between them were similar to body width of *C. elegans* with no applied magnetic field,” explained Lee. “Subsequently, their ‘circumventing movement’ [to get around barriers in a maze] was induced with a microtopography designed using twisted and paired microbarriers and by applying a high magnetic flux density.”

Self-Driving Lorries Hit the Road In Sweden

STOCKHOLM (Dispatches) - Barrelling down a motorway south of Stockholm in a 40-tonne lorry and trailer, the driver keeps a careful eye on the road but, jarringly, no hands on the wheel.

Instead, the truck drives itself, and veteran driver Roger Nordqvist is at the ready only in case of unexpected problems.

Swedish truck maker Scania is not the only auto manufacturer developing autonomous vehicles, but it recently became the first in Europe to pilot them while delivering commercial goods.

“We take their goods from point A, drive them to point B, fully autonomously,” Peter Hafmar, head of autonomous solutions at Scania, tells AFP outside the company’s transport lab in Sodertalje, south of Stockholm.

In the pilot project, the self-driving truck is maneuvering a stretch of some 300 kilometres (186 miles) between Sodertälje and Jönköping in Sweden's south, delivering fast-food goods.

From the outside, the vehicle looks almost like any other lorry, save for a rail on the roof packed with cameras and two sensors resembling bug antennae on the sides.

Inside the cab, the wheel and seats are where you'd expect to find them, but small devices and screens dot the dashboard and a nest of wires run to the computer rack housed behind the passenger seat.

Engineer Goran Fjallid sits next to the safety driver in the passenger's seat, eyes glued to his laptop as it receives video from the truck's cameras and flickering text with information about what the vehicle is seeing.

A second screen shows a 3D-visualisation of the truck on the road and all nearby vehicles.

The lorry combines all the input from the various sensors with a GPS system, with the different technologies acting as back-ups for each other.

"If the road markings disappear for a while, then it will use the GPS and it stays perfectly in its lane," Fjallid explains.

"It drives better by itself than when you drive it manually," he adds.

But he acknowledges that a lot of trial and error has gone into getting the truck to that point.

They've had to tweak things like how the truck handles merging onto the motorway, and what to do when another car cuts in front of it.

Every time the truck does something unexpected, such as braking or slowing down for no apparent reason, Fjallid makes a note of the exact timing so the logs and data can be examined.

The lorry's sensors are also calibrated daily before hitting the road.

Hafmayr says there are still some hurdles to clear before driverless trucks — without safety drivers — become a common sight on roads, both in terms of technology and legislation.

They expect to have this ready by the end of the 2020s or the beginning of 2030s, Hafmar says.

The advent of self-driving trucks can be seen as a threat to the jobs of truck drivers — one of the world's most common professions.

But Hafmar insists autonomous vehicles are needed to address a global driver shortage.

And, he says, it will be a long time before artificial intelligence will be able to handle all aspects of logistics. Initially, self-driving lorries will likely be used for long-haul trips, but the last-mile distribution to

According to a report from the International Road Transport Union (IRU) in June, there were some

According to a report from the International Road Transport Union (IRU), in total, there were some 2.6 million unfilled positions for truck drivers around the world in 2021.



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Zambia on Track for Debt Restructuring Next Quarter

JOHANNESBURG (Dispatches) - Zambia is pushing hard to complete the restructuring of nearly \$15 billion of external debt in the first quarter of 2023 and is "in active engagement" with its largest bilateral creditor China, Zambia's finance minister said in an interview at the Reuters NEXT conference.

Zambia defaulted on its sovereign debt in 2020 and the current government, which took power last year, has been on a quest to restructure its loans and rebuild an economy ravaged by mismanagement under previous administrations and COVID-19.

In August, Zambia won International Monetary Fund (IMF) approval for \$1.3 billion, three-year loan programme to help it restructure debts which the government said stood at \$14.87 billion at the end of June 2022.



Eurozone Inflation Finally Eases, But Remains in Double Digits

LONDON (Dispatches) - Inflation in the eurozone has eased for the first time in more than a year, as fuel and utilities drifted down from painful highs, but the double-digit rate still hovers near a record that has robbed consumers of their spending power and led economists to predict a recession.

The consumer price index in the 19 countries that use the euro currency was down to 10% in November from 10.6% in October, the European Union statistics agency Eurostat said Wednesday. It marks the first decrease since June 2021.

The November reading raises hopes that sky-high price growth is now past its peak and bolstering, if not outright sealing the case for a slowdown in European Central Bank (ECB) rate hikes next month.

The overall picture is more nuanced, however, as energy prices accounted for the bulk of the slowdown while food price inflation, a key worry, continued to accelerate, the data showed.

Energy prices slipped to a 34.9% rate of increase, down from the astronomical 41.5% in October.

Out-of-control inflation is being fed by high energy prices caused by Russia cutting off natural gas over the war in Ukraine as well as bottlenecks in supplies of raw materials and parts and rebounding demand after the removal of COVID-19 pandemic restrictions.

Inflation has hit other economies but has taken a particularly high toll in Europe because of its dependence on Russian natural gas, which exporter Gazprom has reduced to a trickle. European leaders say it's energy warfare due to the continent's support for Ukraine.

