

Over 90 Iranian and Foreign Companies Will Participate in the 11th Iran International Airshow and Aerospace Exhibition to Be Held on 13-16 December 2022, In the Persian Gulf Kish Island

# IRAN NEWS

Majlis Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf attended a Ceremony in Shiraz to Commemorate the Occasion of the 40th Day After the Martyrdom of the People in the Shiraz Terrorist Attack

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**2 DOMESTIC**

Already Free Iranian People Not to Be Fooled By West's Claims



> SEE PAGE 2

**3 DOMESTIC**

Iran, Tajikistan Talk On Oil Cooperation



> SEE PAGE 3

**4 INTERNATIONAL**

Saudi Lays on Lavish Welcome as China's Xi Heralds New Era in Relations



> SEE PAGE 4

**8 SPORTS**

Celtics Rip Suns In NBA Showdown



> SEE PAGE 8

## Several Zionist Regime's Spies Arrested

TEHRAN (MNA) – Brigadier General Ali Fadavi, IRGC deputy commander-in-chief, said Thursday that a lot of spies linked with the Israeli regime's intelligence services have been detained in Iran and face prosecution.

"The Zionists had very good relations with former Iranian government before the victory of the Islamic Revolution, ...They have made many attempts to have spies in Iran after the revolution. But we have full intelligence control over their and also American evil activities. This process is permanent, considering intelligence superiority we have, we have captured a lot of Zionists-linked spies and so will do future," Brigadier General Ali Fadavi, IRGC deputy commander-in-chief said in a recent interview with Iranian media.

General Fadavi said that the arrested spies will be punished according to their actions.

He made the remarks in reference to the recent foreign-backed riots in Iran which he blamed the Western countries led by the United States regime for fomenting them.

See Page 7

## UN to Examine Allegations on Iran Drone Delivery to Russia

TEHRAN (MNA) - The United Nations is examining "available information" about accusations that Iran supplied Russia with drones, the UN Secretary-General Antonino Guterres said as he faces Western presses to send experts to Ukraine.

Russia argues that there is no mandate for Guterres to send UN experts to Ukraine to investigate the origin of the drones. Iran strongly denies supplying the drones to Moscow, and Russia has denied its forces used Iranian drones to attack Ukraine, Reuters reported.

In the nine-month-old conflict, Ukraine has accused Russia of using drones - or unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) - to hit energy infrastructure and other targets.

Britain, France, Germany, the United States and Ukraine say the supply of Iranian-made drones to Russia violates a 2015 UN Security Council resolution enshrining the Iran nuclear deal. Guterres reports twice a year to the council on implementation.

In a report to the Security Council dated Tuesday, seen by Reuters, Guterres said of the drone accusations, "The Secretariat is examining the available information. Any findings will be reported to the Security Council, as appropriate, in due course."

See Page 7

## West Urged to Stop Hosting Anti-Iran Terrorists



TEHRAN (PressTV) - The Foreign Ministry advises the West to rather stop hosting anti-Iran terrorists instead of portraying the Islamic Republic's response to recent Western-backed riots inside the country in a bad light.

The ministry made the comments in a tweet thread on Thursday in reaction to back-to-back aggressive and interventionist remarks, which Western officials have been posting on the social media platform against the Islamic Republic and its lawful answer to the riots.

"In countering riots, Iran's shown utmost restraint & - unlike many Western regimes who smear & violently crackdown even the peaceful protesters - Iran has employed proportionate & standard anti-riot methods," the ministry tweeted on Thursday.

In countering riots, IR's shown utmost restraint & -unlike many Western regimes who smear & violently crackdown even the peaceful protesters- Iran has employed proportionate & standard anti-riot methods. The same is true for the judicial process: restraint & proportionality.

Foreign-backed violence and riots erupted across Iran in September after the tragic death in police custody of a young Iranian woman, named as Mahsa Amini.

The unfortunate incident was immediately picked up by Western-based media outlets and officials, who -- without providing any convincing evidence -- started claiming that the woman had been "murdered" by police forces.

Iran also immediately released the CCTV footage showing the young lady fainting at a police station and being subsequently transferred to a hospital. Iranian authorities, meanwhile, conducted an investigation into the incident, concluding that Amini's death had been caused by an illness, rather than alleged bodily harm.

Earlier this month, Iran's Interior Ministry said the country's enemy had been using the opportunity of Amini's case to wage a hybrid war against the Islamic Republic to weaken its national solidarity and hinder the country's progress. The ministry added that some 200 people had so far lost their lives in the riots that it held separatist and terrorist groups responsible for causing.

"Public security is redline. Armed assault & vandalism aren't tolerable, even to Western regimes who've find an opportunity to hypocritically lecture Iran," the Foreign Ministry added.

"Instead of exposing its mendacity by politicized statements, West must stop hosting, backing & encouraging terrorists," it concluded, referring to Western states' provision of safe havens for anti-Iran groups such as the terrorist Mujahedin-e-Khalq Organization (MKO) -- which is responsible for killing tens of thousands of Iranians.

## Israeli Military Kills Fourth Palestinian in Raid on West Bank

GAZA (Dispatches) - Israeli military forces have shot and killed a Palestinian teenager, hours after three Palestinian men lost their lives during a raid on the northern West Bank city of Jenin as the Tel Aviv regime maintains a months-long campaign of near-daily raids in the occupied territory.

The Palestinian Ministry of Health said in a statement that Israeli soldiers opened fire and wounded a number of young Palestinians during a confrontation near the village of Aboud, which is situated northwest of Ramallah, on Thursday evening. The ministry identified the victim as 15-year-old Dia Mohammad Rimawi, a resident of the nearby village of Beit Rima.

The statement added that two of the wounded Palestinians were taken to hospital in Ramallah, and are said to be in a moderate and stable condition.

One has been shot in the chest while the other has been hit in the leg. The third wounded Palestinian, detained by the Israeli military, remains in critical condition and has been transferred to an Israeli hospital.

The Palestinian Ministry of Health identified the three killed on Thursday morning as Siqdi Zakarneh, 29, Atta Shalabi, 46, and Tareq al-Damaj, 29.

Zakarneh and al-Damaj were from the Jenin refugee camp, while Shalabi was from the town of Qabatya on the southern outskirts of Jenin.

At least two other Palestinian men were injured by Israeli fire during the raid, including one in serious condition, local sources said.

A general strike across Jenin governorate was observed to mourn the three men, with schools, businesses and stores shut.

Palestinian resistance groups have condemned the latest killings of Palestinians in the occupied West Bank, stating that such crimes will fail to discourage the Palestinian nation from continuing to tread the path of resistance against the Israeli enemy. The Gaza-based Hamas movement said the killings will further invigorate steadfastness against the occupying Tel Aviv regime.

It praised members of the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades -- the military wing of Hamas -- for their courageous and armed resistance against Israeli forces, stating that the latest deaths clearly exhibit the extent of organized terrorism being exercised by the regime, its brutal nature, and its desperate attempts to assert control over the West Bank.

See Page 7

## U.S. Sanctions 5 Persons, 26 Companies for Allegedly Facilitating Iran

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The United States has imposed sanctions on five people, including a Turkish businessman, and 26 companies for allegedly facilitating oil sales on behalf of Iran.

The U.S. Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) announced the measures on Thursday.

It named some of the targets as "Turkish businessman Sitki Ayan and his network of companies" as well as "Ayan's son Bahaddin Ayan, his associate Kasim Oztas, and two other Turkish citizens..." Reuters reported, citing the OFAC.

"Ayan has established business contracts to sell Iranian oil worth hundreds of millions of dollars to buyers," in China, the United Arab Emirates, and Europe, the office claimed in a statement.

The sanctions freeze the U.S.-based assets of the targeted individuals and companies, and ban Americans from dealing with them.

The United States began a campaign of "maximum pressure" against Iran under former U.S. president Donald Trump.

As part of the campaign, Trump took the U.S. out of a nuclear deal between Iran and world countries, and returned all the sanctions that the accord had lifted.

See Page 7

## Belgian Court Suspends Iran Prisoners Treaty

TEHRAN (IFP) - Belgium's highest court has suspended a treaty on prisoner exchanges with Iran leaving it to the Constitutional Court on whether to finally cancel the agreement. The implementation of the treaty would mean the release of an Iranian diplomat, Assadollah Assadi, from Belgium prison.

After suspending the treaty, the Constitutional Court will now have to come to a final decision on whether to cancel the treaty "within three months."

In June 2018, Belgian authorities stated that the Belgian police had intercepted a car carrying homemade explosives and a detonation device, claiming that Assadi had handed the materials to two people in Belgium earlier. Assadi, himself, was apprehended in Germany the next day and told that he could not apply his diplomatic immunity.

A Belgian court then sentenced the diplomat, who serves as the third counselor at Iran's Embassy in Vienna, to 20 years in prison after accusing him of plotting an alleged attack against the anti-Tehran terrorist Mujahedin-e-Khalq (MKO) cult.

See Page 7

## Landmines Left 159 People Injured in Yemen Over Past 6 Months

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - The United Nations says land mines and other unexploded ordnance have caused some 159 casualties in Yemen's strategic western port city of Hudaydah over the past six months, as Saudi-backed militants have been accused of planting landmines in areas adjacent to battlefields and in most residential neighborhoods in retaliation for their defeat.

Ilene Cohn, director of the UN's mine action service, said over 50% of the casualties in the city of Hudaydah were women and children, and called for the acceleration of de-mining across Yemen.

The figure refers to casualties caused by landmines and "explosive remnants of war," a term that includes shells, grenades and other deadly devices left behind by a conflict.

Land mines have been laid across Yemen since the 1960s. However, there has been a surge in the use of the devices since the Saudi-led military onslaught began in March 2015.

The mines killed at least 122 people between 2016 and 2018, according to the US-based Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project.

See Page 7

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## Sabotage Network Dismantled in Northwestern Iran

ARDABIL (IP) - The Islamic Revolution Guard Corps (IRGC) Intelligence Organization reported the arrest of three elements of a sabotage network in Ardabil, northwest of Iran.

According to the statement of IRGC, the saboteurs had planned for destroying governmental and military buildings by setting fire to them with Molotov cocktails.

