

**Health Ministry Announced on Sunday That the Number of Deaths From the Coronavirus Pandemic in Iran Stayed Unchanged at 144,658 With Another Zero Death Day Over the Past 24 Hours**

# IRAN NEWS

**The Governor of Mazandaran Province Says the First Shipment Of High-Quality Rice Was Loaded From the International Trade Center and the Rice Export Terminal of Iran in Amol to Russia**

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**2 DOMESTIC**

**Raisi Says Transparency Prevents Corruption**



> SEE PAGE 2

**3 DOMESTIC**

**Iranian Tea Exported To 23 Countries**



> SEE PAGE 3

**4 INTERNATIONAL**

**Russia Grinds on In Eastern Ukraine**



> SEE PAGE 4

**8 SPORTS**

**Morocco Shock Portugal to Face France In World Cup Semis**



> SEE PAGE 8

## Tehran Blasts Sanctions On Supply of Medicine

TEHRAN (PressTV) - An Iranian deputy foreign minister has slammed as "illegal, inhumane and shameful" some countries' measure to impose sanctions on the supply of medicine to other countries.

Reza Najafi, the Iranian Foreign Ministry's deputy for legal and international affairs, made the remark in a Saturday speech while addressing the High-level Meeting of the group of Friends of Neutrality for Peace, Security and Sustainable Development, which was hosted by Turkmenistan.

Najafi described sanctions as a form of economic terrorism, saying, "Countries imposing sanctions on [the supply of] medicine are, in fact, using drugs and medical equipment as a weapon against patients, which is totally illegal, inhumane, and shameful."

The Iranian diplomat noted that recourse to unilateral coercive measures, including sanctions, is among destructive measures that undermines international peace and security, and not only are a blatant violation of human rights, but also hinder the economic and social development of target countries. **See Page 7**

## Glimmer of Hope Remains To Restore Talks on JCPOA

TEHRAN (IFP) - There is still slight hope for the revival of dialogue on the Iran nuclear deal also known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Director General Rafael Grossi has said.

"What one can say is that the JCPOA, or what remains of it, has become, in practical terms, irrelevant. It will have to be revived, and I think there is still maybe a glimmer of hope that this could be done, although that is in the hands of those negotiating," Grossi stated in an interview with Al Jazeera.

The Iran nuclear deal, also known as the JCPOA, was an agreement signed in 2015 by Tehran with the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Russia and China, during the presidency of Barack Obama. However, Obama's successor Donald Trump abandoned the JCPOA in May 2018 and slapped harsh sanctions on Iran. Joe Biden had vowed to resume talks to revive the Iran nuclear deal and remove the harsh US sanctions. Two years into the presidency, Biden has failed to keep his promise and is now threatening to take military action. **See Page 7**

## Iran Foreign Debt in 2021 Insignificant Compared to Developing Countries



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - World Bank in its latest International Debt Report (IDR) has put Iran's foreign debt in 2021 at \$10.349 billion, indicating that the Islamic Republic's foreign debt is almost one-thousandth of the total external debt of developing countries in the mentioned year.

Based on the WB report, the total debt of all the world's low- and middle-income countries amounted to \$9.296 trillion at the end of 2021.

Iran's total long-term external debt was reported to be \$1.06 billion in 2021, 19 percent less than the figure for 2020 when the country's long-term debt stood at \$1.313 billion, according to the report.

The country's short-term external debt in 2021, however, increased compared to the previous year and reached \$2.5 billion. In the previous year, Iran's short-term debt amounted to \$2.06 billion.

The data showed that short-term debt owed by Iran rose to \$2.508 billion in 2021 from some \$2.067 billion in the previous year. Iran settled more than \$254 million and paid \$46 million in interest on its foreign debt in 2022, said the World Bank Group.

In August 2021, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) granted Iran access to its funds based on the entity's Special Drawing Rights (SDR), after which about four billion dollars were loaned to the Islamic Republic. As a result, the total credits paid to Iran by the fund, which amounted to \$2.054 billion in 2020 increased to \$6.781 billion in 2021.

Based on the WB report, Iran managed to repay over \$254 million of the above-mentioned debt in 2021 in addition to \$46 million of interest.

In early November, the IMF in its latest regional economic outlook for "The Middle East and Central Asia Region (ME&CA)" also stated that Iran has the least foreign debt among the countries in the mentioned region.

The fund put the ratio of Iran's external debt to its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) at 0.5 percent in its report. Based on IMF data, the average ratio of foreign debt to total GDP for the countries of the region was estimated at 35.8 percent, while the figure for oil-exporting countries was reported to be 30.9 percent.

Iran has been ranked the world's seventh country in terms of the lowest foreign debt to GDP ratio, according to established international sources.

Brunei, Liechtenstein, New Zealand, Turkmenistan, New Caledonia, Nigeria, Iran, Algeria, Greenland, and the Virgin Islands are the world's top 10 countries with the lowest foreign debt to GDP ratio, respectively.

External debt is the portion of a country's debt that is borrowed from foreign lenders including commercial banks, governments, or international financial institutions. These loans, including interest, must usually be paid in the currency in which the loan was made.

Foreign debt as a percentage of GDP is the ratio between the debt a country owes to non-resident creditors and its nominal GDP.

## Riyadh Extends Hand Towards Iran for Positive Relationship

RIYADH (Dispatches) - Saudi Arabia's Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud says his country continues to extend its hand to Iran for a "positive relationship."

Prince Faisal made the remarks at a joint press conference with Arab League Secretary General Ahmed Aboul Gheit and Secretary General of the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council Nayef Falah al-Hajraf on Saturday, following the China-Arab States Summit in Riyadh.

"Iran is part of the region and a neighbor, and Riyadh will continue to extend a hand in pursuit of a positive relationship that serves the stability of the region and the welfare of our people," he said.

The two sides have already held several rounds of tension-easing negotiations in the Iraqi capital of Baghdad since last April. In July, Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian appreciated the "constructive" role played by Iraq in advancing the regional dialogue and said there has been "progress" in the last five rounds of talks with Saudi Arabia.

The progress of rapprochement was, however, overshadowed as Iran has warned Saudi Arabia that its media campaign aimed at stoking tensions in the recent riots in the country will backfire on the Riyadh regime.

On October 17, the chief commander of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC), Major General Hossein Salami gave Saudi Arabia an ultimatum, cautioning it against interfering in Iran's internal affairs through the kingdom's news media outlets that seek to lead the Iranian youths astray.

He stressed the importance of maintaining national security as a principled policy of Iran and reminded the neighbors that the Islamic Republic pursues the policy of friendship and fraternity as long as the enemies hatch no plot against it.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Prince Faisal reiterated the importance of boosting cooperation between the Arab countries and Beijing, noting that collaboration with a country like China would help face challenges.

He also noted that Saudi Arabia is ready to cooperate with every country in the world, adding that Riyadh has strategic partnerships with the United States, India, China, Japan, and Germany.

## ViewPoint

By: Hamid Reza Naghashian

### Don't Even Think of It

Since the first day of the Islamic Revolution and whenever there is some internal or regional dispute, the UAE supported by its allies in the Persian Gulf begins its false and imaginary claims regarding the ownership of three Iranian islands in the Persian Gulf but this itty-bitsy state should know that Iranians will not let anybody think of separating these islands from the country and it is really really a redline for any Iranian either inside or outside the country.

The (Persian) Gulf Cooperation Council, known as the (P)GCC, states every time gather, they issue a statement against Iran especially regarding ownership of three Iranian islands and they claim the islands belong to the UAE while the fact is otherwise and even there are documents in the UN which show who is the real owner of the island. It seems the PGCC suffers from a disease called Iranophobia and bad habit of wrong claim against these three islands to please the pint-size UAE. Recent riots in Iran once again have emboldened these states to issue such a statement against Iran over the ownership of the islands and this time unfortunately China joined the band in issuing the statement.

Reacting to this funny statement, Iranians warned those behind this statement. Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman condemned anti-Iran remarks featured in a joint statement issued by China and the member states of the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), as continuation of the council's failed "Iranophobic policy."

The statement was issued on Friday at the end of the council's 43rd summit in the Saudi capital Riyadh, which coincided with the termination of an official visit to the kingdom by China's President Xi Jinping.

Speaking on Saturday, the ministry's spokesman, Nasser Kanaani, denounced the statement as a "futile attempt" by the council's members "to cover up their financial, political and logistical support for terrorist groups operating in the region."

The official referred to the enormous material and human losses inflicted on the regional people as a result of the "destructive policies" of a number of (P) GCC members, urging the council to revisit its approaches to regional issues and rather adopt a "constructive" course of action.

In their statement, the (P) GCC members affirmed their support for what they called the United Arab Emirates' efforts to reach a "peaceful solution" on the issue of the three Iranian Persian Gulf islands of Abu Musa, the Lesser Tunb, and the Greater Tunb, to which the UAE lays an unfounded claim. **See Page 7**

## Iran-EAEU Talks on FTA Conclude on 7,500 Products

TEHRAN (MNA) - The Head of Iran's Negotiating Team to the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) on Saturday announced the finalization of talks between Iran and Eurasia on free trade of 7,500 products.

About 30 rounds of talks were conducted with the Eurasian Economic Union represented by the five countries in addition to the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), Mir-Hadi Seyyedi the Advisor to the Trade Promotion Organization of Iran (TPOI) for Trade Agreements and International Affairs said.

Thirty rounds of online talks and about seven rounds of in-person talks were held between Iran and EAEU member states over the past two years, he said, adding that a 150-page text was finally formulated as the most comprehensive Iran's trade agreement, he emphasized.

He announced that a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) will be inked in Tehran in the near future between the head of the Trade Promotion Organization of Iran (TPOI) and EAEU Trade Minister. After PTA document is signed between the two sides, it must be approved by the parliaments of Iran and five EAEU member states and then, the PTA will be put into operation, Mir-Hadi Seyyedi added.

He went on to say that more than 7,500 items of goods would be covered under the PTA agreement, he added.

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## Date of Next Parliamentary Election Announced

TEHRAN (IRNA) - The 12th parliamentary election in Iran (Islamic Consultative Assembly) will be held on February 1, 2024, Director General of the Department of Elections of the Iranian Ministry of Interior Mohsen Eslami, said.

"In addition to the parliamentary election, the election to the 6th convocation Assembly of Experts will also be held in the country on the mentioned date," Eslami said.

The official noted that the date of the election was approved by Iran's Guardian Council.