With inflation running at more than five times its 2% target, the ECB has raised interest rates at its fastest pace on record this year and a string of hikes over the coming months is still likely as price growth will take years to tame.

But some policymakers have recently made the case for a 50-basis-point rise on Dec. 15 after back-to-back 75-basis-point moves, arguing that inflation is finally peaking and that the ECB has made enough progress to justify more modest steps.

"While we're far from out of the woods yet, it does look like the current economic environment could push the European Central Bank to a smaller 50 bp hike next month," ING economist Bert Colijn said. Market bets, which had been split between moves of 50 and 75 basis points, moved sharply on Wednesday's data and investors now see a 50 basis point move as the most likely outcome for December.

While the dip in headline prices, the eurozone's first in well over a year, strengthens the case for more measured ECB action next month, Wednesday's data could also fuel fears that inflation will prove more persistent than expected.

ECB President Christine Lagarde said Monday that she does not believe inflation has peaked after reaching record levels and that the bank isn't through raising interest rates to combat those price spikes.

When looking at what is driving inflation, "whether it is food and commodities at large, or whether it is energy, we do not see the components or the direction that would lead me to believe that we have reached peak inflation and that it is going to decline in short order," Lagarde told European lawmakers.

China Has Room for Further Recalibration of Zero-Covid Policy

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - China has room to adjust its strict zero-Covid policy, the IMF said, while underlining that the country's tough virus restrictions have been especially hard on its people.

Demonstrations against the measures have erupted across major Chinese cities in recent days, in a rare outpouring of public frustration not seen since pro-democracy rallies in 1989 were crushed with deadly force.

"Covid and Covid-related restrictions are hard on people... This has been the case everywhere, and even more so in China," an IMF spokesperson told AFP in an emailed statement.

Almost three years into the pandemic, China still deploys strict virus containment policies including snap lockdowns of entire neighborhoods and cities to stamp out flare-ups, with the measures taking a heavy toll on consumers and businesses.

While authorities have made policies more targeted, "there is scope for further gradual, safe recalibration," the Washington-based fund said.

The IMF spokesperson added that control measures after outbreaks, including major business hub Shanghai which was sealed off for months this year, weighed on domestic economic activity.

The zero-Covid policies have also had spillover effects outside China, interrupting regional and global supply chains.

With the country's economy only "partially recovered so far," an adjustment of its current policy could help growth pick up in 2023 and support the global economy at a difficult time, the IMF said.

On Tuesday, IMF managing director Kristalina Georgieva warned it might have to slash growth forecasts for China, saying this is a time of "high uncertainty."

In October, the IMF cut its projection for the country's economic growth to 3.2 percent this year.

Georgieva added on Tuesday that Beijing is looking into its zero-Covid approach "with a perspective to shift to more targeted response."

For now, China continues to see clashes between police and protesters as a wave of demonstrations sparked by Covid-lockdowns expand into demands for greater freedoms.



OPEC+ Switch to Virtual Meeting Signals Policy Roll-Over

LONDON (Dispatches) - The OPEC+ decision to hold its Dec. 4 meeting virtually signals little likelihood of a policy change, sources told Reuters, as the group assesses the impact of the looming Russian oil-price cap on the market.

A virtual meeting puts the focus on the pending European Union deal over the price cap on Russian oil, as well as a Dec. 5 deadline imposed by the bloc for a full embargo on purchases of Moscow's seaborne crude. "OPEC+ would rather sit on the bench at this time and assess the outcome of what happens on Monday," one source with direct knowledge of the matter told Reuters on Wednesday.

The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and allies including Russia, known as OPEC+, also meets as China's COVID-19 lockdowns weigh on demand and prices. Still, oil on Wednesday gained support from hopes of a Chinese demand recovery.

OPEC+ had been expected to convene in Vienna for only the second time since the pandemic.

OPEC also made a meeting of its own ministers planned for Saturday a virtual gathering, and OPEC+ cancelled a meeting of oil market experts, the Joint Technical Committee, that had been scheduled for Friday, sources said.

"It looks like a simple decision to roll over on Sunday," an OPEC+ delegate said. Some delegates who had travelled to Vienna for technical meetings this week were making plans to return home ahead of the weekend.

In October, OPEC+ agreed to cut output by 2 million barrels per day (bpd) equal to 2% of global supply, effective until Dec. 2023. The decision caused a clash with the West as the U.S. administration called the decision shortsighted.

EU Proposes Confiscating Russian Assets to Rebuild Ukraine

LONDON (Dispatches) - The European Union proposed a plan to confiscate Russian assets that have been frozen to punish Moscow for the invasion of Ukraine, exploring legal options with the EU's partners to compensate Kyiv for damage to the war-torn country.

Officials in the EU, the United States and other Western countries have debated for months how to legally seize Russian assets held abroad - both state and private - that are frozen by sanctions.

The problem is that in most EU member states, seizing frozen assets is only legally possible where there is a criminal conviction. Also, many assets of blacklisted Russian citizens are difficult to seize or even freeze because they are registered as belonging to family members or front people.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said that the 27-nation bloc wants to make Russia pay for the destruction it caused in neighboring Ukraine by using Russian assets frozen under sanctions.