They also tried to communicate with the foreign-backed media, create multiple accounts on social networks, publish lies, and guide the rebels in the unrest that happened in the country. Unrest was instigated under the pretext of Mahsa Amini, 22, who died due to a sudden heart attack in a police center in Tehran on Tuesday, September 13.

## Already Free Iranian People Not to Be Fooled By West's Claims

**TEHRAN (MNA) - President Ebrahim Raisi has said that the Iranian people gained freedom after the 1979 Islamic Revolution, saying that the Western claims on freedom has failed in getting anywhere in Iran.**

President Raisi made the comments on a visit to Robat Karim in the suburb of Tehran on Thursday morning.

"What we need to know today is the conspiracies and seditions and also the people want to create chaos and division in the society and target people's beliefs with their plots" Raisi said on the sidelines of the visit to Robat Karim.

"Iranian people know the enemy well, we gained our freedom after the 1979 Islamic Revolution, and we will not lose this freedom," the president said.

Raisi was accompanied by his Chief of Staff and Vice-President for Executive Affairs, as well as the ministers of Energy, and Roads and Urban Development.

Visiting the projects under construction, participating in the meeting of the administrative council and meeting with the public are among the plans of the President's half-day trip to Robat Karim.

The President had previously visited Varamin, Gharchak, Pardis, Pishva, Shahr-e Ghods, Malard, Shahriyar, Pakdasht and Eslamshahr as part of a field visit to the cities of Tehran province.



As part of today's trip, the president also visited the Parand Metro project and was informed about the latest status of the construction of this project by the project managers.

The process of constructing the Parand Metro line started 14 years ago, and the people of this city have been waiting for the metro train to arrive in their city for years.

This metro line branches off from Shahed Station in metro line one and reaches Parand city with 5 stations along a 50km route. 30 km of the first Parand metro line with Shahr-e Aftab and Imam Khomeini International Airport stations has been put into operation and the last 20 km is under construction.

During his visit to this project, the President obliged the officials to urgently complete the remaining part of this project so that the people of this city can benefit from it.

The managers of the project promised that the Parand Metro will be ready for operation in June of next year.

## Remains of Bodies of

### 111 Iranian War Martyrs Returned Home

ABADAN (IRNA) - The remains of the bodies of 111 Iranian martyrs of the Iraqi imposed war on Iran (1980-88) were transported to the country through the southwestern border river of Arvand Rud on Thursday.

The remains of the bodies were found in the vicinity of Maysan and Basrah provinces in southeastern Iraq, General Mohammad Baqerzadeh, the head of the searching committee responsible for finding the bodies of the 1980-88 Iranian martyrs, announced.

The bodies will be dispatched to the southwestern Iranian city of Ahvaz and then will be transferred to Tehran, General Baqerzadeh noted.

Reportedly, Iraq's eight years of imposed war claimed the lives of 230,000 Iranian soldiers and left nearly 600,000 war-disabled. Also, about 43,000 Iranians were prisoners of war in Iraq and many others were missing.

## Former Roads Minister Qassemi Dies of Illness

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Former minister of roads and urban development, Rostam Qassemi, has passed away, after a long struggle with illness.

According to Iranian media, Qassemi passed away on Thursday at the age of 58 after "suffering a period of illness."

President Ebrahim Raisi late in November accepted Qassemi's resignation following the deterioration of the latter's health conditions some two months earlier.

Immediately after that, the former commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC)'s Khatam al-Anbiya Construction Headquarters, began a serious treatment process of cancer and underwent chemotherapy.

Qassemi was also a former minister of petroleum in Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's administration and also a military veteran who served in the Iran-Iraq war of the 80s.



## U.S., Europe Arms Supplies Have Complicated Ukraine Situation

### IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Foreign minister says the uncontrolled shipment of US and European arms to Ukraine has further complicated the situation in the region.



Hossein Amirabdollahian made the remarks in a phone conversation with his Finnish counterpart Pekka Haavisto.

The top Iranian diplomat said the Islamic Republic of Iran opposed the continuation of war, including in Ukraine.

Amirabdollahian also pointed to Haavisto's visit to Tehran last year and said ties between the two countries are on the right track.

Finland's foreign minister for his part, reaffirmed his country's support for the revival of the Iran nuclear deal, JCPOA.

Haavisto also referred to Afghanistan. He thanked Iran for its constructive role in hosting Afghan refugees.

Haavisto declared Finland's readiness to continue cooperation with Iran in helping Afghan refugees.

The two foreign ministers also pointed to the 90 years of diplomatic relations between Iran and Finland and underlined the need to strengthen bilateral ties.

## FM Spokesman Censures Europe for Banning Press TV

TEHRAN (MNA) - The spokesman of the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Nasser Kanaani condemned the Eutelsat ban on Tehran-based English Press TV as the double standards of the European Union with regard to freedom of expression.

"While Europe hosts many channels that instigate violence and terrorism against Iran, the Eutelsat satellite takes the Press TV channel off it list due to EU sanctions," Nasser Kan'ani wrote in a post on his Twitter page.

"The new measure against Press TV further exposes the true face of those claiming to advocate freedom of expression and free flow of information," the Iranian spokesman added.

The recent action by the France-owned the Eutelsat is widely condemned because it comes in violation of international regulations and freedom of the press.

According to the Press TV website, after the European Union imposed sanctions on a number of Iranian institutions and individuals, including Press TV, on November 14 over alleged "rights violations" following the recent foreign-backed riots in the country, Eutelsat notified the Tehran-based broadcaster on Wednesday of its plan to take the network off the air.

Experts believe that sanctions imposed on Press TV by the EU, and earlier by the government of Canada, are aimed at muzzling free speech and alternative views.

Taking strong exception to the latest anti-Iran measure, Press TV in a statement on Wednesday denounced it as "media terrorism".

## Iran Sets Deadline for Meta to Introduce Representative for Country

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iran has sent a letter to U.S. Technology Company, Meta, giving it ten days after receiving the letter to take necessary measures in order for the company's platforms to continue activities in Iran.

Those measures, according to the letter, include introducing a responsible representative based in Iran.

The letter, written by the Supreme Council of Cyberspace, also raised issues on which Iran had expressed protest against Meta.

The issues include disseminating false news, instigating

discriminatory behaviors and spreading hatred, provoking unrest, violating Iran's national sovereignty and rights of users through applying double standards, and paving the ground for campaigns by terrorist groups on social media platforms affiliated to Meta.

Deepening social gaps, ethnic and racial discrimination, separatism, and paving ground for organized crimes such as transfer and trade of war weapons as well as narcotics were other issues protested by Iran.

## Tehran, Baghdad Discuss Mutual Ties, Cooperation to Tackle Dust Storms

TEHRAN (MNA) - Iranian Ambassador to Iraq Mohammad Kazem Al-e Sadegh and Iraqi Minister of Water Resources Aoun Diab Abdullah on Thursday discussed bilateral ties and issues of mutual interests including drought problem and dust storms.

While congratulating the appointment of new Iraqi minister, Iranian envoy said that Iran benefits from fruitful experiences and enjoys high capability in overcoming soil-related storms, dust particles and droughts, is ready to cooperate with Iraqi side on the relevant issues.

In the meeting, issues of mutual interest between the two countries were also discussed.

Iraqi Minister of Water Resources, for his part, pointed to the destructive consequences of drought and climatic changes in the region, and called for strengthening relations



with Iran in order to solve these problems.

Iraq is ready to take advantage of fruitful experience of Iran in the field of overcoming these problems as mentioned in above, Abdullah emphasized.

Solving drought-related problems and dealing with soil storms have now become a common regional demand, he said, and called on officials of the regional countries to contribute in finding the best solution to overcome these challenges facing ahead.

He considered the policies taken by former Iraqi government under Saddam Hussein and the imposition of numerous wars by him on this country as the main cause of ignoring the solutions for the drought problem.

## Iran Starts Designing, Constructing Indigenous Chopper

TEHRAN (MNA) - The Commander of the Iranian Army's Air Force Brigadier General Yousef Qorbani on Thursday announced the beginning of the design and construction stages of the domestic helicopter using the domestic technical know-how.

Today, Iran's Army Air Force has achieved high capability that, in addition to constructing the most sophisticated combat helicopters, it is able to create its combat power on other helicopters.

Stating that the Army Air Force has increased the combat power of its helicopters, Brigadier General Qorbani said that the Force has also been able to arm its logistics helicopters in order to use them in its missions. Turning to the salient specifications of the logistics

helicopters, he said that the logistic helicopters of the Army Air Force are able to carry out their missions round-the-clock and in the best way possible.

He then pointed to the overhaul of choppers of the Army Air Force and added that 100% overhauling and repairing operations of all helicopters are fully done inside the country, so that there is no need to any foreign country to do this.

Benefitted from the expert manpower and specialists, Iran's Army Air Force has managed to provide all necessary equipment needed in this sector in cooperation with the Ministry of Defense and also competent knowledge-based firms especially after the eight years of Sacred Defense (Iraqi imposed war against Iran in 1980-1988).

Giant steps have been taken in the field of manufacturing parts and equipment needed, so that the Army Air Force, benefited from expert engineers, has been able to manufacture its required parts and equipment with the cooperation of academic centers and knowledge-based companies.

Elsewhere in his remarks, the Commander of Army Air Force pointed to the construction of missile at the Force and emphasized that "Shafagh" Missile was constructed by Iran's Army Air Force using the most experienced manpower and engineers.



## Iran Suspends Rice Imports From India Amid Surplus

### IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Iran has stopped registering new orders for imports of rice from India, at least for the time being, as domestic stocks rise and farming authorities report better yields.

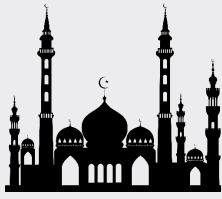
A report by Tasnim news agency showed that Iranian rice importers had confirmed reports in Indian media suggesting that Iran had stopped processing import orders for Indian rice since last week.

The Economic Times claimed in a report earlier in the day that Iran's decision to stop buying rice and tea from India may be related to riots in the country that have caused closures in shops, hotels and markets.

