

Health Ministry Announced on Saturday That the Number of Deaths From the Coronavirus Pandemic In Iran Increased to **144,661** With **Two** More Iranian Killed by the Virus Over the Past 24 Hours

# IRAN NEWS

President Ebrahim Raisi Said That Timely Illumination and Elaboration of The Issues Can Untie the Mental Nodes of Public Opinion and Eliminate the Opportunity for Enemies For Creating and Spreading Lies

VOL. XXVIII, No. 7664 TEHRAN Price 50,000 Rials

www.irannewsdaily.com

SUNDAY DECEMBER 18, 2022 - AZAR 27, 1401

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## Iran Exports to U.S. Rise 11 Folds In 10 Months on Year

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The value of Iran's exports to the United States registered an 11-fold increase in the first 10 months of 2022 from the same period in 2021, IRNA reported.

Based on the data released by the United States Census Bureau, the U.S. imported commodities worth \$10.9 million from Iran in the first 10 months of this year, while the figure was only \$1 million in the same period of time in the past year.

According to the mentioned data, the two countries traded \$46.5 million worth of goods during January-October which was 41 percent more than the figure in the first 10 months of 2021 when the trade between the two sides amounted to \$33.8 million.

The United States Census Bureau's data shows that the value of U.S. export to Iran increased eight percent to \$35.6 million in the 10-month period of this year, from \$32.8 million in the same time span of the previous year.

As previously reported by this bureau, the value of Iran's exports to the United States increased by 18 folds in the first nine months of 2022 from the same period in 2021.

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## Downward Inflation Rate Predicted for Next Year



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Governor of Iran's Central Bank in a TV program said that the inflation rate for next year is predicted to go downward adding that since the beginning of President Seyed Ebrahim Raisi's government, the inflation rate has declined from 59.3% to 39.9% and reiterated that the current excited forex rate will cool down.

Ali Salehabadi said that there are several factors in inflation and one of them is the supply and cost that for example global prices cause it. He added that when the global prices rise, it causes rise in inflation and it can increase the costs. He noted that the other factor is demand which is mostly because of liquidity and the other factor is expectations.

He then elaborated the programs of the central bank for curbing the growth of the liquidity. He reiterated that the liquidity growth will decline to below 30% by the yearend as the monetary base in last Iranian calendar month was 20.5% and the economic growth was 20.2%, and it is expected the liquidity growth will be less than 30% before the yearend.

Salehabadi then touched upon the details of the increase in capitals of the banks and said that this increase is because of selling shares. He also said that the producer price index when President Raisi took office was 82.6% and it has now fallen to 39.1% and even point-to-point index was 103% in May that it has decreased to 32.9% and it will increase more by the yearend.

He said that next year three factors will be ineffective on the inflation trend and therefore liquidity, monetary base and inflation will see a downward trend next year.

He also touched upon the rise in the forex price and devaluation of national currency and stressed that the current dollar price in the free market is unreal adding that the country has no problem in earning forex, and the market has not faced with distribution of forex.

Salehabadi stated that one of the reasons in devaluation of the dollar in Iran is the rise in the value of dollar in the world and the other main reason is because of incidents and expectations in the country and market and actually excitement in the market which have increased the price of forex and it is unreal.

## Tehran to Continue Cooperation on Int'l Fight Against Terrorism

NEW YORK (IRNA) - Iran's Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the United Nations Amir-Saeed Irvani says that the country will continue to cooperate with international efforts to fight terrorism.

Irvani said on Friday that the Islamic Republic of Iran will continue its cooperation with all countries, including those in South and West Asia, particularly Pakistan, in the preemptive and direct fight against terrorism.

"Iran and Pakistan, as two neighbors, have always shared sorrows and happiness, challenges and opportunities, and have both suffered from terrorism," said Irvani as he was speaking at the 8th anniversary of remembrance of the victims of a terrorist attack against a state school in Peshawar, Pakistan.

The Iranian diplomat said that the country is one of the main victims of terrorism in the world with some 17,000 people martyred in terrorist operations over the past decades as he reiterated that Iran's fundamental stance is to condemn terrorism in any type and method.

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## ViewPoint

### West Using Iran as Bogeyman to Milk Others

The Western countries especially countries like the U.S., UK and France have been using methods as "bogeymen" to frighten the independent countries in order they can milk them and the Islamic Republic of Iran has been strongly resisting this move of the West which has led to spread Iranophobia specially for the Persian Gulf and other states in the world so that they can dictate their policies on Tehran and making most of it and by looting the wealth of those countries.

In recent decades, Iran's nuclear issue, missile and drone programs have turned as tools to be used as "bogeymen" to frighten Iran's neighboring countries while the Islamic Republic of Iran does not have evil intention by advancing its nuclear, missile and drone programs and the country wants them just for its own domestic consumption and self-defense because one cannot trust on the West and hostile countries as any moment they can resort to any pretext for invading the country like what the U.S. did during the invasion on Iraq in 2003 under this pretext that Iraq owned weapons of mass destruction but after the end of the Iraq war and toppling of Saddam Hussein, no weapons of mass destruction were found in Iraq.

Now the West led by the U.S. has started the same game and excuse for attacking or putting pressure on Iran either politically or maybe later physically to tame Tehran for milking it but it will definitely fail to defeat Iran, and one cannot expect any crazy move by the West for attacking Iran militarily and the West's only tool is its sanctions and pressure on other countries to increase the pressure on Tehran in the international bodies.

On Thursday the Islamic Republic of Iran in a statement strongly condemned a new round of sanctions imposed by the block on the country over alleged human rights violations and drone deliveries to Russia, warning that persistent Iranophobia campaigns would affect mutual cooperation and interests.

The Iranian ministry issued an 11-article statement on Thursday in reaction to the latest sanctions which were imposed by EU's foreign ministers on Monday.

The statement expressed "strong protest" against the imposition of "unacceptable and baseless" sanctions by the European Union, noting, "The Islamic Republic of Iran believes that dialogue with the EU and its members are possible through mutual respect, trust, and interests."

"Accordingly, we have left the doors of dialogue open but meanwhile, we do not stop expressing our demands and criticisms. Naturally, the opportunities to promote mutual interests will be significantly affected if the media hype that is being followed in the framework of Iranophobia is not stopped," it read.

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## Israeli Regime Poses Serious Threat to Regional Security

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian warns about the "serious threat" posed to the Middle East region by the "occupying and criminal" Israeli regime.

"The bogus and illegitimate regime of the occupying and criminal Israel owns hundreds of nuclear warhead," the top diplomat tweeted on Friday.

"Tel Aviv [poses] serious threat to our common region's security," he added.

The Israeli regime is estimated to possess 200 to 400 nuclear warheads in its arsenal, making it the sole possessor of non-conventional arms in the Middle East and the wider West Asia region.

Tel Aviv, however, neither admits nor denies owning the weapons under a policy of deliberate "nuclear ambiguity."

It has also defied international calls for it to sign the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), something that further corroborates its running of an offensive nuclear weapons program.

Earlier in the month, the United Nations General Assembly overwhelmingly backed a resolution urging the regime to give up its nuclear weapons and join the NPT.

The resolution urged Israel "not to develop, produce, test or others acquire nuclear weapons" and to "renounce possession of nuclear weapons."

It also called on the Israeli regime to place all its nuclear facilities under the comprehensive Safeguards of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

The Iranian foreign minister concluded his tweet by asserting, "Beyond any doubt, the future belongs to Palestine's original people."

The Islamic Republic has, since the 1979 victory of Iran's Islamic Revolution, invariably supported the Palestinian cause of liberation from Israeli occupation and aggression.

In line with the support, Leader of the Islamic Revolution Seyed Ali Khamenei has proposed that the fate of Palestine be determined through a referendum involving all of its original inhabitants, including Muslims, Jews, and Christians.

Iran has presented the initiative to the United Nations, which has been registered at the world body.

## Hamas Demands Mass Mobilization to Protect al-Aqsa Mosque

GAZA (Dispatches) - The Palestinian Hamas resistance movement has called upon Palestinians from all walks of life to mobilize en masse and increase their presence at the al-Aqsa Mosque compound in the occupied Old City of al-Quds, and protect the sacred site against recurrent incursions by Israeli settlers.

Muhammad Hamadeh, the Gaza Strip-based movement's spokesman in al-Quds, said in a statement on Friday that the occupying Tel Aviv regime is hell-bent on Judaizing al-Quds and changing the status quo of al-Aqsa Mosque, urging young Palestinians to thwart Israeli plots.

"The Palestinian nation and resistance fighters will continue defending their lands and holy sites until there would be no place for invaders," Hamadeh stressed.

He held Israel responsible for the repercussions of its desecration and Judaization plans in the occupied al-Quds and the al-Aqsa Mosque compound.

Earlier in the day, tens of thousands of Muslim worshippers reached the al-Aqsa Mosque and performed Friday prayer in its courtyards amid strict measures imposed by Israeli military forces.

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## IRGC Arrests Members of Gang House in Alborz Province

KARAJ (IRNA) - The Intelligence Organization of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps in Fardis County in Iran's Alborz Province announced that it had arrested the members of a gang house of rioters in this city.

Accordingly, the members of this gang house were involved in the recent riots in Fardis. The members of this gang house were involved in all kinds of riotous movements in this city, including distributing pamphlets inviting people to join the riots, making Molotov cocktails, and carrying and using cold weapons.

## President Says His Gov't Holds on to Its election Promises

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

**TEHRAN – President Seyed Ebrahim Raisi said that his administration sticks to its promises in the field of creating millions of houses for people while it also has focused on tackling water shortages and unemployment.**

Speaking on Friday afternoon at the end of his two-day visit to South Khorasan Province at the Province's Administrative Council, Raisi advised the provincial officials and the government managers especially the cultural managers, to pay attention to the people's needs and serve them in the best way.

Raisi continued by stating that the administrative system of the country is obliged to act in accordance with the spirit of the people's sense of responsibility for preserving and strengthening the religious culture.

He added, "Someone who doesn't care about people's pain and doesn't care about the quality and speed of work cannot be the source of change."

He emphasized the necessity of employing educated local workers in the administrative and executive bodies of the province and said, "In the situation where there is an educated male and female workforce in the province, employing them is a priority, unless someone in another city or province has special qualifications."

The President called the efficiency of the administrative system another serious demand of the people from the government and said, "Respect for clients, recognition



of priorities, absence of any kind of corruption and pollution, strict and uniform implementation of the law, action along with the announcement and correct execution of missions are important components."