She estimated the damage to Ukraine at 600 billion euros (\$622.12 billion).

"Russia and its oligarchs have to compensate Ukraine for the damage and cover the costs for rebuilding the country," von der Leyen argued. "We have the means to make Russia pay," she threatened.

Von der Leyen said 300 billion euros of the Russian central bank reserves has been immobilized, and that 19 billion euros of Russian oligarchs' money have been frozen.

She said that in the short term the EU and its partners could manage the funds and invest them. "We would then use the proceeds for Ukraine, and once the sanctions are lifted, these funds should be used so that Russia pays full compensation for the damages caused to Ukraine."

"We will work on an international agreement with our partners to make this possible. And together, we can find legal ways to get to it," she said.

She also said that the EU was proposing the establishment of a specialized court, backed by the United Nations, "to investigate and prosecute Russia's crime of aggression."

Russia says the freezing of its central bank's reserves and the assets of its citizens are illegal. It denies the invasion, which it calls a "special military operation" to disarm its neighbor, amounts to illegal aggression against Ukraine.

The EU said the lifting of the restrictions on Russian assets could be linked to the conclusion of a peace deal between Ukraine and Russia that would settle the question of damages reparation.

Turkish Economy Grows 3.9% In Q3 Despite Global Headwinds

ANKARA (Dispatches) - The Turkish economy lost some momentum but remained buoyant in the third quarter of this year, official data showed, as a global slowdown put a drag on exports, but the tourism sector remained strong.

The gross domestic product (GDP) expanded by 3.9% in the July-September period, the Turkish Statistical Institute (TurkStat) said. The reading means Turkey still had one of the best performances among G-20 countries.

In remarks after the data was released, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said it was essential that Turkey continued its growth at a time when recession fears are increasing.

"Hopefully, we will make a good start to 2023 by closing 2022 at a record level," Erdoğan told a meeting of the ruling Justice and Development (AK) Party.

He added that being among the top five countries in the G-20 with its GDP growth rate showed that Turkey is getting stronger.

Also elaborating on the data, Treasury and Finance Minister Nureddin Nebati said the nine-month GDP growth rate came in at 6.2%.

"We will be one of the strongest growing countries this year, closing the year with a growth rate of around 5%, as we predicted in the medium-term program," Nebati wrote on Twitter.

The data showed that GDP at current prices reached TL 4.26 trillion (\$241.5 billion) in the July-September period.

The value added increased by 21.6% in financial and insurance, 13.9% in information and communication, 12.6% in professional, administrative and support service activities, 7.6% in public administration, education, human health and social work activities, 6.9% in services, 4.9% in other service activities, 4.1% in real estate activities, 1.1% in agriculture, forestry and fishing activities and 0.3% in industry respectively, while the construction sector decreased by 14.1%.

The final consumption expenditures of households rose by 19.9%, and government final consumption was up by 8.5% in the third quarter on a yearly basis.

Over the same period, exports of goods and services soared by 12.6%, TurkStat added.

Meanwhile, the Turkstat data showed that GDP contracted 0.1% from the previous quarter on a seasonally and calendar-adjusted basis, marking the first contraction since the height of the COVID-19 pandemic in the second quarter of 2020.

Analysts predicted growth would slow in the second half due to a downward trend in domestic and foreign demand, led by a slowdown in Turkey's largest trade partners.

Croatia, Heading to Enter Euro Zone, Adopts First Budget in Euros



SARAJEVO (Dispatches) - Croatia, which will enter the euro zone on Jan. 1, passed its first budget in euros, targeting a general deficit of 2.3% of gross domestic product based on the projection of 0.7% economic growth for 2023.

The budget was adopted with 77 votes in favour and 50 against in the 151-seat parliament.

"This is Croatia's first budget denominated in the euro," Finance Minister Marko Primorac said as he presented the budgetary plans.

"The introduction of the euro will strengthen our economy, it will be an anchor of stability, will make us more resistant and protected from external shocks and crises and will contribute to the improvement of investment climate," Primorac told lawmakers.

In July, European Union finance ministers formally approved Croatia - an EU member state since 2013 - becoming the 20th member of the euro common currency at the start of 2023, setting the conversion rate for entry at one euro to 7.53450 Croatian kuna.

Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic said the budget aims to cushion the effects of the Ukrainian war-triggered economic crisis, maintain growth and preserve social stability.

The total budget revenue is forecast at 24.9 billion euros (\$25.86 billion), up 9% from this year and fuelled primarily by direct and indirect taxes projected at 13.3 billion euros.

Expenditures are set at 26.7 billion euros, up 2.1 billion euros from this year, due to an increase in government social and development programmes.

Economic growth of 5.7% expected this year is forecast to drop to 0.7% in 2023, while public debt is targeted to be cut to 67.9% of GDP from 70.2% this year. Inflation, which is projected at 10.4% this year, is seen dropping to 5.7% in 2023.

Opposition lawmakers have proposed 430 amendments to the budget but the government accepted only 10.

U.S. Begged for Release of Vessels Seized in Red Sea

TEHRAN (IRNA) - The American officials begged Iran to release their vessels, which were confiscated in the Red Sea, and they have never dared to enter the region, an Iranian navy commander revealed.

