

Health Ministry Announced on Saturday That the Number of Deaths From the Coronavirus Pandemic in Iran Increased to **144,658** With **Six** More Iranians Killed by the Virus Over the Past 24 Hours

IRAN NEWS

President of Iran Tennis Federation Davoud Azizi Said on Saturday That the International Tennis Federation (ITF) Has Given Iran Hosting of the 2023 West Asian Tennis Tournament

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Iran Slams West's Use of Pressure as Leverage

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The Iranian foreign minister has warned the United States and its European allies against the use of pressure in talks on the revival of the 2015 Iran nuclear deal, saying Tehran will take reciprocal measures against sanctions and meddlesome.

Hossein Amirabdollahian made the remark in a post on his Twitter account late on Friday, after a phone conversation with the European Union's foreign policy chief Josep Borrell on the latest status of stalled negotiations on reviving the nuclear deal, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

Amirabdollahian censured as "wrong" a measure by the U.S. administration and the three European signatories to the JCPOA — France, Germany and the United Kingdom — to use pressure as leverage in the sanctions-lifting negotiations.

Stressing that Iran is approaching the "final stage of a good, strong and durable agreement," the top diplomat said the Islamic Republic will "respond to sanctions and interference."

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IAEA Inspectors Took Samples From Barn, Abandoned Mine

TEHRAN (IFP) - Iran's top nuclear official once again dismisses the UN nuclear watchdog's claims of the existence of "undeclared" nuclear sites in the country, saying such reports are based on baseless allegations by foreign spy services and the notorious Mujahedin-e-Khalq Organization (MKO) terror group.

In an interview with Hamshahri news outlet, Mohammad Eslami, who heads the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI), said the so-called "undeclared" sites that inspectors of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) examined were a barn, an abandoned mine, and a scrap metal dealership.

The metal scrap, from which they took samples, had been imported from other countries, including Iraq, for use in the metal smelting industry, and might have contained "pollution," he explained. But that does not mean Iran has an "undeclared" nuclear facility, said the official, adding that pollution is different from nuclear materials.

Eslami also slammed the latest Western-drafted resolution adopted last month at the IAEA, which claims Iran's cooperation with the agency had been "insufficient."

"These are the same texts that the Zionists write" and make international organizations lose their credibility, he added.

Tehran Complains to UN Chief About Bid to Cancel Its CSW Membership



TEHRAN - The Iranian envoy to the United Nations has warned against the United States' attempts to cancel the Islamic Republic's membership in the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), denouncing the bid as politically-motivated and in contravention with the fundamental principles of the UN Charter.

"If the U.S. push to cancel Iran's membership in the CSW succeeds, it will create a dangerous precedence within the United Nations, and will cast doubt on the equality of member states in the international organization," Amir Saeed Iravani wrote in identical letters addressed to the UN Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres, President of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), Lachezara Stoeva, and Chairwoman of the 67th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women, Mathu Joyini.

The senior Iranian diplomat went on to point to Washington's efforts to annul Iran's CSW membership when the ECOSOC convenes on December 14, stating that the bid is rooted in false claims and unsubstantiated allegations against Iran.

"This illegal initiative is indicative of another US attempt to abuse the UN for the sake of its own political objectives," Iravani highlighted, stating that "The Islamic Republic of Iran has always warned against the abuse of UN-affiliated institutions for the purpose of advancement of political goals, as the practice undermines the credibility of the United Nations."

Iran's UN envoy also drew attention to Washington's hostile policies and its campaign of maximum political and economic pressures against Tehran, especially after former US president Donald Trump withdrew from the 2015 nuclear deal — officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in May 2018, and said ratification of the US motion will be very dangerous for the entire UN.

"Not only will this initiative establish a dangerous procedure with adverse repercussions, it will also be against the essence of the United Nations and will undermine the sovereign equality of member states, their participation in the international arena, and the equal and proportionate presence of world states in all international bodies. This is while such subjects constitute one of the basic foundations of the United Nations and multilateralism," Iravani stressed.

"It has never been the case that an elected ECOSOC member would lose its membership in a certain commission for a specific purpose," the Iranian diplomat said, calling on the UN chief to support the principles of the UN Charter within his responsibilities and prevent the non-constructive and destructive anti-Iran bids, led by the U.S., as they will endanger the active and comprehensive participation of all member states within the activities of the United Nations.

ViewPoint

By: Hamid Reza Naghashian

What a Strange World, What a Strange Freedom Lover

We are living in a strange world with strange definitions for some certain words as everyone has its own definition and has made the words lose their real meanings.

Human rights and freedom of expression are two words which are being mistranslated in the world by countries and everyone has his own definition of these two words but it seems the Westerners have the most strangest definitions and when it comes to them, the meaning of those words totally change in favor of them.

In recent decades and in particular the meaning of these two words have been totally changed by the Westerners and they have been using their own definitions to dictate themselves on other countries especially the independent ones.

For years we have been watching what is going in countries like Palestine and Yemen and many people have been suffering from the atrocities of the Zionists and Saudi-led coalition but the West has just been watching or even supporting the invaders than supporting the oppressed people of Palestinian and Yemenis.

Everyday some reports regarding the crimes of the Zionist regime are published in the media and the Zionist regime continues its killing spree against the Palestinians but the only reaction from the UN and international bodies is to watch or to issue a useless statements but when it comes to the riots or violence in countries like Iran and China, they act differently and resort to the harshest resolutions and decisions.

We have not forgotten recent decisions from the UN against Russia in support of Ukraine which happened almost unanimously but this international body does not give a damn to what goes in Yemen and Palestine.

The recent riots in Iran is another proof for this double standard approach by the international bodies regarding the independent countries as all have been mobilized to punish the Islamic Republic of Iran while the country is trying to curb the riots in the country.

When such riot happen in countries like the U.S., UK, France, Germany or any ally of the West, it is translated as violence and riot but when it happens in Iran, China, Russia or Venezuela, suddenly its meaning changes and becomes freedom of expression and human rights and this is the main reason that we say we are living in a strange country with a strange freedom lover.

Reacting to recent stand of the West regarding the riots in Iran, Iran's Foreign Ministry advised 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.

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Export to Africa Rises 36% in 8 Months on Year

TEHRAN (MNA) - The value of Iran's export to Africa rose 36 percent in the first eight months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21-November 21), as compared to the same period of time in the past year, the vice president of Iran and Africa Merchants Club Ruhollah Latifi said.

According to Latifi, Iranian traders exported over 1,844,601 tons of commodities worth \$990.569 million to African countries in the mentioned eight-month period, IRIB reported.

The official put the total Iran-Africa eight-month trade at 1.914 million tons valued at \$1.056 billion, of which the share of Iran's import was 69,031 tons valued at \$66 million.

The trade between Iran and 38 African countries increased by 10.5 percent in terms of weight and 39 percent in terms of value in the said period, Latifi said.

The imports from Africa also increased by 77 percent and 98 percent in terms of weight and value, respectively.

The official named South Africa, Mozambique, and Sudan as the main export destinations and Tanzania, Kenya, and South Africa as the major sources of imports for Iran among the African countries in the first eight months of the present year.

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Russia Rules out Charges on Arms Delivery From Iran

TEHRAN (IRNA) - The industrial and military complex of the Russian Federation is capable of achieving the objectives without asking other countries to supply aid, a Russian envoy said.

According to Tass news agency, Permanent Representative of Russia to the United Nations Vasily Alekseyevich Nebenzya said at the UN Security Council session on Friday that the claims about importing weapons from Iran are baseless.

Moscow would not be affected by former Western partners, he said, adding that they try to divert the attention of public opinion to unfounded charges on delivery of arms from Iran to Russia, but we have dismissed the accusations on several occasions.

Nebenzya further warned, "During the last week, a true massacre has been going on in Donetsk with Western weapons. Incited by Western states, Ukrainian punishers seek to literally raze the city."

White House National Security Council spokesman John Kirby confirmed on Friday night that Washington will provide Ukraine with a military package worth 275 million dollars.

From the onset of the Ukraine conflict, the US provided the country with 19.1 billion dollars of military and security aid. The American congressmen voted for an additional 800-million-dollar aid for Ukraine in the coming year.

On Friday, the Bulgarian parliament endorsed the delivery of a military package to Ukraine.

Since the beginning of the Russia-Ukraine war on February 24, the Western states have supplied weapons to Ukraine, imposed several sanctions on Russia, and frozen Russians' assets.

The imposition of sanctions on Russia's oil export by Europe has led to a severe fuel crisis and high inflation in the green continent.

Confrontation With Rioters Task of All Gov'ts

TEHRAN (IP) – Foreign Ministry Spokesman notes that deterrent confrontation with lawlessness and riot is an axiomatic responsibility of governments to maintain security for their people.

Nasser Kanaani said that the enforcement of law and the maintenance of general security is a task of the governments in the world's countries and the Islamic Republic of Iran's government is no exception.

Kanaani said pointed out that those countries that suppressed the civil protests of their people had not the prerogative to talk about the enforcement of laws and issuing verdicts to punish the rioters who killed people and disturbed the country's security.

Imam Khomeini, Supreme Leader Remarks Beacon on the Path of Transformation

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Stressing the importance of reviewing the performance of the Supreme Council of Cultural Revolution based on the upstream documents, President Seyed Ebrahim Raisi said, "To evaluate the performance of the Supreme Council of Cultural Revolution, we need to refer to the remarks of Imam Khomeini about the objectives of forming this council and also the remarks and expectations of the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution about this council, which are the beacon for the Supreme Council of Cultural Revolution on the path of transformation".

Speaking at the Conference of the Second Step of the Supreme Council of Cultural Revolution on the Path of Transformation, which was held on the 38th anniversary of the formation of the council, Raisi said, "For transformation in the field of culture and the performance of the Supreme Council of Cultural Revolution, we should have a look at its performance from the beginning up to now".