The report also said that Iranian importers may have decided to delay purchases of Indian rice and tea while waiting for the outcome of talks between Iran and India on a rupee trade settlement mechanism.

However, secretary of Iran's Commission of Rice Suppliers Massih Keshavarz said that the decision to halt rice imports was a provisional measure, adding that government and private importers would resume taking delivery of Indian supplies when inventories fall.





## PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	11:57
■ Evening (Maghreb)	17:11
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	05:34
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	07:04

64. "Therefore concert your plan, and then assemble in (serried) ranks:  
He wins (all along) today who gains the upper hand."  
65. They said: "O Moses! whether wilt thou that thou throw (first) or  
that we be the first to throw?"

Surah 20. Ta-ha ( 64 - 65 )

## Iran, Tajikistan Talk On Oil Cooperation

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

**TEHRAN – Oil Minister Javad Owji hosted a meeting in his Tehran office on Tuesday evening with the visiting Tajik minister of energy.**

The two sides negotiated on oil and gas condensate export, export of petroleum products, petrochemical products, Iran's exploration and extraction in Tajikistan, export of technical and engineering services and reconstruction and modernization of Tajikistan's oil refineries.

Oil Minister Owji hosted a meeting with Tajik Minister of Energy and Water Resources Daler Juma, who came to Iran to participate in the 15th Joint Commission on Economic Cooperation between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Republic of Tajikistan, in the central building of the Petroleum Ministry.

In the meeting, the two sides discussed cooperation in the export of oil, gas condensates and petroleum products, petrochemical products, Iran's exploration and extraction in Tajikistan, the export of technical and engineering services, and the



reconstruction and modernization of Tajikistan's oil refineries.

The delegations of Iran and Tajikistan held expert meetings today (Wednesday, December 7) following the talks between the ministers of the two countries yesterday.

The 15th joint commission for economic cooperation between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Republic of Tajikistan began on Monday under the chairmanship of Ali Akbar Mehrabian, the Minister of Energy, and Daler Juma, the Minister of Energy and Water Resources of the Republic of Tajikistan, and ended its work on Tuesday. Several cooperation documents were signed at the summit.

The government of Tajikistan supplies about 90% of its energy needs with imports, and most of the country's oil and gas reserves are located in the southwest of Tajikistan along the Amu Darya Basin.

## Iran, Russia to Ink Long-Term Cooperation Agreement Soon

TEHRAN (MNA) - The Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran to Moscow announced that the two countries of Iran and Russia will sign a comprehensive long-term cooperation agreement to strengthen bilateral ties.

Kazem Jalali said that Iran and Russia intend to ink a comprehensive long-term cooperation agreement in the very near future.

According to the Russian media outlets, Iranian envoy has not specified the date of signing the agreement and also has not provided any further explanation about it.

## Mazandaran Province Plans Citrus Fruits Exports to China

SARI (IRNA) - Iran's northern province of Mazandaran has exported 124,000 tons of kiwi and citrus fruits to at least ten countries so far in the current Iranian year



(started Mar. 21, 2022), while planning to export citrus fruits to China as well, a local official said on Wednesday.

Hassan Kheirianpour, deputy governor-general for coordinating economic affairs in Mazandaran, said that Russia, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, the UAE, Qatar, Oman, Iraq and Nigeria were the destination countries of the Iranian fruits during the mentioned period.

He said that obstacles to exporting kiwis to India are being removed, while the ground is being paved to export citrus fruits to China as well.

Mazandaran Province produces over 7.5 million tons of agricultural products per annum, accounting for 10 percent of the economic value of the whole agrarian products of Iran.

Rice and citrus fruits are regarded as the most important products of Mazandaran and a key source of income for the northern province.

## Iran Has Maximum Variety of Biotech Products in Asia

TEHRAN (MNA) - The Director-General of the National Institute of Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology Javad Mohammadi said that Iran has the largest variety of biotechnology products in Asia.

Speaking in a ceremony held on Thursday on the occasion of the Students' Day and the graduation ceremony of a number of Ph.D students the Research Institute, Mohammadi emphasized that Islamic Republic of Iran has the most various number of biotechnology products in the Asian region.

Turning to the current situation of biotechnology in the country, Mohammadi stated producing products with high food safety should be placed as top priorities of the country and in this way, the Research Institute of Genetics has always been a pioneer in this respect.

## Cheetah Cubs Found in Touran Good Omen for Endangered Species' Survival



TEHRAN (PressTV) - The two Asiatic cheetah cubs found recently in Khar Touran National Park in central Iran's Semnan province represent a good omen for the survival of this endangered cheetah subspecies in Iran.

Last Saturday, the story of the two cubs found by a livestock breeder went viral, rekindling hopes for the future of the animal known for its buff-to-light fawn-colored fur, which once roamed across Central Asia from the Middle East to Russia.

The fastest land animal in the world capable of reaching speeds of 120 kilometers (74 miles) per hour, listed by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) as critically endangered, is now only spotted in some habitats in Iran, mainly in provinces of Semnan, Yazd, Kerman and Fars. According to Iran's Department of Environment (DOE), the discovery of the two cubs in Touran was "surprising" and "promising" at the same time and could mean that the shrinking population of this cheetah subspecies is likely to see a turnaround in Touran and other natural habitats across Iran.

It is still unclear if the two female cheetah cubs, both less than a month old, can survive without their mother. IUCN says cubs will stay with their mother until they are 18 months old.

In addition to breastfeeding the cubs, the mother will lick their bottoms to stimulate them to defecate and urinate. Parting from the mother could lead to some health conditions or even death.

Moreover, Cheetah Conservation Fund says chronic kidney disease is commonly seen in captive cheetahs. It is still not scientifically known why captive cheetahs are more prone to this condition than their wild counterparts, but diet, age, genetic diversity, and chronic stress are cited as risk factors. The cubs might be transferred to the capital Tehran for further tests, according to some reports.

There is intense speculation over how the cheetah cubs parted from their mother, with some attributing it to wildlife trafficking.

However, as the female cheetah goes on daily expeditions looking for prey, the cubs, being very young cannot follow their mother, and that is how they were found by the livestock breeder who took them away to keep them safe from other large predators, including guard dogs.

According to Cheetah Conservation Fund, during the first few months, when cubs cannot follow their mother far or fast, the mortality rate is highest.

The two cubs are still very young and cannot survive in the wild on their own and because their mother has not been sighted since they were found, it is most likely impossible to take them back to their natural habitat, hence their chance of mating and reproducing in the nature are pretty much thin.

The DOE is hopeful that the cubs could breed in captivity when they become sexually mature.

Nonetheless, cheetahs cannot easily breed in captivity, so it is not possible to predict whether the two cubs can reproduce anytime in the future.

## Tehran, Tokyo Stress Boosting Parliament Research Cooperation

TEHRAN (MNA) - The Head of Iranian Parliament Research Center (IPRC) said that cooperation of research centers of Iran and Japan can improve the links between theoretical and practical policies between the two countries.

Speaking in a meeting with the Japanese Ambassador to Tehran Kazutoshi Aikawa, Babak Negahdari, IPRC Chief

emphasized that cooperation between the research centers of the two countries, which play a leading role in compiling and identifying the shortcomings and flaws in the executive policies, can strengthen the bond between theoretical and practical policies to a great extent.

Turning to the longstanding history of diplomatic ties between Iran and Japan, which dates back to more than nine decades ago, the Head of IPRC said that Iran and Japan have an age-old historical relationship and this issue can play a leading role in outlining the new chapter of cooperation between the two countries.

Stating that Iran and Japan are two important countries with



an ancient civilization in Asia and on the international stage, Negahdari stressed that bilateral cooperation, especially in the parliamentary field, can help boost the role and status of the two countries on international stage.

Iranian Parliament Research Center is ready to play its role in order to develop research cooperation between the two countries, he added.

Japanese envoy to Tehran, for his part, pointed to the historical ties between Iran and Japan and emphasized the need for strengthening bilateral relations in various fields.

Welcoming the cooperation proposal of IPRC and the Parliamentary Research Centers of the Japanese Parliaments, he added, "The actions of IPRC in preparing expert reports in various fields, especially in the field of water resources and electricity generation infrastructures, are very special."

Kazutoshi Aikawa attached great importance to the key role Iran plays in ensuring security of the region especially in Strait of Hormuz.

## Gov't Allows Divestment of Stake in Third Largest Carmaker

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The government has authorized listing of its indirect stake at the country's third largest carmaker Pars Khodro. Head of the Iranian Privatization Organization Hossein Ghorbanzadeh said that the body had issued a permit for divestment of government shares in Pars Khodro, a company where the government holds a stake through Saipa, Iran's second largest carmaker.

Ghorbanzadeh said the permit was issued at the request of Iran's ministry of industries, adding that the managing board of Saipa will decide on the divestment mechanism for Pars Khodro.

The divestment is in line with a government privatization scheme in Iran which is aimed at increasing the participation of the public in the ownership of state corporations and creating new sources of funding for key infrastructure projects.

The government has sold some of its shares in large oil and gas companies as well as in banks. It has also plans to sell shares in Saipa and largest carmaker Iran Khodro.

Founded in 1956, Pars Khodro is the third largest automobile manufacturer in Iran in terms of output. The company has no model or platform of its own and mostly assembles foreign and domestic models.

## UNESCO Registers Iran's Tabas Geopark

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Tabas Geopark in east-central Iran, which is home to a wide variety of scenic landscapes and untouched terrains, has been registered in the listing of UNESCO Global Geoparks (UGGP).

A dossier for the gigantic Tabas Geopark, the third Iranian geopark, was delivered to the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization last year.

Situated in a vast county of the same name, Tabas Geopark has an enormous potential to be registered as "the biggest" geopark in West Asia.

Lying in the eastern province of South Khorasan, Tabas Geopark includes about 50 geo-sites, scenic landscapes, and untouched terrains with the mysterious Kal-e Jeni (canyon of Jinni) located in Azmighan Village, amongst them.



## Isfahan University of Arts, Transylvania Romania Ink MoU

TEHRAN (IP) - A memorandum of understanding on scientific, research, cultural, and tourism cooperation was signed between Isfahan University and the university of Transylvania in Romania.