## Raisi Says Transparency Prevents Corruption

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

**TEHRAN – President Seyed Ebrahim Raisi in the first national conference to promote transparency and its role in administrative health and fighting corruption emphasized the establishment of electronic government and moving towards a smart government for more transparency in the administrative system, stating: Transparency avoids further corruption in the country.**

Raisi made the remarks at the first national conference to promote transparency and its role in administrative health and fighting corruption on Sunday.

He said that the principle of transparency is not an imported principle and has its roots in our religious and Islamic culture.

The President stated: "The basis of this approach is that people should be included in the circulation of information, contracts and agreements, and social and cultural activities."

Raisi emphasized the establishment of an electronic government and moving towards a smart government for more transparency in the administrative system.

At the same time, he did not consider the rate of progress of electronic government to be favorable and stated that it is about 25% and added: "We must move towards the establishment of a smart government."

The president called the comprehensive trade system, the system for issuing electronic versions among the measures taken in the field of transparency.

Referring to the fact that in his administration, according to the report of the Iranian National Tax Administration, 2 million people have been added to the number of taxpayers, he pointed out: "This increase shows transparency because tax evasion is one of the country's problems."



Meanwhile Majlis Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf, in his speech at the National Conference on the Promotion of Transparency, called for an efficient and updated system to deal with challenges.

Qalibaf also said that he will pursue transparency in the parliament because, according to him, transparency makes the system stronger.

In another part of his speech, he said: "We should not make strong and honest managers do not have the courage to make decisions, but we should also fight against corruption and not show mercy to someone who is corrupt."

He added: We should pay attention to making the system smarter, more transparent, more popular, and more efficient. We have spent thirty years in the country to make it smarter, but we were not successful.

"A predominantly state economic system is corrupt and the economy, environment, culture, politics, and defense and security issues should be privatized," he added.

The U.S. and the Zionist regime's recent moves were a reaction against the power of Iran and the Islamic system, so the way to fight against them is to make the country more efficient and stronger," the Majlis Speaker noted.

## Iran's Policy on Enemies, Friends Always Transparent

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Judiciary Chief highlighted here on Sunday the country has always adopted a transparent policy toward enemies and friends.

Nothing has been concealed from people, Hojjatolislam Gholam-Hossein Mohseni Ejei said at the first national conference on transparency in Tehran this morning.

The Islamic Republic transparently says that it will not pay tribute to the enemies and that it will defend the nation's dignity, freedom and independence against the bullying powers and the domineering states, the Judiciary chief underlined.

Islamic Republic will stand against the enemies; the United States and the Zionist regime of Israel in particular, he said.

## Chinese Envoy Summoned for Statement on Iranian Islands

IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Foreign Ministry summoned the Chinese ambassador to Tehran late Saturday to protest a statement related to three disputed islands in the Persian Gulf.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Nasser Kanaani said Chang Hua was summoned to express "strong dissatisfaction" with the joint statement of China and the (Persian) Gulf Cooperation Council ((PGCC) countries.

Iran's Foreign Ministry, however, dismissed the China-PGCC statement regarding the islands and called them an "integral part" of the country's territory, which "have never and will never be subject to negotiations with any country."

China's ambassador, the statement added, said Xi's visit to Saudi Arabia was meant to "help peace and stability" in the region.

Iran and China have emerged as close regional allies in recent years, especially after entering into a long-term comprehensive partnership amid tensions with the US.

## Iran Will Never Compromise On National Integrity

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian has once again reaffirmed that the three islands in the Persian Gulf are eternal parts of the country's territory, emphasizing that the Islamic Republic will never compromise on its territorial integrity.

"The islands of Abu Musa, the Greater Tunb and the Lesser Tunb in the Persian Gulf are inseparable parts of the pure land of Iran and belong to this motherland forever," Amirabdollahian said in a post on his Twitter account on Saturday.

He emphasized that Iran would never compromise with any country on the importance of respecting the Islamic Republic's territorial integrity.

The top Iranian diplomat was reacting to a joint statement issued by China and states of the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) at the end of their summit in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, on Friday.

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

## Iran Response to Some Neighbors Ambition To Be Regrettable

TEHRAN (MNA) - The deputy Iranian parliament speaker said that Iran's response to some neighbors' ambitions will be strong, crushing, and regrettable.

Speaking at the beginning of the Parliament's open session on Sunday, Ali Nikzad said that the policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran has been to neither be a dominator nor be dominated.

The policy of good neighborliness with neighbors is also a fixed principle in the foreign policy of Iran, he added, saying that Iran has proven to be a great friend and supporter of its neighbors.

The Iranian nation's fierce defense of the Iraqi people and government against the barbaric invasion of ISIL to the country is a good example of Iran's benevolence towards its neighbors, Nikzad noted, adding that Iran while being merciful to its neighbors, deals firmly, decisively and crushingly against any mischiefs.

Stating that informed, safe, and economically prosperous neighbors are important to Iran, he said that Iran's response will be powerful, strong, and regrettable in case of any excessive ambitions by its neighbors [against its sovereignty].

Whether the ambition is changing the borders of [Iran] or letting mercenary groups in different regions [act against Iran] or whether making rhetoric about Trio Persian Gulf islands [three Persian Gulf islands of Abu Musa, the Greater Tunb, and the Lesser Tunb] belonging to Iran, Nikzad added.

Proving the undeniable sovereignty of the Islamic Republic of Iran over these islands does not even require legal and international treaties of the United Nations, but a little museum tour and viewing of old maps is enough to prove that this is the Persian Gulf, not a word more and not a word less and these islands absolutely belong to the Islamic Republic of Iran, he stressed.

Iran welcomes the increase in economic exchanges with neighboring countries and does not interfere in their internal affairs, Nikzad said, adding that Iran will never compromise on national integrity with any country.

His comments came in response to a statement issued on Friday at the end of the council's 43rd summit in the Saudi capital of Riyadh, which coincided with the termination of an official visit to the kingdom by China's President Xi Jinping.

## West Azarbaijan Governor General Hails Iran-Turkey Durable Ties

URMYA (IRNA) - Cultural, social and religious commonalities between Iran and Turkey have made ties between the two neighboring countries durable, said Mohammad Sadeq Mo'tamedian, the governor general of West Azarbaijan Province, northwest Iran.

He made the comment as he hosted the new Turkish consul general to the provincial capital Urmia.

Mo'tamedian said that relations between Iran and Turkiye are expanding, adding that West Azarbaijan



Province and border Turkish provinces play a key role in this regard.

He also said that the two neighbors aim to increase their bilateral trade to \$30 billion, stressing that the target can be met thanks to the vast economic capacities of the two countries.

The Turkish consul general, Fehim Çetin, said on his part that Turkiye will make efforts to expand economic cooperation with Iran to hit the trade targets set by the two countries.

## British Ambassador Summoned Over London's Meddlesome Statements

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The Iranian Foreign Ministry has summoned the British ambassador in Tehran, Simon Shercliff, over the UK's continued interference in Iran's internal affairs and new sanctions against Tehran.

According to a statement, during a meeting, the head of the third bureau of Western Europe at Iran's Foreign Ministry strongly condemned the continuation of British officials' meddling and impudent remarks about internal developments in Iran and the support of the country's government and media for acts of terror and turmoil in Iran.

The Iranian official also conveyed the Islamic Republic's vehement protest at Britain's illegal sanctions against a number of Iranian nationals to the British envoy.

He told Shercliff that efforts by Britain and the London-based state media to incite more protest in Iran would bear no fruit and would only increase the Iranian nation's hatred towards the European country's policies against Tehran.

The British diplomat was told that the Islamic Republic reserves the right to take retaliatory measures in response to the new sanctions.

Britain on Friday announced sanctions against 10 Iranian officials in the country's biggest package brought against individuals, over alleged human rights violations, particularly during the recent protest in Iran sparked by the death of a young Iranian woman in police custody.

## Australia's Anti-Iran Sanctions Amount to Interference in Domestic Affairs

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran has slammed Australia for imposing sanctions on Iranian individuals and entities, saying the move is a clear example of meddling in the internal affairs of the Islamic Republic and inciting violence and hatred.

In a statement on Saturday, Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Nasser Kanaani reminded Australia about its international obligations to fight terrorism and hate and observe human rights principles.

Canberra, however, has dark human rights history which should be taken into consideration by the international community, he said.

"Australia's new anti-Iran move took place while the country's government has systematically violated the basic rights of the Australian aborigines, prisoners and asylum seekers for many years. It has also sheltered agents of anti-Iran terrorist and separatist groups," the spokesperson added.

Australia's Foreign Minister Penny Wong said on Saturday the country is imposing Magnitsky-style sanctions on 13 individuals and two entities in response to what it called "egregious" human rights violations and abuses.

Canberra will place targeted sanctions on Iran's Morality Police, the Basij

volunteer force and six Iranian individuals, allegedly involving in the violent crackdown on riots following the death of the 22-year-old woman, named Mahsa Amini, in police custody.

The Iranian foreign ministry spokesman said that international organizations have presented numerous documentary reports on human rights violations in Australia.

Kanaani said Australia has recently violated its human rights obligations as it prevented an international committee against torture from visiting the detention centers of the asylum seekers in this country so that its inhumane mistreatment remains hidden.

The United Nations in October decided to suspend its anti-torture mission to Australia after inspectors were denied entry into several jails, calling it a "clear breach" of international obligations.

The UN Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture (SPT), a treaty body tasked with preventing the ill-treatment of detainees, said in a press release that it "had no other option" but to suspend its visit to Australia due to "obstructions it encountered" while carrying out its mandate.

TEHRAN (MNA) - Head of Iran Small Industries and Industrial Parks Organization (ISIPO) Ali Rasoulouian said that over 40 trillion rials (about \$111.1 million) has been invested for implementing infrastructure development projects in the country's industrial parks and zones since the beginning of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21).

"With more than 2,200 development projects being implemented in industrial parks and zones, we hope that nearly eight trillion rials (about \$222.2 million) will be invested in these projects by the end of the year," IRIB quoted Rasoulouian as saying.

## Over \$111m invested in Industrial Parks

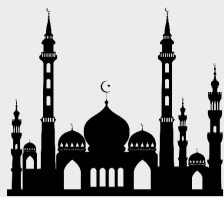
Mentioning his organization's plan for establishing 1,000 workshop units in industrial parks across the country, the official expressed hope that some of these units will become operational by the end of the year.

He further underlined reviving idle units as another priority plan of ISIPO, saying: "Since the beginning of the 13th government administration (August 2021), 2,200 stagnant production units have

returned to the production cycle."

In line with the current Iranian year's motto, which is "Knowledge-Based and Job-Creating Production", the Ministry of Industry, Mining and Trade has been implementing new programs to support productive units across the country.