Stressing the importance of reviewing the performance of the Supreme Council of Cultural Revolution based on the upstream documents, the President said, "To evaluate the performance of the Supreme Council of Cultural Revolution, we need to refer to the remarks of Imam Khomeini about the objectives of forming this council and also the remarks and expectations of the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution about this council, which are the beacon for the Supreme Council of Cultural Revolution on the path of transformation".

He said, "The implementation and operationalization of transformation in the Supreme Council of Cultural Revolution require attention to this beacon so that it can become clear in what parts it has been successful, and it should be appreciated and strengthened, and in what parts there are shortcomings, which should be addressed as soon as possible".

Referring to the fact that I have repeatedly emphasized the importance of improving productivity, the President said, "I would like to say to you intellectuals that we need to improve productivity in the country. We have more than 80,000 faculty members in the country, who should be expected to improve productivity".



Raisi stated that he deeply believes that spending money in this sector of science and culture is a kind of investment, and clarified, "In no way should we worry about spending money in the sector of science and culture, but we must also monitor whether we have been productive in proportion to the costs or not?"

Referring to his meeting with students on Student's Day and asking them to hold meetings to familiarize themselves with political issues and current issues along with scientific issues, Raisi clarified, "Our students and university professors should definitely have a correct analysis of the situation in addition to knowledge enhancement".

The President further mentioned the issue of cultural guidance in the words of the Supreme Leader of the Revolution in the Declaration of the Second Step of the Islamic Revolution and stated, "One of the important missions of the Supreme Council of Cultural Revolution is to monitor the realization of cultural guidance in addition to preserving and promoting cultural identity".

The President stated that the successive defeats of the enemies are due to the lack of recognition of the societies, and clarified, "The 20-year presence of the Americans in Afghanistan did not achieve anything other than war, bloodshed and defeat, because contrary to their claims, they are unaware of the conditions and realities of this region".

Raisi also mentioned the issue of recent disturbances in the country and said, "The recent conspiracy of the enemies had different dimensions. The security aspect will be followed by the security officials, but the other aspect is definitely related to the cultural issues that the cultural officials of the society must carefully scrutinize the recent events and correct the effective factors in the cultural background of the recent riots and compensate for the possible deficiencies and shortcomings".

The President considered explaining the issues and raising awareness to the society as one of the very important and dangerous responsibilities of the custodians of culture in the country and stated, "Martyr Lieutenant General Haj Qasem Soleimani believed that we had won the military victory over the Takfiri terrorist movement in the region, but to save the thoughts and minds that are washed, we need a cultural army".

German Ambassador Summoned

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran has summoned Germany's ambassador to Tehran over Berlin's vociferous support for foreign-backed riots and inciting terrorism in the Islamic Republic.

The envoy, Hans-Udo Muzel, was summoned to the Foreign Ministry on Friday after the German government "strongly condemned" Iran's execution of a rioter, and questioned the Islamic Republic's lawful response to the riots.

During Muzel's meeting with Iranian Foreign Ministry officials, Iran conveyed its strong protest at Berlin's unacceptable intervention in the Islamic Republic's internal affairs.

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

The German ambassador was also notified that Germany was adopting duplicitous stances concerning the Islamic Republic's legitimate confrontation against terrorism and violence, while Berlin, itself, would consider security to be a redline, and did not tolerate riotous conduct. Earlier in the week, German officials arrested dozens of people, who had reportedly been plotting a coup against the German state.

The Foreign Ministry told the ambassador that it was "intensely woeful" that Germany would adopt the "selective and dual" attitude, through which it would consider subversive efforts to be "good for others, but bad for themselves."

The Foreign Ministry also reminded Germany of its "dismal record" vis-à-vis the Iranian people.

The German envoy, for his part, said he would convey Iran's protest to his respective government.

Iran Among World's Top Powers in Producing Air Defense Equipment

TEHRAN (MNA) – The Deputy Commander of Iranian Army Air Defense said that Iran benefiting from domestic experts and scientists is among the top countries in the world in terms of constructing the most sophisticated air defense equipment.

Speaking in a local ceremony on Friday evening, Brigadier General Alireza Elhami stated that the Islamic Republic of Iran has attained salient achievements during the years after the glorious victory of the Islamic Revolution in various fields including science and technology, etc.

He pointed to the upgraded version of the homegrown Bavar-373 defense missile system and noted that Iran has achieved the advanced air defense system which is able to destroy the enemies' targets at a range of more than 300 kilometers.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Brigadier general Elhami referred to the hybrid war waged by enemies against the country and added that a part of the goal of the hybrid war, which is being launched against the country, is to marginalize the progress and successes gained in the country.

Rioters, Violators to Be Handed Over to Justice

TEHRAN (Dispatches) – Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian has criticized the Western states' double standard when it comes to human rights in Iran, stressing that rioters and perpetrators of violence and terrorism will be judged according to the country's judicial law.

Amirabdollahian made the remarks in a phone call with Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands Wopke Hoekstra on Friday, noting that the West pursues double standards and takes interfering stances when it comes to human rights and issues related to women in Iran.

Undoubtedly, the rioters as well as those involved in terrorism, violence, and usage of cold weapons and



firearms against the police and security forces, will be handed over to justice in accordance with judicial laws of the country, the Iranian top diplomat said.

The attempt by certain Western officials and

circles to provoke the Iranian youths and women, and the instrumental use of media outlets have been unconstructive diplomatic measures, which led to the spread of violence and terrorist acts in Iran, he criticized.

Wopke, for his part, pointed to four-century-long positive and historical ties between Iran and the Netherlands, underlining the need for the improvement of the consulate-level interactions to resolve issues related to nationals of both countries.

The Dutch official also appreciated his Iranian counterpart's good faith to resolve the issues related to a Dutch national, calling for the continuation of talks to expand mutual ties.

Suppressing Protests in UK More Hideous Than Double Standards

TEHRAN (MNA) - Government spokesman Ali Bahadori Jahromi slammed the use of the army in suppressing the peaceful protests in the United Kingdom and said that such action is more hideous than double standards.

While the westerners call for a civil war in Iran, they give their own police extraordinary powers to suppress protests, Bahadori Jahromi wrote in a tweet on Saturday.

"This is more hideous than double standards," he stressed.

Saying that the UK has used the army to suppress the peaceful protests, Bahadori Jahromi called on the British government not to use violence against its citizens.

Iran carefully observes the UK government's behavior toward the people who are worried about the upcoming harsh winter and are angry about the economic situation, discrimination, and inequality, according to him.

UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak recently pledged police powers to tackle the protests in the country. Earlier, under the pretext of defending human rights and in support of the rioters in Iran, the UK imposed illegal anti-Iran sanctions.

Rishi Sunak has said it is "completely unacceptable" that people were having their lives disrupted by a "selfish minority" who join illegal protests.

A series of protests filled the streets of the largest UK cities recently, with people rallying for causes ranging from a cost-of-living crisis and pay rises to protecting the climate.



IRGC Forces Foil Assassination Attempt

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) says its forces have thwarted an assassination attempt against the Friday Prayer leader of Mashhad Ayatollah Ahmad Alamolhoda.

The IRGC said in a statement on Friday that its forces identified and arrested members of a terror outfit affiliated with the "Jaish al-Zulm" terrorist group in the eastern province of Khorasan Razavi.

It said the terrorist team planned to carry out destabilizing acts and terrorist operations in the holy city of Mashhad.

The terrorists also intended to attack the office of the Governor General of Khorasan Razavi, it added.

According to the statement, huge amounts of weapons, ammunition and explosives have been discovered from the hideout of the terrorists.

All the terrorists' agents in other provinces have also been identified and are under investigation, it said.

First Announcement

شناسه آگهی: ۱۴۲۳۸۹۵

TENDER NO.:
08-38 -9640005



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

Items	Material Description	Quantity
02	ACCESSORIES FOR COILED TUBING LOGGING	8 RL

Vendors who intend to participate in aforesaid tenders are requested to send their "Intention To Participate" letter via fax to the following number along with their resume according to Qualitative Assessment Form no. 2., available at: www.nisoc.ir, not later than 14 days after the second announcement, otherwise, their requests for participation in the tender will be disregarded.

The applicants should have relevant background in supplying the required goods and capability to provide and submit a bid bond of 30,175/- EURO or 7,926,975,579 /- RIAL, in favor of NISOC.

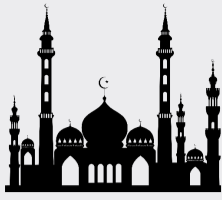
Tender documents including the materials through technical specifications and Qualitative Assessment Forms can be accessed via: www.nisoc.ir-material-procurement-management-tab

ONLY ACCEPTABLE DELIVERY TERM IS D.D.P. NISOC'S WAREHOUSE, AGHAJARI, IRAN
PAYMENT TERM IS C.O.D. SUBSEQUENT TO NISOC'S MATERIAL APPROVAL

NO ADVANCE PAYMENT WILL BE PAID

FOREIGN PURCHASING DEPARTMENT
Bldg. No. 104, Material Procurement Management Complex,
Kouy-e-Fadaeian Islam (New Site), Ahvaz, Iran
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PRAYER TIME

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

66. He said, "Nay, throw ye first!" Then behold their ropes and their rods-so it seemed to him on account of their magic - began to be in lively motion!
67. So Moses conceived in his mind a (sort of) fear.

Surah 20. Ta-ha (66-67)

85% of Foreign Tourists Canceled Their Visits to Iran

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHEAN – Head of Iran Hoteliers Association says recent incidents in the country has made 85% of foreign tourists cancel their visits to Iran and occupancy ration of hotels has declined to below 20%.

Speaking to ILNA, Jamshid Hamzehzadeh said that any incident and unrests in the country directly has its impact on tourism industry, adding that Iran's hoteliering industry has faced different crises since March 2019, adding that flood and heavy raining, rise in gasoline price, pandemic and recent unrests in the country have inflicted heavy damages on the national tourism industry.

