

Iran's Central Bank Governor Partly Blamed Recent Riots for the Fall of The Iranian Currency to Record Lows While Some Experts Blame the Economic Policies and Actions of The Related Bodies for Devaluation

IRAN NEWS

Health Ministry Announced on Sunday That the Number of Deaths From the Coronavirus Pandemic in Iran Increased to 144,664 With Three More Iranians Killed by the Virus Over the Past 24 Hours

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Iran to Send at Least Two Satellites Into Space by Yearend

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Minister of Communications and Information Technology (ICT) announced that at least two satellites will be launched into space by the end of this year, while other satellites will remain in line to be launched.

Speaking to local Iranian media about the latest conditions of the launch of Nahid 1 and 2 satellites, Issa Zarepour, the Iranian ICT minister said that these two satellites are being prepared and hopefully will be launched by the end of the year.

Nahid satellites are telecommunication satellites built in the country by the Space Research Institute; the Nahid-1 satellite was unveiled in February 2015 at the Space Technology Day ceremony. It was designed and built for the first time in the country at the Satellite Systems Research Institute of the Iran Space Research Institute under the leadership of the Iran Space Agency (ISA). *See Page 7*

Iran Uranium Enrichment Officially Reaches 60% Purity Level



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - The spokesman for the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) says the country's enrichment of uranium has officially reached the purity level of 60 percent in accordance with a December 2020 parliamentary law seeking to accelerate the development of the Iranian nuclear program.

Behrouz Kamalvandi made the remarks in a meeting with a number of Iranian lawmakers on Saturday, referring to the law - dubbed the Strategic Action Plan to Counter Sanctions, which is aimed at countering sanctions and promoting the country's peaceful nuclear program.

He said the parliamentary law has "provided good conditions for the country and today our [uranium] enrichment has officially reached 60% in accordance with this law."

The Iranian official added that the country is pursuing continuous and non-stop research and development plans while its efforts to update a new generation of centrifuge machines are "at its best."

Under the parliament's law, the Iranian administration is required to restrict the International Atomic Energy Agency's (IAEA) inspections and accelerate the development of the country's nuclear program beyond the limits set under the 2015 nuclear agreement, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), such as ending the voluntary implementation of the Additional Protocol to the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

Meanwhile, Head of the AEOI Mohammad Eslami said on Saturday the parliamentary law has contributed to the development of Iran's nuclear industry, saying the capacity for the enrichment of uranium in Iran is currently twice as high as the total capacity since the beginning of the nuclear industry in the country.

He added that a comprehensive document has been devised for the development of industries and creation of domestic capacities in various industries of the country, noting that the AEOI is acting based on this document.

The Iranian nuclear chief emphasized that power generation by nuclear energy has provided considerable economic benefits for the country, reduced fossil fuel consumption and prevented environmental problems.

Eslami also noted that the development of nuclear energy can help other sectors, including medicine and agriculture.

Official Blames Sanctions For Problems for Thalassemia Patients

TEHRAN (IP) - The head of Iran's Food and Drug Administration emphasized that sanctions are the leading cause of problems for thalassemia patients.

The inhumane sanctions of the United States and the European governments aligned with the White House have created many problems for patients in Iran.

Haider Mohammadi, the head of the Food and Drug Administration of Iran, pointed to the disloyalty of the foreign company that produces drugs for thalassemia patients in setting up oral drug production lines for thalassemia patients inside the country; he criticized the problems of supplying drugs for these patients and the foreign party's compliance with the laws related to sanctions.

Mohammadi said: "Although the foreign company was supposed to produce this drug in the country and the Iranian counterpart made a large investment, after two years of investment, they suddenly announced that they would not provide the raw material."

The head of Iran's Food and Drug Administration added: "The delay in sending these drugs from the Swiss company and reducing their amount will cause patients and families who are not compatible with domestically produced drugs to suffer."

Mohammadi pointed out: "The Swiss company has always created problems in sending medicine for thalassemia patients to Iran and is one of the companies that has always been subject to sanctions."

ViewPoint
By: Hamid Reza Naghashian

UN, Int'l Body Or West's Arm?