Providing infrastructure and incentives to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are among the major programs that the ministry has been following in relation to industrial parks.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	11:58
■ Evening (Maghreb)	17:11
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	05:35
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	07:05

68. We said: "Fear not! for thou hast indeed the upper hand:  
69. "Throw that which is in thy right hand: Quickly will it swallow up that which they have faked what they have faked is but a magician's trick: and the magician thrives not, (no matter) where he goes."  
Surah 20, Ta-ha (68 - 69)

# Iranian Tea Exported To 23 Countries

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK



According to Ruhollah Latifi, Iranian tea was exported to 25 countries in the previous year. The United Arab Emirates was the top importer of Iranian tea in the mentioned year, buying 8,304 tons of tea worth over \$8.774 million. Turkey with 2,904 tons worth \$3.537 million of imports, Russia with 2,598 tons worth over \$3.092 million, India with 2,538 tons worth \$2.371 million, and Iraq with the purchase of 2,195 tons worth \$1.998 million worth of tea, were the next four export destinations for the said commodity. Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kenya, Kazakhstan, and Afghanistan occupied the sixth to 11th places among Iran's top tea export destinations, followed by Germany, Ukraine, Lebanon, Georgia, United Kingdom, China, the Netherlands, Kuwait, Finland, Switzerland, Canada, Belgium, Azerbaijan, and Australia, according to Latifi. Iran also imported some 75,379 tons of tea worth \$386,160,767 from 10 countries in 1400, among which India was the top supplier of tea for Iran exporting 34,285 tons of the product valued at \$168 million. Sri Lanka was the second biggest exporter of tea to Iran, selling 18,326 tons of the product worth \$107 million, followed by the UAE with 14,368 tons worth \$71.572 million, Turkey with 4,593 tons worth \$23.700 million, and Kenya with 1,471 tons worth \$5.8 million. Iraq, Vietnam, Germany, China, and Afghanistan also started selling tea to Iran in the previous year, the official said.

**TEHRAN-** The value of Iran's tea export rose 32 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.

As reported, Iran exported about 23,000 tons of tea worth \$29.5 million to 23 countries including Uzbekistan, Germany, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Canada, Ukraine, the Netherlands, Pakistan, and even India in the eight-month period. The country also imported 46,000 tons of tea valued at \$355 million from countries like Kenya, India, China, Vietnam, Turkey, and the Netherlands in the first eight months of this year. Iran's tea import increased 42.9 percent in the eight-month period of this year, as compared to the same time span in the previous year. As previously announced by the former spokesman of the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA), Iran exported over 27,272 tons of tea leaves valued at \$28 million in the previous Iranian calendar year 1400 (ended on March 20), registering a 77 percent rise in value and a 68 percent increase in weight.

## Gazprom Managers, Experts Visit ISOICO

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – A group of managers and experts of Russia's Gazprom Company visited Iran Shipbuilding and Offshore Industries Complex Company (ISOICO) and had a joint meeting with managers and officials of this industrial complex.



According to IDRO News, in line with MoU on cooperation between National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) and Gazprom of Russia for using capacities and capabilities of this industrial complex in implementing projects of developing offshore fields and offshore pipelines, Gazprom managers and experts visited ISOICO and had a meeting with the officials of this complex.

In the meeting, Deputy on Developing Transportation Industries of Industrial Development and Renovation Organization of Iran (IDRO) Mr. Amir Hossein Ghanati and Deputy on Developing Marine and Air Industries of IDRO Mr. Mohammad Reza Hosseini were also present.

ISOICO is considered as one of the reputed brands in the national offshore projects and this positive performance has paved the ground for talks with foreign companies for cooperation in some important offshore projects.

ISOICO is considered also as the biggest plant and manufacturer of marine industries in Iran and the Middle East.

## Iran Thermal Power Capacity at Nearly 73 GW



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's Thermal Power Plants Holding Company (TPPH) says electricity generation capacity from the country's thermal power plants reached nearly 73 gigawatts (GW) with the launch of a small electricity station in the country's southeast on Saturday.

TPPH's head of expansion projects Mohammad Ramazani said that thermal power currently accounts for 81% of Iran's total electricity generation capacity which also comes from hydroelectric dams, the renewables, diesel plants, small generators and one nuclear power plant in the country's southern coast.

Ramazani made the announcement after a 200-megawatt gas-fired electricity generator, launched by Butia steel company in Iran's province of Kerman, synchronized with the Iranian power grid.

He said private owners, including industrial manufacturers, now own some 49 GW of capacity at Iran's thermal power plants.

Latest figures by Iran's Energy Ministry show some 22.558 GW of Iranian thermal power plants solely use gas turbines, some 15.829 GW work on steam turbines and some 34.539 GW operate on a combined cycle system where the exhaust heat from gas turbines is used to raise steam to drive the steam turbines.

## Iran-Tajikistan Economic Ties Grew 300%

TEHRAN (IP) - Iran's Ambassador to Tajikistan reported a 300% growth in the economic exchanges between the two countries in the past six months of 2022.

Mohammad Taghi Saberi pointed to the 15th joint commission agreed upon during the recent visit of the Tajik President Emomali Rahmon, which was held on November 5 and 6, the most important part of which was the coordination for the private sector activities of the two countries.

The meeting was held in Tehran with the participation of the Iranian and Tajik high-ranking officials in the economic and financial sectors including banking, tourism and investment, culture, education, science and research, industry and new technologies, transportation, and energy.

Saberi also referred to the Iranian cultural weeks held in the two countries during the last two months: "After 12 years, we witnessed the cultural week of the Islamic Republic of Iran was in Dushanbe, Khujand, and Kolab.

The 15th Joint Economic Commission meeting of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Republic of Tajikistan is hosted by the Iranian Minister of Energy Ali Akbar Mehrabian and with the Tajikistan Minister of Energy and Water Resources Juma Daler in attendance.

## Fishery Export Rises 68% in 7 Months yr/yr

TEHRAN (MNA) - The value of Iran's fishery export has increased 68 percent during the first seven months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21-October 22), as compared to the same period of time in the past year, according to Agriculture Minister Javad Sadati-Nejad.

Sadati-Nejad said the export of fishery products has also increased by 28 percent in terms of weight, IRIB reported.

Emphasizing the need for taking new measures to develop the sector and complete the value chain of aquatic products, he said the Agriculture Ministry will continue supporting fishery farms to increase exports.

According to the minister, his ministry is taking the necessary measures to continue establishing fishery parks in the country.



Referring to the unique capacities of Iran's marine environment including beaches and rivers, Sadati-Nejad emphasized the need to develop fisheries and said: "In addition to the production of high-quality and cheap aquatic products, it is necessary to promote the consumption of marine proteins."

Enjoying high quality, Iran's fishery products are

being sold easily in export markets around the world and some new export destinations including China, South Korea, and the Eurasian Union nations have recently welcomed these products.

In late November, Sadati-Nejad announced the launch of the country's first fishery industries park on the sidelines of the 6th International Fisheries Industry Exhibition (IFEX 2022).

## Arvandan Co. Joins Certain Vessel Builders Fleet

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – The CEO of the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Line Group (IRISL) says the group has bought 100% of stakes of Arvandan Shipbuilding Company, adding that building special vessels for drilling and serving the drilling rigs in south of the country is one of the main missions of Arvandan Company in its new era.

According to the public relations of IRISL, during the ceremony for signing contract for manufacture of two multifunctional 800-ton tanker vessels tanker which was signed between Qeshm Marine Service and Engineering Company and Arvandan Building Company, the CEO of IRISL Mohammad Modarres Khiabani expressed hope that signing of this contract is a good beginning for Arvandan Shipbuilding Company in order that it can join the fleet of manufacturers of certain vessels.

He said that activities of Arvandan Company had come to a halt due to different reasons for years, adding that the main mission of IRISL is activity in the marine services and transport of goods but above them is the look of this national fleet to the necessity for supporting domestic production and attention to the domestic manufacturers according to the recommendations of the Supreme Leader especially during the sanctions.

Modarres Khiabani then pointed to the good trust of IRISL to Arvandan Shipbuilding Company and signing contract and ordering manufacture of two multifunctional 800-ton vessels and said that the investment for manufacture of these two vessels is 7m euros and they should be completed and delivered in 18 months.

He reiterated that Arvandan Company should plan in a way that it can produce at

least four vessels per year and deliver them to IRISL and manufacture of special vessels for drilling and serving the drilling rigs in south of the country can be one of the important activities of Arvandan Company.

In the ceremony, IRISL awarded a major contract for building two bunkering tankers to a domestic company, a first of its kind in the country amid efforts to offset U.S. sanctions by supporting local manufacturing and jobs.

IRISL's deputy head for fleet expansion Abdorrezza Mohebi said that Iran's Arvandan Shipbuilding Company will deliver two 800-ton multi-purpose tankers to IRISL's bunkering agent GMSENG within the next 20 months based on a contract signed between the two companies earlier on Saturday.

Mohebi said the IRISL will pay 2.140 trillion rials (\$7 million) for the two ships which will boost bunkering services to company's container ships once they are added to its fleet.

He said the contract will create 100 permanent jobs at Arvandan, a shipbuilder based in Iran's southwestern Province of Khuzestan near the Karun River.

Iran has increasingly relied on domestic companies to satisfy its manufacturing demands in recent years. That has come as the country still remains under a series of US sanctions that ban foreign companies from engaging in deals with Iran.

Increased support for local manufacturers has also helped Iran create hundreds of thousands of jobs for its youth in recent years while also allowing for more exports to other countries.



## Producers of Cooling, Heating Facilities to Gather in Isfahan

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

ISFAHAN – The 21th International Exhibition of Cooling and Heating Equipment and Installations will be held in Isfahan on December 13-16 at Isfahan's International Permanent Fairground.



According to the public relations of Isfahan International Exhibition Public Relations, the exhibition will host experts, specialists, producers and activists of this field on December 13-16 and the exhibition will be open to the public from 10 a.m. to 18 p.m.

The Cooling and Heating Equipment and Installations will be held on a land over 8,000 square meters where 85 companies will put on display their achievements.

Isfahan, East Azarbaijan, Tehran, Khorasan Razavi, Fars, Mazandaran and Khuzestan provinces are to attend the event. By the way foreign companies like Mitsubishi, Electronic, Wiseman, Hitachi, ATEG and Midea are to attend this exhibition event where they are to put on display their latest products and technologies in the field of cooling and heating equipment.

Some famous Iranian brands are also to attend the event and to show their latest products. According to plans, society of exporters of cooling and heating equipment of Turkey (ISIB) is to attend the exhibition. Meanwhile some trade delegations from Belarus and Tajikistan are to visit this event which will be held at Isfahan International Permanent Fairground.