According to the Public relations of the Isfahan University of Art: The MoU was signed by Ioan Vasile Abrudan, President of Transylvania University and Head of the International Relations Office of the Isfahan University of Art.

The Romanian cultural and academic delegation traveled to Isfahan at the end of June and met with a number of city



officials, and visited some scientific and cultural centers, including Isfahan University and Isfahan Art University.

During the visit of the Romanian delegation to Isfahan, an MoC was signed between the Romanian Transylvania University and the University of Isfahan in 19 chapters, most of which are related to research activities.

Isfahan Art University is one of the top art universities in the center of Iran. Transylvania is also one of the most comprehensive and prestigious Romanian public universities in the city of Braşov.



## Germany Wants to Deepen Ties With UK

BERLIN (Dispatches) - German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock said she wants to intensify cooperation between Germany and the United Kingdom after Brexit, which she described as "a watershed for us all".

"With a formalized strategic dialogue between our two countries we want to further intensify the close UK-German exchange which has accompanied me in my role as Foreign Minister since almost the very first day," she said in a statement ahead of a visit to Ireland and the United Kingdom.

"We also want to work together to place very practical achievements of the EU, such as the youth exchange programs between our two countries and worker mobility, on a new footing in our relations with the United Kingdom."



## More Than 9,000 Flee Violence In South Sudan's Upper Nile

KHARTOUM (Dispatches) - More than 9,000 people have fled the most recent violence in South Sudan's Upper Nile state, the United Nations has said, adding that some were forced to hide in swamps and bushes during attacks.

The bloodshed in the region has killed an unknown number of people while rape, murder and kidnapping of civilians have been reported as the conflict intensifies, the UN's humanitarian agency OCHA said.

More than 9,100 people had been displaced since clashes between armed factions erupted in Upper Nile's Fashoda County in mid-November, it said in a statement.



## Saudi Lays on Lavish Welcome as China's Xi Heralds New Era in Relations



RIYADH (Dispatches) - Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman received President Xi Jinping as the Chinese leader heralded "a new era" in Arab relations, with a lavish welcome signalling Riyadh's interest in deepening ties with Beijing despite U.S. wariness.

Members of the Saudi Royal Guard riding Arabian horses and carrying Chinese and Saudi flags escorted Xi's car as it entered the royal palace in Riyadh, where Prince Mohammed, de facto ruler of the oil giant, greeted him with a warm smile.

The two leaders held an official meeting with the crown prince "wishing him, his delegation a pleasant stay" in Saudi Arabia, Saudi state news SPA reported.

It stood in stark contrast to the low-key welcome extended in July to U.S. President Joe Biden, with whom ties have been strained by Saudi energy policy and the 2018 murder of Jamal Khashoggi that had overshadowed the awkward visit.

The United States, warily watching China's growing sway and with its ties to Riyadh at a nadir, said on Wednesday the visit was an example of Chinese attempts to exert influence around the world and would not change U.S. policy towards the Middle East.

Prince Mohammed, with whom Biden bumped fists instead of shaking hands in July, has made a comeback on the world stage following the Khashoggi killing, which cast a pall over Saudi-U.S. ties, and has been defiant in the face of U.S. ire over oil supplies and pressure from Washington to help isolate Russia.

Setting the tone for Xi's visit, his plane was escorted by Saudi air force jets as it entered Saudi airspace and a 21-gun salute was fired as senior Saudi royals met him at the airport on Wednesday, the Chinese foreign ministry said.

In an op-ed published in Saudi media, Xi said he was on a "pioneering trip" to "open a new era of China's relations with the Arab world, the Arab countries of the Persian Gulf, and Saudi Arabia".

China and Arab countries would "continue to hold high the banner of non-interference in internal affairs, firmly support each other in safeguarding sovereignty and territorial integrity", he wrote.

Xi, due to meet with other Persian Gulf oil producers and attend a wider gathering of Arab leaders on Friday, said these states were a "treasure trove of energy for the world economy ... and are fertile ground for the development of high-tech industries".

Several Middle Eastern rulers, including Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi and Sudanese Sovereign Council head Abdel Fattah el-Burhan, arrived in Riyadh on Thursday.

Saudi Arabia and other Persian Gulf states like the United Arab Emirates have said that they would not choose sides between global powers and were diversifying partners to serve national economic and security interests.

China, the world's biggest energy consumer, is a major trade partner of Persian Gulf states and bilateral ties have expanded as the region pushes economic diversification, raising U.S. hackles about Chinese involvement in sensitive Gulf infrastructure.

## German Police Set to Make More Arrests After Coup Plot Thwarted

BERLIN (Dispatches) - German police plan further arrests as they investigate a far-right group that prosecutors say was preparing to overthrow the state and install a former member of a German royal family as national leader.

Investigators have said the group, many of whom were members of the Reichsbuerger (Citizens of the Reich) movement, planned to install aristocrat Heinrich XIII Prinz Reuss as leader of a new state and found evidence that some members planned to storm the Bundestag and arrest lawmakers.

Heinrich is a descendant of the royal House of Reuss in the eastern state of Thuringia. Aged 71, he has been working as a real estate developer and was arrested in the financial capital Frankfurt on Wednesday.

Nineteen of the alleged plotters were remanded in custody on Wednesday, while another six were set to go before a judge on Thursday, prosecutors said. Many of the suspects are over 50, and they encompass right-wingers, COVID deniers and people who reject the modern German state.



## Peru's First Female President, Pledges to Heal Nation's Wounds

LIMA (Dispatches) - Dina Boluarte became Peru's first female president amid a political maelstrom when her predecessor and former boss Pedro Castillo was ousted in an impeachment trial and detained by police after he tried to illegally shut down Congress.

Boluarte, 60, who started the day as vice president and next in line to replace Castillo, faces the unenviable challenge of healing a divided Peru where the presidency has been locked in battle with Congress for more than a year.

"I request a political truce to install a government of national unity," she said in her first speech after being sworn in as the country's sixth president in just five years. She pledged to form a broad Cabinet of "all bloods".

"I ask for time, valuable time to rescue the country from corruption and misrule." A lawyer by training, Boluarte was relatively unknown to most Peruvians until recently. In 2018 she won less than 4% of the vote in a Lima district's mayoral election and lost a bid for a parliamentary seat in 2021.

But she shot to prominence alongside Castillo as the vice president on his ticket when the pair pulled off a shock election victory in 2021 for the far-left Peru Libre party.

Born in Apurimac, one of the regions in Peru's mountainous south where Castillo saw his strongest support, Boluarte spent years working at the National Registry of Identification and Civil Status, which records births, marriages and deaths.

Once in office, Castillo tapped Boluarte as his development and social inclusion minister, a role she managed to keep until recently amid several cabinet shakeups.

"Although she is previously inexperienced in politics, I think that after a year and a half of being a minister - roles that tend to be short-lived - she has gained a lot of policy experience that will serve her now," said political columnist Gonzalo Banda.

## EU Backs Croatia's Entry Into Schengen, Rejects Bulgaria, Romania

BRUSSELS (Dispatches) - European Union members confirmed the admission of Croatia to the bloc's passport-free Schengen area while rejecting the candidacies of Bulgaria and Romania.

The decisions came on Thursday during a meeting of EU interior ministers in Brussels.

"Last step completed! Council decision adopted - It is now formally confirmed that Croatia joins Schengen area as of 1 January 2023," the permanent representation of Croatia to the EU said in a tweet on Thursday.

"The Schengen area is growing for the first time in more than a decade," the Czech Republic, which holds the EU's rotating presidency tweeted. "Ministers approved Croatia's membership as of 1 January 2023!"

EU commissioner for Home Affairs Ylva Johansson said that Romania and Bulgaria have been denied access to the area.

"When it comes to the accession of Romania and Bulgaria we are not united and that makes us very weak and that makes me also sad," he said.

"You deserve to be full members of Schengen, you deserve to have access to the free movement in the Schengen area," Johansson said.

Full accession for the EU's newest members - Bulgaria and Romania joined the bloc in 2007, Croatia in 2013 - required unanimous support from their partners.

The three countries already partly adhere to the Schengen rulebook, but internal border controls have yet to be lifted.

The hold-up has long been over concerns among the trio's partners about the reach of organised crime, unauthorised migration, and other security concerns.

Last month, the EU's executive branch, the European Commission, ruled that all three candidate countries meet the technical criteria for joining, and the European Parliament has also voted in favor of their membership.

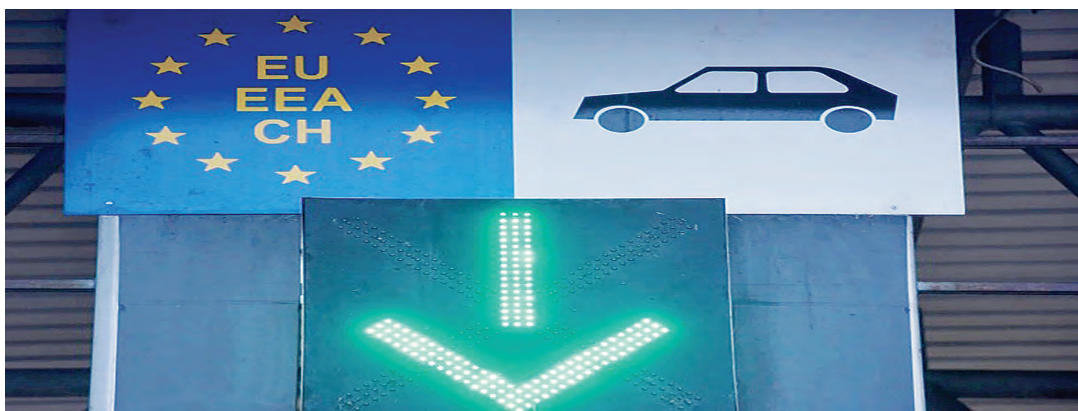
Croatia's bid had not received any notable opposition from its EU partners. But ahead of Thursday's meeting Austria appeared almost certain to veto the Bulgarian and Romanian bids over immigration, as increasing numbers of people cross its borders without authorization via the Balkans region.

Austrian Interior Minister Gerhard Karner renewed his country's staunch opposition, noting that more than 100,000 people have entered Austria this year without authorization.