He went on to say that the average occupancy ratio of hotels in the country has fallen to below 20% and according to reports many hotel owners cannot afford to cover the costs and they have to spend from their own pockets and even some of them have faced in paying the salary of their staff. He reiterated that if this condition continues, hotel owners may dismiss their staff like what they did during the pandemic.

On the success of attracting foreign tourists, he said that recent incidents in the



country has led to decline in the visits of foreign tourists and 85% of foreign tourists mainly from Europe, the U.S. and Asia have canceled their visits and some foreign tourists intended to pay a visit after staying in Qatar for the World Cup and they also changed their minds.

Hamzehzadeh added that most of Iranian hotels have standard certificates and some are on the verge of getting it and therefore Iranian hotels have no certain problem regarding standards.

On the change of rate of rooms, he said that it changes based on the inflation rate and the tourism ministry in cooperation with the association fix the rate rooms in the hotels.

Meanwhile Head of Union of Inns Mr Shahrokh Mohammadzadeh, for his part, said that the number of travelers in Tehran has decreased by 50% and people's economic condition has moved in a direction that people do not tend to travel.

He blamed the rise in price of laundering, refrigerator and TV for the rise in the room rate, adding that owners of inns and motels have tried to boost their services in the level of two-star hotels.

Over 16m Car Tires Produced In 8 Months



TEHRAN (MNA) - Iranian tire manufacturers produced over 16.279 million car tires in the first eight months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21-November 21), rising two percent from the output in the same period of time in the previous year.

This number of produced tires weighed over 172,653 tons, with 419-ton growth year on year.

According to the statistics, in the mentioned period, 107,625 tons of passenger car tires were produced, showing an eight-percent rise year on year.

Meanwhile, 16,498 tons of van tires were produced, indicating a 10-percent fall, and 33,424 tons of truck and bus tires were produced, showing a 10-percent drop.

Production of the tires of agricultural vehicles experienced a decline of 12 percent to stand at 112,365 tons, and that of road building and industrial vehicles fell 16 percent to 2,741 tons in the period under review.

In the first eight months of the present year, 12,132 tons of bicycle and motorcycle tires were also produced, indicating a two percent rise year on year.

Production of tubes fell seven percent to stand at 6,140 tons.

Iranian tire manufacturers produced 47,624,426 vehicle tires in the past Iranian calendar year 1400 (ended on March 20), which was one percent more than the figure of the preceding year.

This number of produced tires weighed over 288,149 tons, with a four-percent drop year on year. As reported, 24,179,708 car tires weighing 259,096 tons were produced in the past year, with a four percent drop in number, and a five percent fall in weight as compared to the preceding year.

In the previous year, 152,251 tons of passenger car tires were produced, showing a five-percent fall year on year.

Passenger cars accounted for 58.7 percent of the total tires produced in 1400.

SP Phase 11 Development Project to Be Implemented Soon

TEHRAN – The CEO of the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) said the gas from South Pars Phase 11 Project would come online in February after two decades of waiting.

According to NIOC, Mohsen Khojasteh-Mehr said the gas would come online after two decades of work in the offshore plan. Iran shares South Pars with Qatar in the Persian Gulf.

Speaking on Friday evening that the project was about to come online after two decades of work and \$85 billion investment.

He further said that over 700 million cubic meters of gas is being produced from the joint gas field daily, adding that the field accounts for over 70% of Iran's gas supply.

"Right now, \$27 billion worth of projects are being implemented in the upstream part of the South Pars region," he added.

He then pointed to the major task of the company and people in protecting national gas reserves especially in efficient consumption.

He also pointed to the jihadi and important action in the development project of Phase 11 and added that this phase for years of indecisiveness and passiveness especially in the past eight years and despite signing a contract with a foreign company has not seen any progress and even the foreign company withdrew from the contract.

He reiterated that during the 13th government and after instant actions in this field began and now drilling of four gas wells have been completed.

Khojasteh-Mehr went on to say that development of the joint Balal Field has started following the developments in the South Pars gas field.

He then pointed to the start of executive operation of developing North Pars gas field and said that with



developing Kish Field and developing 13 gas fields in the onshore sector and many in other fields, some 500m cubic meters of gas will be added to the national gas production.

He also announced the start of operations of Dasht Azadegan Arvand Company for the integrated development of Azadegan Field within the next two weeks.

He noted: "NIOC owns 54% of the organizational positions of the oil industry and 47% of the industry's human resources, and provides technical, engineering and oil and gas services in 16 operating and oil companies with 26 management and headquarters units and 6 representative offices."

He touched on the oil and gas reserves of Iran's oil industry: "NIOC has 158 billion barrels of crude oil equivalent and 182 billion barrels of crude oil equivalent in the gas sector, which is a total of 340 billion barrels of crude oil equivalent which is considered the first in the world."

The NIOC CEO further said: "We rank third among national and international oil companies in the world in oil and gas production, and we manage 410 oil and gas reservoirs."

Khojasteh-Mehr stated that one of NIOC's achievements in the first 6 months of the 13th government's activity was the 1mbd increase in crude oil production capacity to the levels prior to the sanctions, which cost \$500 million.

The official underlined intensive negotiations with international companies in the 13th government, and added: "The most distinctive of them was the \$40 billion memorandum with Russian companies, while we had extensive activities in international lawsuits."

Mashhad to Host Tajikistan-Iran Trade Conference

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Businesses from Tajikistan and Iran are scheduled to meet at a trade conference in Mashhad, the capital of Razavi Khorasan Province in Iran, from December 17 to 22.

According to asiaplustj.info, 16 companies from Tajikistan have sent their requests for taking part in the trade conference to be held December 17-22.

The Tajik firms are mainly active in the food industry, construction materials, and engineering services.

Mohammad Jan Mohammad Jaan, the head of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Sogd, will head the Tajik delegation to the trade conference in Mashhad.

Tradesmen and merchants from both countries are going to hold negotiations on the sidelines of the conference.

Tajikistan's Embassy in Tehran as well as the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of the Islamic Republic of Iran are expected to support entrepreneurs to contribute to economic and trade cooperation.

The two sides held talks on trade, financial, energy, transportation, industry, engineering services, healthcare, and tourism in the meeting, where they signed 25 memoranda of understanding.

The trade volume between Tajikistan and Iran stood at more than 157 million dollars from January to September 2022. Tajikistan exported commodities worth over 73 million dollars to the Islamic Republic and imported Iran-made goods worth 84 million dollars in the period.

Challenges of Investment Projects In Uzbekistan Reviewed

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Director of the department of Central Asia, Russia and Caucasus at Trade Promotion Organization says reviewing challenges and problems in field of investment in Uzbekistan is a very important and necessary issue.



A meeting was held for reviewing the investment projects in Uzbekistan in presence of Director of Department of Central Asia, Russia and Caucasus at Trade Promotion Organization of Iran Mr. Rahmatollah Khormali, former commercial attaché of Iran in Uzbekistan, representatives of state bodies and organizations and active companies in the field of export to the Central Asian states.

Reviewing the introduced investment project by the Uzbeks, reviewing the financial resources for investing in the related projects, reviewing the launch of the joint fund with Uzbekistan and reviewing financing the credit line and introducing capabilities and capacities of Iranian companies were the major issues which were discussed in the meeting.

Addressing the meeting, Mr. Khormali said that infrastructural problems of exports and planning cooperation with Uzbekistan in the field of investment projects should be reviewed. He noted that both countries are to cooperate in the fields of medicines and medical equipment, construction materials and ceramic, producing new greenhouse agro products and pursuing and cooperation regarding the inauguration of innovation house in Uzbekistan which all were raised during the meeting of presidents of both states.

Then former commercial attaché of Iran to Uzbekistan Mr. Mostafa Goodarzi said that reforms in Uzbekistan have led to favorable progress in Uzbekistan in different fields and the country has been now under the spotlight of foreign investors especially from China, Russia, South Korea and recently the UAE and Saudi Arabia.

IME Enjoys Weekly Trade Rise by 31%

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Iran Mercantile Exchange (IME) last week witnessed trade of 3,038,357 tons of commodities with a total trading value of nearly \$728m, logging growths of 31% and 33% in volume and value of trades compared with the week before that.



According to a report by the IME's International Affairs and PR, the exchange saw on its metals and minerals trading floor trade of 2,753,947 tons of commodities worth more than \$551m.

On this floor the IME sold 1,125,905 tons of cement, 845,000 tons of iron ore, 664,938 tons of steel, 66,000 tons of sponge iron, 36,700 tons of zinc, 9,200 tons of aluminum, 6,579 tons of copper, 200 tons of molybdenum concentrate, 100 kg of gold bars and 40 vehicles.

Furthermore, the IME saw on both domestic and export pits of its oil and petrochemical trading floor 281,422 tons of commodities worth more than \$174m.

Commodities traded on this floor included 92,681 tons of polymeric products, 78,000 tons of vacuum bottom, 8,500 tons of lube cut, 37,297 tons of chemicals, 15,520 tons of sulfur, 5,311 tons of base oil and 42,872 tons of bitumen.

The IME also traded within the same week 2,989 tons of commodities on its side market.

Iranian, Russian Cities to Boost Cooperation

ISFAHAN (IRNA) - The central Iranian city of Isfahan and the western Russian city of St Petersburg are to promote cooperation in tourism, technological, scientific, cultural, and economic fields, a provincial official announced on Saturday.

The two will widen cooperation under a recently-signed agreement, Ali Salehi, the spokesman for Isfahan City Council said.

The time of the agreement is unlimited, Salehi underlined.