## Iran-Kenya Trade at \$50m

TEHRAN (MNA) – Iran and Kenya traded \$50 million worth of goods in the first eight months of the current Iranian year (March 21-Nov. 21), according to an Iranian official.

Iran's exports to Kenya reached 86,156 tons worth \$38.3 million during the period, registering a 20% year-on-year decrease, says Ruhollah Latifi, the deputy head of Iran-South Africa Merchants Club.

Bitumen worth \$29.71 million accounted for 78% of the exports. It was followed by industrial oils and other petroleum derivatives worth \$3.75 million with a share of 10% in total exports, food and agricultural products worth 1.43 million with a share of 4%.

## No Modi-Putin Summit This Year

NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Russian President Vladimir Putin will not hold an annual in-person summit this year, an Indian government source said, after the two held discussions on the sidelines of an event in September.

Bloomberg News reported earlier in the day that the decision to cancel the summit was taken after veiled threats by Putin to use nuclear weapons in the Ukraine war.

The government source, who declined to be named citing the sensitivity of the matter, said the decision not to hold a summit was taken much earlier and that the nuclear angle was not a factor.



## German Hostage Held in Sahel Since 2018 Freed

BERLIN (Dispatches) - A German humanitarian worker held hostage in the Sahel for more than four-and-a-half years has been freed, his organization said.

Jorg Lange, 63, "can return to his family", said Bianca Kaltschmitt, director general of the NGO Help, thanking Germany's foreign ministry, criminal police and the authorities in Mali, Niger and other neighboring countries for contributing to his release.

Lange was kidnapped by armed men riding motorcycles on April 11, 2018 near Ayorou in western Niger, in a region near the Malian border frequently hit by jihadist attacks.



## Russia Grinds on In Eastern Ukraine



KYIV (Dispatches) - Russian forces have turned the eastern Ukrainian city of Bakhmut into ruins, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said, while Ukraine's military on Saturday reported missile, rocket and air strikes in multiple parts of the country that Moscow is trying to conquer after months of resistance.

The latest battles of Russia's 9 1/2 month war in Ukraine have centered on four provinces that Russian President Vladimir Putin triumphantly — and illegally — claimed to have annexed in late September. The fighting indicates Russia's struggle to establish control of those regions and Ukraine's persistence to reclaim them.

Zelenskyy said the situation "remains very difficult" in several frontline cities in eastern Ukraine's Donetsk and Luhansk provinces. Together, the provinces make up the Donbas, an expansive industrial region bordering Russia that Putin identified as a focus from the war's outset and where Moscow-backed separatists have fought since 2014.

"Bakhmut, Soledar, Maryinka, Kreminka. For a long time, there is no living place left on the land of these areas that have not been damaged by shells and fire," Zelenskyy said in his nightly video address, naming cities that have again found themselves in the crosshairs. "The occupiers actually destroyed Bakhmut, another Donbas city that the Russian army turned into burnt ruins."

Some buildings remain standing in Bakhmut, and the remaining residents still mill about the streets. But like Mariupol and other contested cities, it endured a long siege and spent weeks without water and power even before Moscow launched massive strikes to take out public utilities across Ukraine.

The Donetsk region's governor, Pavlo Kyrylenko, estimated seven weeks ago that 90% of the city's prewar population of over 70,000 had fled in the months since Moscow focused on seizing the entire Donbas.

The Ukrainian military General Staff reported missile attacks, about 20 airstrikes and more than 60 rocket attacks across Ukraine between Friday and Saturday. Spokesperson Oleksandr Shtupun said the most active fighting was in the Bakhmut district, where more than 20 populated places came under fire. He said Ukrainian forces repelled Russian attacks in Donetsk and neighboring Luhansk.

Russia's grinding eastern offensive succeeded in capturing almost all of Luhansk during the summer. Donetsk eluded the same fate, and the Russian military in recent weeks has poured manpower and resources around Bakhmut in an attempt to encircle the city, analysts and Ukrainian officials have said.

After Ukrainian forces recaptured the southern city of Kherson nearly a month ago, the battle heated up around Bakhmut, demonstrating Putin's desire for visible gains following weeks of clear setbacks in Ukraine.

Taking Bakhmut would rupture Ukraine's supply lines and open a route for Russian forces to press on toward Kramatorsk and Sloviansk, key Ukrainian strongholds in Donetsk. Russia has battered Bakhmut with rockets for more than half of the year. A ground assault accelerated after its troops forced the Ukrainians to withdraw from Luhansk in July.

But some analysts have questioned Russia's strategic logic in the relentless pursuit to take Bakhmut and surrounding areas that also came under intense shelling in the past weeks, and where Ukrainian officials reported that some residents were living in damp basements.

## Tens of Thousands Rally in Bangladesh To Demand New Elections

DHAKA (Dispatches) - Tens of thousands of supporters of Bangladesh's main opposition party have gathered in Dhaka to protest against the government led by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and demand new elections.

The protesters rallied on Saturday at the Golapbagh sports ground, where the crowd chanted "Sheikh Hasina is a vote thief" amid heightened tensions in the Bangladeshi capital.

The rally comes days after security forces stormed the headquarters of the opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) on Tuesday. At least one person died and dozens of others were injured in the raid.

Anti-government protests have erupted across the country in recent months triggered by power cuts and fuel price hikes. The prime minister has rejected calls to stand down.

A BNP official said that some 200,000 people had joined Saturday's rally by mid-morning. Dhaka Metropolitan Police spokesman Faruq Ahmed rejected the claim and said the venue could not hold more than 30,000 people.

"Our main demand is Sheikh Hasina resign and parliament is dissolved and let a neutral caretaker government step in to hold a free and fair election," BNP spokesman Zahiruddin Swapan said.

The protests have been peaceful, but SWAT teams, counterterrorism units and canine squads were on standby, Ahmed said. Police have also set up checkpoints on roads to the city and increased security there.

BNP officials accused the government of triggering an unofficial transport strike to try to prevent people from joining the rally.

The rally comes a day after two BNP leaders were arrested on allegations of inciting violence. More than 2,000 activists and supporters of the opposition party have been detained since November 30 to prevent them from attending the protest.

Western governments, the United Nations and human rights organizations have raised concerns over the political climate and human rights violations in Bangladesh.



## Tunisians Protest Against President Ahead of Parliamentary Elections

TUNIS (Dispatches) - Hundreds of Tunisians protested against President Kais Saied a week before elections to a new parliament created by his constitutional changes, accusing him of an undemocratic coup.

Saied shut down the previous parliament last year and ruled by decree before rewriting the constitution this year to give the presidency more powers, moves rejected by most political parties.

"Saied get out!" chanted protesters marching in the center of Tunis.

Saied has said his actions were legal and necessary in order to save Tunisia from years of crisis and has repeatedly said he will not become a dictator.

Tunisians had grown increasingly frustrated over recent years at economic stagnation and political paralysis, with a divided parliament and unstable government.

Elections will be held on Dec. 17 for a new, less powerful parliament created by Saied's constitution, which was passed through a referendum in July with low turnout.

Speakers at the protest including senior politicians from parties opposing Saied said the election was illegitimate and urged a boycott. "All the opposition is agreed on one position which is rejecting a coup and calling for a return to democracy," said Samira Chaouachi, who was deputy speaker in the elected parliament that Saied dissolved.



## Philippines Protesters Decry Alleged Injustices Under Marcos

MANILA (Dispatches) - Hundreds of people marched in the Philippine capital protesting what they said was a rising number of extrajudicial killings and other injustices under the administration of President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.

The protesters, led by a Philippines-based rights group, gathered at a public square in Manila before marching toward the presidential palace to demand justice for victims. Police estimated around 800 protesters took part in the rally, which coincided with International Human Rights Day.

Cristina Palabay of the rights group Karapatan said under the Marcos administration's counterinsurgency campaign, the group has documented at least 17 cases of extrajudicial killings in addition to four other incidents of violence where victims survived.

The number of political prisoners continues to rise, with 828 detained as of Nov. 30, Palabay said, noting that at least 25 of them were arrested after Marcos took office in June.

"Despite these sordid figures there has been zero justice for the victims of extrajudicial killings," Palabay said in a statement. "The culture of impunity continues to rear its ugly head."

Organizers said protesters in Manila and other parts of the country included families of activists who disappeared or were tortured during the administration of Marcos' father and namesake, ousted dictator Ferdinand Marcos, as well as human rights victims

under former President Rodrigo Duterte, whose brutal war on drugs is under investigation by the International Criminal Court after leaving thousands dead.

The dictator was ousted in an army-backed "People Power" revolt in 1986 and died three years later in exile in the U.S. without admitting any wrongdoing, including accusations that he, his family and other associates amassed an estimated \$5 billion to \$10 billion while he was in power.

"We come together as families of victims from different regimes and presidents ... We have made it a point that every International Human Rights Day we call for justice, and commit to not allow the same violations to happen to others," said Evangelina Hernandez, chairperson of a human rights victims group.

Karapatan said the current administration is also increasing the use of anti-terror laws to suppress dissent and curtailing freedom of expression and association.

The U.N. Human Rights Council has urged the Marcos administration to address the killings and other rights abuses.

The government has said it is committed to protecting human rights, citing reforms in the country's judicial system.

Justice Secretary Jesus Crispin Remulla, in a speech last month in Geneva before the Human Rights Council, dismissed allegations that there is a culture of impunity in the Philippines. He said the government will not tolerate the denial of justice or the violation of rights.



## Ukrainian, Russian Nobel Peace Winners Slam Putin

OSLO (Dispatches) - Following the awards ceremony in Oslo, the recipients of this year's Nobel Peace Prize took turns criticizing Russia's continuing war in Ukraine.

Jailed Belarusian activist Ales Bialiatski, the Russian organisation Memorial, and the Ukrainian Centre for Civil Liberties were announced as the recipients in October, and recognized for their work in documenting war crimes, human rights abuses and the abuse of power.

The Peace Prize is awarded annually on December 10, the day Alfred Nobel died in 1896, and the recipients will share the prize which is worth nearly \$1m. Al Jazeera talked to Natallia Pinchuk, Bialiatski's wife, who attended the ceremony on behalf of her jailed husband.

"Ales and we all realise how important and risky it is to fulfil the mission of civil rights defenders — especially in the tragic time of Russia's aggression against Ukraine," Pinchuk said.

She went on to say that her husband is only one of thousands of Belarusians unjustly imprisoned for their civic action and beliefs.

"Hundreds of thousands have been forced to flee the country for the mere reason that they wanted to live in a democratic state," Pinchuk said.