"The system is not working right now," he told reporters. Austrian officials are anxious that abolishing internal border checks could make Bulgaria and Romania thoroughfares for asylum seekers.

Right-wing parliamentarians from the Sweden Democrats party have opposed membership for the three hopeful countries, citing similar worries.

Romanian Prime Minister Nicolae Ciucu said on Wednesday that his government has had "meetings at the highest levels" with Austria to try to ease the concerns, and noted that data shows "Romania is not on migration flows that would generate fears".



## Russia Attacks In East Ukraine

NEAR BAKHMUT (Dispatches) - Russian forces attacked settlements in eastern Ukraine from the ground and air, officials said, in support of the Kremlin's apparently scaled-back ambition of only securing the bulk of Ukrainian lands it has claimed in the war.

Fighting was underway along the entire line of demarcation in the Donetsk region, with the frontline town of Avdiivka shelled by Russian tanks on Thursday morning, said Tatiana Ignatchenko, a spokeswoman for the regional administration.

Near the city of Lysychansk, Russia deployed more troops to try to capture the village of Bilohorivka, Ukraine's governor of Luhansk region said, while a commander in another fought-over settlement described an intensifying Russian air offensive.

"They are bringing in more and more reserves," around Bilohorivka to try to capture the village, Luhansk governor Serhiy Haiday told Ukrainian television. "There are constant attacks."

In a reminder that despite the hostilities, Russia maintains lines of communication with the West, Washington said Moscow had freed U.S. basketball player Brittney Griner in return for the release of Russian arms dealer Viktor Bout.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has given conflicting statements on the goals of the war since his Feb. 24 invasion, but is now clear the aims include some expansion of Russia's borders, in contrast with comments made at the start of the "special military operation," when he said Moscow's plans did not include the occupation of Ukrainian land.

The Kremlin said on Thursday it was still set on securing at least the bulk of the parts of east and south Ukraine that it has claimed as its own, but appeared to give up on seizing other territory in the west and northeast that Ukraine has recaptured in a steady reversal of early Russian gains.

The Kremlin no longer speaks of trying to force a change of government in Kyiv.

Putin on Wednesday said Russia had already achieved a "significant result" with the acquisition of "new territories" - a reference to the annexation of four partly occupied regions in September that Kyiv and most members of the United Nations condemned as illegal.





# Pandemic Treaty Plans Thrashed Out at WHO

GENEVA (Dispatches) - Negotiators are meeting in Geneva this week to thrash out a pandemic treaty aimed at ensuring the flaws that turned Covid-19 into a global crisis could never happen again.

As the third anniversary of the virus emerging rolls around, negotiators are raking over an early concept draft of what might eventually make it into an international agreement on how to handle future pandemics. "The lessons of the pandemic must not go unlearned," WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus told the negotiating panel at the start of three days of talks, which conclude on Wednesday.

An intergovernmental negotiating body is paving the way towards a global agreement that would regulate how nations prepare for and respond to future pandemic threats.

They are huddled in Geneva for their third meeting, refining and going over their ideas so far.

A progress report will be put before WHO member states next year, with the final outcome presented for their consideration in May 2024.

The dense, 32-page early draft "is a true reflection of the aspirations for a different paradigm for strengthening pandemic prevention, preparedness, response and recovery," said Tedros.

The so-called conceptual zero draft contains various notions, some of which will have to be developed and others thrown out as negotiators hone down the text ahead of the next meeting in February.

The trick will ultimately be finding the balance between something bold and with teeth, and something all countries can agree to.

"There's a lot of material currently that probably doesn't belong in there," said Pamela Hamamoto, the lead U.S. negotiator.

"There's a lot that needs to change before we're going to sign onto it. That is the same for a lot of member states -- probably most," she told reporters.

Hamamoto said Washington wanted to see transparency fixed into the accord, along with better surveillance and rapid response, plus swift and comprehensive data sharing.

The United States also wants to see more equitable access to medical countermeasures, possibly through regional manufacturing.

"A pretty broadly-held view is that we need to make sure that the process is set up right so... we basically don't blow this opportunity to put together an accord that is going to be meaningful and implementable," Hamamoto said.

The Panel for a Global Public Health Convention, an independent coalition of states people and health leaders, said the conceptual draft did not go far enough, despite its bright spots.

The panel said more should be done to establish accountability and clear timelines for alert and response to avoid damaging consequences when an outbreak emerges.

The medical charity Doctors Without Borders said the negotiations must not overlook the role of clinical trials in any pandemic response.

Mohga Kamal-Yanni, of the NGO coalition People's Vaccine Alliance, said the draft showed negotiations were "at a crossroads".

"A treaty could break with the greed and inequality that has plagued the global response to Covid-19, HIV/AIDS and other pandemics. Or, it could tie future generations to the same disastrous outcomes," she said.

"Governments must resist any attempts to turn a pandemic treaty into another obscene profit opportunity for pharmaceutical companies."



# Migrants in UK Face Degrading Surveillance Ankle Tags

LONDON (Dispatches) - After two years being held in a British immigration detention center, Mimi was so desperate to be released that she agreed to wear an electronic ankle tag. But her sense of freedom was short-lived.

Two months later, she said she attempted suicide because of the stress of being monitored while wearing the tag. "I couldn't do anything because I didn't want to have this tag showing. It was horrific," said Mimi, asked to be identified by a pseudonym as she awaits a decision on her asylum claim almost a decade later.

"I was already beyond stressed - this was just throwing me over the edge. One day, it all became way too much for me." Mimi, who is in her 40s, said she believes her parents came to Britain from the Caribbean after World War Two but she has been unable to prove her nationality and is officially stateless.

"I know nothing about my background. I was abandoned in sexual exploitation and modern slavery from a very young age," she told the Thomson Reuters Foundation in a video interview. Britain has ramped up its use of electronic tags on people detained over their immigration status as it seeks to fulfil a long-standing pledge to cut immigration, one of the drivers behind the country's 2016 vote to leave the European Union.

Migration hit a record high of 504,000 this year, with a surge in international students and arrivals from Ukraine, Afghanistan and Hong Kong. This figure does not include those arriving irregularly on small boats across the English Channel. "People find it incredibly degrading and stigmatising," said Rudy Schulkind, research and policy manager at Bail for Immigration Detainees, which provides free legal representation to people held in detention across Britain.

"Having to walk down the street and have people notice that they're wearing a tag, seeing them as a dangerous or violent person, (it's an) incredibly painful thing to go through." DEHUMANISING

As the numbers of people fleeing war, poverty, climate disasters and other events reach record levels worldwide, states are turning to digital technologies including ankle tags and biometric data to toughen borders and monitor migrants. Amid an increase in anti-immigration rhetoric in Britain, it became mandatory in 2016 to tag all foreign nationals facing deportation - a move that rights groups say is dehumanising and infringes on people's privacy.

Electronic tags have traditionally been fitted on individuals involved in the criminal justice system so that the police and courts can monitor their location and compliance with orders and to deter them from absconding. Under the Nationality and Borders Act 2022, people who knowingly arrive in Britain without permission can face up to four years in jail - unfairly criminalising migrants seeking asylum as refugees, rights campaigners say.

"Our government has for the last couple of years just repeated that refugees are illegal immigrants, that they arrive illegally, that they will be treated as criminals," said Clare Moseley, founder of migrant charity Care4Calais. "Many of these people are innocent victims of wars and persecution."

In August 2021, the prison service extended the use of GPS monitoring to people on immigration bail, which means they have been freed from detention while their application to remain in Britain is assessed.

As a result, the number of migrants being tagged on immigration bail almost doubled between January and September to over 2,100 people - or 16% of all individuals being monitored with tags, the latest government data shows. "We're seeing an increased watching of migrant communities," said Zehrah Hasan, advocacy director at the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants, which campaigns for reform of the immigration system.



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## Rosneft Reports \$889m Loss From Assets Transfer in Germany

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russia's oil giant Rosneft said its profit over the past nine months had been badly hit by the seizure of its German-based refineries by Berlin.

"In 3Q 2022, the most significant negative impact on income came from the transfer of the company's assets in Germany... which resulted in the recognition of an additional loss of 56 billion rubles (around RM3.9 billion)," Rosneft said in a statement.

Between July and September, the company "continued to be negatively affected by external factors and illegal restrictions", including the transfer of assets in Germany, Rosneft chief executive Igor Sechin said in the statement.



## World Economy Faces More Pain In 2023 After a Gloomy Year

PARIS (Dispatches) - This was supposed to be the comeback year for the world economy following the Covid pandemic.

Instead, 2022 was marked by a new war, record inflation and climate-linked disasters. It was a "polycrisis" year, a term popularised by historian Adam Tooze.

Get ready for more gloom in 2023.

"The number of crises has increased since the start of the century," said Roel Beetsma, professor of macroeconomics at the University of Amsterdam "Since World War Two we have never seen such a complicated situation," he told AFP.

After the Covid-induced economic crisis of 2020, consumer prices began to rise in 2021 as countries emerged from lockdowns or other restrictions.

Central bankers insisted that high inflation would only be temporary as economies returned to normal. But Russia's invasion of Ukraine in late February sent energy and food prices soaring.

Many countries are now grappling with cost-of-living crises because wages are not keeping up with inflation, forcing households to make difficult choices in their spending.

"Everything has become more expensive, from cream to wine and electricity," said Nicole Eisermann from her stand at the Frankfurt Christmas market.

Central banks played catch-up. They started to raise interest rates this year in an effort to tame galloping inflation — at the risk of tipping countries into deep recessions, since higher borrowing costs mean slower economic activity.

Inflation has finally started to slow down in the United States and the eurozone.

Consumer prices in the Group of 20 developed and emerging nations are expected to reach 8 per cent in the fourth quarter before falling to 5.5 per cent next year, according to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.

The OECD encourages governments to provide aid to bring relief to households.

In the 27-nation European Union, €674 billion (RM3.1 trillion) have been earmarked so far to shield consumers from high energy prices, according to the Bruegel think tank.

Germany, Europe's biggest economy and the most dependent on Russia energy supplies, accounts for €264 billion of that total.