Rear Admiral Shahram Irani, the commander of the Islamic Republic of Iran Navy, said before the Friday Prayers sermon in Tehran, adding that two squadrons from Iran are patrolling Malaga Strait and Bab al-Mandab Strait to hinder the enemies from hatching plots against the interests of

the Iranians. The Islamic Republic of Iran Navy conducts in line with international regulations and based on a professional attitude, but if it sees that the enemies utilize unjustified equipment, the Iranian naval force with react decisively, he warned. Pointing to the seizure of American vessels in the Red Sea following the Iranian forces made use of the Jamaran destroyer, Irani said that the American officials begged for the release of the vessels, but the Iranian forces threw away their boats into the water, so they have not dared to return to the region up to now.



Europe Wary of Turkish Hub to Hide Gas “Made in Moscow”

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - President Vladimir Putin’s plan to make Turkey a hub for Russian gas in theory could allow Moscow to mask its exports with fuel from other sources, but that might not be enough to persuade Europeans to buy, analysts and sources said.

Russia supplied 40% of the European Union gas market until Moscow on Feb. 24 sent tens of thousands of troops into Ukraine in what it calls a “special military operation”.

Since then, the West has introduced sweeping sanctions, including on Russian oil and gas, cut its purchases of the Russia-sourced fuels and sought alternatives.

After explosions - whose cause is under investigation - damaged the Nord Stream Russian gas pipeline system to Europe under the Baltic Sea, Putin in October proposed setting up a gas hub in Turkey, building on a southern route for exports.

Without being specific, Putin has said a hub could be set up in Turkey relatively quickly, and predicted customers in Europe would want to sign contracts.

So far there have been no public commitments to do so, and analysts say investment as well as time would be needed.

“Does Europe need the project, given the determination of the EU countries to forego Russian gas in the nearest future?” asked Alexei Gromov of the Moscow-based Institute for Energy and Finance Foundation.

He also said it would be impossible to reconfigure gas flows within the European Union, as there are no existing links that would connect to the proposed hub from northwestern Europe, which used to get gas via Nord Stream 1.

Gas and pipeline capacity is however available.

Russia’s exports to Europe have fallen by 43.4% this year and the TurkStream pipeline to Turkey is running well below its 31.5 billion cubic meters (bcm) of annual capacity.

Zongqiang Luo, senior analyst at Rystad Energy, estimated about 60% of pipeline capacity was unused following exports this year of about 10.6 bcm gas by Nov. 21.

Rystad’s Luo estimated it would take at least three to four years to build the costly new infrastructure needed.

“Even if a new pipeline could be built, then who is going to buy that gas?” he asked. Others thought buyers would be found.

A source in Russia’s pipeline gas exporting monopoly Gazprom said it is believed the hub would facilitate sales.

“That will not be Russian gas, but gas from the hub,” said the source, who did not want to be named due to the sensitivity of the matter.

A trading source in Europe said China, which overtook Japan to become the world’s top importer of liquefied natural gas (LNG) in 2021, is already re-selling Russian LNG, which has not been labelled as “made in Moscow”.

He said it was possible buyers in southern and eastern Europe may not care where the LNG originated.

Noting Europe has not imposed an embargo on Russian gas, in contrast to oil, Alexander Gryaznov, director at S&P Global Ratings, said Europe could be willing to buy from Moscow via mediators.

“Europe is unlikely to want to enter into direct contracts with the Russian Federation, and buying free volumes on the spot market in Turkey will be politically acceptable,” he said, while adding time and money would be needed to set up the hub.

Alexei Grivach from the Moscow-based National Energy Security Fund said the hub presented trading opportunities.

“If the hub started to work, huge possibilities would open up for all sorts of swap operations,” he said.



Putin and Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan have forged close relations in recent years despite a chequered past marred by the murder of Russian ambassador Andrei Karlov in Ankara in 2016 and Turkey’s downing of a Russian jet on a mission to Syria a year earlier.

Turkey has said it would be also possible to include Trans Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline (TANAP), which carries Azeri natural gas to the Turkish border, into the proposed hub.

Turkey and Azerbaijan agreed last month to double the capacity of the pipeline from the current 16 bcm “in the short term”, and on Nov. 23 the heads of Russia’s Gazprom and Azeri state energy company Socar, Alexei Miller and Rovshan Najaf, met in Moscow.

Neither Gazprom nor Socar provided details of the meeting but this month, Russia agreed to supply Azerbaijan with 1 bcm of gas under a new short-term contract.

The deal “raised some concerns from the market” about a possible gas swap deal with Russia to export more gas to Europe, said Luo.

With the Turkish gas hub proposal, Russia has returned to a long-standing idea to add two lines to the existing TurkStream pipeline to double its annual capacity to 63 bcm.

That corresponds exactly to the combined volumes Russia sold via various routes to Austria, Bulgaria, Hungary, Italy, Serbia, Slovenia and Turkey in 2020, according to Gazprom data.

Russia supplies pipeline gas to Europe mainly via Ukraine at a rate of over 40 million cubic metres per day, less than half the amount it used to sell to the European Union. It also delivers gas to southern end eastern Europe, including Hungary, via the TurkStream.