Recently, an industrial and agricultural delegation from Isfahan visited St Petersburg and Moscow. Isfahan is a sister city with Florence in Italy, Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia, Kuwait City in Kuwait, Barcelona in Spain, Freiburg in Germany, Lahore in Pakistan, Havana in Cuba, Yerevan in Armenia, and Baalbek in Lebanon.

Sinema Leaves U.S. Democratic Party

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - U.S. Senator Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona said she is leaving the Democratic Party and registering as an independent, in an announcement just days after Democrats won a Senate race in Georgia to secure 51 seats in the 100-member chamber.

"Like a lot of Arizonans, I have never fit perfectly in either national party," Sinema said in an article for the Arizona Republic newspaper.

Sinema intends to maintain her committee assignments from the Democrats, an aide told Reuters on condition of anonymity. The aide would not say whether or not Sinema would continue to caucus with Democrats.



Huge Fire Engulfs Shopping Center in Moscow Suburb

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russian firefighters have put out a massive blaze that engulfed one of the largest shopping centers in a suburb of the capital, Moscow, leading to the collapse of part of the structure and one death.

The fire early on Friday spread over an area of about 7,000 square meters (75,000 square feet) in the Mega Khimki shopping and entertainment center, authorities said.

The head of the Russian emergencies ministry, Sergey Poletykin, reported that at least one person had been killed in the incident, with the fire put down at 10:45am (7:35 GMT).



Russia Shells Eastern Front as War Aims Appear to Shift



NEAR BAKHMUT (Dispatches) - Russian forces have shelled the entire front line in the Donetsk region in eastern Ukraine, Ukrainian officials said, part of what appears to be the Kremlin's scaled-back ambition to secure only the bulk of territory it has claimed.

The fiercest fighting was near the towns of Bakhmut and Avdiivka, the region's governor Pavlo Kyrylenko said in a television interview. Five civilians were killed and two wounded in Ukrainian-controlled parts of Donetsk over the previous day, he said early on Friday.

"The entire front line is being shelled," he said, adding that Russian troops were also trying to advance near Lyman, which was recaptured by Ukrainian forces in November, one of a number of battlefield setbacks suffered by Russia in the past few months.

In Bakhmut and other parts of the Donetsk region that neighbors Luhansk province, Ukrainian forces countered with barrages from rocket launchers, a Reuters witness said.

"The Russians have intensified their efforts in Donetsk and Luhansk," Ukrainian presidential adviser Oleksiy Arestovych said in a video post.

"They are now in a very active phase of attempting to conduct offensive operations. We are advancing nowhere but, rather, defending, destroying the enemy's infantry and equipment wherever it tries to advance."

In an early, the Ukrainian general staff said its forces had attacked Russian positions and troop assembly points in at least half a dozen towns in the south of Ukraine.

Russian losses amounted to about 240 wounded, with three ammunition depots and about various military equipment destroyed, it added.

Reuters was not able to verify battlefield reports.

President Vladimir Putin has given conflicting statements on the goals of the war but is now clear the aims include some expansion of Russia's borders. This contrasts with comments at the start of Russia's "special military operation" in February, when he said his plans did not include occupying Ukrainian land.

Putin on Friday repeated his accusation that the West was "exploiting" Ukraine and using its people as "cannon fodder" in a conflict with Russia, and said the West's desire to maintain its global dominance was increasing the risks of conflict.

"They deliberately multiply chaos and aggravate the international situation," Putin said in a video message to a summit of defense ministers from the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and a group of ex-Soviet states.

The Kremlin said on Thursday it was set on securing at least the bulk of the territories in east and south Ukraine, but appeared to give up on seizing other land in the west and northeast that Ukraine has recaptured.

Russia proclaimed in October that it had annexed four provinces shortly after holding so-called referendums that were rejected as bogus and illegal by Ukraine, the West and most countries at the United Nations.

China, Saudi Arabia Strengthen Partnership on Energy, Defense

RIYADH (Dispatches) - Saudi Arabia and China reaffirmed their cooperation on the global oil market and the principle of non-interference in internal affairs during a visit aimed at deepening strategic relations, at a time when Washington's ties with Riyadh appear increasingly frayed.

Chinese President Xi Jinping and Saudi King Salman signed a series of strategic deals, including one involving Chinese tech giant Huawei, since the official state visit began on Wednesday.

In a joint statement on Friday, the two sides said they "exchanged views regarding ways to reinforce and develop comprehensive strategic partnership relations between the Kingdom and China".

It stressed the principles of sovereignty and "non-interference", while affirming the importance of a peaceful solution to the Ukraine conflict.

In a nod to Persian Gulf security concerns over Iran, another oil supplier to China and with whom Beijing has good ties, they agreed on the need to "strengthen joint cooperation to ensure the peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear program", and for Tehran to respect "principles of good-neighborliness".

S. Korean Truckers Vote to End Strike for Minimum Wage Protections

SEOUL (Dispatches) - South Korean truckers voted to end their strike as it entered a third week with public support waning and the government refusing to budge, saying the action had caused "astronomical" damage to the economy. Many businesses prepared for the strike, which began Nov. 24, and were ready to weather short-term pain.

And as the government increased pressure - including unprecedented "start work" orders - some of over 25,000 striking truckers headed back to work this week, realizing that their bid to widen and make permanent a government scheme on minimum freight rates was failing.

On Friday, the Cargo Truckers Solidarity Union said that 62% of union members voted to call off the strike but that the union would continue its minimum wage campaign.

"The game is over. It is so sad that all we could do is stop our cars, but nothing has changed," said Kang Myung-gil, a container truck driver who came back to work on Monday after a two-week walkout.

Drivers said they faced the prospect of not only lost income but lost jobs as the strike was prolonged.

"The union fell into a trap that the government buried," said Kang, who is not a union driver, referring to the government narrative that the strike was devastating the country's economy, the world 10th largest.

"Then, we, living day by day, just have to accept the reality and move on," he said.

After the strike ended, President Yoon Suk-yeol's press secretary Kim Eun-hye said the government would "unwaveringly abide by laws and principles" on labour issues. She said the strike had caused "astronomical damage" to the economy.

This summer, an eight-day walkout by truckers delayed cargo shipments from cars to cement across Asia's fourth largest economy before it ended with each side claiming it had won concessions.



French Tanks Join NATO Defensive Line in Romania

CINCU (Dispatches) - Freshly arrived at Cincu army training camp, 120mm cannons loaded on French tanks are already booming out across the muddy firing range as NATO bolsters its forces in Romania, a member country bordering Ukraine.

"The Ukrainian crisis shows that what's going on in the east can threaten all of Europe. We're showing that NATO is present, united and ready for anything," says Alexandre de Feligonde, a French colonel leading a battalion of troops from different countries in central Romania.

As lead nation for the alliance's "Enhanced Forward Presence" deployment in Romania, France has just sent around 20 armored personnel carriers and 13 Leclerc tanks.

The menacing 56-tonne battle tanks can fire six shells a minute at ranges of up to 6,000 metres (3.7 miles) -- even on the move.

Development on the Leclerc was begun during the Cold War, when NATO was tooling up for "high-intensity" conflict with its Warsaw Pact opposite numbers led by the Soviet Union.

Alliance members' return to preparations for such a war, after years fighting totally different conflicts in the Middle East and Africa, have been stepped up since Russia invaded Ukraine in February.

French tanks were previously deployed to Estonia and Lithuania, NATO members bordering Russia, but the sudden attack has turned Romania into a new front-line state.

The French-led battalion now numbers around 700 men. Most are French and around 80 are Dutch.

Facilities are being built to host the target number of 1,200. As well as flying the NATO flag on the alliance's southeastern flank, the deployment aims to get the different armies working better together.

"We have to train together to be credible" as a combined fighting force, de Feligonde says, watching from a hill as the tanks fire salvos of shells in a joint exercise with the Dutch and Romanians.

"There is a language barrier with the French but we have the same procedures. It is easier than I thought," said Lieutenant Wietse of the Dutch force.

Romania currently hosts around 5,000 foreign troops, the largest contingent anywhere in NATO's southeastern region.

Some are based at the Black Sea airfield of Constanta, around 400 kilometres (250 miles) as the crow flies from the Crimean Peninsula, which Russia illegally annexed from Ukraine in 2014.

One corner of the base bristles with light armoured vehicles, and Chinook and Apache helicopters belonging to a brigade of the US 101st Airborne Division.

Further north, just 100 kilometers from the Ukrainian border, French troops arrived earlier this year to beef up air defenses.



Gangs Control About 60% of Haiti's Capital

UNITED NATIONS (AP) - Close to 60% of Haiti's capital is dominated by gangs whose violence and sexual attacks have caused thousands to flee their homes, the U.N. humanitarian chief in the Caribbean nation said.

Ulrika Richardson said that has left nearly 20,000 people in the capital facing "catastrophic famine-like conditions" as a cholera outbreak spreads throughout Haiti.

Richardson painted a grim picture of a country in a downward spiral, with half its population in urgent need of food assistance as the number of cholera deaths has risen to 283. She said close to 12,000 people have been hospitalized with the disease since Oct. 2, and there are now a total of more than 14,000 suspected cholera cases in eight of the country's 10 regions.

She said all but 1,000 of the 20,000 Haitians facing starvation are in the capital, Port-au-Prince, mainly in the Cite Soleil slum controlled by the gangs. Richardson said insecurity has led to "massive displacement," especially in the capital, where 155,000 people have fled their homes.

She said at a news conference that the gangs are using "very terrifying levels of sexual violence as a weapon" to keep people under control, instill fear and punishment.

She said gang battles over territory and their criminal actions are tearing society apart and escalating insecurity.

Political instability has simmered in Haiti since last year's still-unsolved assassination of President Jovenel Moïse, who had faced protests calling for his resignation over corruption charges.

Daily life in Haiti began to spin out of control in September just hours after Prime Minister Ariel Henry said fuel subsidies would be eliminated, causing prices to double. A gang led by Jimmy "Barbecue" Cherizier, a former police officer, blocked the Varreux fuel terminal, setting off a fuel crisis.