One in two Germans say they now only spend on essential items, according to a survey by EY consultancy. "I am very careful but I have a lot of children and grandchildren," said Guenther Blum, a shopper at the Frankfurt Christmas market. Rising interest rates have also hurt consumers and businesses, though US Federal Reserve chairman Jerome Powell signalled last week that the pace of hikes could ease "as soon as" December.

He warned, however, that policy will probably have to remain tight for some time to restore price stability. For her part, European Central Bank president Christine Lagarde sent a clear signal that the ECB would maintain its tightening policy, saying that eurozone inflation had yet to peak.

## BOJ May Ditch Yield Cap Next Year as Inflation Perks Up

TOKYO (Reuters) - The Bank of Japan (BOJ) may abandon its 10-year bond yield cap as early as next year on growing prospects that inflation and wages will overshoot expectations, said Takeo Hoshi, an academic with deep knowledge of Japanese monetary policy.

The BOJ must maintain ultra-loose policy for the time being to convince the public that it is serious about reflationing the economy long enough to generate sustained inflation, said Hoshi, an economics professor at the University of Tokyo.

But the central bank must also guard against the risk of inflation well exceeding its expectations, as intensifying labour shortages lift wages not just for part-time but permanent workers, he told Reuters in an interview.

With inflation expectations already "sufficiently" high, core consumer inflation could exceed the BOJ's 2% target next fiscal year, and open scope for the central bank to abandon its 0% target for the 10-year bond yield, Hoshi said.

"Prices didn't rise much in Japan in the past, but that's changing," Hoshi said. "Japan might enter an era of high inflation. The BOJ must start worrying about the possibility of inflation accelerating more than expected."

A member of various government committees and an expert on macroeconomic policy, Hoshi spoke as a panelist at the BOJ's workshop on Nov. 25 that discussed Japan's wage dynamics.

Under yield curve control (YCC), the BOJ guides short-term interest rates at -0.1% and pledges to guide the 10-year bond yield around 0%. It also gobbles up government bonds and risky assets as part of efforts to sustainably achieve 2% inflation.

The central bank has been forced to offer buying unlimited amounts of 10-year government bonds to defend the yield target, a move criticized by investors for draining bond market liquidity and distorting the shape of the yield curve.

If the BOJ were to normalize monetary policy, it will do so in several stages starting with the removal of the 10-year yield target that is distorting the shape of the yield curve, he said.

The central bank will then reduce the size of its balance sheet by slowing or ending asset purchases, before moving onto raising short-term interest rates, Hoshi said.

In a less favorable scenario, the BOJ could be forced into abandoning YCC as early as next year if upward pressure on global interest rates persists, he added.

The BOJ has been an outlier amid a global wave of central banks tightening monetary policy, even as rising raw material prices push core consumer inflation above its 2% target.



## India Central Bank Says Inflation Battle Not Over

MUMBAI (Dispatches) - India's central bank raised its key policy rate by 35 basis points to 6.25% on Wednesday, the highest in over three years and its fifth straight increase, and vowed there will be no let-up in its fight to tame high inflation.

While there have been signs recently that price pressures may be moderating, Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Governor Shaktikanta Das said the main risk was that inflation could remain pervasive and elevated, reinforcing market views the central bank could hike rates again in coming months.

The monetary policy committee (MPC), comprising three members from the RBI and three external members, raised the key lending rate or the repo rate to 6.25% -- the highest since April 2019. Five of the six members voted in favor of the increase.

A strong two-thirds majority in a Reuters analysts poll had predicted a 35 basis point (bps) increase, smaller than its last three hikes of 50 bps each, and said it was still too soon for the central bank to take its eye off inflation, which has stayed above the upper end of the RBI's 2-6% tolerance band all year.

India's annual retail inflation eased to a three-month low of 6.77% in October, helped by a slower rise in food prices and a higher base effect, strengthening bets on smaller rate increases by the RBI going ahead.

Das said the worst of this year's inflationary spike "is behind us" but warned there was no room for complacency.

## China's Trade Sinks as COVID-19 Woes, Feeble Demand Take Toll

BEIJING (Dispatches) - China's exports and imports contracted more sharply than expected in November, official data showed Wednesday, battered by flagging global and domestic demand, COVID-19-led production disruptions and a property slump at home, adding to fears a global recession is looming.

The downturn was much worse than markets had forecast, and economists are predicting a further period of declining exports, underlining a sharp retreat in world trade as

consumers and businesses slash spending in response to central banks' aggressive moves to tame inflation.

Exports contracted 8.7% in November from a year earlier, a sharper fall from a 0.3% loss in October and marked the worst performance since February 2020, official data showed on Wednesday. They were well below analysts' expectations for a 3.5% decline.

Beijing is moving to ease some of its stringent pandemic-era restrictions, but outbound shipments have been losing steam since August as surging inflation, sweeping interest rate increases across many countries and the Ukraine crisis have pushed the global economy to the brink of recession.

Exports are likely to shrink further over coming quarters, Julian Evans-Pritchard, senior China Economist at Capital Economics, said in a note.

"Outbound shipments will receive a limited boost from the easing of (China's) virus restrictions, which are no longer a major constraint on the ability of manufacturers to meet orders," he said.

"Of much greater consequence will be the downturn in global demand for Chinese goods due to the reversal in pandemic-era demand and the coming global recession."

Responding to the broadening pressure on China's economy, state media reported on Wednesday that a high-level meeting of the ruling Communist Party held on the previous day had emphasized the government's focus in 2023 will be on stabilizing growth, promoting domestic demand and opening up to the outside world.

"The Politburo meeting held yesterday points to domestic demand as the major driver for growth for the next year, and the fiscal policy will remain proactive to support demand," said Hao Zhou, chief economist at Guotai Junan International.

Almost three years of pandemic controls have exacted a heavy economic toll and caused widespread frustration and fatigue in China.

## Turkey's Inflation Dips To 84.39% as Price Pressures Start to Ease

ANKARA (Dispatches) - Price increases moderated in Turkey in November, official data showed, signaling that inflation pressures that have been plaguing consumers for about a year and a half might be finally easing.

The annual consumer price index (CPI) dipped to 84.39% last month, the Turkish Statistical Institute (TurkStat) announced, ending a 17-month-long cycle of rises.

It dropped from a 24-year peak of 85.51% in October and marked the first time that annual inflation has eased since May 2021, when the CPI stood at 16.6%.

Economists had forecast inflation would cool toward year-end, largely due to favorable base effects from late 2021.

"As we have previously stated in various platforms, we have entered a downward trend in inflation, leaving the peak behind, unless there is an unexpected global development," Treasury and Finance Minister Nureddin Nebati said.

Weaker prices of commodities and some improvement in global conditions played a role in the lower rate of inflation, Nebati wrote on Twitter after the data release.

Month-over-month, consumer prices rose 2.88%, TurkStat said, compared with 3.51% in September. It is compared to a Reuters poll forecast of 3%. Annually, consumer price inflation was seen at 84.65% and is expected to touch 69% by year-end.

The domestic producer price index was up 0.74% month-over-month in November for an annual rise of 136.02%, the data showed.

Last month, the central bank wrapped up the easing cycle that saw it lowering its benchmark policy rate by 5 percentage points since August to 9% from 14%, in line with President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's calls for stimulus.

Erdoğan and his government have emphasized low rates to boost production, investments, employment and exports with the aim of achieving a current account surplus, which it says will lead to a lasting fall in inflation.

Erdoğan says high rates cause inflation and he had called for single-digit rates by year-end. He has said the economic model is expected to yield results in the new year.

The president at the weekend forecasted that consumer price rises would soon slow down.

"We will witness the rapid descent of inflation soon and we will see together that the dirty scenarios built on this trouble are torn and thrown away," he noted.

## Thai Economy Firmly On Recovery Path Despite Risks

BANGKOK (Dispatches) - Thailand's economy remains firmly on the path to recovery despite global uncertainty, and further interest rate hikes will be gradual to ensure that recovery continues, the finance minister said.

Southeast Asia's second-largest economy is stable, with relatively low interest rates, sufficient liquidity and strong fiscal and financial positions, Arkhom Termpittayapaisith told a business forum.

"The Thai economy has proved once again that it is highly resilient and can weather the storms," he said, adding that annual third-quarter growth of 4.5% was the fastest pace in more than a year.

Thailand's economy is expected to grow 3.4% this year and 3.8% next year, with the tourism sector a key driver, Arkhom said, citing the ministry's forecasts.

However, he earlier said the economy may not reach a forecast growth of 3.8% next year due to a global economic slowdown, but this year's outlook should be achieved.

Thailand's economic recovery has lagged that of other Southeast Asian countries, with its tourism sector only starting to rebound this year. Last year's growth of 1.5% was among the slowest in the region.

With the economy in recovery, the central bank will gradually hike interest rates, and fiscal policy will be more targeted in supporting growth and tackling inflation, Arkhom said.

A joint business group on Wednesday predicted growth of 3.2% this year and 3.0-3.5% next year as the tourism sector picks up pace.

Thailand has received 9.78 million foreign tourists from Jan. 1 to Dec. 5, said Tanes Petsuwan, deputy governor of the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT).

The TAT is expecting Thailand's 10 millionth visitor this year to arrive within days, he said, as the agency plans to mark that milestone with events at airports on Dec. 10.

The TAT expects 18 million foreign tourists next year, or around 25 million if Chinese tourists return, Tanes said.

In pre-pandemic 2019, Thailand saw nearly 40 million foreign tourists who spent 1.91 trillion baht (\$54.42 billion).

Marisa Sukosol Nunbhakdi, president of the Thai Hotels Association, said hotel occupancy rates should be around 40-50% by the end of 2022 and she was upbeat about 2023.



## 13th Int'l Confab on Quranic Researches to Be Held in Iran

TEHRAN (MNA) – The 13th International Conference on Quranic Researches is to be held in Iran.

The latest edition of the conference is themed on “Methodology of Extracting Quran-based Humanities».

The Quranic event is to cover four general axes including «nature, principles and characteristics», «territory and species», «consequences, harms and challenges» as well as »solutions».

The secretariat of the conference has announced that the deadline for sending articles to this event will be January 5, 2023.

The conference will be held concurrent with the 39th international competition of the Holy Quran.