The existing TurkStream cost \$3.2 billion and the never-launched Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline via the Baltic Sea required another \$11 billion shared between Gazprom and its western partners.

Neither Gazprom, nor the Kremlin provided a cost estimate for the Turkish hub idea. Dmitry Peskov, Kremlin’s spokesman, declined to comment this week when asked by Reuters on a daily conference call how Azeri gas could be used in the hub.

Gazprom and Socar did not reply to Reuters requests for a comment.

France Sees Hottest Year On Record in 2022

PARIS (Dispatches) - France this year experienced the hottest year since records began, the country’s national weather service said, as global warming stokes temperatures globally.

A cascade of extreme weather exacerbated by climate change devastated communities across the globe this year, including sweltering heat and drought across Europe that wilted crops, drove forest fires and saw major rivers shrink to a trickle.

France saw temperatures surge repeatedly in successive heatwaves from May and into October, accompanied by extreme events like wildfires in areas like north-western Brittany, and damaging marine heat waves in the Mediterranean.

“All the months of the year have been warmer than normal, except January and April,” said Meteo France in a statement.

It estimated the average temperature for the year as a whole would be between 14.2 degrees Celsius and 14.6C degrees depending on December temperatures. That is a significant increase from the previous record of 14.07C seen in 2020, and the highest since records began in 1990.

Annual rainfall is expected to be as much as 25 percent lower than normal, with precipitation in July 85 percent below average. The driest year in France was 1989, which saw a 25 percent rainfall deficit.

Globally, if projections for the rest of 2022 hold, the United Nations says that each of the last eight years will be hotter than any year prior to 2015.

Earth has warmed more than 1.1 degrees Celsius since the late 19th century, with roughly half of that increase occurring in the past 30 years, the World Meteorological Organization said in a report in November.

Greenhouse gases accounting for more than 95 percent of warming are all at record levels, the WMO’s annual State of the Global Climate found.

In the European Alps, glacier melt records have been shattered in 2022, with average thickness losses of between three and over four metres (between 9.8 and over 13 feet), the most ever recorded.

Switzerland has lost more than a third of its glacier volume since 2001.

Germany Seeks to Boost Immigration of Skilled Workers

BERLIN (Dispatches) - The German government announced that it plans to ease entry rules for immigrants from outside the European Union with a reform of immigration law, in order to meet Germany’s demand for skilled workers.

Experts say Europe’s biggest economy needs about 400,000 skilled immigrants each year as the country’s ageing workforce shrinks, particularly to fill vacancies in the health care, IT and construction sectors.

Lack of workers endangers Germany’s ambitious plans to boost the roll-out of renewable energy, Economy Minister Robert Habeck said.

“We’ve known for years that we’re going to have a demographic problem but nothing was done about it,” he told reporters in Berlin.

Cabinet agreed on a draft proposal that would help would-be immigrants from outside the EU get their skills and qualifications recognized and lower bureaucratic hurdles – such as language requirements – for some sectors such as IT.

Labor Minister Hubertus Heil said that apart from providing more language training abroad, Germany would also have to do more to highlight what it has to offer if it wants to compete with other countries for skilled workers.

“We’ve got a lot to offer, we’ve got great jobs and we need to strengthen that (image) abroad,” he said, adding that it is in Germany’s interest to present itself as a cosmopolitan society that’s welcoming to immigrants.

The proposal needs to be debated in parliament before lawmakers pass a bill reforming immigration law.

Brazilian Amazon Deforestation Falls

RIO DE JANEIRO (Dispatches) - Deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon destroyed an area bigger than Qatar in the 12 months through July, according to official figures released, which showed a decline from the year before -- but a sharp increase overall under outgoing President Jair Bolsonaro.

In the latest grim news on the world’s biggest rainforest, satellite monitoring showed 11,568 square kilometers (4,466 square miles) of forest cover was destroyed in the Brazilian Amazon from August 2021 to July 2022, according to national space agency INPE’s annual deforestation tracking program, PRODES.

The figure was a decrease of 11.3 percent from the year before, when INPE detected 13,038 square kilometers of deforestation -- a 15-year high.

But it closed out four years of what environmentalists call disastrous management of the Amazon under the far-right Bolsonaro, whose successor, veteran leftist Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, has vowed to work toward zero deforestation when he takes office on January 1.

Under agribusiness ally Bolsonaro, average annual deforestation rose by 59.5 percent from the previous four years, and by 75.5 percent from the previous decade, according to INPE figures.

“The Bolsonaro government was a forest-destroying machine... The only good news is that it’s about to end,” said Marcio Astrini, executive secretary of the Climate

Observatory, a coalition of environmental groups.

“The devastation remains out of control. Jair Bolsonaro will hand his successor a filthy legacy of surging deforestation and an Amazon in flames,” he said in a statement, urging ex-president Lula (2003-2010) -- who has faced criticism over his own environmental record -- to show “zero tolerance” for environmental crimes.

Experts say the vast majority of the clear-cutting and fires erasing the Amazon is aimed at turning rainforest into farmland -- especially for cattle ranches in Brazil, the world’s top beef exporter.

Iran to Ease Ban...