The U.N. Security Council imposed sanctions on Cherizier on Oct. 21, and he announced on Nov. 6 that his G9 gang federation was lifting the blockade.

But despite the availability of fuel, Richardson said, the humanitarian, security and political situation is worsening, saying that "everyone is affected by the violence."



Syrians Brace for Long, Cold Winter as Fuel Crisis Bites



DAMASCUS (Dispatches) - Mohammed Abu Ramadan can't afford to keep his children warm this winter so he and his sister's family in Damascus take it in turn to look after them - heating their homes only for the weeks that the young ones are staying.

Like millions of Syrians who are unable to afford - or often even to find - diesel and gas, he has been forced into innovative and desperate responses to survive a fuel crisis that is deepening hardships after more than a decade of civil war.

"My children and I have gone without many things. For a couple of months they haven't eaten more than one meal a day," said the government employee who tops up his state salary by working in a paint shop in the evening.

He often works an 18-hour day, but even that doesn't bring in enough money to heat the family home. "After they finish school my children will go to their aunt's for a week, and the week after that I will prepare firewood for my children and their cousins," he said.

Syria's economic collapse, triggered by years of conflict, Western sanctions, a currency meltdown and the government's loss of its northeastern oil producing territories, has been pushing millions of people deeper into poverty every year.

With state revenues in freefall, authorities have had to cut back subsidies which cushioned Syrians from the worst impact of the crisis, and the government is struggling to pay for fuel imports after the war in Ukraine drove up world energy prices.

Shortages even pushed the prime minister to announce public institutions would close for two additional days this month. Sports authorities delayed basketball and soccer tournaments to help stadiums save on fuel.

Syrians who still qualify for subsidised diesel can buy 50 litres at 500 pounds (less than 10 U.S. cents) a litre, but supply has been slow and patchy and the quantities are not enough to last a family for long.

The government sells limited amounts of non-subsidized diesel at five times that price, while the black market rates for diesel run to more than 30 times the subsidized amount.

Many Syrians have switched their traditional diesel stoves, used to cook meals and heat homes to alternatives fuelled by firewood or even pistachio shells - cheaper and abundant in some parts of the country.

Abdullah Tuweit, who owns a workshop which produces heaters, said he started converting them three years ago from burning diesel to the more affordable husks and shells.

"Demand goes up every year," he said. "It started in the rural areas and gradually spread to the city". Meanwhile hundreds of diesel heaters remain unsold in his warehouse, he said.

Nine out of 10 Syrians live under the poverty line and the number who urgently need help this winter has increased 28% compared to last year, aid groups say.

"With another harsh winter around the corner, people have to take yet more desperate measures to try and stay warm," said Samah Hadid from the Norwegian Refugee Council, which has distributed heaters and warm clothes to help ward off the cold.

Families said they were resorting to burning old clothes, shoes, plastic bags and garbage to stay warm, she added, despite the health threat from the smoke and fumes.

"I don't use the heater unless it's bitterly cold, because of the smoke," said Ahlam Mohsin Warda, a single mother bringing up three children, who receives just 150,000 pounds a month from her ex-husband and uses a woodfire heater.

Recession Worries Could Support Dollar After Monstrous 2022 Rally



NEW YORK (Dispatches) - A breathtaking surge in the U.S. dollar trampled foreign currencies, gouged corporate profits and gave investors one of the year's few winning trades. Though the greenback has stumbled in recent weeks, recession worries may keep it elevated in 2023.

At its September peak, the dollar the pace of the rate increases that helped fuel the dollar's gains. While rising U.S. yields were a key catalyst for the dollar's rally, other factors played an important part in boosting the buck. Investors flocked to the dollar — a popular destination during uncertain times — to shelter from market volatility spurred by surging global inflation, spiking energy prices and Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Also heightening the dollar's allure was the comparative strength of the U.S. economy during a time when fears of an energy crisis hammered European assets while stringent COVID-19 controls hurt China's growth.

Even after paring some of its gains, the dollar is still on track for its best year since 2014. Fund managers surveyed by BoFA Global Research named it the market's most crowded trade for the fifth straight month in November and a record number of survey participants said the currency was overvalued.

Still, a Reuters poll of 66 foreign exchange strategists suggested the dollar will trade at its current level around a year from now, with many expecting global central bank policy tightening to hurt growth and boost the greenback's safe-haven appeal once again.

Getting the dollar right is key for investors, as its trajectory sways everything from corporate earnings to the prices of raw materials such as oil and gold.

A stronger dollar makes U.S. exporters' products less competitive abroad while hurting U.S. multinationals that need to exchange their earnings into dollars. The S&P 500's foreign exposure stands at around 30%, according to Bank of America, with the technology and materials sectors most vulnerable.

Nike, IBM and Meta Platforms were among the broad range of companies that warned of a hit from a stronger dollar this year. The dollar's rally shaved about 8% from S&P earnings in 2022, according to Tom Lee, head of research at Fundstrat Global Advisors.

For the rest of the world, a stronger U.S. currency pressures the price of oil and other dollar-denominated commodities by making them more expensive to foreign buyers, while also making it more expensive for foreign companies and governments that have borrowed in dollars to service their debt.

And while a strong greenback can tamp down U.S. consumer prices, it also pushes down the currencies of other countries, helping exacerbate inflation around the globe. On average, the estimated pass-through of a 10% dollar appreciation into inflation is 1%, the International Monetary Fund estimated in October.

There are signs that Wall Street's sentiment on the dollar may be shifting. Data showing that consumer prices fell less than expected in October helped fuel a 5% fall in the dollar against a basket of currencies last month, its biggest monthly decline since 2010.

In futures markets, speculative traders swung to a net short position on the U.S. dollar for the first time in 16 months in November, calculations by Reuters based on U.S. Commodity Futures Trading Commission data showed.

Whether the dollar's decline continues may depend on the Fed's ability to contain inflation enough to eventually ease monetary policy. Another benign inflation reading in U.S. data due next week could bolster the case for further dollar declines.



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SOCAR Halts Russian Crude Supplies to Turkish Refinery

LONDON (Dispatches) - The trading arm of Azerbaijan's state oil firm SOCAR has paused purchases of Russian crude oil for its Turkish refinery as the industry grapples with EU sanctions on shipping and crude, sources familiar with the matter said.

Turkish refineries, including SOCAR's STAR plant, had increased purchases of Russian crude after Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Russian flows to Turkey had already dropped last month to their lowest since February, according to Refinitiv Eikon data, and a source said SOCAR was reviewing the situation in order to remain compliant with Western sanctions.



China Buys Russian Oil at Multi-Month Low Discounts

SINGAPORE (Dispatches) - China is paying the deepest discounts in months for Russian ESPO crude oil amid weak demand and poor refining margins even though the effective prices refiners pay could exceed a price cap imposed this week by Western countries.

The \$60 per-barrel cap, set by the Group of Seven (G7) nations, the European Union and Australia, took effect on Monday to limit Moscow's power to finance its war in Ukraine, though Russia has vowed to defy it.

China, Russia's top oil buyer, has not agreed to the price cap. Traders said they were doing business as usual.

China's independent refiners, dominant clients of ESPO, a grade exported from the Russian Far East port of Kozmino, secure the shipments almost all on delivered basis from traders who arrange shipping and insurance, shielding the refiners from possible secondary sanctions that may result from the price cap.

The light sweet crude is favored by Chinese refiners due to their proximity and the oil's high middle-distillates yield.

But the Chinese government's zero-COVID policy has weakened the country's economy and demand for crude.

At least one December-arrival ESPO cargo was sold last week to an independent refiner at a discount of \$6 per barrel against the February ICE Brent price on the delivery-ex-ship (DES) basis, according to four traders with knowledge of the deal.

That compares with a premium of about \$1.80 per barrel three weeks ago. At current Brent levels, the \$6 discount implies a price of \$68 a barrel including freight and insurance costs.

"They (independent plants) don't really care about the price cap. All they do is crunch the numbers to see if the delivered prices make good profit or not," said a trading executive with one independent refiner.

"Domestic refining margins are still struggling," the executive added.

On Thursday, there were still two December-loading cargoes unsold, and offers had fallen to discounts of around \$7 to \$8 a barrel, two trading sources said.

Some early trades of January-loading cargoes were done at \$4 a barrel below the March ICE Brent, the lowest level for front month ESPO since July.

Benchmark Brent slid to its lowest since January on Tuesday at below \$80.

Traders said ESPO's cheapness could soon attract fresh buying from Chinese buyers on hopes that Beijing's relaxation of pandemic controls over the past week could reignite demand.

"It could be expected that some buyers of Russian crude might take a cautious approach in the first few weeks, reducing imports until the legal implications of such trade are clearer," said Rystad Energy analysts Viktor Kurilov and Jorge Leon in a note on Tuesday.

With the price cap in place, China, India and Turkey could have more bargaining power, the analysts added.

In Shandong, a province with many independent refiners, known as teapots, ESPO is also facing increasing competition particularly from Iranian oil, which traded at a discount of nearly \$10 against ICE Brent last week.

U.S. Weekly Jobless Claims Rise

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - The number of Americans filing new claims for jobless benefits increased moderately last week, while unemployment rolls hit a 10-month high towards the end of November, suggesting the labor market was gradually slowing down.

Still, labor market conditions remain tight, keeping the Federal Reserve on course to continue increasing interest rates as it fights inflation. The labor market has remained resilient in the face of growing recession risks, caused by the Fed's aggressive monetary policy campaign.

"Overall, the labor market remains tight and demand for workers is strong," said Rubeela Farooqi, chief U.S. economist at High Frequency Economics in White Plains, New York. "But the claims data are suggesting a very gradual shift up in layoffs." Initial claims for state unemployment benefits increased 4,000 to a seasonally adjusted 230,000 for the week ended Dec. 3. Last week's increase was in line with economists' expectations.