## Europe Can't Look to U.S. Shale to Fill Any OPEC Gap



NEW YORK (Dispatches) - U.S. shale oil drillers turned from scrappy wildcatters into multi-millionaires over the past two decades, propelling the United States to become the world's largest producer, but now they are running out of runway.

Oil output gains are slowing and executives from some of the largest firms are warning of future declines from overworked oilfields and less productive wells.

On Sunday, the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) meets to decide whether to hold the line or cut its output, no longer afraid that their policy decisions might provoke a surge in shale production in the way they did in the years before the pandemic.

The sidelining of U.S. shale means consumers around the world may face a winter of higher fuel prices. Russia has threatened to block oil sales to countries supporting a European Union price cap, and the United States is winding down releases from emergency oil stockpiles that helped cool energy inflation.

U.S. shale production costs are soaring and there is no sign that tight-fisted investors will change their demands for returns rather than investment in expanding drilling.

During a decade of stunning growth, shale consistently defied production forecasts, and opposition from environmentalists, as technology broke open more and more shale plays and revolutionized the global energy industry.

But there appears to be no new industry-transforming technologies in the works or cost-savings that could change the picture this time around. Inflation has pushed up costs by up to 20%, and less productive wells are crimping the industry's ability to produce more.

Research and engineering spending at top oilfield firm SLB this year dropped to 2.3% of revenue through September, from 2.4% in the same period a year ago. At Helmerich & Payne (HPN), one of the largest drilling contractors, its R&D budget will rise only \$1 million, from 2022's \$27 million.

Industry spending on new oil projects, said analysts last week at Morgan Stanley, “is modest at best and the absolute level of investment is still historically low.”

Shale has proven naysayers wrong in the past. After the 2014-2016 OPEC price war put hundreds of oil companies into bankruptcy, shale innovated with less expensive ways of operating. Their subsequent gains gave the United States by 2018 the title of world's largest crude producer, a distinction it still holds.

Investors have put dividends and share buybacks ahead of more production gains in the past few years, said executives.

That has changed the ability of shale producers to react to spikes in international oil prices, said Bryan Sheffield, who sold producer Parsley Energy and now runs an energy-focused private equity fund.

“Shale can't come back to become a swing producer,” Sheffield said, because of the investors' unwillingness to finance growth. The demand for payouts and repeated price busts have forced oil producers and service companies “to cut back on science projects” that fed past production breakthroughs, he added.

Technology development that led to innovations such as multi-stage hydraulic fracturing “will slow down and has slowed down,” said Richard Spears, a vice president at researcher Spears & Associates. “If you want to advance how far you can drill out and how fast, that now becomes a problem.”

The industry also has less time to regain its former leadership, said Hess Corp CEO John Hess. He estimates rivals have about a decade of running room before they fizzle out. Shale is “no longer in the driver's seat” with OPEC regaining control over the market, said Hess.

The U.S. government expects overall oil production to reach a new peak next year, but it has several times this year cut its forecasts. It recently slashed 2023 production growth outlook by 21%, to a gain of about 480,000 barrels per day (bpd), to 12.31 million bpd. That could mean less growth compared to the mere 500,000 bpd gain this year - which is already well short of lofty expectations of an about 900,000 bpd gain this spring.

Shale's waning influence is clear in North Dakota. Once the vanguard of the U.S. shale oil industry, poor well productivity in the state's Bakken region and labor shortages have left it far from its boom days.

About 4% of its shale drilling inventory remains high producing, or Tier 1, locations, down from 9% at the start of 2020, according to production technology

firm Novi Labs, which focuses on oil and gas well returns.

As the number of prime drilling locations decline across all shale fields, the outlook is grim. Shale production declines rapidly after peaking compared to conventional oil wells, falling about 50% after the first year.

“It's kind of a canary in the coal mine for what's going to happen in the other unconventional oil plays,” said Ted Cross, director of product management Novi Labs and a former oil company geologist, referring to North Dakota.

The Permian Basin of west Texas and New Mexico, the largest and most important U.S. oilfield, is the only U.S. shale region to exceed its pre-COVID-19 pandemic oil production levels, according to U.S. Energy Information Administration data.

Even that field is showing signs of stress.

“There are a bunch of underlying causes, but frac sand is so expensive now, tight labor markets make last-mile logistics difficult, and public producers are generally more willing to miss on production than on capex,” said Matt Hagerty, a senior analyst for FactSet's BTU Analytics.

Initial production rates on a new well in the Central Midland basin section of the Permian averages about 790 barrels per day of oil, according to researcher BTU, down from 830 bpd just six months ago. Its outlook for initial output in another shale field, the eastern Eagle Ford, is down to 778 bpd from 828 bpd.

“We're going to go into 2023 with a serious workforce shortage,” said North Dakota Department of Mineral Resources Director Lynn Helms. The northern state has historically had difficulty attracting workers, and the tight labor market has worsened the problem.

Attracting laborers for crews needed to run frac fleets and rigs has been stubbornly difficult, Helms said, adding that more drilling rigs have moved south to the Permian.

The number of oil and gas extraction workers in North Dakota fell by 12% between 2019 and 2021, the most recent annual Bureau of Labor Statistics data show, compared to New Mexico's 9.6% drop.

Lower production rates are “a longer-term prospect,” said Mike Oestmann, chief executive of shale producer Tall City Exploration. Other issues depressing potential shale gains: a lack of regulatory clarity and the U.S. government's desire to shift away from fossil fuels, he said.

With producers determined to put limited resources into the best drilling prospects, “we won't be able to keep this up forever,” said Kaes Van't Hof, finance chief at Diamondback Energy, in a recent earnings call.

The U.S. Energy Department has been cutting forecasts for U.S. crude production all year after slower-than-expected increases in output.

## What's on the Agenda at the U.N.'s COP15 Nature Summit?

MONTREAL (Dispatches) - A key United Nations summit to halt nature loss begins this week in Montreal, Canada. Delegates from nearly 200 countries will spend two weeks hashing out a new global deal to protect the world's struggling species and fast-vanishing wild places.

This month's Montreal summit is sometimes referred to as COP15, as it is the 15th “conference of parties” - or nations - signed onto the 1992 U.N. Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).

China holds the COP15 presidency, meaning it is responsible for facilitating year-round negotiations ahead of hosting the deal-making summit. The CBD holds a summit every two years under a rotating presidency. China's COP15 summit has been delayed four times, however, from its original date in 2020 due to COVID.

The world's last set of nature targets - the Aichi Targets - expired in 2020. Currently, there is no global agreement in effect.

Nevertheless, there are currently more than 1 million species threatened with extinction, as plant and animal species vanish at a rate 1,000 times faster than the natural extinction rate.

In Montreal, negotiators are considering 23 new targets, tackling everything from pesticides and noise pollution to corporate disclosures around the use of natural resources.

Scientists and campaigners are pushing for countries to adopt a “Paris Agreement for nature” - referring to the 2015 deal brokered at the U.N. climate talks in Paris to hold global warming to within 1.5 degrees Celsius.

## Israeli Military...

FROM PAGE 1

“Such bids are meant to undermine the willpower and determination of freedom-loving Palestinians as they are fighting off the Israeli regime's acts of aggression,” Hamas said in a statement.

It added, “By assassinating our resistance fighters, the occupiers have exposed themselves to fairly adverse consequences. They should realize that the upshots of these crimes will impinge on them and they cannot escape the public wrath.”

The Islamic Jihad movement also stated that the latest killings in the occupied West Bank will not deter the Palestinian nation from treading the path of resistance, emphasizing that Palestinians will remain steadfast and resilient against the occupying Israeli regime.

Since the start of 2022, Israeli troops have killed more than 210 Palestinians, including more than 50 children, in the occupied West Bank and East al-Quds as well as the besieged Gaza Strip.

## Airbus Drops 2022 Delivery Forecast, Softens Output Goal

PARIS (Dispatches) - Airbus abandoned a numerical forecast for jet deliveries and a date for its key production goal, but maintained financial targets as it limps towards the end of a year haunted by disruption in factories and supply chains.

The world's largest planemaker said its previous target of “around 700” deliveries in 2022 was now out of reach, but that it did not expect to fall “materially short” of that estimate.

Reuters reported on Friday that the target was under review after November deliveries fell short of expectations.

Airbus also confirmed a Reuters report it had delivered a net total of 563 aircraft between January and November after adjusting for the earlier cancellation of two jets caught up in Western sanctions against Russia over the Ukraine war.

That included a total of 68 in November, compared with what suppliers had described as an industrial planning target of 80.

The announcement, originally due on Dec. 8, was brought forward by two days.

Airbus did not say what range it had previously had in mind with its target of “around 700,” but two analysts said anything below 690 would have been seen as a missed target.

The delivery crunch immediately set the stage for an uncertain production outlook next year.

Airbus reaffirmed an interim production goal of 65 benchmark A320neo-family jets a month but withdrew the target's implementation date, saying instead it would adjust the speed of the ramp-up to that level over the course of 2023 and 2024.

It also said it plans to reach an ultimate target of 75 of the single-aisle jets a month by the middle of the decade.

Airbus had previously planned to reach 65 a month by early 2024, having pushed this back from mid-2023 earlier this year, citing problems in its supply chain.

Boeing is producing at a lower level as it recovers from successive safety and pandemic demand crises.

Historically, the level of production and deliveries were broadly in synch, making it reasonably simple to track production data, which Airbus does not publish on a monthly basis.

But the correlation broke down, making it harder to guess production, when the pandemic left a build-up of unwanted jets in inventory and factories kept running at a reduced rate.

Airbus has said it aims to end the current year at a production rate of 50 a month, compared with 60 before COVID-19.

However, some analysts and suppliers say production has fluctuated throughout the year and remains fragile as the industry tackles missing parts or planning problems.

The speed of the production increase will depend in part on how many 2022 jet deliveries get pushed into 2023.





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## FIFA Fine Croatia Over Fans Xenophobic Chants

DOHA (Dispatches) - FIFA sanctioned World Cup quarter-finalists Croatia following abuse by their fans targeting Canada's goalkeeper Milan Borjan. A disciplinary inquiry fined the Croatian federation 50,000 Swiss francs (50,674 euros, \$53,000) "in relation to the behavior of Croatian supporters during the Croatia v. Canada FIFA World Cup match on 27 November", a statement announced. During the match in Doha, Croatia fans verbally insulted Borjan, an ethnic Serb, who was born in Croatia but fled the country as a child.