He considered the issue of employment as one of the main concerns of the government in South Khorasan province and stated, "Creating employment is not only the duty of the Ministry of Labor but also of each manager and official."

Raisi emphasized the operationalization of existing mines in South Khorasan province as the capital of this province and said, "It was decided that the Minister of Industry and the Governor General of South Khorasan should immediately form the Mines Council and remove the obstacles to the operationalization of mines in the province."

Referring to some statements and doubts about the construction of one million housing units per year, the President said, "We have said many times that this figure of housing is the country's need, it is a legal duty, and it is also our promise, and we say unequivocally that it will be done."

### GC Proposal for Constitution Park, Museum Welcomed

TEHRAN (IP) - The Guardian Council (GC) Spokesman said that the suggestion to create the Constitution Park or Constitution Museum had been warmly welcomed by many bodies.



Attending his weekly press brief, Hadi Tahan-Nazif stated that the cultural center or museum for the Constitution to inform people about their civil rights needs to be evaluated by many bodies.

Tahan-Nazif reminded that the creation of such a Constitutional center was proposed last week, and it requires time to be implemented.

The Guardian Council Spokesman stated: "We should all help in the development and promotion of the Constitution, and proposed the inclusion of the Constitution in textbooks, its teaching along with the education of citizenship rights and the creation of a Constitution park or museum."

Iran's Constitutional Council spokesman also said about the draft agreement between Iran and Croatia on assistance and cooperation in customs matters that the agreement had just a problem of not respecting Persian words.

He noted that in order to prevent the problem, the Iranian administration and parliament must be careful so that the bills and plans do not face objections from the Constitutional Council.

## Commander Vows for Deploying Fast, Advanced Vessels at Sea Borders

BUSHEHR (IRNA) - Deputy Commander of Iran's Border Guards for Operations Brigadier General Jalal Setareh lauded advanced military facilities in border guards, saying that fast and advanced vessels will be deployed at sea borders.

According to the military protocols in the border areas, the Iranian borders are monitored and controlled 24/7, Setareh said.

He also hailed Iran's progress in scientific, technology, nuclear, defense, and medical fields.

He referred to safeguarding borders and preventing smuggling as priorities of the Iranian border guards.

Pointing to the evils and tricks of the enemies of Islamic Iran, led by the US and some western countries, he said that weakening the Islamic system, distorting religious beliefs, and creating a gap between the people and the officials are among the goals of the criminal US and its allies in the region.

## Iranian Companies to Participate in Iraq's Energy Projects

TEHRAN (MNA) - In coordination with the Iranian Oil Ministry's representative office in Baghdad, the Iraqi Oil Ministry has notified all its affiliated entities about Iranian companies' readiness for participation in the country's energy projects, Shana reported.

The oil ministries of Iran and Iraq have established a joint working group in order to facilitate cooperation between the two sides in the energy sector through reviewing joint projects and providing recommendations to the ministers of both countries in order to take the necessary decisions and measures.

One of the major priorities of the mentioned working group is to pave the way for the presence of capable Iranian companies in Iraq's energy projects.

As a result, the Iraqi Oil Ministry has put the mentioned goal on the agenda and as the first step, all the entities affiliated with the ministry have been notified to take the necessary measures for preparing the ground for the presence of Iranian contractors in the country.

Iranian Oil Ministry opened a representative office in

Baghdad in November with the aim of enhancing the level of cooperation and synergy between the two sides, and especially to carry out joint projects between the two brotherly countries in the fields of oil, gas, and energy.

In late November, Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi said the country was seeking expansion of energy ties with neighbor Iraq.

Raisi made the remarks in a joint press conference with Prime Minister of Iraq Mohammed Shia' al-Sudani who arrived in the Iranian capital on November 30 to hold talks with the authorities of the Islamic Republic.

"Fortunately, today Iran and Iraq have very good and close cooperation in a wide range of political, economic, security, social, cultural, scientific, and technological areas, and we hope that this cooperation will be improved in the future," Raisi said.

After meeting with President Raisi, Al-Sudani also held talks with Iran's First Vice President Mohammad Mokhber, in which the two sides stressed the need for establishing and strengthening banking ties as a prerequisite for the expansion of energy relations.

## Diplomat Criticizes London Police's Dual Behavior

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iranian chargé d'affaires in London criticized the London police for its dual behavior toward the attackers on Iranian Embassy.

Spontaneous intruders are patronized here for creating an atmosphere of intimidation and threats against the Iranian Embassy, Hosseini Matin wrote on his Twitter account.

When the Iranian client who was attacked and beaten up by intruders complains to the police, the police, instead of handling the complaint, protest to the embassy why the attackers were insulted!? he added.

## Weekly Commodities Trade On IME Exceeds 2.5m Tons

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Iran Mercantile Exchange (IME) last week witnessed trade of 2,531,054 tons of commodities with a total trading value of more than \$781m on its physical market.



According to a report by the IME's International Affairs and PR, the exchange saw on its metals and minerals trading floor trade of 2,065,000 tons of commodities valued at more than \$541m.

On this floor the IME sold 1,086,868 tons of cement, 330,000 tons of iron ore, 537,718 tons of steel, 112,500 tons of sponge iron, 5,025 tons of zinc, 7,725 tons of aluminum, 8,000 tons of copper, 200 tons of molybdenum concentrate, 53 kg of gold bars and 4,800 vehicles.

Furthermore, the IME witnessed on both domestic and export rings of its oil and petrochemical trading floor 431,306 tons of commodities worth nearly \$220m.

Commodities traded on this floor included 867,757 tons of polymeric products, 115,000 tons of vacuum bottom, 38,500 tons of lube cut, 39,429 tons of chemicals, 1,200 tons of sulfur, 260 tons of argon, 5,409 tons of base oil, 600 tons of insulation and 141,967 tons of bitumen.

The IME also traded within the same week 34,531 tons of commodities on its side market.

## Iran Ambassador to Afghanistan to Return Home After Finishing Tenure

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iran's embassy in Afghanistan has announced Ambassador Bahador Aminian will leave the country after concluding his tenure.

The embassy said in a Twitter post on Saturday that Aminian's return to Iran will take place under the normal diplomatic procedures and at the end of his three-year tenure as head of Iran's mission in Kabul.

The post came in response to some media reports suggesting that Aminian had been ousted from his role as Iran's ambassador to Afghanistan after his alleged remarks about the ruling Taliban group leaked to the media.

The reports indicated that Iranian president's special envoy to Afghanistan Hassan Kazemi-Qomi had taken over as caretaker head of the Iranian embassy in Kabul.

In a reaction to the news, the Iranian Foreign Ministry said on Saturday that Kazemi-Qomi will continue to serve as presidential envoy to Afghanistan.

## Iranian Man Sets World's Shortest Man Record

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - A 20-year-old Iranian has broken the world's shortest-man record surpassing the previous title holder by almost 7 centimetres. Afshin Ghaderzadeh is the fourth-shortest man ever confirmed by Guinness World Records.

The social media handles of Guinness World Records (GWR) have always left netizens excited and stunned. Videos of several interesting record holders shared by GWR on its accounts are worth watching. From a boy showing his reverse shoulder nunchaku skills to the highest free jump by a blind horse, GWR has posted numerous interesting posts. Amidst this, the official handle of the Guinness Book of World Records has shared a post about the world's shortest man. The record is held by an Iranian man who measures not more than 65.24 cm (2 ft 1.6 in) in height.

But the 20-year-old Iranian has broken the record by measuring around 7 centimeters shorter than Hernandez. The present record is held by Afshin Esmail Ghaderzadeh, born on July 13, 2002, in a remote village in Bukan County, West Azerbaijan Province, Iran. Ghaderzadeh speaks both Kurdish and



Persian languages and has a Farsi dialect. Jerry is one of his favourite cartoon characters. He even loves football matches and supports Esteghlal Football Club in Iran.

The Iranian is the fourth-shortest man ever verified by the versatile platform. Afshin was flown to the Guinness World Records Dubai office, where his measurements were taken three times over 24 hours to register the accurate record height. Afshin Ghaderzadeh was born with a body weight of 700 g (1.5 lb) and is presently around 6.5 kg (14.3 lb). During his Dubai visit, Afshin enjoyed trips to the tailor and barber and also visited the world's tallest building, the Burj Khalifa.

## Raisi, Bin Salman Likely To Meet in Jordan

TEHRAN (MNA) - A Lebanese media, citing informed sources, claimed that Iranian and Saudi officials will have an important meeting on the sidelines of the Iraq Conference in Jordan.

El-Nashra news announced in a report that the second edition of the Baghdad Conference for Cooperation and Partnership will be held on December 20 in the Jordanian capital of Amman.

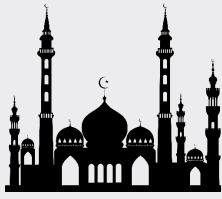
Iran, Turkey, and a number of Arab countries, including Saudi Arabia, are supposed to participate in this meeting.

Some Lebanese sources, pointing out that the issue of electing the Lebanese president is supposed to be discussed in this meeting, claimed that Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi and Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman will meet on the sidelines of the meeting in Amman.

The news comes as Iranian sources have not yet confirmed such a meeting.

Also, the informed sources of the recent negotiations between Iran and Saudi Arabia claim that the meetings between Tehran and Riyadh in Baghdad did not reach concrete results.





## PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	12:00
■ Evening (Maghreb)	17:13
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	05:39
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	07:09

78. Then Pharaoh pursued them with his forces,  
but the waters completely overwhelmed them and covered them up.  
79. Pharaoh led his people astray instead of leading them aright.

Surah 20, Ta-ha (78 - 79)

## Sanctions a Big Hurdle in Way Of Boosting Iran-Brazil Trade

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

**TEHRAN- Ambassador of Brazil to Tehran Laudemar Goncalves de Aguiar Neto says sanctions are a big obstacle in way of trade between Iran and Brazil but the main hurdle is lack of acquaintance of both states about their capacities for bilateral cooperation which can be resolved through the presence of traders in the exhibitions.**

During his visit to Zanjan Province and meeting with Zanjan Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Mine and Agriculture officials, Brazilian Envoy Mr. Neto pointed to the problems resulted by the sanctions and added that unfortunately sanctions have increased the cost of trade between the two countries and have hurt people and prolonged the period of trade exchange between the two states.

He stipulated that Iran is the biggest trade partner of Brazil in the Middle East and his country is interested in trade with Iran and wants to increase exports to this country.

Neto noted that Brazil's exports to Iran have been doubled this year comparing to the past year, and at the same time Iran's exports to Brazil have increased. He went on to say that the direct trade between Iran and Brazil is around \$4b, reiterating that there is also indirect trade between the two countries but it is focused on few goods which should be increased.