Claims tend to be volatile at the start of the holiday season as companies temporarily close or slow hiring, which can make it hard to get a clear read of the labor market. They shot up to a three-month high a week before the Thanksgiving holiday, only to almost unwind the surge in the following week.

Unadjusted claims jumped 87,113 to 286,436 last week, driven by large increases in California, New York, Georgia and Texas. There were also notable rises in Illinois, Pennsylvania and Washington state.

Though there has been an increase in layoffs in the technology sector, with Twitter, Amazon (AMZN.O) and Meta (META.O), the parent of Facebook, announcing thousands of job cuts in November, that has not significantly shifted labor market dynamics.

U.S. stocks opened little changed. The dollar slipped against a basket of currencies. U.S. Treasury prices fell.

The government reported last week that nonfarm payrolls increased by 263,000 jobs in November. Economists say technology firms are right-sizing after over-hiring during the COVID-19 pandemic, noting that small firms remain desperate for workers.

Businesses are also hoarding workers after difficulties finding labor in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. There were 1.7 job openings for every unemployed person in October.



Fresh Wave of Industrial Strikes Hit UK Over Cost-of-Living Crisis

LONDON (Dispatches) - Britain is facing a fresh wave of strikes carried out by nurses, postal workers and university lecturers, sparked by a bitter cost-of-living crisis triggered by soaring inflation and a deteriorating economy.

The annual inflation rate in the U.K. jumped to 11.1% in October from 10.1% in September, its highest since October 1981, leading to a fall in real wages.

Both unionized and non-unionized workers across the U.K. went on strike over the summer, and with the negative impact of Brexit, COVID-19 and lately the Russia-Ukraine war, the cost-of-living crisis just got worse, causing more strikes during this winter.

Leaving the European Union added nearly 6 billion pounds (\$7.3 billion) to household food bills in the U.K., with the poorest bearing the brunt of the higher costs, according to new research by the London School of Economics (LSE).

Food prices have increased by 3% a year since Brexit, leading to a 6% jump over two years. With all of this, the country has been facing a huge wave of strikes - from the workers in health, transport, education and postal sectors.

The walkout by railway workers that started in the summer still continues, with about 40,000 staff members across Network Rail and 14 other rail firms likely to go ahead with the industrial action on Dec. 13, 14, 16 and 17.

With the new announcement, rail workers will also go on strike from 6 p.m. on Christmas Eve until 5.59 a.m. local time on Dec. 27.

About 50% of train services nationwide are expected to be affected.

London bus drivers also announced industrial action in the run-up to Christmas, with strikes starting on Dec. 10, 15 and 17.

Nurses in the U.K. are preparing to go on strike on Dec. 15 and Dec. 20 over a pay dispute with the government.

The strike will take place across England, Northern Ireland and Wales. Around 100,000 nurses are expected to participate in the strike, but emergency care services will continue.

Also, more than 10,000 ambulance workers in England and Wales will strike on Dec. 21 and Dec. 28 because of pay issues, Britain's General Union (GMB) confirmed on Tuesday.

The walkouts will also involve paramedics, control room staff and support workers.

Workers in ambulance services and some National Health Service (NHS) trusts voted to strike because of the government-imposed 4% pay rise. Employees asked for above-inflation pay rises.



Saudi Arabia Reports Bumper Budget Surplus

RIYADH (Dispatches) - Saudi Arabia's Finance Ministry said that the country recorded its first annual budget surplus in nearly a decade, beating its own projections in a year of elevated oil prices.

The surplus for 2022 amounted to 102 billion Saudi riyals (\$27 billion), representing 2.6% of GDP, according to preliminary estimates.

That compared to a surplus of 90 billion Saudi riyals that had been projected for 2022 at the end of last year.

The world's biggest crude exporter also preliminarily recorded GDP growth of 8.5% for the year, the ministry said, higher than the 7.6% predicted by the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

The budget approved for 2023 foresees a surplus of 16 billion Saudi riyals (\$4 billion) and GDP growth of 3.1%, the ministry said.

The strong data comes as much of the world grapples with widespread energy shocks and deepening worries about recession.

The Persian Gulf kingdom has benefited from oil price hikes triggered by Russia's invasion of Ukraine that began in February.

Yet in a briefing with journalists in Riyadh on Wednesday, Saudi Finance Minister Mohammed Al-Jadaan pushed back on the notion that the surplus resulted from the war.

Instead, he said it reflected investments the kingdom had made in its oil and gas sector as well as growth in non-oil sectors, as officials push the "Vision 2030" agenda of economic diversification.

New York Times Journalists Stage 1st Major Strike in 40 Years

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Hundreds of journalists and other employees at The New York Times, the second-largest daily newspaper in the U.S., began a 24-hour walkout Thursday in what was the first strike of its kind at the newspaper in more than 40 years.

Newsroom employees and other members of The NewsGuild of New York say they are fed up with bargaining that has dragged on since their last contract expired in March 2021. The union announced last week that more than

1,100 employees would stage a 24-hour work stoppage starting at 12:01 a.m. Thursday unless the two sides reach a contract deal.

The NewsGuild tweeted Thursday morning that workers, "are now officially on work stoppage, the first of this scale at the company in 4 decades. It's never an easy decision to refuse to do work you love, but our members are willing to do what it takes to win a better newsroom for all."

Negotiations lasted for more than 12 hours into late Tuesday and continued Wednesday, but the sides remained far apart on issues including wage increases and remote-work policies.

On Wednesday evening the union said via Twitter that a deal had not been reached and the walkout was happening. "We were ready to work for as long as it took to reach a fair deal," it said, "but management walked away from the table with five hours to go."

"We know what we're worth," the union added. But New York Times spokesperson Danielle Rhoades Ha said in a statement that they were still in negotiations when they were told that the strike was happening.

"It is disappointing that they are taking such an extreme action when we are not at an impasse," she said.

It was unclear how Thursday's coverage would be affected, but the strike's supporters include members of the fast-paced live-news desk, which covers breaking news for the digital paper. Employees were planning a rally for that afternoon outside the newspaper's offices near Times Square.

Rhoades Ha told The Associated Press (AP) the company has "solid plans in place" to continue producing content, including relying on international reporters and other journalists who are not union members.

In a note sent to guild-represented staff Tuesday night, Deputy Managing Editor Cliff Levy called the planned strike "puzzling" and "an unsettling moment in negotiations over a new contract." He said it would be the first strike by the bargaining unit since 1981 and "comes despite intensifying efforts by the company to make progress."

The Worst Is Yet to Come: The Curse of High Inflation



LONDON (Dispatches) - Globally, people are experiencing inflation at levels not seen for decades as prices surge for essentials like food, heating, transport and accommodation. And though a peak could be in sight, the effects may yet get worse.

How did we get here? In two words: pandemic and war.

A long and comfortable period of scant inflation and low interest rates ended abruptly after COVID-19 struck, as governments and central banks kept locked-down businesses and households afloat with trillions of dollars of support.

That lifeline kept workers from joining dole queues, businesses from going broke and house prices from crashing. But it also knocked supply and demand out of kilter as never before.

By 2021, as lockdowns ended and the global economy grew at its fastest post-recession pace in 80 years, all that stimulus money overwhelmed the world's trading system.

Factories that had been idled could not ratchet up fast enough to meet demand, COVID-safe rules caused labor shortages in retail, transport and healthcare, and the recovery boom caused a spike in energy prices.

If that wasn't enough, Russia invaded Ukraine in February and Western sanctions on the major oil and gas exporter sent fuel prices yet higher.

Known as a "tax on the poor" because it hits those on low incomes the hardest, double-digit inflation has exacerbated inequalities worldwide. While wealthier consumers can rely on savings built up during pandemic lockdowns, others struggle to make ends meet and a growing number rely on food banks.

With winter setting in across the northern hemisphere, that squeeze on living costs will tighten as fuel bills soar. Workers have taken strike action in sectors from healthcare to aviation to demand that wages keep pace with inflation. In most cases, they are having to settle for less.

Kazakhstan Calls for EAEU Further Interaction With Iran

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev has called for improvement of interaction between Iran and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU).

Speaking at the Friday Summit of the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, Tokayev called for the EAEU's further interaction with Iran, Vietnam, and Serbia with which the Economic Union has signed a preferential trade agreement.

In a related development, Iran's chamber of commerce, industries, and mines had already said that signing the preferential trade agreement opened a new chapter in Iran's relations with the regional states including Russia.

Once in September 2019, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan noted that his country is the sole member of the EAEU that enjoys a land border with Iran, and this is a key factor in the transit of Iran's commodities to Eurasia.



Chinese Grab Russian Car Market Share

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Chinese brands account for almost a third of Russia's car market, data shared with Reuters shows, as the sector more than any other shows China's growing importance to the economy following the exodus of Western companies.

New sales of passenger cars and light commercial vehicles (LCV) are down almost 61% year-on-year, as Western sanctions curb Russia's access to some materials and falling demand and high prices further hobble the sector.

But sales of Chinese branded passenger cars, including Haval, Chery and Geely have surged, rising to 16,138 units in November, almost double the 8,235 in January, while market share reached 31.3% from 9.6%, data from Russian analytical agency Autostat showed.

Russia's new passenger car and LCV sales were 46,403 in November, the Association of European Businesses (AEB) said on Tuesday, and sales should reach around 600,000 for this year overall.

"There is little production of Western car brands and few imports, so the market is divided between the Russian and Chinese car industries," Russian automotive analyst Vladimir Beshpalov told Reuters.

Russian cars satisfy demand at lower prices - up to about 1.5 million roubles (\$23,961), and Chinese are also taking over the Western niche of prices above 2.5 million roubles.