Last week and on Wednesday and Friday, the United Nations had two sessions regarding the Islamic Republic of Iran and in both sessions, this so-called international body voted against Iran and actually condemned Tehran while it should at first have condemned some Western countries and Israel for violation of human rights than condemning Iran for its action against recent riots in the country.

Although in both sessions the member states voted against Iran, the results showed that there is no consensus on the West's proposal against Iran and many countries are wise enough not to follow blindly what the West proposes and they vote and decide based on logic and reality than under the Western propagation and hype.

Reacting to Friday meeting of UN General Assembly, Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman said the resolution passed by the UNGA about human rights in Iran is "devoid of legitimacy," urging the West to stop exploiting international mechanisms to further its political goals.

Nasser Kanaani made the comments in a statement early on Friday, a day after a resolution dubbed "Situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran" was adopted by 80 in favor and 29 against, with 65 abstentions.

Put forward by Canada and supported by European countries and the Israeli regime, the resolution "reflects the hypocrisy of its designers and is devoid of legitimacy," Kanaani said.

"The hypocritical approach of sponsors of this resolution in exploiting international institutes to exert pressure on the Islamic Republic of Iran is a clear example of abusing sublime human rights concepts and values to pursue short-sighted political objectives," he added.

The spokesman said this is part of the efforts of Western countries to maintain the "Iranophobia project" and "psychological war" against the Islamic Republic.

The resolution accuses Iran of "disproportionate" use of the death penalty and "systemic discrimination and other human rights violations against women and girls."

Sponsors of this resolution have violated "all fundamental principles of human rights" in the world, he said, urging them to stop accompanying the US's economic terrorism against the Iranian nation and hosting terrorist groups instead of expressing "hypocritical" sympathy with Iranian people over human rights issues.

Respecting human rights is among religious and legal principles in the Islamic Republic, Kanaani said, noting that the country is "serious" in adhering to its international commitments with regard to human rights.

Kanaani also noted that the Islamic Republic of Iran is ready to hold dialogue and develop a constructive cooperation with all legitimate international mechanisms and countries based on mutual respect and non-discrimination to promote the status of human rights globally.

The new draft resolution came just days after Iran was ousted from the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) following a draft proposal by the United States over what it claimed to be "policies contrary to the rights of women and girls" in the country.

The 54-member UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) adopted the U.S.-drafted resolution to "remove with immediate effect the Islamic Republic of Iran from the Commission on the Status of Women for the remainder of its 2022-2026 term."

On Wednesday, Kanaani condemned the anti-Iran measure as politically motivated and against the UN Charter.

Kanaani described the U.S.'s "malicious" drive against the Islamic Republic as an attempt by Washington to "impose its unilateral political demands" on the world body.

Of course Tehran is accustomed to such biased and unfair decisions and approvals against it, but the important thing is that the United Nations and its agencies should act fairly and support the truth and independent countries rather than acting as the agencies and arms of the arrogant states especially the West because it is gradually losing its credibility and countries are gradually distancing from these bodies. *See Page 7*

Resistance Groups Vow Revenge After Two Palestinians Killed

GAZA (Dispatches) - Palestinian resistance movements have condemned the killing of two young Palestinian brothers in a car-ramming attack by an Israeli settler in the north of the occupied West Bank city of Nablus, vowing to take revenge on the occupying regime over the brutal murder.

Mohammad and Muhannad Yousef Muteir were run over by an extremist Jewish settler near the Za'tara military checkpoint in the south of Nablus on Saturday night after they had stopped to fix a flat tire.

Local media reports said the two young Palestinian brothers were on the side of the road when the Israeli settler deliberately drove his vehicle into them, killing Mohammad, 28, and seriously injuring Muhannad, 24, both from the Qalandiya refugee camp in the north of the occupied city of al-Quds.

Mohammad's body was transported to a hospital in the nearby city of Nablus, while Muhannad, who was first said to be critically injured, was rushed to a hospital in Israel for medical treatment, before he was pronounced dead.

In a statement on Sunday, the Palestinian Hamas resistance movement mourned the deliberate killing of the two brothers and offered its deep condolences to their families and friends.

"We are facing this crime, which is added to the series of daily and escalating Zionist crimes. The resistance will continue to be our people's option to curb the settlers and repel their attacks, crimes and provocations," Hamas said in the statement, adding, "The martyrs' blood will remain a curse haunting the enemy, its soldiers and settlers in every street and alley of our occupied land."