FROM PAGE 1

The bans are meant to prevent the flow of hard currency out of Iran at a time the country faces restrictions on its oil exports and banking ties with the rest of world because of American sanctions.

However, the Iranian telecoms ministry has continued registering all Apple products on the country’s mobile network except for latest model iPhone 14.

Iranian authorities have endorsed the ban on imports and registration of “luxury products” manufactured by US companies at a time the country and its people are struggling economically because of the US sanctions.

Enemies Committed...

FROM PAGE 1

The project to transfer water from Azad Dam to the Sanandaj plant is one of the government’s major urban water supply projects, completed in 20 months.

The project’s first phase kicked off in 2020 and was implemented in November of this year.

With the inauguration studious Minister of Energy, the Governor General of Kurdistan, the representative of the Leader in Kurdistan, the follow-up of parliament members, contractors, and has ended, and we are happy that the dear people of Sanandaj can benefit from clean and fresh water.

Energy Minister Ali Akbar Mehrabian called water the key to the development of Kurdistan Province.

Speaking at the inauguration ceremony of the Sanandaj Water Supply Project, Ali Akbar Mehrabian said that in Iran’s Kurdistan Province, there are many exclusive capacities and potentials, including Agriculture, mining, gardening, natural resources, and different industries.

Despite the mountainous conditions, difficulties in transferring water from the Azad Dam to the plant, and the complex process of passing the steel pipeline through Heart of the Rocks, the transfer project ended with a favorable result.

The route of the water supply project from the water resources of Kurdistan province to the city of Sanandaj is about 60 km, among which 27 km of this route is branched with steel pipes with diameters of 1400 and 1200 mm.

The operationalization of this water supply network, for which 850 billion Tomans have been spent, will provide the possibility of transferring 57 million cubic meters of water to the Sanandaj water treatment plant for the population of 700,000 people in the year 1425(2046).

Azad Dam is located 60 km west of Sanandaj, and its reservoir volume is 300 million cubic meters.

Qeshlaq Dam, 12 km north of Sanandaj, has suffered from nutrition for several years, and this city’s drinking water has an unpleasant taste and smell.

Drugs for Chemical...

FROM PAGE 1

...asking Mr. Arias to continue his humanitarian efforts in this regard. The deputy foreign minister for legal and international affairs is in Holland to attend the 27th Conference of the Chemical Weapons NPT member countries.

He had earlier in his address at that conference said, “Iran, as the greatest victim of systematic usage of the chemical weapons in contemporary history, neither forgives nor forgets the users of those weapons and their providers for him.”

Iran Thwarted Hybrid...

FROM PAGE 1

An official report by Iran’s Legal Medicine Organization attributed Amini’s death to underlying health issues rather than blows to the head or other vital body organs as misreported by the Western media.

“The enemy has been defeated both in the face-to-face and hybrid wars and both Israelis and Americans have confessed to this,” Soleimani asserted, adding that these incidents are the continuation of US efforts to restore its dominance over Iran which it lost 44 years ago with the victory of the Islamic Revolution.

The Iranian nation has always shown “vigilance” in the face of such American-Israeli plots in the past four decades, he stressed.

The remarks came days after Iran’s Intelligence Ministry and the Intelligence Organization of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) issued a joint statement on October 28, pointing to the major role of foreign spy agencies, especially the CIA, in orchestrating the violent riots in Iran.

“Intelligence evidence shows that the CIA had devised an extensive plan with the cooperation of allied spy services and reactionary proxies before the start of the unrest to initiate a nationwide chaos with the aim of committing crimes against the great Iranian nation and the country’s territorial integrity as well as paving the ground for increasing foreign pressures,” reads part of the statement.

According to available information, the statement maintained, “the CIA played the main role” while closely cooperating with the spy services of the UK, the Israeli regime, and Saudi Arabia.

The intelligence bodies also said that enemies planned and implemented a “global media war” against Iran, using TV channels and social media.

Iran Gas Exports...

FROM PAGE 1

Reports have suggested Iran could tap Russian gas supplies under swap or purchase arrangements to boost its gas exports to Turkey.

That comes as Russia has been looking for new customers for its gas since earlier this year when its exports to Europe declined because of the military conflict in Ukraine.

England Defender White Leaves World Cup

DOHA (Dispatches) - Defender Ben White has left the England camp and gone home for personal reasons, the FA said in a statement on Wednesday, adding that he was not expected to return to the tournament.

White, normally a central defender but who has been operating as right back for Premier League table-topping Arsenal this season, was something of a surprise inclusion in the squad.

He missed training two days ago, with the FA saying he was ill.

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Pele in Stable Condition After Admission to Hospital

SAO PAULO (Dispatches) - Brazilian football legend Pele is in a stable condition after he was admitted to hospital on Tuesday to re-evaluate his cancer treatment, the hospital said in a statement.

"After medical evaluation, the patient was taken to a common room, with no need for admission in a semi-intensive care unit," the Albert Einstein Hospital in Sao Paulo said.

Pele's daughter Kely Nascimento had said on Instagram that there was "no surprise or emergency" regarding Pele's condition.

Suns' Booker Drops 51 on Bulls

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Devin Booker scored a season-high 51 points before resting in the fourth quarter as the Phoenix Suns extended their winning streak to six games with a 132-113 victory over the visiting Chicago Bulls.