He admitted that 95% of bilateral trade is in favor of Brazil, adding that his duty as the ambassador is to help the trade between the two states to increase but his 40 years of experience shows that if one wants to export more, it should also increase imports.

Neto added that beside the Iran-Brazil Joint Chamber of Commerce, Iran's embassy in Brazil is also very active, stating that some studies have been conducted in the fields of fish, ewe, livestock feed, and animal husbandry as well as joint cooperation in the field of foodstuff, fruit juice, tomato paste, carpet and oil of transformer of Zanjan Province and expressed hope both sides would witness more co-operations due to the existing capacities of the province.

He said that state officials should be facilitators and helpers because the private sector plays the key role.

He went on to say that although sanctions hinder the trade but the main problem is the lack of acquaintance of both sides to their potentials for cooperation. He reiterated that exchange of trade delegations and presence in the exhibitions is one way to boost acquaintance and the trade exchange.



Then Head of Zanjan Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Mine and Agriculture Mr. Ali Yeganehfard, for his part, pointed to the historic relation between Iran and Brazil which dates back to 120 years and added that Brazil is the fifth biggest country in the world with over 200m population and the third economic power in the Western Hemisphere.

He stated that Brazil is ninth economy in the world with GDP over \$2.4 trillion and will become the fifth consumer market by 2023.

Yeganehfard said that the trade exchange between Iran and Brazil is around \$2.5b which can increase to \$100b and stipulated that Brazil has special stance in Iran's trade exchange and government's policy is to broaden trade ties with this country.

He pointed to massive capacity of Brazil in the field of agriculture, mining, production and services and expressed hope they can have good cooperation.

He then pointed to the signed MoU and expressed hope that the MoU was signed with Iran-Brazil Joint Chamber of Commerce and expressed hope this can be a prelude to improve the province and they can cooperate in exchanges, dispatch of trade delegations and exhibitions.

Meanwhile Head of Iran-Brazil Joint Chamber of Commerce Seyed Fakhroddin Amiran said that Zanjan Province has great potentials but it has been ignored for trade with Brazil due to the lack of acquaintance.

He noted that Iran-Brazil Chamber has been established in Tehran for five years and opened its office in Brazil last year, adding that since then the exports between Iran and Brazil have been doubled. He then pointed to the details of trade between the two states and exchange of goods between them.

He reiterated that Brazil is a fruit importer but so far Iran has not taken action for exporting fruits to Brazil but recently both sides have reached agreements for cooperation in this field.

## Active Presence of MAPNA Group In Int'l Kish Aerospace Exhibition

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – The 1th Iranian International Air show and Aerospace Exhibition was held on the Kish Island while MAPNA Group displayed and introduced its capacities in the air industry and in this exhibition for the first time engine of a passenger plane was tested live by MAPNA Group.

In this event, the system for mobile testing of jet engines with using all knowhow capacities of MAPNA in research, development and design was unveiled.

The group with having a private independent pavilion presented its achievements and introducing its activities and products in the field of repairing engines of passenger planes.

The activities of MAPNA Group in the field of jet engines include engine and parts repair services in the form of part 145 and design and manufacture of parts in the form of part 21.

It is worth noting that MAPNA Group with reliance and trust on the knowledge-based and infrastructural capacities and engineering capabilities as well as reliance on valuable experiences in the field of manufacturing gas turbines has entered the air industry.

Some 90 domestic and 7 foreign companies had participated in the three-day exhibition which ended on Friday on Kish Island.



## Iran to Set Up State Medical Travel Agency in Oman

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Iran's southern province of Fars is to establish a state-owned medical tourism agency in the neighboring country of Oman. The province is looking to target more patients from Oman, Qatar and Kuwait.

39 authorized clinics and hospitals in Khorasan Razavi, the North Eastern province of Iran, have earned special certificates to provide services to international travellers. They all have international patient units, whose task is to coordinate the provision of diagnostic and treatment services to foreign patients. 17 hospitals, three limited surgery centres and 19 clinics in the province have been licensed to accept medical tourists. In addition, five hospitals and three clinics are in the process of receiving International Patient Department (IPD) licenses if they reach the standards needed to provide services to medical tourists.

To accept patients from Oman to Fars province and provide services to these medical tourists, there are plans to establish a company with the shareholdings of five province's IPD certified hospitals in Oman.

The province is currently hosting a large percentage of Omani health tourists, but this project would be able to host more patients from other Gulf countries, including Qatar and Kuwait.

Fars province needs a specific medical travel destination brand to attract more patients. In June, the province announced that the number of international travellers who received medical services in Fars province's hospitals hit a record high during the first two months of the current Iranian calendar year.

The number of medical travellers to Fars jumped 250% and 550% respectively in Farvardin (Mar. 21-Apr. 20) and Ordibehesht (Apr.21-May 21) in comparison to the same months in 2021.

According to statistics, hospitals of Fars province admitted 10,500 foreign medical travellers and received some 5,000 international outpatients last year (ended Mar. 20).

## 561 km of Railway to Be Put Into Operation by Next Year

TEHRAN (MNA) – An Iranian railway official announced that 3,300 kilometers of railway are under construction 561 kilometers which will come on stream by next year.

Khairalla Khademi, the deputy Minister of Roads and Urban Development of Iran made the comments on the two-day trip to South Khorasan Province on Friday long with the President Ebrahim Raisi.

"3,300 kilometers in the railway sector are being carried out, of which 561 kilometers will be put into operation by next year," Khademi said while talking to reporters. "It is planned that 561 kilometers of railway tracks with physical progress of more than 70% will come on stream by next year," he elaborated more.

Khademi added, "1,35 kilometers of motorway projects are being implemented in the country, which is a significant figure compared to the existing 2,800 kilometers of freeways."

Stating that some 40% of the country's existing motorways are under construction, he added, "293 kilometers of this figure are planned to be exploited that's to say that 3.5 times the annual average of the country's highway construction will be realized next year." The deputy road minister also said that most the highway projects have physical progress above 85%, therefore this goal is achievable.

## Tehran to Host 6th Int'l Transportation Exhibition

TEHRAN (MNA) – The Sixth International Exhibition of Transportation, Logistics, and Related Industries is scheduled to be held in Tehran from Dec. 18-20.

Representatives from Russia, Italy, China, and Singapore will be showcasing their products and services at the event, which will also host business delegations from Russia, Tajikistan, Armenia, Oman, and Belgrade.

The exhibitors represent a wide range of fields, including road, sea, air, rail, multimodal and smart transportation, as well as technical and civil engineering. Knowledge-based

companies and startups will also participate.

Specialized panels and workshops related to transportation, in addition to roundtables and press conferences with the deputy ministers of road and urban development, will also be held on the sidelines of the event.

"One of the main goals of this expo is to showcase the latest achievements of companies, especially knowledge-based companies, in the field of transportation," deputy minister Shahriar Afandizadeh was also quoted as saying by the news portal of the Ministry of Roads and Urban Development.

## IRISL Group Purchases 200 Cargo Wagons

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Line Group (IRISL Group) has purchased 200 cargo wagons from domestic manufacturers in a bid to speed up transport services.

The hybrid transportation company known as the M-MTC affiliated to the IRISL Group plans to develop services and find fresh markets; so, it bought the 200 cargo wagons.

The hybrid transportation company of the IRISL Group signed a contract with a domestic firm to manufacture 100 long-edge wagons, to be utilized for transporting mineral and bulk cargos. As part of the tender, the M-MTC purchased 100 flat wagons from another domestic producer, which are being manufactured.

Every long-edge wagon possesses the capacity of transiting around 68.5 tons of different sorts of goods, which will be very helpful in reducing fuel consumption; so, the use of these wagons would be very effective in preserving environment.

The increase of number of flat wagons will decrease time of transit of cargos and facilitate door-to-door transportation. The manufacturing of the wagons by Iranian engineers has helped prevent the outflow of capital estimated 14 million euros.

Moreover, the domestic manufacturing of the 200 cargo wagons created direct and indirect job opportunities for 500 people.

The Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Line Group possesses about 1200 wagons for fuel supply and some 732 wagons out of the number are operational at present.



## Goharzamin Co. Eyes Indigenization And Creating Jobs for Elites

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – The CE of Goharzamin Iron Ore Company, accompanied by his deputies, visited three achievements of the company in indigenization.

According to the public relations of Goharzamin Iron Ore Company, the CEO of the company visited three big strategic achievements of the company in indigenization for the first time in the country which happened due to endeavors of engineers and experts of the company which were designed and manufactured in collaboration with capable domestic contractors.

In the beginning of the visit, Mr Mohammad Fallah and his entourage visited the biggest home-made ball mill shell which was delivered to the company in its site on December 9 after passing all process of design and manufacture. Deputy Head of company on engineering and indigenization Mr. Ali Zahrodi explained the technical properties and complicated process of producing body of ball mill shell with the weight of 117 ton and dimension of 6060 millimeters of diameter and 12624 millimeters. This product has been fully designed and produced by the domestic experts.

Then the visitors inspected two more strategic products which are in service in the concentrate Line 2.

Meanwhile manager of indigenization of the company Sina Salari pointed to the strategic role and cooperation of Goharzamin in materialization of design and manufacture of these knowledge-based companies pointed to the cooperation of other companies which helped Goharzamin Company in indigenizing these three products.

At the end of the visit, the CEO of the company hailed and honored the actions of the company in indigenizing the technology products which have been produced for the first time and emphasized expansion of activities for indigenization to reach full self-sufficiency especially in the sanctions era.



## Oil Storage Capacity to Increase in Khark Terminal

TEHRAN (Shana) – The CEO of Iran Oil Terminals Company announced plans to increase crude oil storage capacity by 4,200,000 barrels at Khark Oil Terminal.

According to the Iranian Oil Terminals Company, Abbas Asadrooz stated: "The Iran Oil Terminals Company, which is responsible for receiving, storing and exporting crude oil, as the last piece in the country's oil and gas production value chain, is responsible for exporting more than 95% of the country oil cargoes."

He said: "In order to maintain stable storage and increase reliability, permission to build new tanks in Khark Oil Terminal was obtained from the National Iranian Oil Company."

The CEO of Iran Oil Terminals Company stated: "Based on the investigations and decisions, it was decided to build three tanks of one million barrels and two tanks of 600,000 barrels capacity in Khark Oil Terminal."



## Varadkar to Become Irish PM For Second Time

DUBLIN (Dispatches) - Leo Varadkar takes over for the second time as Ireland's prime minister this weekend, in a handover of power between the two main political partners in the three-party governing coalition.