In one high-profile case, a Chinese car is masquerading as Russian one. Engine parts from China's JAC, whose design, engineering and platform are being used to revive the Soviet-era Moskvich, were clearly visible at the brand's relaunch last month.

Moskvich said it is working with a foreign partner, but would not name it. JAC did not respond to a request for comment.

Most Western automakers, who have fought with domestic carmakers for market share since they began building factories in Russia in the early 2000s, ceased operations after Russia sent tens of thousands of troops into Ukraine in February.



The Moskvich is produced at a plant taken over from French carmaker Renault, while Nissan, Mercedes and Ford are among the others that have left Russia.

If the economic situation remains unchanged, Chinese producers, including the Moskvich, could account for around 35% of sales in Russia next year, Beshpalov said, estimating the market would recover to 800,000 units.

In monetary terms, the share could surpass 40% of what he expects will be a 1.5-trillion-rouble market in 2023.

China's sales volumes in Russia pale by comparison with in its domestic market, where in November they were about 35 times higher than in Russia.

For the first 10 months of the year, Russia was the sixth-largest export destination for Chinese automotive products, which includes vehicles and parts, according to China's Association of Automobile Manufacturers, accounting for 3.9%, virtually unchanged from the same period last year.

765K World Cup Visitors Fall Short of Qatar's Expected 1.2M Influx



DOHA (Dispatches) - Qatar received just over 765,000 visitors during the first two weeks of the World Cup, according to an organizers' report obtained by Reuters, falling short of the country's expectations for an influx of 1.2 million during the month-long event.

A huge surge in visitors at this stage is unlikely with only eight teams staying on in Doha, and eight games left out of the 64 in the tournament that began on Nov. 20.

Organizers had previously identified the peak period for international visitors to be Nov. 24-28 during the busy group stage, when 32 teams were playing four matches every day.

The Dec. 7 report was prepared by the Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy (SC), which organizes the tournament, and said that the first 17 days of the World Cup saw 765,859 international visitors, more than half of whom have now departed.

The report registered 1.33 million match ticketholders and 3.09 million tickets sold across the eight stadiums in Qatar for the tournament that ends on Dec. 18.

A Qatari official, who did not wish to be named, confirmed the figures. The SC did not respond to Reuters' requests for comment.

The tournament in Qatar, the first to be held in the Middle East, is considered one of the most expensive in terms of tickets, hotels and alcohol, sales of which are restricted.

Fewer international visitors than originally forecast led to an unexpected glut of accommodation but has also averted major over-crowding or traffic headaches in Qatar, the smallest country by both population and area to host the World Cup.

The influx of visitors represents a 25% boost to the country's resident population of 3 million, of which only about 10-12% are Qataris.

"With over a week of competition still to go, a wave of new visitors has started arriving from the nations that made it to the quarter finals," the Qatari official told Reuters.

More visitors are expected to flock to Qatar for popular matches and after the country lifted entry restrictions for nationals and residents of fellow Persian Gulf states.

Cumulative stadium attendance at the first 52 matches was 2.65 million, the document said.

Previously, world soccer's governing body FIFA said that stadium attendance in Qatar had surpassed attendance at stadiums during a corresponding period at the 2018 World Cup in Russia.

Vietnam Shifts Gears on Arms Trade as It Loosens Ties With Russia

HANOI (Dispatches) - Vietnam is eyeing a major defense shift as it seeks to reduce its reliance on Russian arms and launch a push to export locally made weapons, officials and analysts said, with possible buyers in Africa, Asia - and potentially even Moscow.

The Southeast Asian nation is one of the world's 20 biggest buyers of weapons amid on-and-off tensions with China, with an annual budget for arms imports estimated at about \$1 billion and set to grow, according to GlobalData, a provider of military procurement intelligence.

Most of that money has historically gone to Russia, which was for decades Vietnam's main supplier of weapons and defense systems. That made Vietnam one of the top buyers of Russian arms, according to data from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), which tracks global military expenditures.

But that is changing as Vietnam strives to become more self-sufficient, obtain advanced gear that Russia can't provide, and faces Western pressure to reduce arms purchases from Moscow amid its invasion of Ukraine, analysts said.

Instead, Vietnam is turning to suppliers from Europe, East Asia, India, Israel and the United States, diplomats, officials and analysts said. It has also boosted its domestic military industry with support from Israel and other partners, and hopes to export weapons, analysts and officials said.

Nguyen The Phuong, Nguyen The Phuong, formerly a defense researcher at Vietnam National University and now at the University of New South Wales, Australia, said there had been internal discussions in October about whether the country should sell weapons to Russia - although no decision on that was seen as imminent.

The Russian embassy in Hanoi and Vietnam's defense and foreign ministries had no comment.

Starting Thursday, the country will host its first large-scale international arms trade fair, for which more than 170 companies from 30 countries have registered, the defense ministry said.

They include Western companies such as U.S. defense contractor Lockheed Martin and France's Nexter, and defense groups from Israel, India, Japan and the United Arab Emirates.

The three-day event in Hanoi will help Vietnam "diversify procurement channels and sources of technologies to produce military equipment for the country's armies and for exports," the ministry said in a statement in November.

Facilitating Export of Agriculture Products Ministry's Top Agenda

TEHRAN (MNA) - Minister of Agriculture said that supporting and facilitating export of agricultural products is one of the most important objectives of the Ministry of Agriculture this Iranian year (started March 21, 2022).

Speaking in 41st session of "Food Diplomacy Headquarters" held in Tehran on Saturday with the participation of members of Iran Cooperatives Chamber, Seyyed Javad Sadatinejad said that his ministry has defined export incentives to exporters of agricultural products, reducing and removing export tariffs, paying export subsidies, etc. which are followed up seriously at the Ministry of Agriculture.

With the drastic measures taken in this regard, the country witnessed considerable growth in the export of agricultural products last year (ended March 20, 2022), he said, adding that exports of agricultural products to countries such as India, Pakistan, Iraq, China, Russia, etc. is continuing, adding that there is not any limits for exporting Iran's agricultural products to the target markets.

Sadatinejad pointed to the role of trade unions in the field of export of agricultural products and stated that his ministry has made up its mind to handover all powers of regulating the domestic market and export of agricultural products to the union in line with spurring export activities in that sector.

Official Hits Back at China Over Statement in Saudi Arabia

TEHRAN (IFP) - The deputy director of political affairs at the Iranian president's office, Mohammad Jamshidi, slams a joint China-Saudi Arabia statement critical of Tehran's role in the region, reminding Beijing of Iran's effective counter-terrorism fight in the region.

Earlier this week, Chinese President Xi Jinping paid a visit to the Saudi kingdom, where he held talks with Riyadh's rulers over wider cooperation.

In a statement, Beijing joined Riyadh in its stance against Tehran's nuclear program and regional activities, regardless of the Asian state's friendly relations with the Islamic Republic.

The two countries called on Iran to cooperate with the International Atomic Energy Agency, "maintain the non-proliferation regime, and emphasize respect for the principles of good-neighborliness and non-interference in internal affairs of states."

Reacting to China's position, Jamshidi said, "Chinese colleagues should keep in mind that at a time when Saudi Arabia and America supported Daesh and al-Qaeda terror groups in Syria and destroyed Yemen in a savage military aggression, it was Iran that fought the terrorists in order for the restoration of stability and security to the region and for terrorism not to spread to the East and West."

Daesh and al-Qaeda, the world's most notorious terror groups, are widely known to be inspired by Wahhabism, a Takfiri ideology running deep in Saudi Arabia.

Meanwhile, Yaghoob Reza-Zadeh, a member of the Iranian Parliament's National Security and Foreign Policy Committee, said that the parliamentary body is expected to discuss the statement at a session on Sunday.

What a Strange World...

FROM PAGE 1

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.

"The same is true for the judicial process: restraint & proportionality," it added.

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.

The West sheds crocodile tear for Iranian protesters and people or any other nation in the world and it acts based on their own interests rather than helping the nations and now the West has resorted to interventionist remarks and acts to fan the flame of the riots in the country in order to destabilize the government and the country to materialize its vicious goals in Iran and the region.

Some Iranian officials are right that the West envies the progresses which have been achieved by the Islamic Republic of Iran in recent decades because it does not want Iran to become a strong power in the region and the world which stands firmly against the arrogant powers.

The Islamic Republic of Iran has experienced many turbulences since its first day of existence and it will also pass this turbulence, and it will show the West and arrogant countries that Tehran has found its way towards prosperity and success and nobody can stop this train from reaching its destination which is prosperity for all people in the country and the world in any sphere, and riots like what is going in Iran now are unable to stop the country from reaching this goal; and the West is better not bother itself with changing the definitions of the words because the nations will not be fooled as they really know what the human rights or freedom of expression means and they do not need any definition from the West because what the West does is "translating the words in favor of itself" and ignores the real meaning and rights of others and the Islamic Republic of Iran is a victim of this mistranslation; but it will fight to show the world the translation of the West from words of freedom of expression and human rights is totally wrong while the West has turned the world into a strange world and has become a strange freedom lover.

Iran Slams...

FROM PAGE 1

"Talked to Josep Borrell following his call. I said, if the U.S. & the E3 think, via pressure, they generate leverage in the negotiations, they are wrong! We respond to sanctions & interference," Amirabdollahian tweeted. "Concurrently, we are on the way to the final stage of a good, strong & durable agreement."

The Islamic Republic has on occasions underlined its commitment to the talks aimed at reviving the 2015 nuclear deal with world powers but made it clear that Tehran will never negotiate under pressure and threats.

The nuclear deal was signed in 2015 between Tehran and the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Russia and China during Barack Obama's presidency.

Export to Africa...

FROM PAGE 1

Latifi noted that last year trade between Iran and Africa reached \$1.250 billion with a 100 percent growth, and considering the current trend of trade with the African continent the figure is expected to reach \$1.7 billion by the end of the current year (March 20, 2023).