Deandre Ayton scored a season-high 30 points and grabbed 14 rebounds for Phoenix, which led wire-to-wire and improved to 12-1 at home. Landry Shamet and Damion Lee each scored 12 points.

Chicago fell to 2-2 on its six-game road trip while shooting 4 of 25 from 3-point range. DeMar DeRozan scored 29 points to lead the Bulls, while Zach LaVine added 21 points and seven assists.

Booker, who scored 44 points on Monday in Phoenix's 122-117 victory over the Sacramento Kings, had 25 points on 10-of-14 shooting in the first half to help give Phoenix a 64-43 lead at the break.

Celtics 134, Heat 121

Jayson Tatum scored a season-high 49 points and Boston extended its winning streak to five games while continuing Miami's road woes.

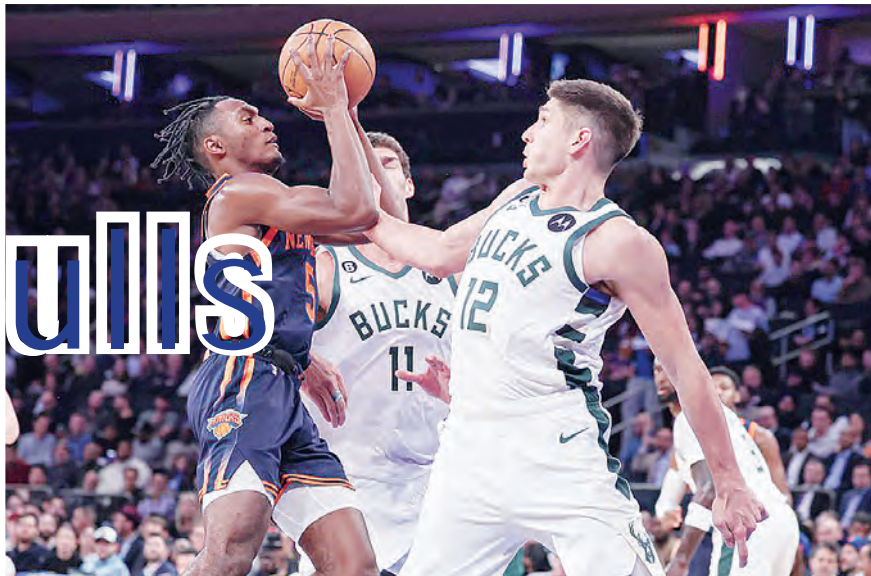
The Celtics are unbeaten in their last 10 home games and 11-1 at home while the Heat are now 2-8 on the road. Tatum made eight of his 12 3-point attempts and also had a game-high 11 rebounds. Jaylen Brown added 26 points for the Celtics, and Malcolm Brogdon finished with 21.

All five Miami starters scored in double figures. Bam Adebayo and Max Strus led the way with 23 points apiece. Tyler Herro finished with 22, Kyle Lowry tossed in 14 and Caleb Martin had 10.

Bucks 109, Knicks 103

Grayson Allen hit the tiebreaking 3-pointer with 30.9 seconds left as Milwaukee outlasted host New York for its third straight win.

Bucks star Giannis Antetokounmpo posted 37 points and 13 rebounds and scored 14 points in the fourth quarter before fouling out



with one minute left. Jrue Holiday added 22 points. Mitchell Robinson finished with 15 points and 20 rebounds, one board shy of his career-high for the Knicks, who have lost three of four. Their total margin of defeat in those losses -- against the contending Bucks, Portland Trail Blazers and Memphis Grizzlies -- is 13 points. RJ Barrett chipped in 26 points for New York.

Timberwolves 109, Grizzlies 101

Anthony Edwards recorded 29 points, five assists, five steals and three blocks to fuel Minnesota past Memphis in Minneapolis.

Edwards, who made 10 of 18 shots from the floor, authored his second strong performance against the Grizzlies this season. He collected 28 points, six rebounds and six assists in Minnesota's 114-103 win over at Memphis on Nov. 11.

Memphis' Ja Morant collected 24 points and six assists to offset seven turnovers before being ejected for jawing with an official with 1:22 to play in the fourth quarter.

Jazz 125, Clippers 112

Jordan Clarkson scored a season-high 33 points to help Utah snap a five-game losing streak by beating Los Angeles in Salt Lake City.

Lauri Markkanen added 23 points and nine rebounds, Collin Sexton chipped in 21 points, six rebounds and six assists and Jarred Vanderbilt compiled 14 points and 12 rebounds for the Jazz.

Real, Barca to Skip Urgent La Liga Meeting in Dubai

MADRID (Dispatches) - Real Madrid and Barcelona will not send club representatives to attend La Liga's "urgent" Extraordinary General Assembly meeting scheduled to take place in Dubai next week, the Spanish giants said.

Real said in a statement they were notified of the EGM — to be held "as a matter of urgency" on Dec. 7 in Dubai — only last Friday. The meeting, Real added, was called to address important modifications to La Liga's statutes and internal regulations.

Real said they were also told La Liga would provide club representatives and companions with appropriate transportation and accommodation to facilitate attendance at the meeting.