Varadkar, who is mixed race, openly gay and is still one of Ireland's youngest ever leaders even in his second stint in the role, steps up from deputy premier.

The rotation between 43-year-old Varadkar's Fine Gael and current premier Micheal Martin's Fianna Fail parties is unprecedented in Irish history.

The center-right parties were forged from opposing sides in the Irish Civil War in the early 20th century.



## Putin to Visit Belarus On Monday for Talks

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russian President Vladimir Putin will visit Belarus on Monday for talks with his counterpart and ally Alexander Lukashenko, the Belarus leader's office said.

The Belarus presidency said today the pair will hold discussions at the Independence Palace, Lukashenko's office, in Minsk during Putin's "working visit". The visit comes 10 months into Russia's offensive in Ukraine, which was launched from several directions, including Belarusian territory.

Minsk said the pair will hold one-on-one talks as well as wider negotiations with their ministers on "Belarusian-Russian integration".



## Thousands of Tourists Stranded But Peru Rejects Bringing Forward Vote



LIMA (Dispatches) - Peru's Congress rejected a move to bring forward elections as deadly protests left thousands of tourists stranded in the gateway city to Machu Picchu.

Protesters are demanding the release of ousted president Pedro Castillo, the resignation of his successor Dina Boluarte and fresh elections.

But Congress voted against a bill to bring forward elections by more than two years from 2026 to December 2023.

It comes with demonstrations escalating and the death toll rising after protesters on Thursday night tried to storm the airport in the southern city of Ayacucho that was being guarded by soldiers.

Health minister Rosa Gutierrez said on Friday 18 people have been killed in clashes since Castillo was arrested on December 7.

Two cabinet ministers resigned on Friday in protest at the deaths.

Trouble broke out in Peru last week after Castillo was impeached and arrested following his attempt to dissolve parliament and rule by decree.

Initially detained for seven days, Castillo was on Thursday ordered to spend 18 months in pre-trial detention.

The leftist former schoolteacher stands accused of rebellion and conspiracy, and could be jailed for up to 10 years if found guilty, according to public prosecutor Alcides Diaz.

Boluarte declared a nationwide state of emergency for 30 days and said she wanted to bring forward elections.

But needing 87 votes to pass, Friday's vote in Congress garnered only 49 in favor of bringing forward elections with 33 against and 25 abstentions.

Several airports around the country have been closed, including the international terminal in Cusco, which acts as the gateway city to the jewel of Peruvian tourism, the Inca citadel of Machu Picchu.

Cusco's airport is the third largest in Peru and serves numerous tourist sites in the region.

It has been closed since Monday when protesters tried to storm the terminal.

That has left thousands of tourists in limbo.

"There are 5,000 tourists stranded in the city of Cusco, they are in their hotels waiting for flights to restart," Darwin Baca, mayor of the nearby town of Machu Picchu, told AFP.

The rail service that serves Machu Picchu has been suspended since Tuesday, leaving around 800 tourists stranded in the small town at the foot of the mountain where the Inca citadel stands.

Around 200 mostly American and European tourists have left the town on foot along the train tracks in a bid to reach the town of Ollantaytambo, 30 kilometers (20 miles) away, from where they would be able to take a train to Cusco.

"What they fear is getting to Cusco and then not being able to go to their country because this could get worse," said Baca.

Several major roads in Cusco, the old Inca capital, have also been blocked by protesters, as have more than 100 roads around the country.

The death toll rose sharply on Thursday when soldiers protecting the Ayacucho airport shot at protesters.

Soldiers "found themselves surrounded with the masses closing in," rights ombudsman Eliana Revollar told AFP.

The army says its soldiers would have first raised their weapons and then shot into the air, but Revollar said that shots were fired at protesters.

## Jordanians Continue Fuel Protests Day After Rioting

AMMAN (Dispatches) - Jordanians staged sit-ins on Friday and activists called for more protests against fuel price increases that have caused the cost of living to rise, a day after riots in the southern city of Maan left one police officer dead, witnesses and security sources have said.

The authorities said the policeman was killed on Thursday night by a gunshot fired by an unidentified individual when armed officers entered a neighbourhood of Maan to quell riots. Youths had attacked government property in the city, witnesses said.

Although the streets were calm on Friday, sporadic protests continued with a sit-in in front of Maan's main mosque and a mosque in the capital Amman after Friday prayers, while activists called for more demonstrations.

Several highways linking the capital Amman to other governorates including Irbid and Karak have been shut down.

Tensions have mounted in Maan and several cities in southern Jordan, in particular, after sporadic strikes by truck drivers protesting against high fuel prices and demanding cuts in diesel prices. Fuel price rises have squeezed household incomes and hit lower-income groups disproportionately.



## Europe Cannot Rely on U.S. Alone as Shield

BRUSSELS (Dispatches) - European Union states should buy arms jointly to replenish stocks after supplying Ukraine, said the bloc's defence agency, warning the United States may not always be able to shield Europe from threats.

"The Russian war of aggression against Ukraine demonstrates our capability shortfalls," said Jiri Sedivy, chief executive of the European Defense Agency, an EU body that helps the bloc's governments to develop their military capabilities.

The agency was in talks with European arms firms about boosting production, he said, as well as with countries about clubbing together to buy equipment and ammunition.

"What is important is that we would be able, the European Union, to become a credible provider of security in protecting citizens," he told Reuters, urging countries to heed U.S. calls to invest in defense.

"The United States will be inevitably engaged in Asia Pacific and not be able to provide some of the essential enablers such as strategic airlift, reconnaissance aircraft, precision-guided missiles and air defenses."

He pointed also to the threat of terrorism and failed states in the Middle East or North Africa.

Europe has had a splintered approach to defense, with countries mostly equipping their military on their own, spawning a patchwork of incompatible weapons and equipment.

The war in Ukraine has confronted the region with its biggest challenge in a generation, exposing deep rifts in how to deal with Moscow.

Tens of thousands of people have been killed, millions more displaced and

cities reduced to rubble since Russia invaded Ukraine on Feb. 24 in a "special military operation" that Kyiv and its allies call it an unprovoked war of aggression.

On Friday, Jordan's King Abdullah II extended condolences to the family of the slain policeman.

"We will not tolerate violence against our security personnel, who work day and night to protect Jordan and Jordanians," he said, according to Jordan's Roya news.

For his part, interior minister Mazen Farrayeh told a news conference that the government will apply tough steps and redeploy more anti-riot police against demonstrators who protest violently.

"We have seen a large jump in violent acts," he said. "After what happened, there will be tougher security measures to reinforce the security forces in the areas that witness such acts."

Meanwhile, the head of the Public Security Directorate (PSD), Major General Obaidallah Maaytah, said 49 security personnel sustained injuries in confrontations with protesters so far, according to Jordan's Roya news.

In an interview with told Al-Mamlaka state television on Thursday in Maan, one truck driver pledged they will remain "steadfast".

## Russia Fires Massive Missile Barrage at Ukraine Grid

KYIV (Dispatches) - A fresh barrage of deadly Russian strikes hit Ukraine, cutting water and electricity in major cities and piling pressure on the grid in sub-zero temperatures.

AFP journalists in Kyiv reported loud explosions and the mayor said the metro had stopped running to allow residents to take shelter as water supplies were disrupted.

The strikes killed two people and injured several others — including children — in the southern city of Kryvyi Rig, President Volodymyr Zelensky's hometown.

"Another wave of massive Russian attacks on energy infrastructure," Energy Minister German Galushchenko said on social media. "There will be emergency power outages," he added.

The onslaught is just the latest of several waves of strikes that began in October after a series of embarrassing battlefield defeats for Russia in Ukraine.

Ukraine's second largest city Kharkiv, near the border with Russia, was without electricity, its mayor said.

The central cities of Poltava and Kremenchuk were also without power.

Air raid sirens wailed across the entire country as the extent of the damage was being assessed.

Regional officials in Kryvyi Rig said rockets had hit a residential building.

"Two people died," governor Valentyn Reznichenko said. "At least five people were injured, including two children. All are in hospital," he added.

Oleksandr Starukh, head of the frontline Zaporizhzhia region, which houses Europe's largest nuclear power plant, said more than a dozen Russian missiles had targeted territory under Ukrainian control.

"Due to damage to energy infrastructure, there are interruptions to water supplies in all areas of the capital," said Kyiv Mayor Vitali Klitschko on social media.

"Metro traffic is temporarily stopped on all lines," he added, so that stations could be used as bomb shelters.

Temperatures in the Ukrainian capital on Friday hovered between minus one and three degrees Celsius (30 to 37 degrees Fahrenheit).

Fresh Russian shelling in the southern city of Kherson, recently recaptured by Ukraine, killed one person and wounded three more.

Kherson has been subjected to persistent Russian shelling since Moscow's forces retreated in November and power was cut in the city on Thursday.

The UN humanitarian coordinator for Ukraine, Denise Brown, said a woman working as a paramedic for the Ukrainian Red Cross was killed by Thursday's strikes in Kherson.



## U.N. Shelves Bid By Afghan Taliban, Myanmar Junta For Representation

UNITED NATIONS

(Dispatches) - The United Nations General Assembly

approved postponing - for the

second time - a decision on whether the Afghan Taliban administration and the Myanmar junta can send a United Nations ambassador to New York.

The 193-member General Assembly approved without a vote the decision by the U.N. credentials committee, which also deferred a decision on rival claims to Libya's U.N. seat. The nine-member committee includes Russia, China and the United States.

The postponement of decisions on Myanmar, Afghanistan and Libya leaves the current envoys in place. But the credentials committee said it could "revert to consideration of these credentials at a future time in the seventy-seventh session" of the General Assembly, which ends in September next year.

Competing claims were again made for the seats of Myanmar and Afghanistan with the Taliban administration and Myanmar's junta pitted against envoys of the governments they ousted last year. U.N. acceptance of the Taliban administration or Myanmar's junta would be a step toward the international recognition sought by both.

A rival claim was also made this year for Libya's U.N. seat - currently held by the Government of National Unity in Tripoli - by a "Government of National Stability" led by Fathi Bashagha and backed by a parliament in the country's east.

The Taliban seized power in mid-August last year from the internationally recognized government. When the Taliban last ruled Afghanistan between 1996 and 2001, the ambassador of the government they toppled remained the U.N. envoy after the credentials committee deferred its decision on the seat.

Myanmar's junta seized power from Aung San Suu Kyi's elected government in February last year.