Oleksandra Matviichuk of Ukraine's Center for Civil Liberties dismissed calls for a political compromise that would allow Russia to retain some of the illegally annexed Ukrainian territories, saying that "fighting for peace does not mean yielding to pressure of the aggressor, it means protecting people from its cruelty."

"Peace cannot be reached by a country under attack laying down its arms," she said, her voice trembling with emotion. "This would not be peace, but occupation."

The triple peace prize award was seen as a strong rebuke to Russian President Vladimir Putin, not only for his action in Ukraine but for the Kremlin's crackdown on domestic opposition and its support for Lukashenko's brutal repression of dissenters.

Russia's Supreme Court shut down Memorial, one of Russia's oldest and most prominent human rights organizations that was widely acclaimed for its studies of political repression in the Soviet Union, in December 2021.



# Climate Disaster Damage "Down" to \$268b

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - This past year has seen a horrific flood that submerged one-third of Pakistan, one of the three costliest U.S. hurricanes on record, devastating droughts in Europe and China, a drought-triggered famine in Africa and deadly heat waves all over.



Yet this wasn't climate change at its worst. With all that death and destruction in 2022, climate-related disaster damages are down from 2021, according to insurance and catastrophe giant Swiss Re. That's the state of climate change in the 2020s that \$268 billion in global disaster costs is a 12% drop from the previous year, where damage passed \$300 billion.

The number of U.S. weather disasters that caused at least \$1 billion in damage is only at 15 through October and will likely end the year with 16 or 17, down from 22 and 20 in the last two years, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. But because of Hurricane Ian, overall damage amounts are probably going to end up in the top three in American history.

Weather disasters, many but not all of them turbocharged by human-caused climate change, are happening so frequently that this year's onslaught, which 20 years ago would have smashed records by far, now in some financial measures seems a bit of a break from recent years.

Welcome to the new abnormal. "We've almost gotten used to extremes. And this year compared to many years in the past would be considered a pretty intense year, but compared to maybe the most extreme years, like a 2017, 2020 and 2021, it does look like ... a slight adjustment down," said NOAA applied meteorologist and economist Adam Smith, who calculates the billion dollar disasters for the agency. "We're just getting used to it but that's not a good way to move into the future."

Wildfires in the United States weren't as costly this year as the last couple years, but the Western drought was more damaging than previous years, he said. America's billion dollar disasters in 2022 seemed to hit every possible category except winter storms: hurricanes, floods, droughts, wildfires, heat waves, hail storms and even a derecho.

When it comes to 2022's financial damages globally and the United States, Ian, which walloped Florida, was the big dog, even though Pakistan's flooding was more massive and deadly. In terms of just looking at dollars not people, Ian's damages eclipsed the drought-triggered African famine that affected more people. It also overshadowed river levels in China and Europe that dropped to levels so low it caused power and industrial problems and the heat waves in Europe, India and North America that were deadly and record-breaking.

Smith said NOAA hasn't finished calculating the damages from Ian yet, but there's a good chance it will have more than \$100 billion in damage, pushing past 2012's Superstorm Sandy that swamped New York and New Jersey, ranking only behind 2005's Katrina and 2017's Harvey for damaging hurricanes.

In the 1980s, the United States would average a billion-dollar weather disaster every 82 days. Now it's every 18 days, Smith said. That's not inflation because damages are adjusted to factor that out, he said. It's nastier weather and more development, people and buildings in harm's way, he said.

Globally "if you zoom in the last six years, 2017 to 2022, this has been particularly bad" especially compared to the five years before, said Martin Bertogg, Swiss Re's head of catastrophic peril.

"It felt like a regime change, some people called it a new normal," Bertogg said. But he thinks it was more getting back, after a brief respite, to a long-term trend of disaster costs steadily rising 5% to 7% a year.

U.S. climate envoy John Kerry said the increasing number of disasters makes the case for reducing emissions.

"You're spending money now because we're not doing the things we ought to be doing," Kerry said in an interview with The Associated Press. "We'll be spending a hell of a lot more under much more stringent circumstances than we are today if we don't move faster."

Not every year has to be a whopper. The U.S. got a break in 2019 when there were "only" 14 billion-dollar disasters, NOAA's Smith said.

"A growing body of evidence indicates that climate change is increasing the variability as well as the average" of weather disasters, said Stanford University environment director Chris Field, who led a United Nations 2012 report on extreme weather. "What this means is that in some years we get hit harder than others. In other years we get hit like never before."

"The important thing is that the trend in disasters is increasing," Field said. "And it will continue to increase until we halt the warming."

Looking at damages, mostly insured losses, can give a skewed picture because how much a disaster cost depends greatly on how wealthy the area that the disaster hit, less so than the scale of the disaster itself, said Debarati Guha-Sapir, who runs the Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters at the Catholic University of Louvain in Belgium.

And even more important, these figures are about dollars, not people, and that distorts the true picture, said Guha-Sapir and University of Washington health and climate professor Kristie Ebi.

"What is insured is a small fraction of total infrastructure and the people killed in Pakistan," which lowers the damage amount despite 1,700 people killed, Ebi said. The flood in Pakistan, which submerged one-third of a country that's bigger than Texas, was not the only thing that hit that developing country.

"Pakistan just couldn't catch a break this year. A January snowstorm killed 23 followed by a lethal spring heatwave, then devastating floods from June-October took over 1,700 lives and untold livelihoods," said Jennifer Francis, a climate scientist at the Woodwell climate Research Center in Cape Cod. "Many other surprising, less publicized, and alarming events wreaked havoc on local communities, such as the sudden collapse of the lucrative snow crab fishery in the Bering Sea, rapid demise of European glaciers, inundation of several coastal villages in Alaska by ex-tropical cyclone Merbok."

"Additional heat in the atmosphere is sucking moisture out of soils, exacerbating drought and heatwaves," Francis said. "Evaporation from oceans and land also increases the amount of moisture in the air, which provides more fuel for storms and heavier downpours."

Swiss Re's Bertogg said although climate change is at work he estimates two-thirds, perhaps more, of the rise in damages is due to more people and things in harm's way.

Urbanization across the globe puts more people in dense environments, which increases damage when disaster hits, Bertogg said. Then add urban sprawl that takes those cities and makes them geographically bigger and thus more vulnerable, he said. A good example of that is how wildfires started damaging more homes in California as more homes got built in rural areas, he said.

Plus more construction is being built on the coast and along waterways making them more vulnerable to storms and flooding, with flooding as "the biggest threat for the global economy," Bertogg said.

But NOAA's Smith keeps searching for a little silver lining in storm clouds: "I just hope the trends get a little bit less profound and less stressful for society. We all need a break."



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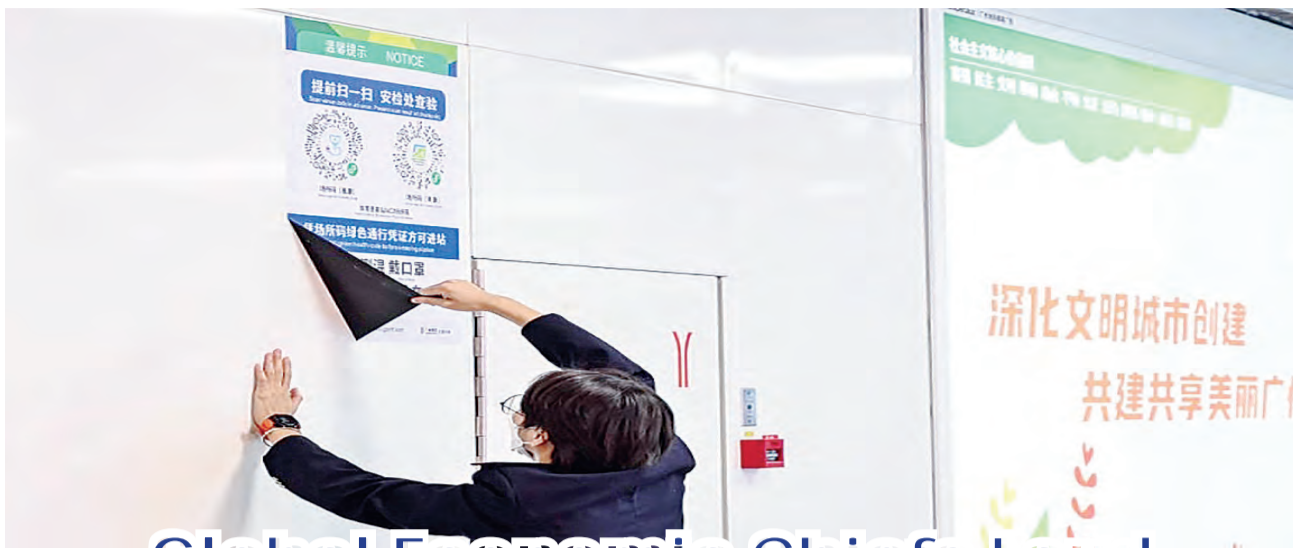
## U.S. Does Not Object to Kazakh Banks Using Russia's Mir Bank Cards

ASTANA (Dispatches) - Kazakhstan's financial market regulator said on Friday that the U.S. Treasury Department has informed banks in Kazakhstan that it does not object to Russians in the country using Russia's Mir payment cards.

The importance of Mir cards for Russians rose significantly this year, amid sanctions over Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and after U.S. payments firms Visa Inc. and Mastercard Inc. suspended operations in

Russia and their cards that were issued in Russia stopped working abroad.

"The American agency clarified that it has no objection to the use of Mir bank cards by private individuals, namely citizens who have migrated from Russia to Kazakhstan, to make life-sustaining transactions," Kazakhstan's financial market regulator said in a statement, referring to the U.S. Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control.



## Global Economic Chiefs Laud China's Decisive Zero-Covid Reversal

HUANGSHAN (Dispatches) - Global economic leaders hailed China's move away from its hardline zero-Covid policy, with the IMF chief saying the "decisive actions" would help revive growth both in the country and globally.

The relaxation would help to shore up a world economy struggling with the impact of the pandemic and Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the head of the World Trade Organization said after the conference in the eastern city of Huangshan, hosted by outgoing Chinese Premier Li Keqiang.

Beijing on Wednesday announced a loosening of its zero-tolerance approach to coronavirus outbreaks, ending large-scale lockdowns and allowing some positive cases to isolate at home following widespread protests against the restrictions.

The decision indicated that the world's second-largest economy is finally shifting towards living with Covid after years of grinding curbs stifled growth.

"We welcome very much the decisive actions taken by the Chinese authorities... to recalibrate the Covid policies so as to create a better impetus for the revival of growth in China," Kristalina Georgieva said at a press briefing with the heads of other major economic institutions.