## Qatar Probing Death of a Worker At World Cup Training Site

DOHA (Dispatches) - Qatar has launched a work safety investigation into the death of a worker, Qatari officials said, after reports that a Filipino man died at a training site during the soccer World Cup, marked by controversy over treatment of migrant workers. Nasser Al Khater, Chief Executive of the 2022 World Cup in Doha, confirmed to Reuters that a worker died, without providing specifics, and stated that "death is a natural part of life" while offering condolences to his family.

# Celtics Rip Suns In NBA Showdown

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - Boston's Jaylen Brown and Jayson Tatum turned a matchup of NBA conference leaders into a rout on Wednesday while Ja Morant's triple double sparked the Memphis Grizzlies over Oklahoma City.

Tatum and Brown each scored 25 points as the Celtics improved the NBA's best record to 21-5 with a 125-98 blowout victory at Western Conference leader Phoenix.

Boston stayed two games atop Milwaukee in the Eastern Conference while Phoenix fell to 16-9 and a half-game behind New Orleans (16-8) in the West.

The Suns trailed 69-42 at halftime, their largest deficit of the season to that point, and by as many as 45 points in the third quarter.

"We were just really connected," Tatum said. "We're just making the right plays. We hit a lot of shots tonight."

The Celtics, who lost to Golden State in last season's NBA Finals, improved to 10-3 on the road. "We're happy with the way we're playing," Tatum said. "But we're far from satisfied. This doesn't mean anything if we don't get back to where we want to get to (the NBA Finals) and get over that hump."

"It's a long process but we're trending in the right direction."

Phoenix welcomed back guard Chris Paul, who missed a month with a heel injury. He had four points, four rebounds and four assists.

Morant, meanwhile, delivered a triple double with 26 points, 13 rebounds and 11 assists to lead host Memphis over the Thunder 123-102.

It was a club-record sixth career triple double for the 23-year-old US guard.

"It means a lot," Morant said. "A lot of credit goes to my teammates and my coaches putting me in positions to excel at a high level."

"We knew rebounding was important. I took it upon myself early on, I think I had seven early. Every other stat was from my teammates. Them knocking down shots opened up shots for me on the floor as well."



Memphis allowed only 15 points in the fourth quarter. "It was pretty much just locking in, getting stops and rebounds," Morant said. "We've got to continue fighting and play hard."

Greek star Giannis Antetokounmpo scored 35 points and added six rebounds and seven assists while Jrue Holiday contributed 31 points in Milwaukee's 126-113 victory over visiting Sacramento. The Bucks improved the NBA's second-best record to 18-6.

Kyrie Irving scored a game-high 33 points with nine assists, five rebounds and four blocked shots while Kevin Durant added 29 points, nine rebounds and eight assists in Brooklyn's 122-116 home victory over Charlotte.

Simone Fontecchio made the winning basket with 1.4 seconds remaining to give Utah a 124-123 home victory over the Golden State Warriors.

Golden State's Jordan Poole scored a game-high 36 points but his bad pass set up the Italian forward's decisive inside shot.

Jordan Clarkson led the Jazz with 22 points while Fontecchio added 18 off the bench.

Zion Williamson scored 29 points and grabbed 10 rebounds to spark New Orleans over Detroit 104-98. The host Pelicans took the West lead with their fifth consecutive victory.



## Hazard Retires From Int'l Football

AL RAYYAN (Dispatches) - Belgium captain Eden Hazard announced his retirement from international soccer aged 31 after his team's group-stage exit at the World Cup.

The forward played in all three Group F games but did not score as Belgium beat Canada, lost to Morocco and played out a goalless draw with Croatia to finish third.

Hazard made his international debut in 2008 and scored 33 times in 126 appearances. He helped Belgium reach the 2018 World Cup semi-finals, where they lost to eventual champions France, and beat England in the third-placed playoff.

"I have decided to put an end to my international career. The succession is ready," Hazard wrote on Instagram.

"A page turns today... Thank you for your love. Thank you for your unparalleled support. Thank you for all this happiness shared since 2008... I will miss you."

Belgium coach Roberto Martinez stepped down from his role on Thursday following a disappointing tournament in Qatar for the team ranked second in the world.

## Baku, Qatar and Austin to Stage F1 Sprints in 2023

PARIS (Dispatches) - Formula One on Wednesday named Qatar, Azerbaijan and Austin in the United States among the six circuits chosen to stage sprint races in 2023.

The 100-kilometre dash has proved a popular addition to Grand Prix weekends since it was first introduced last year.

F1 announced in September it was doubling the number of sprints to six for 2023.

And joining Azerbaijan's Baku street circuit, Qatar's Losail track and Austin's Circuit of the Americas are the Red Bull Ring in Spielberg, Austria, Belgium's Spa-Francorchamps and Interlagos in Brazil.

For a sprint weekend the traditional one-hour qualifying session is shifted to Friday, setting the starting order for Saturday's sprint, which in turn shapes the grid for the Grand Prix itself.

This season the sprint's points system was beefed up, with the top three home gaining eight, seven and six points respectively down to one point for eighth place.

At Imola's Emilia Romagna Grand Prix in April, double world champion Max Verstappen hit the points jackpot for the weekend, emerging with a maximum 34 points after winning the sprint, the grand prix and setting the fastest lap.

F1 boss Stefano Domenicali said the sprints had proved a welcome addition "and we can't wait to bring even more action to fans with six events next year, including our first US F1 Sprint in Austin".

## Olympic Chiefs Want to Explore Ways to Reintegrate Russian, Belarusian Athletes

LAUSANNE (Dispatches) - The International Olympic Committee wants to examine ways to reintegrate Russian and Belarusian athletes, banned from international competition since February after Moscow's invasion of Ukraine, IOC president Thomas Bach said.

While most international federations followed the IOC's recommendation in February to ban Russian and Belarusian athletes, the question is already being asked over their participation in the 2024 Paris Olympics.



## Spain Coach Luis Enrique Fired, De la Fuente Takes Over

DOHA (Dispatches) - Luis Enrique was sacked as Spain coach after the team's elimination in the last-16 at the World Cup with the country's under-21 manager Luis de la Fuente named as his replacement by the Spanish football federation (RFEF).

Spain were beaten on penalties by Morocco after a goalless draw on Tuesday in an upset result after failing to turn their dominance into a victory.

"The RFEF has chosen Luis de la Fuente as the new (Spain) coach," RFEF said in a statement.

"The ... RFEF has delivered to the president a report in which it determined that a new project should start for the Spain national team, with the aim of continuing the growth

achieved in recent years thanks to the work carried out by Luis Enrique (and the staff).

"Both the RFEF president Luis Rubiales and sports director, Jose Francisco Molina have informed Luis Enrique of the decision. The RFEF would like to thank Luis Enrique and his entire coaching staff for the work done in the last few years."

The 52-year-old said after the Morocco match that he was to blame for the defeat. Luis Enrique, who was first appointed Spain coach in 2018, had a contract until the end of the year.

He is the fourth manager to get sacked after their teams were eliminated at the World Cup in Qatar.

De la Fuente, 61, joined the RFEF in 2013 as the under-15 manager having worked with players like Marco Asensio, goalkeeper Unai Simon, Eric Garcia, Pau Torres, Pedri, Carlos Soler and Dani Olmo when they were youngsters.

## Djokovic to Begin Australian Open Campaign At Adelaide Int'l

ADELAIDE (Dispatches) - Novak Djokovic will begin his bid for a 10th Australian Open title at the Adelaide International, organizers said today, after the Serbian was granted a visa to enter the country.

The world number five missed the opening Grand Slam of 2022 when he was deported over his vaccine status after a high-stakes legal battle.

Australia has since lifted the requirement for visitors to show proof of Covid vaccination, and his three-year ban was overturned by the government in November.

Djokovic said at the time it was a "a relief".

"The Australian Open has been my most successful Grand Slam," he added. "I made some of the best memories there."

Djokovic will face a strong field from January 1-8 that also features Felix Auger-Aliassime, Daniil Medvedev and Andrey Rublev, ranked six, seven and eight, respectively, along with two-time Wimbledon champion Andy Murray.

His longtime-rival Rafael Nadal, the defending Australian Open champion, will instead use the United Cup, a new mixed teams event in Perth, Brisbane and Sydney, as his warm-up to the Grand Slam.

Four of the world's top 10 women will begin the year in Adelaide, with second-ranked Ons Jabeur, world number five Aryna Sabalenka, world number eight Daria Kasatkina and world number nine Veronika Kudermetova all entered.

The field also includes two-time Australian Open champion Victoria Azarenka, 2022 Wimbledon champion Elena Rybakina and Grand Slam winners Bianca Andreescu and Jelena Ostapenko.



## Portugal Deny Ronaldo Reported World Cup Walkout Threat

DOHA (Dispatches) - The Portuguese Football Federation (FPF) on Thursday denied Cristiano Ronaldo threatened to abandon the World Cup squad after being benched against Switzerland.

The 37-year-old striker was surprisingly dropped for the last 16 clash on Tuesday, with his replacement Goncalo Ramos netting a hat-trick in the 6-1 victory.

Ronaldo appeared from the bench, but a report from Portuguese publication Record said the striker had previously threatened to leave in a tense conversation with coach Fernando Santos.

"The FPF clarifies that at no time did the captain of the Seleccion, Cristiano Ronaldo, threaten to leave the national team during the stay in Qatar," said the federation.

"Every day Ronaldo is building up a unique track record at the service of the national team and the country, which must be respected."

The FPF said Ronaldo's appearance against Switzerland was a further demonstration of his commitment to the cause.

Ronaldo is the most-capped Portuguese player and the top men's international goalscorer of all time.

Portugal face Morocco on Saturday in the quarter-finals, where Ramos may again get the nod over Ronaldo.

The five-time Ballon d'Or winner did not train with the other substitutes on Wednesday after the game, instead taking part in a gym session alongside the starters against Switzerland.