## Japan to Radically Overhaul Defense Policy On China Threats



TOKYO (Dispatches) - Japan is expected to announce its biggest defense overhaul in decades this week, hiking spending, reshaping its military command and acquiring new missiles to tackle the threat from China.

The policies, to be outlined in three defense and security documents as soon as Friday, will reshape the defense landscape in a country whose post-war constitution does not even officially recognize the military. "Fundamentally strengthening our defense capabilities is the most urgent challenge in this severe security environment," Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said at the weekend.

"We will urgently ramp up our defense capabilities over the next five years."

The shift is the result of Tokyo's fears about China's growing military strength and regional posturing, as well as threats ranging from North Korean missile launches to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Key among the new policies is a pledge to boost spending to two percent of GDP by 2027 to bring Japan in line with NATO members.

That marks a significant increase from historic spending of around one percent, and has sparked criticism over how it will be financed.

The money will fund projects including the acquisition of what Japan calls "counterstrike capacity" -- the ability to hit launch sites that threaten the country, even preemptively.

Japan has previously shied away from acquiring that ability over disputes on whether it could violate the constitution's limit on self-defense.

In a nod to the controversy, the policy documents will reportedly insist that Japan remains committed to a "self-defense-oriented security policy" and will "not become a military power".

Part of that capacity will come from up to 500 US-made Tomahawk cruise missiles Japan is reportedly considering purchasing as a backstop while it develops longer-range missiles domestically.

Japan has also announced plans to develop a next-generation fighter jet with Italy and Britain, and is reportedly planning to build new ammunition depots and launch satellites to help guide potential counterstrikes.

The changes will also affect military organization, with the Nikkei newspaper reporting that all three branches of the Self-Defense Forces will be brought under a single command within five years.

The SDF presence on Japan's southernmost islands will be increased -- including a tripling of units with ballistic missile interception capacity, according to local media.

The documents, including the key National Security Strategy, are expected to point to China for the shift in policy.

Japan's ruling party reportedly wanted to term Beijing a "threat", but under pressure from its coalition partner will settle for dubbing China a "serious concern" and Japan's "greatest strategic challenge".

That still represents a sea change from 2013, the document's first iteration and the last time it was updated, when Japan said it sought a "mutually beneficial strategic partnership", a phrase expected to disappear now.

Worries about China have deepened since major military drills carried out by Beijing around Taiwan in August, during which missiles fell in Japanese economic waters.

China on Wednesday said they are "firmly opposed" to the proposed documents.

They "deviate from Japan's commitment to bilateral relations and the consensus between China and Japan, and contains groundless smears against China," said Wang Wenbin, China's foreign ministry spokesman.

## Back From Underworld: Greek City's Cultural Rebirth



ELEUSIS (Dispatches) - It was the Greek city where the ancients flocked in the hope of learning the secret of life after death.

Now Eleusis — known to Greeks as Elefsina — aims to resurrect its flagging fortunes by becoming European capital of culture next year.

Roman emperors including Marcus Aurelius and his son Commodus — of Gladiator fame — were among the glitterati of antiquity who came to be initiated into its secret death-defying cult based around Persephone, the queen of the underworld.

But Eleusis long ago lost its glamour.

Its grim factories, steelmills, refineries and ship and breaker yards drew thousands fleeing the poverty of rural Greece over the last century.

Choked by smog and pollution, its bay a vast ships' graveyard, for decades it resembled a modern version of the underworld from which Persephone escaped.

Her rebirth each year with the spring was recreated in the secret ancient rites of the Eleusinian Mysteries. Local leaders hope becoming a European city of culture will do the same trick for the post-industrial city half an hour northwest of Athens.

Eleusis 2023 CEO Nana Spyropoulou said they had faith that a small "but historically significant city can draw the international and European cultural spotlight."

"Our goal is to make use of Elefsina's cultural wealth, and to leave a legacy for the future," she told reporters.

Dance, concerts, street art, films and exhibitions will draw on the city's fabled history and its long experience with unemployment, immigration and environmental degradation.

Many locals are descended from ethnic Greeks forced from their homes in Turkey in the wake of the disastrous Greek invasion of Asia Minor after World War I.

The refugee legacy continues still, with a large camp there sheltering Ukrainians fleeing the Russian invasion. Several derelict buildings have been repurposed for the €25-million (RM117-million) event, including a former olive oil mill which is becoming an archaeological museum, and an old bowling alley a conference hall.

Thanks to being a capital of culture, Elefsina has gained use of "infrastructure it never had before", said mayor Argiris Economou.

"(This is) a great legacy and an opportunity to upgrade the city," Economou said.

For some 12 centuries Eleusis was one of the most important religious centres of both the ancient Greek and Roman worlds.

The birthplace of ancient Greek tragedian Aeschylus, its mysterious rites centred on Demeter, the goddess of agriculture and fertility, and her daughter, Persephone, wife of Hades and queen of the underworld.

In a large hall that could seat up to 3,000 people, participants at nocturnal torchlit ceremonies were told of the endless cycle of life and death, and attended a re-enactment of the myth of Persephone, archaeologists say.

"It was kind of a psychotherapy to deal with the fear of death," Efi Anesti, an archaeologist at the sprawling Greco-Roman sanctuary where the mysteries took place, told AFP.

To enforce secrecy, "anyone who revealed the details was supposed to suffer the wrath of the gods," she said.



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## Goldman Sachs to Cut Thousands of Employees

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Goldman Sachs Group Inc is planning to cut a couple of thousand employees to navigate a difficult economic environment, a source familiar with the move said.

The Wall Street bank had 49,100 employees at the end of the third quarter this year, after adding significant numbers of staff during the pandemic. Headcount will remain above pre-pandemic levels, which stood at 38,300 at the end of 2019, the source said.

News platform Semafor earlier reported on Friday that Goldman Sachs Group will lay off up to 4,000 people as the Wall Street bank struggles to meet profitability targets, citing people familiar with the matter. Goldman Sachs declined to comment.



## China to Step Up Support For Economy in 2023

BEIJING (Dispatches) - China will focus on stabilising the economy in 2023 and step up policy adjustments to ensure key economic targets are hit, according to a statement issued today following an agenda-setting meeting of leaders and policymakers.

The closed-door two-day meeting convened to chart the economy's course in 2023 has been watched closely by investors amid expectations that Beijing would ramp up support measures.

The world's second-largest economy faces multiple headwinds as Covid infections surge follow an abrupt relaxation of harsh restrictions, hitting businesses and consumers, while a weakening global economy hurts Chinese exports.

China will implement a proactive fiscal policy and a prudent monetary policy next year, said the statement, issued after the annual Central Economic Work Conference and published by the official Xinhua news agency.

Fiscal policy will be stepped up and become more efficient, maintaining the necessary intensity of spending, while monetary policy will be precise and forceful, keeping liquidity reasonably ample, Xinhua said.

"Next year, we will prioritise stability and strive for progress," Xinhua cited the statement as saying.

China should better coordinate epidemic prevention and control, and economic and social development, it added.

Policymakers have moved to address two of the key drags on the economy, the zero-Covid policy and a property sector downturn, but analysts believe will be a while before these efforts bear fruit.

China's move last week to start aligning with a world that has largely opened up to live with the virus followed historic protests against President Xi Jinping's signature 'zero-Covid' policies.

While the u-turn will bring long-term benefits, surging infections are weighing on a fragile healthcare system.

China's economy grew just 3 per cent in the first three quarters of this year and is expected to stay around that rate for the full year, well below the official target of around 5.5 per cent.

China's economy faces pressure from shrinking demand, supply shocks and weakening expectations, Xinhua said.

It lost more steam in November as factory output slowed and retail sales extended declines, both missing forecasts and clocking their worst readings in six months, hobbled by surging Covid-19 cases and widespread virus curbs.

China will take steps to expand domestic demand, prioritize consumption recovery, and achieve major economic targets in 2023, according to the statement.

Government advisers told Reuters last month they would recommend the conference adopt 2023 growth targets ranging from 4.5 per cent to 5.5 per cent, while a central bank adviser said last month that China should set a target no lower than 5 per cent.

Since then, proposals that China should aim for growth around 5 per cent have gained steam in the run-up to the meeting.

## Russia Central Bank Holds Rates

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russia's central bank held its key interest rate at 7.5% at its final meeting of the year but slightly shifted its rhetoric to acknowledge growing inflation risks, saying a recent military mobilization was adding to labor shortages.

"We gave a neutral signal. This means the next decision, the trajectory of the rate, will depend on the incoming data, on which factors - pro-inflationary or disinflationary - will prevail," Governor Elvira Nabiullina told a news conference.

"In our opinion, pro-inflationary factors prevail now, not only over the medium-term, but also over a short-term horizon. Therefore, rate changes will depend on incoming data. It is possible to hold the rate, increase it or decrease it - if disinflationary factors are realised, which we believe are weaker right now."

The Bank of Russia has kept policy on hold since September, after six rate cuts that gradually reversed February's emergency rate hike to 20%. That action came after Russia sent tens of thousands of troops into Ukraine, prompting Western countries to impose wide-ranging sanctions.

On Friday, as in October, it warned that the partial military mobilization ordered by President Vladimir Putin in September could stoke inflation due to a shrinking labor force.

Hundreds of thousands of Russians have since joined the army or fled the country.

"Labour shortages are increasing in many industries amid the effects of the partial mobilization," the bank said, adding that labor market conditions and logistics problems were limiting economic activity and the capacity to expand production.

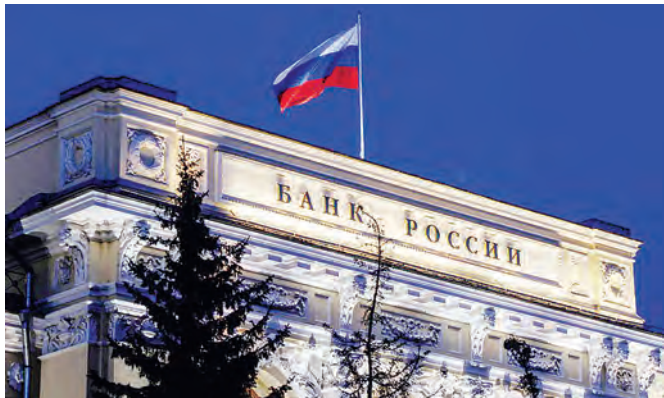
Nabiullina said the impact of a Western price cap on Russian oil, introduced this month, was hard to assess, but the bank would consider this at its next meeting in February.

Inflation, which the central bank targets at 4%, stood at 12.65% as of Dec. 12, according to the economy ministry. The central bank's year-end inflation forecast is 12-13%.