The effort to boost vaccination rates and anti-viral treatments "is very good for the Chinese people, but also important for Asia and the rest of the world", Georgieva added.

"China's performance matters (not just) to China — it matters to the world economy as well."

The global economy has been rocked this year, with Russia's brutal invasion of Ukraine adding to a stuttering post-pandemic recovery and a cost of living crisis in many countries.

The retreat from zero-Covid "will help remove one set of uncertainties" in a world reeling from the impacts of the pandemic, the war in Ukraine and climate change, said WTO Director-General Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, at the same briefing.

Secretary-General of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, Mathias Cormann, said the "adjustments will support the strength of the recovery both in China and globally".

Beijing's step back from zero-Covid has so far helped to prop up global stock markets fearful of a looming recession in the United States, but analysts have warned that China's route to a full reopening remains bumpy.

Public frustration with snap lockdowns and mass testing boiled over last month as protesters took to the streets in cities around the country, with some calling for greater political freedoms in China's most widespread demonstrations since 1989.

Long criticized for disrupting business operations and global supply chains, the zero-Covid policy has acted as a constraint on China's economy, with analysts expecting Beijing to miss its stated annual growth target of 5.5 per cent.

Friday's briefing came during something of a farewell tour for Li, who has served as President Xi Jinping's second-in-command for two five-year terms but is now set to retire.

## Inflation to Ease Soon as Turkey's Economy Model Yields Results

ANKARA (Dispatches) - Turkey's exports are approaching the \$300 billion threshold by breaking records every month, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said Thursday as the country tries to navigate the economic crisis with a model that promotes growth via exports, employment, production and a current account surplus.

The president also said that the negative impact of inflation will begin to ease as of the beginning of the new year thanks to the measures taken by the government.

Erdoğan sent a video message to the Turkey 2023 Summit and Money Talks organized by Turkuvaz Media Group in Istanbul.

Expressing his hope that the summit will be beneficial, Erdoğan congratulated the media group on the event that saw the participation of many respected names and thanked all the participants who enriched the program with their ideas, presentations and evaluations.

Stating that the world has been going through a painful process over the last three years that started with the pandemic and then grew more complicated with hot conflicts and regional tensions, Erdoğan said that energy, food and raw material prices, which have reached the highest levels in recent years, and the subsequent inflation problem is an issue all economies are facing.

Meanwhile, he stated that the classical approach to reducing inflation by raising interest rates has not met expectations thus far, adding that many economies that try to restrain inflation with such policies are struggling with employment losses and facing a cost-of-living crisis.

Under the country's economic program, dubbed the "Turkey Economy Model," the Turkish government prioritizes low-interest rates to boost exports, production and investments, aiming to lower inflation and flip the country's chronic current account deficits to a surplus.

In line with the model, Turkey's central bank in its last meeting in November lowered its key policy rate, or the one-week repo rate, by 150 basis points to 9.0%.

The lender said the easing cycle that started in August has come to an end as it was assessed that the current policy rate is at a sufficient level, taking into account the increasing risks to global demand.

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



## China to Use Shanghai Exchange for Yuan Energy Deals With Persian Gulf Nations

BEIJING (Dispatches) - China's President Xi Jinping said in Riyadh that China and Gulf nations should make full use of the Shanghai Petroleum and National Gas Exchange as a platform to carry out yuan settlement of oil and gas trade.

China and states of the (Persian) Gulf Cooperation Council ((P)GCC) are natural partners for cooperation, Xi said in a speech at the China-(P)GCC summit.

"China will continue to import large quantities of crude oil from (P)GCC countries, expand imports of liquefied natural gas, strengthen cooperation in upstream oil and gas development, engineering services, storage, transportation and refining, and make full use of the Shanghai Petroleum and National Gas Exchange as a platform to carry out yuan settlement of oil and gas trade," he said.

In his speech, Xi proposed other areas for cooperation in the next three to five years, including finance and investment, innovation and new technologies, as well as aerospace, and language and cultures.

"China is willing to carry out financial regulatory cooperation with (P)GCC countries, facilitate (P)GCC enterprises to enter China's capital market, establish a joint investment association with GCC, support sovereign wealth funds of both sides to cooperate in various forms," Xi said.

China will also establish bilateral investment and economic cooperation working mechanisms, carry out local currency swap cooperation and deepen digital currency cooperation, he said.

In his speech, Xi also called on China and (P) GCC nations to be partners in promoting unity, development and security.

Xi's visit comes at a time when Riyadh's long-standing alliance with Washington has been strained over human rights issues, energy policy and Russia, as well as Gulf doubts about the commitment of main security guarantor America to the region.

## Japan Vows to Stick to Budget Balancing Goal

TOKYO (Dispatches) - Japan must stick to its target of a primary budget surplus by the 2025 fiscal year, Finance Minister Shunichi Suzuki said, even as a planned increase in defense spending raises the spectre of worsening already dire public finances.

"It's true, that's a lot of money" Suzuki said,

referring to a plan for ¥43 trillion (RM1.39 trillion) in defense spending over the next five years.

"But we must stick to the aim of achieving a primary budget surplus by fiscal 2025," Suzuki said when asked about how increased defense spending may affect Japan's fiscal target.

Japan aims to achieve a primary budget surplus, excluding new bond sales and debt servicing costs, by the end of the 2025 fiscal year, in March 2026.

"Fiscal discipline must be maintained," he added. Prime Minister Fumio Kishida told ruling coalition tax chiefs yesterday to work out a plan by the end of the year for increasing taxes to fund defense spending.

Kishida's government is considering raising taxes in stages after fiscal 2023 and towards 2027 to help fund a plan to secure funding for the planned ¥43 trillion in defense spending for the five-year, mid-term defense plan.

After fiscal 2027, the government will need to earmark additional spending worth ¥4 trillion a year, of which some ¥1 trillion would be paid by tax increases.

"It's important to gain consent from the public as we are going to ask them to shoulder the burden," Suzuki said.

He brushed aside the possibility of issuing additional debt.

"It's difficult to consider debt issuance as stable sources of funding strengthened defense capabilities over time," he said.

Instead, the government would focus on reforming spending and tapping unused budget and non-tax revenue, and put them together in a pool of funds for strengthening defense.

Kishida has announced plans to lift defense spending to an amount equivalent of 2 per cent of gross domestic product within five years, from 1 per cent now.

## China's Producer Prices Fall, Consumer Inflation Slows On Soft Demand

BEIJING (Dispatches) - China's factory-gate prices showed an annual fall for a second month in November, while consumer inflation slowed, indicating weak activity and soft demand in an economy that has been held back by tough pandemic controls.

Analysts said they expected the government to keep interest rates low and take measures to boost confidence.

The producer price index (PPI) was down 1.3% from a year earlier, unchanged from an annual contraction seen in October, according to National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) data issued on Friday. That was slower than a 1.4% fall tipped in a Reuters poll.

The November consumer price index (CPI) rose at its slowest pace in eight months, climbing 1.6% from a year earlier, which was less than the 2.1% annual rise seen in October but in line with a Reuters poll.

"These data suggest the economic momentum (continues) to weaken," said Zhiwei Zhang, chief economist at Pinpoint Asset Management.

A high-level political meeting on Tuesday, a gathering of the ruling Communist Party's Politburo, emphasized that in 2023 the government would focus on stabilizing growth, promoting domestic demand and opening up to the outside world.

Zhang said that, although the government had eased pandemic controls over the past week, it would take further measures to spur the economy.

"The Politburo meeting ... identified weak confidence as a major problem for the economy," he said. "I expect the government will do more to boost market and household confidence. The fast pace of reopening indicates the government's sense of urgency."

Growth in the world's second-largest economy has sagged this year, largely impacted by the uncompromising COVID-19 curbs as global demand has also wavered.

The producer price deflation and milder consumer price inflation of November accompanied record COVID-19 infections and related curbs that disrupted production and curbed mobility.

Although markets have cheered the shift in pandemic policy, economists say it will likely depress growth over the next few months as infections surge, bringing an economic rebound only later in 2023.

Producer deflation was led by the steel industry, in which prices were down 18.7%. Part of the explanation for slower growth in consumer prices was in food markets.

Food prices were up 3.7% when compared to last year, with a rise of 7.0% seen in October. Within the food category, pork was a factor behind moderating inflation: it was 34.4% more expensive in November than in the same month year ago, while in October the annual rise had been 51.8%.

## Euro Zone Banks Hand Back Another \$472b of ECB Cash



FRANKFURT (Dispatches) - Euro zone banks are set to repay early another 447.5 billion euros (\$472 billion) in multi-year loans from the European Central Bank, bringing the total reduction of outstanding loans to nearly 800 billion euros in just a few weeks, the ECB said.

Banks had until recently been sitting on 2.1 trillion euros worth of cash from the ECB's Targeted Longer-Term Refinancing Operations, launched to encourage lending and spur economic activity when the euro zone was threatened with deflation.

But inflation is now surging and the ECB raised borrowing costs on these loans last month, hoping banks would rather hand back the funds than pay the extra interest.

Banks last months repaid 296 billion euros in TLTRO funds while another 52 billion euros will mature in December, taking the total reduction to 796 billion euros.

Outstanding TLTRO funds will still total 1.32 trillion after the repayment, with much of these maturing in June.

The early repayments are expected to raise bank funding costs and temper demand, all in the hope this will ease inflation which hit a record high 10.6% in October.

At 8.5 trillion euros, the ECB's balance sheet is still exceptionally large by historic standards and the bank is expected to outline plans next week on reducing it further.

The next step will be to let some of the 5 trillion euros of debt it holds expire but this process is likely to be gradual and the reduction is set to be small, at least initially.

Analysts polled by Reuters see the bond holdings shrinking by only 175 billion euros next year.

# Tehran Ranked World's 21st Polluted Capital City

TEHRAN (IFP) - An Iranian official says Tehran has been ranked as the 21st polluted capital city in the world, as air pollution in the Iranian capital reaches an unhealthy level once again. Jafar Tashakori Hashemi, who heads the Transportation Commission of Tehran's City Council, warned against the dangerous effects of pollutants on the people's health and said, "Iran ranks 24th in terms of air pollution among 113 countries, while Tehran ranks 21st among 107 capital cities in the world." He said 26,000 people suffer early death each year due to air pollution, which inflicts losses worth \$30 billion.



# Madrid, Paris, Lisbon Push Ahead With Hydrogen Pipeline

ALICANTE (Dispatches) - Spain, France and Portugal unveil details of their ambitious plan for an underwater pipeline to bring green hydrogen from the Iberian Peninsula to the rest of Europe.

Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez, French President Emmanuel Macron and Portuguese premier Antonio Costa were to formally sign off on the plans in the presence of EU chief Ursula Von der Leyen on the sidelines of a regional EU summit in southern Spain.

They were expected to outline both a roadmap and timeline for completing the so-called H2Med project which they are hoping will be partially covered by European funds.

The pipeline project comes as Europe struggles to reduce its dependence on Russian energy following its February invasion of Ukraine.

Also known as BarMar for its planned route connecting Barcelona and Marseille, the submarine pipeline will carry green hydrogen, which is made from water via electrolysis in a process using renewable energy.

It will ultimately facilitate the EU's transition to green energy, French and Spanish government officials say.

Energy ministers from all three countries will also be at the gathering in the southern city of Alicante to offer their outlook on "the feasibility of the infrastructure project, its funding and an initial timeline" for its construction, sources in Macron's office said.

Announced at an EU summit in October, the pipeline offers an alternative to the defunct 2003 MidCat pipeline project which was to have carried gas across the Pyrenees from Spain to France.

It was abandoned in 2019 over profitability issues and objections from Paris and environmentalists.

H2Med aims to boost the decarbonisation of European industry, giving it large-scale access to clean energy from Spain and Portugal which are hoping to become world leaders in green hydrogen thanks to their numerous wind and solar power farms.



Initially, the idea was for the pipeline to carry gas from the Iberian peninsula to central Europe, given Spain and Portugal's huge capacity for turning liquefied natural gas (LNG) that arrives in tankers back into gas form.

But that idea has been dropped with the pipeline only slated to carry green hydrogen, Spanish and French sources said, in a move expected to free up European funding.

France said H2Med could come online in 2030 with Spain offering slightly earlier estimates, with the vast project carrying an estimated price tag of two billion euros (\$2.1 billion).

The three leaders will meet just before the start of the EuroMed 9 summit, at which they will be joined by six other southern European countries: Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Malta and Slovenia.

Spain's Sanchez had planned to hold bilateral talks with Italy's new far-right Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni but she pulled out due to illness early on Friday, Rome said.

## Don't Even Think of It...

FROM PAGE 1

The strategically-positioned islands have always been part of Iran, the proof of which can be corroborated by countless historical, legal, and geographical documents inside the Islamic Republic and elsewhere in the world.



Kanaani reasserted Iran's principled position on the islands, calling them "an inseparable and permanent" part of the Islamic Republic's territory.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran considers any claim to the islands to be destabilizing, [and an instance of] intervention in its internal affairs and [violation of its] territorial sovereignty, and strongly condemns it," the Foreign Ministry spokesman said.

The PGCC statement also accused Iran of posing a threat to "the safety of international waterways and oil facilities."

Responding to the claim, Kanaani said the Islamic Republic's Armed Forces are determined to preserve the maritime security of the regional waters, and such statements could not dent their resolve to protect the security of their country and the region.

"The islands of Abu Musa, the Greater Tunb and the Lesser Tunb in the Persian Gulf are inseparable parts of the pure land of Iran and belong to this motherland forever." Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian said in a post on his Twitter account on Saturday.

The UAE and its allies, mainly Saudi Arabia, should know that Iranians will not let anyone invade their lands as we see even their lord, the U.S., does not dare to attack on Iran because of the military power and strong determination of Iran and Iranians.

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

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

So these states are better to know that these three islands or any inch of the land of the country is considered as the red line and they will give due response to anybody who has devilish intention at any inch of the land in this country.

We also recommend the PGCC states to drink coffee and talk on their own businesses and stop thinking bad things against the Islamic Republic of Iran although we know that the Islamic Republic of Iran due to its progresses and influence in the world has turned into a nightmare for these Persian Gulf states and they try to relieve themselves by issuing such nonsense statements but the fact is that these three islands belong to Iran and nobody dares to think bad about it. So it seems issuing such a statement against the islands is turning to a boring and useless habit for the bloc to entertain themselves during the summit.

## Tehran Blasts Sanctions...

FROM PAGE 1

He added, "Such [unilateral coercive] measures are irresponsible and amount to brazen violation of international law as well as the basic principles on which the international humanitarian law is based."

The group of Friends of Neutrality for Peace, Security and Sustainable Development was established on Turkmenistan's initiative in 2020 with the goal of peaceful settlement of conflicts, and has about 20 countries as its members.

The United States under former President Donald Trump reinstated crippling sanctions on Iran after unilaterally walking out of the 2015 nuclear deal in May 2018, despite Iran's full compliance with the terms of the agreement, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

The sanctions have been choking up the financial channels that could be used for providing Iran with essential medicine, material, or medical equipment.

Although Washington and its Western allies claim that humanitarian goods are exempted from sanctions, tens of thousands of patients in Iran have over the years died or developed critical ailments due to the unavailability of essential drugs. The blanket ban on banking transactions involving Iran have made it impossible for the country to access life-saving medicine and medical equipment.

Iranian authorities say the US has been bullying companies in Europe and other parts of the world to make them stop trading with Iran. The issue became more acute during the spread of the coronavirus in Iran in 2020 when the country was forced to delay a nationwide vaccination program against the disease because sanctions made it impossible to pay for vaccine supplies ordered from other countries.

# As COVID-19 Becomes Routine, Africa Readies for Next Crisis



ABUJA (Dispatches) - Building on the experience of battling the COVID-19 pandemic, African countries are strengthening health systems to prepare for the next health crisis, the World Health Organization's Africa director said.

At the onset of the pandemic in early 2020, some of the 54 countries in the continent of 1.3 billion people lacked the facilities or trained health workers to respond adequately to the health crisis, with some struggling to provide hospital isolation wards and intensive care units, Matshidiso Moeti, the World Health Organization's Africa regional director, said at an online briefing Thursday.

However, over the course of three years, African countries have ramped up investments in health infrastructure in the race against the pandemic with support from global donors, she said.

"The future, however difficult the past couple of years have been, will find us in a much better situation in terms of our strategies, our investments and our capacities to confront public health threats," said Moeti. "We know now what we need to do to be able to make sure that our systems are resilient to the impact of a shock like an outbreak," she said.

Across the continent, she said, WHO is working with countries to reinforce their capacities by training first responders while work is also ongoing to strengthen public health institutions and emergency operations.

One of the "most exciting outcomes of the struggle" Africa faced in getting COVID-19 vaccines is that some countries in the continent are now developing their capacities to produce those key tools locally, Moeti added.

"Whatever happens in the future, the next pandemic will find the world and Africa much readier" in its response, she said, optimistic about "important partnerships" and African institutions being established "to take the lead to work in the area of preparedness and also in primary healthcare."

In Gambia, as in many countries across Africa, the pandemic was "very difficult" for many health systems but it was "an eye-opener for all of us to know where the gaps have been," said Ahmadou Lamin Samateh, Gambia's minister of health.

Samateh called for a global support system that offers more assistance and resources to countries experiencing challenges.

"National governments have roles to play but international communities have important roles to play as well," he said. "We've seen in the COVID-19 pandemic that one problem in one part of the world is a problem for the entire world."

# Some Bloodstream Infection Bacteria Grew Resistant to Last-Resort Drugs in 2020

LONDON (Dispatches) - Increased drug resistance in bacteria causing bloodstream infections, including against last-resort antibiotics, was seen in the first year of the coronavirus pandemic, a World Health Organization report based on data from 87 countries in 2020 showed.

The overuse and/or misuse of antibiotics has helped microbes to become resistant to many treatments, while the pipeline of replacement therapies in development is alarmingly sparse.

High levels (above 50 per cent) of resistance have been reported in bacteria that typically cause life-threatening bloodstream infections in hospitals such as *Klebsiella pneumoniae* and *Acinetobacter* spp, report authors highlighted today.

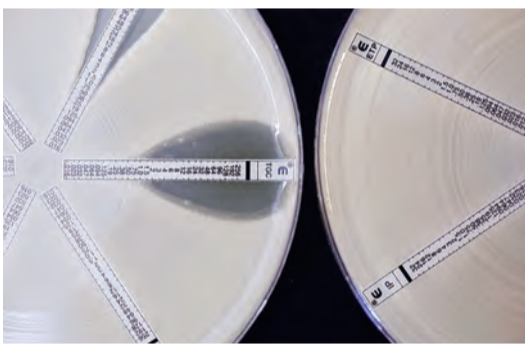
These infections often require treatment with 'last-resort' antibiotics, drugs that are used when all other antibiotics fail.

About 8 per cent of bloodstream infections caused by *Klebsiella pneumoniae* grew resistant to a vital last-resort group of drugs called carbapenems, the report said.

Rates of antimicrobial resistance (AMR) remain very high, but last-resort antibiotics are only just starting to lose potency, said Dr Carmem Pessoa-Silva, the lead for WHO Global Antimicrobial Resistance Surveillance System, in a media conference.

The message of hope, she said is, "we have a very narrow window of opportunity...for responding to the threat."

While there is a concerted push to limit the unbridled use of antibiotics, the pace of new research remains grim.



The effort, cost and time it takes to get an antibiotic approved and the limited return on investment have deterred drugmakers, as treatments must be priced cheaply and are designed to be used as little as possible to limit drug resistance.

As a result, the lion's share of antibiotic development is taking place in a handful of labs of small biopharma companies as a majority of their larger counterparts focus on more lucrative markets.

Only a few big pharmaceutical companies remain in the space — including GSK and Merck — down from more than 20 in the 1980s.

A landmark global analysis published earlier this year found that 1.2 million people died in 2019 due to antibiotic-resistant bacterial infections, making AMR a leading cause of death worldwide, higher than HIV/AIDS or malaria.

"Political commitment (on AMR) must now urgently move from aspiration into action," said Thomas Cueni, director general at International Association of Pharmaceutical Manufacturers and Associations.

The authors of the WHO report said more research is needed to identify the reasons behind the jump in AMR in the period studied, and to what extent it is linked to the accelerated use of antibiotics during the pandemic.

AMR rates also remain difficult to interpret due to insufficient testing and weak laboratory capacity, particularly in low- and middle-income countries, the authors wrote.

# Australia to Cap Prices of Coal, Gas to Drive Down Energy Bills

MELBOURNE (Dispatches) - Australia will cap coal and gas prices for a year in a bid to shave utility bills for households and businesses hit by soaring costs because of the Ukraine conflict, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said.

Gas prices will be capped at A\$12 (RM35.81) per gigajoule (GJ), while the limit for coal will be A\$125 per ton for 12 months, with the government supporting coal producers whose costs exceed that figure, he said.