Head of Iran's Trade Promotion Organization (TPO) Alireza Peyman-Pak has said the country is taking the necessary steps to increase annual trade exchanges with African countries to \$5 billion by the Iranian calendar year 1404 (begins in March 2025).

Peyman-Pak said the trade with the mentioned countries is expected to reach \$2.5 billion by the end of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20, 2023).

No Timescale On Jesus Return

LONDON (Dispatches) - Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta said he has no timescale for when striker Gabriel Jesus will recover from his knee injury and that the Premier League side will look at their options ahead of next month's transfer window. Jesus was forced off the pitch during Brazil's 1-0 defeat by Cameroon in their final group match at the World Cup and was subsequently ruled out of the remainder of the tournament. The 25-year-old forward underwent surgery on his right knee, with reports saying he could be sidelined for up to three months.

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Prannoy Upsets Axelsen at Badminton World Tour Finals

BANGKOK (Dispatches) - Men's world number one Viktor Axelsen had his aura of invincibility shaken at the season-ending badminton World Tour Finals in Bangkok with a surprise loss to India's H.S. Prannoy. The defeat was only the third this year for the dominant 28-year-old Dane, who eventually succumbed 14-21, 21-17, 21-18. But Axelsen -- who won gold at the Tokyo Olympics last year -- still advances to Saturday's semi-finals albeit with his confidence slightly bruised.

Argentina Into Semis While Brazil Crash out of World Cup

DOHA (Dispatches) - Argentina will face Croatia in the World Cup semi-finals after beating the Netherlands 4-3 on penalties following a thrilling 2-2 extra-time draw on a night of high World Cup drama.

Argentina goalkeeper Emiliano Martinez was the hero in the shootout after the South Americans let a two-goal lead slip in the final minutes of normal time after Lionel Messi had put them on the brink of the last four.

Wout Weghorst scored two dramatic late goals, the second from a remarkably inventive free-kick in the 11th minute of stoppage time, as the Netherlands fought back with seven minutes of normal time remaining to force extra-time.

Argentina had looked well set to reach the last four after Messi conjured up a brilliant assist for Nahuel Molina and a clinical goal from the penalty spot.

Just hours after Brazil and Neymar crashed out of the tournament on penalties to the Croats, Argentina survived to keep South American interest in the competition.

The Lusail Stadium felt like home for Argentina with at least three quarters of the 88,235 crowd backing the South American team and only a smattering of orange shirts in the crowd.

But all were treated to a thrilling late night drama that finally reached its conclusion just before 1 a.m. local time.

After a cagey start, Messi produced a moment of inspiration, ten minutes before the interval, to create the opener for his team.

Offering no clues of his intent, he split open the Dutch defence with a sublime reverse pass between Daley Blind and Virgil van Dijk into the path of Nahuel Molina who timed his run perfectly and slotted home with the outside of his foot.

Dutch coach Luis van Gaal responded at the break by making a double change, bringing Teun Koopmeiners and Steven Berghuis on into midfield in place of Bergwijn and Marten De Roon.

The momentum was with the Argentines and it was no surprise when they extended



their lead in the 73rd minute after Denzel Dumfries tripped Marcos Acuna in the box and Messi made no mistake from the spot, burying the ball in the corner.

Ten minutes of added time raised Dutch hopes and - tempers with a couple of mass confrontations - and they moved Van Dijk up front and pumped balls into the box.

Deep into added time, one of those high balls, led to a free-kick just outside the area.

Koopmeiners feigned an expected shot before instead, to everyone's surprise, playing a short pass into Weghorst, who twisted past Enzo Fernandez and poked home the equaliser.

Van Dijk was up first and Martinez dived to his right to save. Messi followed and made no mistake before Martinez saved again from Berghuis.

This time there was no way back for the Dutch as, even despite a miss from Fernandez, Argentina held on to win the shoot-out and head into the semi-finals.

Meanwhile earlier Croatia stunned favorites Brazil 4-2 on penalties to reach the World Cup semi-finals for the second time in a row after battling back from a goal down in extra time, in one of the biggest knockout-phase upsets in the tournament's history.

The 2018 runners-up came through their second straight shootout after beating Japan on penalties in the last 16 and will now face either the Netherlands or Argentina, who were playing each other in the later game.

In an evening filled with tension and drama, Brazil superstar Neymar thought he had won it for the five-time champions when he rifled in an extra-time goal.

But Brazil were punished for letting their guard down, with substitute Bruno Petkovic drilling in an 117th-minute equalizer with their one and only shot on target, breaking Brazilian hearts in the Education City Stadium. The Croats, who needed two shootouts and an extra-time win to reach the final in 2018 and now have a perfect four-out-of-four record in World Cup penalty shootouts, kept their composure as Brazil's Marquinhos and Rodrygo failed to convert.

PSG to Discuss Messi Contract After World Cup

PARIS (Dispatches) - Paris St Germain President Nasser Al-Khelaifi said Lionel Messi is happy at the Ligue 1 champions and they will open discussions about a possible contract extension after the World Cup.

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

When asked if the 35-year-old is interested in extending his stay in Paris, Al-Khelaifi told Sky Sports, "definitely".

"He performed fantastic this season for us, he's scored a lot of goals and assists for the national team and for the club," he added.

"So what we agreed together -- that after the World Cup, sit down together. But both sides -- our side of the club and him -- are very happy, so we will talk after the World Cup."

Another player out of contract this summer is Manchester United's Marcus Rashford, who was previously linked with a move to PSG in the close season.

Al-Khelaifi said "every club" would be interested in signing the England international on a free transfer and that PSG had spoken to him previously.

"But the moment was not a good moment for both sides," he said.

"Today if he's a free agent of course we can talk to him directly but we are not going to talk to him now. Let him focus on the World Cup. Then after in January, hopefully, if we're interested we will talk to him."

Zverev Returns to Action Six Months After French Open Injury

PARIS (Dispatches) - Alexander Zverev returned to tennis for the first time since tearing ankle ligaments in his French Open semi-final defeat to Rafael Nadal in June.

The 25-year-old German appeared in the Diriyah Tennis Cup exhibition tournament in Saudi Arabia where he defeated Austria's Dominic Thiem in two super tiebreaks.

World number 12 Zverev then lost to the Russian Daniil Medvedev, 6-4, 6-0.

Olympic champion Zverev left Court Philippe Chatrier at the French Open in June in a wheelchair, subsequently undergoing surgery to repair torn ligaments in his right ankle.

He subsequently missed Wimbledon and the U.S. Open.

A planned return at the Davis Cup in September came up short when Zverev pulled out after experiencing "extreme pain".

Majchrzak Provisionally Suspended for Failing Drug Test

LONDON (Dispatches) - Poland's Kamil Majchrzak has been provisionally suspended by the International Tennis Integrity Agency (ITIA) for failing a drug test, with the player saying he did not knowingly take a banned substance and that the news was "the biggest shock."

The 77th-ranked Majchrzak, who won the Challenger Tour event in Busan, South Korea in October and reached the semi-finals of an ATP 250 event in Pune, India earlier this year, did not provide further details about the banned substance.

The ITIA said on Friday that Majchrzak had provided samples from tournaments at Sofia in September and Japan and Seoul in October which were found to contain three banned substances (SARM S-22, LGD-4033 and PPARδ agonists).

"I have some incredibly sad and difficult news to share with everyone. I have tested positive in anti-doping controls during October and November 2022," Majchrzak wrote in a post on Instagram on Thursday.



Kyrgios Embracing the Pressure Ahead of Australian Open

but temperamental Kyrgios won the Citi Open in Washington and reached his first Grand Slam singles final at Wimbledon, where he lost to Novak Djokovic.

The 27-year-old, who won the Australian Open men's doubles title in January with countryman Thanasi Kokkinakis, also reached the US Open quarter-finals, going down in five sets to Karen Khachanov.

MELBOURNE (Dispatches) - A terrific run of form in the latter half of 2022 put Nick Kyrgios among the Grand Slam contenders and while the Australian knows much is expected of him heading into Melbourne Park next month he says he has learned to embrace the pressure.

After years of underachieving, the talented

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Federer Aced By Wimbledon Security Guard

LONDON (Dispatches) - Roger Federer has only been retired for three months but the eight-time Wimbledon champion is having to get used to ordinary life including being turned away unrecognized at the All England Club.

The 41-year-old Swiss legend revealed to American TV program The Daily Show's security guard succeeded where many an opponent failed on the grass of Wimbledon beating him without a ball being hit in anger.

Federer took his final tennis bow at September's Laver Cup in London -- he had not played competitively since Wimbledon in 2021 because of a knee injury, which ultimately persuaded him to call time on his glittering career.

"I didn't want to tell Wimbledon that I was going to maybe be there," said Federer.

"I didn't know if I was going to have time to go by the club because I was going to fly home to the family.

"So the doctor appointment was done. OK, we got two hours to kill.

"So what are we going to do? Do we head to the airport? Or let's quickly go have tea at Wimbledon?!"



Man United Owners Halt Dividend Payments

LONDON (Dispatches) - The owners of Manchester United, the Glazer family, have not taken their usual semi-annual dividend out of the club as they look to sell the English giants.

The regular flow of money out of the club in dividends has been a frustration for fans as United's fortunes on the pitch have deteriorated during the Glazer's reign in charge.

A total of £33.6 million was paid to shareholders, with the Glazers taking the majority, in the 2021/22 season as United finished sixth in the Premier League.

"On 15 November, the Board of Directors did not approve the payment of the semi-annual dividend for fiscal 2023," United said in a statement.

The Manchester United Supporters' Trust (MUST) welcomed the news and urged for no more dividends to be paid until a new owner is found.

"Dividends should not be paid when the football club is not achieving success on the pitch, challenging for top honors," MUST said in a statement.

"That is rewarding failure and removes the incentive for the owners to ensure sufficient reinvestment of profits back into the football club."