"(The central bank) emphasized that inflation risks have become slightly more skewed to the upside," said Liam Peach from Capital Economics. "This reinforces our view that the easing cycle is unlikely to resume until around mid-2023."

With an oil embargo and price cap taking effect, as well as significant increases in budget spending, the central bank's wait-and-see approach looks sensible, said Azret Guliev of MKB Investments.

"The central bank has for now given a neutral signal to the market," he said.



## Euro Zone Business Activity Falls at Slower Rate In December

BENGALURU (Dispatches) - Euro zone business activity shrank at the slowest pace in four months in December, suggesting a likely recession ahead will be shallower than previously thought, a survey showed on Friday, while prices rose at the most modest rate in about a year.

S&P Global's flash Composite Purchasing Managers' Index, seen as a good gauge of overall economic health, rose to a four-month high of 48.8 this month from 47.8 in November, higher than the median Reuters poll forecast of 48.0.

But December was the sixth month below the 50 mark separating growth from contraction, the longest streak of a downturn since June 2013.

"The rise in the purchasing managers' indices gives us hope that the recession in the euro area will be very mild. Nevertheless, we should not rejoice too soon. The economic environment has clouded noticeably," said Christoph Weil, senior economist at Commerzbank.

Still, the downturn in German economic activity eased for the second straight month as retreating price pressures bolstered the view that a milder recession lies ahead, a sister survey showed.

However, French business activity shrank at a faster rate, adding to signs of a recession ahead for the euro zone's second-biggest economy as inflation hits businesses.

"The flash PMIs for December provide more evidence that businesses in some parts of the euro zone have become a bit less gloomy about their current situation - but they still point to a combination of recession and very high inflation," said Andrew Kenningham, chief Europe economist at Capital Economics.

Despite the rising risks of an economic downturn, the European Central Bank hiked its key deposit rate to 2% from 1.5% on Thursday and hinted more would come as inflation is still far above its target rate of 2%.

Higher interest rates coupled with cost-of-living concerns mean demand is likely to weaken further, a view shared by a Reuters poll that showed the economy would contract this quarter and next, meeting the technical definition of recession.

In Britain, outside the European Union, the downturn has eased slightly this month, and companies have reported the weakest cost pressures since mid-2021. Overall the survey fitted with other signs that the economy is contracting at a slow pace.

In the bloc, new orders in the private sector fell at a slower pace and soaring price growth - driven by higher energy costs in the wake of Russia's war in Ukraine - waned further. While input prices rose at their slowest rate since May 2021, the PMI subindex tracking output prices was at its lowest in a year.



## EU Adopts Global Minimum 15% Tax on Multinationals

BRUSSELS (Dispatches) - The European Union adopted a plan for a global minimum 15 per cent tax on multinational businesses, after leaders gave final approval following months of wrangling.

The landmark agreement between nearly 140 countries is intended to stop governments racing to cut taxes to lure the world's richest firms to their territory. "Today the European Union has taken a crucial step towards tax fairness and social justice," EU economy commissioner Paolo Gentiloni said.

"Minimum taxation is key to addressing the challenges a globalised economy creates."

The plan was drawn up under the guidance of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development and already had the backing of Washington and several major EU economies.

But the implementation of the minimum tax in the 27-nation European Union has already been delayed as member states raised objections or adopted blocking tactics.

Most recently, this week Poland blocked formal adoption of the measure while arguing about unrelated measures, such as sanctions on Russia.

But at Thursday's summit such reticences were negotiated away, and the tax will now come into effect across the block at the end of next year.

Leaders hailed the decision.

Germany's Chancellor Olaf Scholz said it was a "project close to my heart" and France's President Emmanuel Macron said France had been pushing the idea for more than four years.

## OPEC's U.S. Shale Worries Subside as It Cuts Forecast

LONDON (Dispatches) - OPEC has cut its forecasts for U.S. shale oil supply several times as factors including investor caution curb expansion, making the non-conventional supply less of a worry for the producer group in its decisions on oil policy.

On Tuesday, OPEC trimmed its forecast for 2023 growth in U.S. tight oil, another term for shale, to 780,000 barrels per day. The group kept its 2022 forecast unchanged at 590,000 bpd, having steadily cut the figure from 880,000 bpd in July.

U.S. shale oil drillers over the last two decades helped to turn the United States into the world's largest producer. But the gains in output are slowing and executives warn of future declines.

The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries pumps about a third of the world's oil and its view on shale growth is important, since output from non-OPEC allied countries is factored into its output policy decisions as part of the wider OPEC+ group.

Shale's slowdown, some in the industry say, gives OPEC more influence over total global oil supplies. The chief executive of U.S. producer Hess last month said OPEC was "back in the driver's seat" as the top swing producer.

"It is becoming more predictable and less expandable than it was five years ago," said Gary Ross, CEO of Black Gold Investors and a veteran OPEC watcher, referring to shale.

OPEC+ in October made its biggest output cut since the pandemic took hold in 2020. While OPEC or OPEC+ decisions to cut output in the past have drawn warnings that higher prices and lower OPEC+ output would encourage U.S. shale producers to pump more, officials have not voiced such concerns recently.

"Certainly as a factor of importance it fell a few places," an OPEC+ source said, declining to be identified by name.

OPEC's Secretary General Haitham Al Ghais, in comments to Reuters in August, attributed the slower shale growth to factors including an increase in investor caution, less funding and the impact of environmental, social and governance (ESG) issues on the industry.

"We are seeing signs that the phenomenal growth that happened maybe three, four, five years ago is not taking place, thus far at least," he said.

Flaring concerns, licensing permits and supply chain issues were obstacles for shale, Al Ghais said.

## Global Coal Consumption To Reach All-Time High This Year



LONDON (Dispatches) - Global coal consumption is set to rise to an all-time high in 2022 and remain at similar levels in the next few years if stronger efforts are not made to move to a low-carbon economy, a report by the International Energy Agency (IEA) said.

High gas prices following Russia's invasion of Ukraine and consequent disruptions to supply have led some countries to turn to relatively cheaper coal this year.

Heatwaves and droughts in some regions have also driven up electricity demand and reduced hydropower, while nuclear generation has also been very weak, especially in Europe, where France had to shut down nuclear reactors for maintenance.

The IEA's annual report on coal forecasts global coal use is set to rise by 1.2% this year, exceeding 8 billion tons in a single year for the first time and a previous record set in 2013.

It also predicts that coal consumption will remain flat at that level to 2025 as falls in mature markets are offset by continued strong demand in emerging Asian economies.

This means coal will continue to be the global energy system's largest single source of carbon dioxide emissions by far.

The largest increase in coal demand is expected to be in India at 7%, followed by the European Union at 6% and China at 0.4%.

"The world is close to a peak in fossil fuel use, with coal set to be the first to decline, but we are not there yet," said Keisuke Sadamori, the IEA's director of energy markets and security.

Europe's coal demand has risen due to more switching from gas to coal due to high gas prices and as Russian gas has reduced to a trickle.

However, by 2025 European coal demand is expected to decline below 2022 levels, the report said.



### Russia-Iran Astara Rail Transportation To Operationalize Soon

TEHRAN (MNA) - The Iranian ambassador to Moscow predicted the operationalization of regular rail transport of goods from Russia's territories to the northern Iranian city of Astara in the near future.

"The issue of solving the problems of transporting goods between Iran and Russia was and is one of the main issues in the development of trade relations between the two countries", wrote Kazem Jalali in a tweet about solving the problems of transporting

goods between Iran and Russia. "Fortunately, we are achieving good achievements in this field; regular rail transport of goods from Russia to Astara [in the north of Iran bordering Azerbaijan], is one of these cases that will be launched in the near future", he added.

In an interview with the Russian media recently, the Iranian diplomat pointed to the increase in trade exchanges between Iran and Russia and said that Iran is seeking to meet its domestic needs for foodstuffs from Russia.



## NASA Launches Satellite for Landmark Study of Earth's Water

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - A satellite lifted off from California on a mission to survey nearly all bodies of water on Earth, offering key insights on how they influence or are impacted by climate change.

The Surface Water and Ocean Topography (SWOT) satellite, a billion-dollar project jointly developed by NASA and France's space agency CNES, took off at 1146 GMT atop a SpaceX rocket from the Vandenberg Space Force Base.

According to a statement from NASA, it will start collecting scientific data in about six months after undergoing checks and calibrations.

"SWOT will bring us a revolutionary advance in our understanding of how water moves around our planet," said Karen St. Germain, NASA's Earth Science Division director, ahead of the launch.

"We will be able to see detail in eddies and currents and circulation in the oceans that we have never been able to see before."

She said this would help predict floods in areas with too much water, and manage water in regions prone to drought.

Selma Cherchali, of the French space agency CNES, told a press conference on Tuesday that the satellite represents a "revolution in hydrology. We are aiming to provide fine-scale observations ten times better than the current technology."

From a height of 890 kilometers (550 miles), SWOT will have the clearest view yet of the world's oceans, allowing it to track the rise in sea levels, as well as rivers and lakes.

The satellite will measure the height of water in freshwater bodies and the ocean on more than 90 percent of Earth's surface -- which it will track in its entirety at least once every 21 days.

Researchers will be able to get data on millions of lakes, rather than the few thousands currently visible from space.

NASA is currently operating some 25 space missions observing Earth, and SWOT will be like "putting on glasses. We will have a crisp picture," said St. Germain.

The satellite will help scientists better understand climate change, and factors such as how much more heat and carbon dioxide oceans can absorb.

"We know with climate change that Earth's water cycle is accelerating. What this means is that some locations have too much water, others don't have enough," said Benjamin Hamlington, a NASA research scientist.



"We're seeing more extreme droughts, more extreme floods, precipitation patterns are changing, becoming more volatile. So it's really important that we try to understand exactly what is happening."

The mission is meant to last for three and a half years, but could be extended until five years, or even more, said SWOT's project head at CNES, Thierry Lafon.

The breakthrough technology at the heart of the satellite mission is called KaRin, a Ka-band radar interferometer, which Lafon described as "the flagship for a new generation of altimeters in space."

The radar sends down a signal which is reflected back by the water surface. This echo is received by two antennas, resulting in two sets of data providing high accuracy for water detection and resolution.

The U.S. and French space agencies have worked together in the field for more than 30 years. A previous satellite developed by the partners, TOPEX/Poseidon, improved understanding of ocean circulation and its effect on global climate.

It also aided the forecast of the 1997-1998 El Nino weather phenomenon.