"Extraordinary times call for extraordinary measures, and we know, with the Russian invasion of Ukraine, what we've seen is a massive increase in global energy prices," Albanese told reporters after a national cabinet meeting with state leaders.

The government also agreed to provide assistance of up to A\$1.5 billion to homes and small businesses, starting from the second quarter of 2023.

The gas price cap will apply to new wholesale gas sales by east coast producers. At A\$12, it is less than half the average short term gas price of A\$26/GJ in the third quarter, according to data from research group EnergyQuest.

The coal price cap will apply to coal used in power generation, the government said. The cap of A\$125 is about half the A\$249 a ton average selling price Banpu achieved for its Australian coal in the third quarter.

Gas producers had urged the government not to impose the price cap, saying it would deter future investment in supply, which would be key to driving down prices in the long run, and could damage Australia's reputation for foreign investors.

Producers that could be hit by the gas price cap include ExxonMobil Corp, Shell Plc, Origin Energy, Woodside Energy Group, Santos Ltd and South Korean steel giant POSCO International Corp's 04750.KS Senex Energy.

"The uncertainty caused by the federal government's plan to impose a price cap in the eastern Australian gas market has already destroyed the confidence both buyers and sellers need in order to complete the transactions that will ensure energy supplies to households and businesses," a Woodside spokesperson said.

## Glimmer of Hope Remains...

FROM PAGE 1

Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesman Nasser Kanaani has recently noted the sanctions removal talks have not been taken off Iran's agenda.

Kanaani added that all efforts by the EU coordinator for the talks show that the other sides have also remained committed to the continuation of the negotiations.

The Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman however stressed that the only problem is the contradiction between the US's words and action.

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## Odermatt Wins Val D'Isere Giant Slalom

VAL-D'ISERE (Dispatches) - Switzerland's world number one Marco Odermatt produced a masterclass of skiing to win the men's World Cup giant slalom at Val D'Isere. The 25-year-old Olympic champion was in a class of his own confirming his dominance of the first leg in the second run, for a combine time of 2min 03.62sec. Second-placed Manuel Feller of Austria was 1.40 seconds slower than the Swiss whilst Slovenia's Zan Kranjec finished third, 2.05sec adrift.

## Diaz to Undergo Tests After Leaving Training Camp With Injury

LONDON (Dispatches) - Liverpool winger Luis Diaz will undergo assessments following physical discomfort after he left the Premier League club's mid-season training camp in Dubai, manager Juergen Klopp said. Diaz, who earlier this week said he was "happy to be back", reportedly suffered a relapse of a knee injury sustained in October and missed training sessions on Thursday and Friday ahead of Liverpool's friendlies against Lyon and Milan.

# Morocco Shock Portugal to Face France In World Cup Semis

DOHA (Dispatches) - Morocco made history by becoming the first African nation to reach a World Cup semi-final after beating Portugal 1-0. Each of the previous three African sides to reach a quarter-final were all eliminated at this stage - Cameroon in 1990, Senegal in 2002 and Ghana in 2010. It was a strong start for Morocco, scoring just before half-time when Youssef En-Nesyri beat the Portuguese keeper to a cross to head home. Star striker Cristiano Ronaldo, who had started the game on the bench, was brought on early in the second half as Portugal searched for an equalizer. But despite coming under sustained pressure for large parts of the second half, the Atlas Lions held firm and had a chance in injury time to score a second. Morocco forward Walid Cheddira was given two yellow cards in the space of seconds, forcing his side to see the game out the final minutes with 10 men. Sky News' Zein Ja'far, who is in Qatar, said during the second half: "Every shot from Morocco is cheered, every pass applauded. "Fans young and old are grabbing hold of one another, throwing their hands in the air and cheering their team on. It's an incredible atmosphere here in Lusail."

A dejected Ronaldo left the pitch in tears and looked inconsolable as he made his way down the tunnel. In the Arab world, Saturday's win felt particularly sweet, with Morocco's progression marking the first time an Arab or African country has ever reached the last four in 92 years of World Cup history. Morocco coach Walid Regragui s hailed the battling spirit of his players after they defeated Portugal to become the first African national team ever to reach the World Cup semi-final stage.

## Maradona Is Watching Argentina From Above And Pushing Team

LUSAIL (Dispatches) - Lionel Messi said Argentina have felt the presence of the late, great Diego Maradona throughout their World Cup campaign, including Friday when they beat the Netherlands on penalties to reach the semi-finals. Messi looked to have inspired Argentina into a last four meeting with Brazil's conquerors Croatia after he set up Nahuel Molina's opener before the break and added the second from the penalty spot. But Argentina blew a two-goal lead deep into stoppage time before goalkeeper Emi Martinez kept his cool to save the first two Dutch penalties and Lautaro Martinez scored the decisive spot kick to send them through. "Diego is watching us from heaven. He is pushing us and I really hope this stays the same until the end," Messi told reporters. "When Lautaro scored and we qualified there was a huge joy. It was a weight off our chest," Messi added. "It was a very hard match. From the beginning it was a really tough match, we knew it would be this way. "We leave that on the pitch with our people. We were really happy and we enjoyed that moment and that's what we can see here and also in Argentina because people are really happy, they are really excited and they are full of enthusiasm. "The Dutch team made trouble for us with long balls and a lot of players in the area. In the end they drew and we suffered. But we were able to seal our passage to the semi-finals, which is what we wanted."

Argentina will take on Croatia for a place in the final, after the 2018 runners-up beat Brazil on penalties earlier. Argentina coach Lionel Scaloni said despite their second-half collapse, his team had no problem finding players willing to take penalties. "Sometimes it's difficult in these situations, they shy away. This time we had too many volunteers. ... We only had to decide the order of our penalty takers," Scaloni said.

# Ronaldo Never Told Ten Hag Me He Wanted to Leave

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - Manchester United manager Erik ten Hag said that Cristiano Ronaldo never told him he wanted to leave Old Trafford. United parted ways with the Portuguese star after the veteran forward gave an explosive TV interview in which he said he felt "betrayed" by the club and had no respect for Ten Hag. "I think it was quite clear after the interview that he had to leave. I think we didn't have to discuss it," Ten Hag told the Manchester Evening News "I wanted him to stay from the first moment until now. He wanted to leave, it was quite clear. And when a player definitely doesn't want to be in this club then he has to go, clear.

"The interview I think, as a club, you can't accept. There will be consequences. To make that step he knew the consequences. Before he never told me he wanted to leave." Ten Hag, speaking at United's winter training camp in Spain, claimed the 37-year-old, currently playing for Portugal at the World Cup, had even hinted at his desire to remain at the club before the season started. "Until that moment he never told me 'I want to leave'," added the United boss. "In the summer, we had one talk. He came in and said 'I will tell you in seven days if I want to stay'. Then he came back and said 'I want to stay'. Until that moment (the interview), I never heard anything." The Portugal star made his name in his first spell at Old Trafford, developing from a raw but prodigiously gifted teenager into one of the world's deadliest forwards.



AL RAYYAN (Dispatches) - Brazil's Neymar said he was unsure if he would play again for the national team after their heartbreaking World Cup quarter-final defeat to Croatia on penalties. "Honestly, I do not know. I think talking now is bad because of the heat of the moment. Maybe I'm not thinking straight," an emotional Neymar told reporters. "To say that this is the end would be rushing myself, but I don't guarantee anything either. Let's see what happens going forward. "I want to take this time to think about it, think about what I want for myself. I will not close the door to playing with Brazil, nor do I say 100% that I'll come back." Neymar's team mate Dani Alves said that he would be retiring from international duty but intended to keep playing at club level. Against Croatia, Neymar put the South Americans ahead with a brilliant mazy run in the first half of extra time. But their rivals equalized three minutes from time and then won a penalty shootout 4-2 to go through to the semifinals where they will face either Argentina or the Netherlands.

## Bassino Wins Giant Slalom In Sestriere

SESTRIERRE (Dispatches) - Italian Marta Bassino claimed her first World Cup victory of the season when she won the giant slalom on her home piste at Sestriere. The 26-year-old, who was born in Coni 80 kilometres from Sestriere, was second after the first run but put in a solid second leg to complete in a combined time of 2min 28.89, finishing 0.11 seconds ahead of the Swede Sara Hector. Bassino's 1min 12.37sec placed her behind Vlhova on the first run but the Slovak was unable to maintain her pace and had to settle for third, 0.40sec adrift. It is the sixth World Cup win of Bassino's career, all of them coming in the giant slalom. "To win at home, in front of an unbelievable Italian public, is super," said Bassino. "It was a real battle, the course was very complicated, I tried to give my maximum. "It is really a dream I have fulfilled." Olympic slalom champion Vlhova is still seeking her first win of the campaign, her two third placed finishes in the slaloms in Levi, Finland, her best showings so far. US ski great Mikaela Shiffrin -- Olympic champion in the giant slalom in 2018 -- was fourth quickest after the first run but fell away to come in sixth, 1.96sec behind Bassino. Another Italian Federica Brignone, victorious on this track two years ago, set the fastest time before being eclipsed by Hector who shaved 0.55sec off it. Brignone missed out on the podium, finishing fourth ahead of French skier Tessa Worley -- the World Cup holder in the discipline -- and Shiffrin.



## Kishan "Special" Leads India to Big ODI Win Over Bangladesh

CHITTAGONG (Dispatches) - Opener Ishan Kishan hit the fastest-ever double century in one-day internationals in just 126 balls to set up a 227-run consolation win for India in the third match against Bangladesh. The left-handed Kishan, who made the team in the absence of injured skipper Rohit Sharma, powered India to 409-8 with his 210 off 131 balls including 24 fours and 10 sixes. He and Virat Kohli, who made 113, put on 290 runs for the second wicket -- the seventh-highest partnership in ODI history. Bangladesh were bowled out for 182 in 34 overs but won the series 2-1 after their opening two victories in Dhaka. India's 409 was their fourth-highest ODI score and the highest-ever total against Bangladesh by any team. Kishan, 24, raised his maiden ODI hundred with a four as he let out a scream, and kept up the charge to convert into a double ton off Mustafizur Rahman as he and Kohli danced in the field. "At this level, whenever you get the chance, you need to make the most out of it," said man of the match Kishan. "I was just picking the ball and the bowlers, and things were going my way. "It was a special one to get my name on with so many legend players and I'm really happy about it," he told reporters. Kishan is only the fourth Indian batsman to score an ODI double ton after Rohit -- who has done so three times -- Sachin Tendulkar and Virender Sehwag. India lost Shikhar Dhawan for three in the fifth over after being invited to bat first, but Kishan hit back with a string of boundaries and took control of the innings with Kohli.