"We consider the call to be illegal, since the clubs are being summoned more than 5,000 kilometres away from La Liga's headquarters," Real said.

"It is totally unjustifiable to address in this improvised and urgent manner, without appropriate debate and calm analysis, relevant modifications to La Liga's internal regulations."

La Liga rejected Real's suggestions, saying the meeting was called following internal regulations and added the presence of club representatives in Dubai was voluntary, with remote participation systems in place.

"Neither the directly applicable positive regulations nor the internal regulations of La Liga limit the possibility of the general assembly holding its meetings at any location as long as this is indicated in the notice," a La Liga statement said.

"... It's not the first time that the assembly is held in places other than the registered office of La Liga."

It added that travelling to Dubai to take advantage of an international event in the region of the importance of a World Cup was "absolutely justified".

Real said it was "totally inappropriate" and "deeply incoherent" for La Liga to commit to taking over 100 people to the United Arab Emirates, when it could be held at its headquarters without incurring extraordinary costs.

Bale Vows to Play for Wales After World Cup Exit



Wales ended the tournament on one point, finishing bottom of Group B following a 1-1 draw with the United States in their opening game and a disappointing 2-0 defeat by Iran in the second match.

Bale was anonymous in attack in the first half against England before coach Rob Page had to substitute him at the break due to a hamstring issue.

AL RAYYAN (Dispatches) - Wales captain Gareth Bale vowed to keep playing for the national team amid doubts over his future after they were knocked out of the World Cup in the group stage with a 3-0 defeat by England in the so-called "Battle of Britain".

Returning to the World Cup after 64 years, Wales ended the tournament on one point, finishing bottom of Group B following a 1-1 draw with the United States in their opening game and a disappointing 2-0 defeat by Iran in the second match.

"I'll keep going as long as I can and as long as I'm wanted," Bale, Wales' most-capped player, told the BBC.

"It's a difficult moment now obviously but we go again.

"We have a (European Championship) qualifying campaign starting now again in March and we have a few months to get away from international football now which is obviously disappointing, we'd love to stay longer."

Page said Bale gave an "excellent" performance before the break.

"Bale is fine and he wants the best for the team," Page told reporters. "He knew if he went back on the field he would have been around 70 per cent (fit). When you play against a team like England, you can't carry anybody.

"He put in a big shift ... I don't think it will be the last time you see him in a Wales jersey."

Japan Stun Spain But Both Reach World Cup Last 16

DOHA (Dispatches) - Spain staggered through to the World Cup last 16 despite a 2-1 defeat by Japan, who remarkably won Group E on a rollercoaster night which saw four-time champions Germany eliminated.

Japan secured another incredible triumph after beating Germany in their opening game, with their progression from the "group of death" one of the greatest achievements in the country's footballing history.

For a few heart-stopping minutes Spain were poised to head out when Costa Rica were leading in the other game, but the 2010 champions squeezed through after Germany did them a favour by coming back to beat Los Ticos.

Spain and Germany ended on four points each, but La Roja progressed on goal difference.

Alvaro Morata sent Spain ahead early on with a towering header, but Japan dramatically struck back at the start of the second half.

Ritsu Doan and Ao Tanaka's goals saw them mount a sensational comeback, just as they did against Germany.

Tanaka's goal was highly controversial after the officials relied on VAR to decide Kaoru Mitoma had kept the ball in play by a hair's breadth to set him up.

Spain struggled to create chances against a staunch Japanese defense in the final stages, with the Asian side aware that conceding another goal would see them eliminated.

Japanese players collapsed at full-time in celebration, exhausted and elated, while the substitutes raced on to celebrate.

Spain face Morocco in the last 16, while Japan play Croatia.

Both sides made five changes, with Luis Enrique bringing in Morata to lead the line, and handing Alejandro Balde and Nico Williams their full debuts.



Maradona Would Be Super Happy

DOHA (Dispatches) - Lionel Messi believes Diego Maradona would be "super happy" after he led Argentina into the World Cup last 16 on Wednesday thanks to a 2-0 win over Poland.

Messi became his country's most capped player at the tournament with a 22nd appearance surpassing his legendary compatriot who died just over two years ago.

"I learned it recently, I didn't know it. It's a pleasure to be able to continue to achieve these kinds of records. I think Diego would be super happy for me, because he always showed me a lot of affection, he was always happy when things went well for me," said Messi.

Despite missing a penalty — his 39th career failure from the spot — the Argentina captain said he was "happy" with this "big match".

"We achieved our first objective, which was to get out of the group after starting the way we did (a shock 2-1 loss against Saudi Arabia)," said Messi.

"I was really frustrated to have missed the penalty, because I knew that a goal could change the whole match, that it makes you play in a different way. But I think that from the penalty I missed, the team came out stronger."

Messi, who still needs a World Cup winner's medal to cement his legacy as one of the sport's greatest players, believes Argentina are moving up through the gears at precisely the right time.

"After the first goal, everything went our way. We started doing again what we had been trying to do since the start of the World Cup, but which we hadn't been able to achieve for various reasons.

"Having been able to do it today, it gives us confidence for the future."

Next up for Argentina is a last-16 clash against Australia on Saturday.