### West Using Iran as...

FROM PAGE 1

According to a statement issued by the EU foreign ministers, 20 individuals along with one entity -- the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting -- have been sanctioned over alleged human rights abuses, while four more people and as many entities blacklisted over the issue of drones. The bloc's new sanctions include asset freezes and travel bans to the EU.



The new sanctions came after Iran imposed a round of sanctions on dozens of the EU and British officials and entities over their support and instigation of recent deadly riots in the country and their meddlesome statements about the Islamic Republic's internal developments and support for terror in Iran.

The Thursday statement further noted that the Islamic Republic of Iran has been "steadfast" in supporting and promoting human rights despite campaigns waged by some governments to defame the country.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran by no means accepts the fabricated agendas, which are part of an organized political campaign to put maximum pressure on a thriving government and nation which are resisting two simultaneous challenges, namely international isolation and the US's economic warfare," it stressed.

The statement slammed in "strongest terms" the exploitation of international mechanism, be it in the UN Human Right Council or meetings of EU foreign ministers.

It noted that Iran's police and security forces have acted to contain the violence according to "precise and defined" regulations which are based on laws and religious teachings and respect for the rights of individuals.

The issue of human rights has become a tool for pursuing the "political goals" of some European and American governments, the ministry added.

The statement reminded the West of its "brazen double standards" with regard to its allies such as the Israeli regime that is flagrantly violating human rights in the occupied territories of Palestine.

These countries are "morally disqualified" to preach others about human rights, it stressed, adding that according to a UN report, Western countries have violated human rights because of following the illegal and inhumane American sanctions against Iranian people and hence, should be held accountable.

European countries have complied with unilateral sanctions imposed by the U.S. since 2018 against Iran. These sanctions have basically targeted civilians as they have, for instance, restricted Iran's access to medicine and medical equipment.

The West after successive failures in dealing with Tehran has found recent riots in Iran a best opportunity to increase pressure on Tehran through painting a negative picture of the country in the world and spreading Iranophobia and using Iran as a bogeyman to frighten, and impress other states even a small country like Liberia, which is struggling with domestic violence during the UN's Commission on the Status of Women, talked negatively about Iran as if Iran is a dreadful state while this small country has forgotten what is going in Western countries regarding their African migrants and citizens.

As Tehran warned European countries, these countries and above all the U.S. are better to stop using Tehran as "bogeyman" for their ill intentions because the Islamic Republic of Iran is real defender of the human and women rights but not in American and Western styles and Iran is kinder and more beautiful than what the West tries to show it to the world and such hasty and hostile actions by the West are unable to stop the Islamic Republic of Iran from marching towards progress and increasing its influence among the freedom-seeking nations who want to get rid of world hegemony.

### Iran Exports to...

FROM PAGE 1

The U.S. imported commodities worth \$10.9 million from Iran in the first nine months of this year, while the figure was only \$600,000 in the same period of time in the past year.

According to the mentioned data, the two countries traded \$42.2 million worth of goods in the mentioned nine months which was 42 percent more than the figure in the first nine months of 2021 when the trade between the two sides amounted to \$29.9 million.

The value of U.S. export to Iran increased seven percent to \$31.3 million in the nine-month period of this year, from \$29.3 million in the same time span of the previous year.

### EV Production Set to Surge In 2023 Despite Low Sales

DETROIT (Dispatches) - The past year was sobering for investors who poured money into Tesla Inc and rival electric vehicle startups that hoped to emulate Tesla CEO Elon Musk's success.

As interest rates rose and financial markets gyrated, shares in many EV startups deflated. Rivian Automotive Inc, which had a higher market value than Ford Motor Co shortly after it went public in 2021, lost more than 70% of its value over the past year.

Other EV startups fared worse. Electric van maker Arrival warned it could run out of cash in less than a year. Lucid Group Inc, backed by Saudi Arabia's sovereign wealth fund, struggled to build its sleek Air luxury EVs. Chinese Tesla challenger Xpeng Inc's shares lost more than 80% of their value.

Now comes the hard part: Persuading more mainstream consumers to come along for the ride.

The automobile industry is pouring more than \$1 trillion into a revolutionary shift from combustion engines to electric vehicles guided by software. From Detroit to Shanghai, automakers and government policymakers have embraced the promise of electric vehicles to provide cleaner, safer transportation. European countries and California have set 2035 as the deadline for ending sales of new combustion passenger vehicles.

Tesla Inc's surge to become the world's most valuable automaker - achieving a \$1 trillion valuation last year - humbled established automakers such as Toyota Motor Corp and Volkswagen AG that once were reluctant to go electric.

Starting next year, a wave of new electric vehicles from pickup trucks to middle market SUVs and sedans will hit the world's major markets.

Industry executives and forecasters do not agree on how rapidly electric vehicles could take over half the global vehicle market, let alone all of it.

In China, the world's largest single automotive market, battery electric vehicles have captured about 21% of the market. In Europe, EVs account for about 12% of total passenger vehicle sales. But in the United States, EV market share is only about 6%.

Among the barriers to EV adoption, industry executives and analysts said, were a dearth of public fast-charging infrastructure, and the rising cost of EV batteries, driven by shortages of key materials and uncertainty over government subsidies that have buoyed EV purchases in major markets including the United States, China and Europe.

By 2029, electric vehicles could account for a third of the North American market, and about 26% of vehicles produced worldwide, according to AutoForecast Solutions, a consultancy.

Electric vehicle sales likely will not increase in a smooth, ever-ascending curve, said AFS President Joe McCabe. If there is a recession next year, as many economists forecast, that will slow EV adoption.

Wards Intelligence forecasts that combustion vehicles will make up just under 80% of North American sales in 2027. Based on automakers' product plans, Wards analyst Haig Stoddard said at a recent conference that manufacturers "expect strong ICE (internal combustion engine) volume heading into the next decade."

### Latin America Emerging as Hot Spot for More Climate-Friendly Jet Fuel

MONTREAL (Dispatches) - Latin America is drawing early investment for jet fuel produced from materials like forest residues and palm oil as emission-conscious airlines scour emerging markets for less-polluting fuel to power flights, industry executives say.



While most sustainable aviation fuel, or SAF, is produced in the United States, Europe, and Singapore, Latin America is emerging as a budding market. That demand is driving early investments and reviving debate over palm oil, which has faced boycotts in Southeast Asia over labor concerns and environmental grievances.

The push comes as industry faces fresh pressure to curb pollution, with the United Nation's aviation agency targeting net zero emissions by 2050 and negotiators scrambling to reach an agreement on Monday at a Montreal summit to protect nature.

While SAF is not currently produced in Latin America, Honeywell's (HON.O) Performance Materials and Technologies (PMT) unit is talking to companies about 12 proposed SAF projects in the region valued in the billions of dollars, up from three projects in 2018, an executive told Reuters.

"We have two that we are going to announce ... in 2023," said Jose Fernandes, the region's president for Honeywell PMT, which supports companies in converting vegetable oil and fats into SAF. "Latin America right now is really a hot spot for Honeywell."

The U.S. company is working with Brazilian biodiesel producer ECB Group on an \$800 million to \$1 billion

plant in Paraguay featuring SAF expected to be operational in 2025.

Production of SAF, which can reduce emissions by up to 80% from conventional fuel, is used in an up to 50-50 blend with kerosene and remains scarce. It should hit 300 million liters

in 2022 according to airline trade group IATA, but that is less than 1% of total fuel consumed by carriers.

In the near term, the industry sees SAF hitting 10% of the total by 2030, and the 2050 net zero emissions target relies on SAF accounting for 65%, which would require 450 billion litres annually.

That has spurred a race to boost SAF production for aviation, which accounts for 2% to 3% of global emissions. With supply now limited mainly to U.S. and European hubs, some travelers are making bulk purchases, while airlines seek new SAF sources in the developing world where traffic is growing more quickly than mature markets.

"In order to be successful, SAF needs to be available across the globe," Juan Carlos Salazar, secretary general of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) said.

Under ICAO's CORSIA deal, most airlines will also limit their rising emissions from international flights, either by purchasing offsets or using SAF, driving demand for the fuel.

Chile's LATAM Airlines, for one, says it favors fuel from South America to meet a pledge of using 5% of SAF in its operations by 2030.

### Hamas Demands Mass...

FROM PAGE 1

Local sources reported that more than 70,000 worshipers performed the prayer, even with restrictions in place at the gates and entrances of the Old City of al-Quds.

During the Friday sermon, Sheikh Muhammad Hussein hailed the Palestinian worshipers' strong determination, calling for an increased Palestinian presence at the holy site.

"We categorically reject any Israeli violation of al-Aqsa Mosque and its sanctity," he said.

Moreover, a Palestinian teacher and activist has warned against the danger posed by Jewish holidays at the al-Aqsa Mosque.

"Celebration of Jewish holidays falls within the Israeli regime's conspiracies aimed at imposition of spatial and temporal divisions on the holy site," Khadija Khweis said.

She noted that the extremist Jewish groups plan to launch massive raids into al-Aqsa Mosque next week to celebrate the Jewish holiday of Hanukkah.

Khweis called on the entire Palestinian nation to protect the al-Aqsa Mosque compound against Israeli desecrations.

In recent weeks, Israeli settlers escorted by regime troops have broken into the al-Aqsa Mosque compound. The settlers frequently enter the compound in groups and perform rituals and Talmudic prayers there under the protection of Israeli forces.

Under the current status quo, only Muslims are allowed to worship within the compound while non-Muslims may visit the site, but are not allowed to pray there.

### Tehran to Continue...

FROM PAGE 1

He recalled the fact that the Islamic Republic of Iran was one of the first countries to condemn the 2014 Peshawar school terrorist attack as it offered condolences to the bereaved family members and the Pakistani nation and government.

Iravani also referred to a recent terrorist attack by the Daesh terrorist group in Shah Cheraq Mausoleum in Iran's southern city of Shiraz in which 14 people were martyred.



## Nadal Launches Hotel Brand

MADRID (Dispatches) - Spanish tennis star Rafael Nadal announced the launch of a new hotel brand with Spain's Melia group that is planning to open some 20 hotels across the globe in the next five years.

Inspired by the "Mediterranean lifestyle", the new "Zel" chain is expected to open its first hotel in 2023 in Mallorca in the Balearic Islands where 36-year-old Nadal was born and where Melia Hotels International was founded in 1956.

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**ISSN 1024-6053**

**P.O. Box:** 15875-8551

**Address:** No 13, Pajouhesh St., Golestan II St, Golestan St.Marzadaran Blvd., Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran

**Printed by:**Honar Sarzmin Sabz

**Distributed by:**  
Cities of Iran Cultural and Artistic Institute

**Managing Director:** Fereydoon Taherpour Asl

## Vialli Takes Break From Italy Duties

MILAN (Dispatches) - Gianluca Vialli said that he was taking a break from his role within the Italy national team set-up as he continues a long-standing battle with pancreatic cancer.

"After a long discussion with my brilliant team of oncologists I have decided to suspend, I hope only temporarily, my current and future professional engagements," Vialli said in an Italian Football Federation statement.

# Qatar World Cup Best Ever

AL RAYYAN (Dispatches) - The Qatar World Cup kept political messaging away from the football so that fans could enjoy "a little moment of pleasure and joy", FIFA President Gianni Infantino said.

Speaking two days before the final between Argentina and France, Infantino defended FIFA's decision not to allow teams to display any messages on their shirts or team captains' armbands.

"It is not about prohibiting. It's about respecting regulations," he told a news conference. "On the field of play we play football."

"You need to respect the field of play. This is nothing new."

The World Cup in the desert state had led to a significant amount of political discussion, with some teams voicing concerns about the host's treatment of migrant labor, its approach to LGBT rights and FIFA's threats to penalize players for political statements.

Germany's football federation was among the most vocal in pressing for anti-discrimination "OneLove" armbands to be worn by players and said "extreme blackmail" from FIFA and a threat of sanctions led to Germany, Denmark, Belgium, Netherlands, Wales, England and Switzerland abandoning plans to wear them.

Before their surprise opening defeat by Japan, the German team posed for a pre-match photo with their hands on their mouths, alluding to them being silenced by FIFA.

"Maybe everyone has his own problems. They (fans) just want to spend 90 minutes or 100 minutes or 120 minutes with penalties without having to think about anything else. Just enjoying a little moment of pleasure and joy, of emotions," Infantino said.

"We have to give these people a moment in time where they can forget their problems and enjoy football. Outside of the match everybody can express their views and opinions."

Infantino said the tournament was the "best World Cup ever" and had shown the cohesive power it had.

Qatar invested a reported \$200 billion in the tournament but after two weeks had received just over 765,000 visitors.

This fell short of the country's expectations for a total influx of 1.2 million during the month-long event with a surge in visitors not materializing in the second half of the tournament, and with empty seats at almost every game.

## Morant's Triple Double, Herro's 41 Points Spark NBA Wins

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - Memphis star Ja Morant and Miami's Tyler Herro, two of the NBA's top young guards, delivered dazzling performances in impressive triumphs.

Morant had a triple double for the host Grizzlies, who stretched their win streak to seven games and overtook New Orleans for the Western Conference lead, while Herro unleashed a historic career-best effort for the Heat.

Morant managed his third triple double of the season and the seventh of his career with 25 points, 10 rebounds and 10 assists to lead Memphis in a 142-101 rout over Milwaukee.

Asked if it was the Grizzlies' best performance so far this season, Morant said: "Easily."

The 23-year-old guard's masterful display highlighted a blowout triumph for Memphis, which led 70-41 at half-time and 117-71 after three quarters.

"We were real locked in on the defensive end and that got us easy looks," Morant said. "We were able to get out and run, get inside the paint and score there."

Herro scored a career-high 41 points, making 13-of-20 shots from the floor and 10-of-15 from three-point range, and added six rebounds for the Heat in a 111-108 victory at Houston. The 22-year-old guard became the youngest NBA player to produce 40 points, 10 three-pointers and five rebounds in the same game.

"I'm feeling good, just trying to get good looks, get the ball up and not pass up my open ones," Herro said. "My teammates get me the ball in situations where I can make a play and it's another great win."

Herro broke his old career mark of nine three-pointers in a game set one night earlier in a 110-108 victory at Oklahoma City.

"Tyler was fantastic again with his shotmaking," Heat coach Erik Spoelstra said. "He just got into such a great rhythm. Guys were setting great screens for him and he was stepping up into open shots."

Jimmy Butler added 20 points, 10 rebounds and seven assists for Miami. At Memphis, the Grizzlies improved to 19-9 while Milwaukee fell to 20-8 in the matchup of second-place clubs in the Eastern and Western conferences.



Infantino announced plans today for a 32-team Club World Cup from 2025, despite reported opposition from Europe's biggest clubs.

An expansion of the competition has long been a pet project of Infantino's. A 24-team event, featuring eight sides from Europe, was planned for 2021 in China but was put on hold due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Infantino said the new-look tournament would be even bigger than first planned.

"We had agreed a few years ago to have a new 24-team men's Club World Cup," he added. "It should have taken place in 2021 but was postponed because of Covid. The new competition will take place in 2025 and will feature 32 teams, making it really like a World Cup."

Reports in the British media this week said European clubs had rejected Fifa's proposal to launch the new-look competition.

The plans are for an expanded tournament to be held every four years instead of annually, as is the case for the current seven-team event.

"The first edition will take place in 2025 in the summer and during that slot where in past years it was the Confederations Cup," Infantino said.

"It will be slightly longer because there will be 32 teams but they will be the best teams in the world who will be invited to participate."

Infantino said next year's Club World Cup, in its current format, would take place in Morocco from February 1 to 11, 2023.

Morocco hosted the tournament in 2013 and again in 2014, while the most recent edition was held in the United Arab Emirates in February, with Chelsea lifting the trophy.



## Busquets Announces Int'l Retirement

BARCELONA (Dispatches) - Spanish midfielder and 2010 World Cup winner Sergio Busquets announced his international retirement.

"I would like to announce that after almost 15 years and 143 matches, the moment has arrived to bid farewell to the national team," wrote the 34-year-old Barcelona stalwart on his social media platforms.

Busquets is the last member of the 2010 team to bow out of international football — he was also part of the team that won the 2012 European title.

He was captain of the 2022 World Cup side that fell to a penalty shoot-out defeat to Morocco in the last 16.

Only his fellow 2010 team-mates Iker Casillas (167) and Sergio Ramos (180) represented Spain more often than him.

"It has been an honor to represent my national team and help lift it higher, to being European and World champions. To have been captain and to have played so many matches with a certain level of success and always trying to do my best," Busquets wrote.

Busquets said from now on he would be "just another fan giving my unconditional support".

He made his international debut in the build-up to the South African World Cup where Spain wowed fans with their tika-taka passing game.



# Portugal Coach Santos Leaves Job

LISBON (Dispatches) - Fernando Santos has left his job as Portugal coach after his team lost to Morocco in the World Cup quarter-finals, the Portuguese Football Federation (FPF) said.

The Portuguese suffered a shock 1-0 defeat by Morocco in Qatar on Saturday, after Santos started the match by leaving the country's all-time record goalscorer Cristiano Ronaldo on the substitutes' bench.

In an emotional video message, Santos said that being Portugal's coach was a "dream come true" and a "life goal" he fulfilled.

"When you lead groups, you have to make some difficult decisions," he added. "It's normal that not everyone was happy with the choices I made but the decisions I took were

always thinking about what would be best for our team."

In a statement, the FPF said both parties agreed to terminate the contract as it was the "right moment to start a new cycle".

Santos, who has been widely criticized for his tactics, became Portugal coach in 2014 and led the country in 109 matches. They won the European Championship in 2016 and UEFA's inaugural Nations League in 2018-19.

"In addition to the titles won, Fernando Santos became the coach with the most games and most victories," FPF said. "It was an honor to have a coach and a person like Fernando Santos as the head of the national team."

FPF said its board would now start the process of selecting a new manager.

Various Portuguese media outlets have reported that names such as AS Roma manager Jose Mourinho, the national under-21 coach Rui Jorge and Lille boss Paulo Fonseca were being considered as possible replacements.

## Mihajlovic Dies at 53 After Leukemia Battle

ROME (AFP) - Sinisa Mihajlovic died at the age of 53 on Friday after leukemia finally got the better of a charismatic and controversial figure who was one of the most recognizable players from the golden age of Serie A.

Serb Mihajlovic, a powerful defender and mercurial set-piece taker, passed away in Rome after spending most of his adult life in Italy, where he was revered for his play and reviled for his friendship with notorious Serbian nationalist paramilitary warlord Arkan.

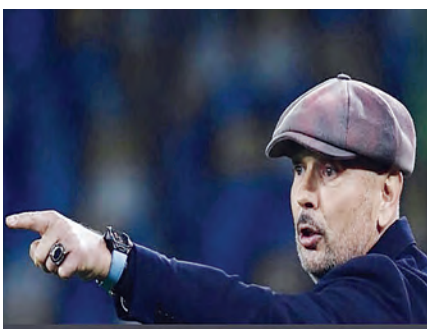
His wife Arianna and their five children deplored the "unjust and premature death" of Mihajlovic who played for numerous clubs in Italy and competed in the 1998 World Cup and 2000 European Championships for the former Yugoslavia.

He later became a coach, largely in Serie A and most recently with Bologna, where he was working when he was diagnosed with leukemia just before the 2019-20 season.

His coaching career was less distinguished than what he achieved on the field in Serie A, where he won the title with both Lazio and Inter Milan and was a prominent player when the league was considered the world's strongest.

Mihajlovic moved to Roma in 1992 from Red Star Belgrade, where he won the European Cup, but he is best known for his time at Lazio.

He won the Serie A title, two Italian Cups and the Cup Winners Cup in his six-year spell with Roma's fierce cross-town rivals, and remains a hero figure among Lazio supporters. Lazio remembered "a warrior on the pitch and in life".



## Super League "Not Dead"

MADRID (Dispatches) - "The Super League is not dead, far from it, it is alive and well," Bernd Reichart, head of a company set up to promote the breakaway European football competition said Friday.

The comments come a day after the European Court of Justice's Advocate General said any club involved risked exclusion from FIFA and UEFA.

A22 was set up in October and its CEO Reichart was speaking at an event alongside Florentino Perez and Joan Laporta, the presidents of Real Madrid and Barcelona respectively.

There was no representative of the third holdout club, Juventus, which is without a chairman after the resignation of Andrea Agnelli in November.

The attempt to set up an elite trans-European league in 2021 initially attracted 12 clubs -- but triggered a backlash from fans and governments.

The effort fell apart within 48 hours, but left behind bitterness and a key legal question.

A suit alleging that football governing bodies UEFA and FIFA had abused their power when they threatened to expel clubs or players who joined a proposed Super League is awaiting a verdict from the European Court of Justice.

On Thursday, the court's Advocate General Athanasios Rantos offered his official view that the Super League clubs could face exclusion from current competitions.

He said that the clubs could not remain in FIFA and UEFA and at the same time set up an independent competition and that as long as they were part of the 'ecosystem' they could be punished by the governing bodies.