The resistance movement also called on Palestinians to respond to the heinous Israeli crime and to avenge the blood of the martyrs.

More than 600,000 Israelis live in over 230 settlements built since the 1967 Israeli occupation of the West Bank and East al-Quds. All Israeli settlements are illegal under international law.

The UN Security Council has condemned Israel's settlement activities in the occupied territories in several resolutions. Palestinians want the West Bank as part of a future independent state with East al-Quds as its capital.

Moreover, the Palestinian Freedom Movement denounced on Sunday the actions of the Israeli regime and its settlers against the Palestinian people as a "dangerous" sign indicating that what the future holds is the "establishment of an extremely radical state in Israel," which must be prevented by "a massive intifada of the Palestinian nation."

The movement called on the Palestinian Authority (PA) to stop security coordination with the Zionist regime in political prosecutions and arrests, allowing the resistance to stand against the occupying regime and its crimes. *See Page 7*

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Foreign Minister to Pay Visit to Jordan

TEHRAN (MNA) – Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian is scheduled to pay a visit to Jordan's capital today (Monday).

The top Iranian diplomat will travel to Amman, the capital of Jordan, to participate in the second iteration of the Baghdad Conference for Cooperation and Partnership.

The summit will take place on December 20 in Amman, Jordan, according to a report from El-Nashra. At the summit, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Iran, and several more Arab nations are expected to attend.

President Highlights Main Missions of Seminary, University

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – President Seyed Ebrahim Raisi described recognizing and meeting the needs of the contemporary human society as the main mission of the seminary and the university and emphasized, “The recognition of these needs depends on the seminary and the university being of the people, among the people and with the people, and providing solutions based on solid and rich Islamic scientific principles to solve problems”.

Speaking at the 6th conference celebrating the Anniversary of the unity of the Seminary and University, President Raisi called this occasion a good excuse to review the goals, methods and dos and don'ts of learning and knowledge.

The President considered the seminary as the center of knowing and learning the word of God and the university as the center of knowing and learning the deeds of God and added, “Regardless of whether this science is learned in the seminary or the university, it should be useful and savior for mankind”.

The President described recognizing and meeting the needs of the contemporary



human society as the main mission of the seminary and the university and emphasized, “The recognition of these needs depends on the seminary and the university being of the people, among the people and with the people, and providing solutions based on solid and rich Islamic scientific principles to solve problems”.

The President considered the timely identification of the dangers facing the society and the courage to give timely warnings as the characteristics of real intellectuals and emphasized, “Intellectuals and religious and academic scholars should be on the path of explaining the facts without fear”.

Raisi described learning knowledge and increasing insight and trying to implement justice as one of the characteristics of the revolutionary seminary and said, “Revolutionary forces emerging from the seminary both study well and have an effective and constructive presence in the social field to identify and resolve issues based on logic, planning and rationality”.

Top Officials Stress Dealing With Rioters Based on Justice

TEHRAN (MNA) - The heads of three power branches of the Iranian government emphasized the need for dealing with the detained perpetrators behind recent foreign-backed riots based on the law and Sharia.

In Saturday evening's regular meeting of the heads of three power branches, which was hosted by President Seyyed Ebrahim Raisi at the presidential compound, they exchanged their views on the most important issues of the country.

President Raisi, Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf and Judiciary Chief Gholmhossein Mohseni-Ejei also emphasized that the 7th Five-Year Socioeconomic and Cultural Development Plan and the next fiscal year's Budget Bill (2023 Budget Bill) should be submitted in due date to the Parliament.

They further stressed the need to observe justice, laws and Sharia in legal proceedings of the detained perpetrators behind recent foreign-backed riots.

Raisi, Ghalibaf and Ejei also called on all government officials to make their utmost efforts in line with building trust in people and enhancing their happiness with the government policies.

Air Pollution Enters Orange Zone in Tehran

TEHRAN - Tehran remains engulfed by hazardous airborne pollutants as the Air Quality Index reaches the “orange” zone, with officials advising the residents of Tehran to skip unnecessary travels across the city.

Tehran's air quality index (AQI) for Sunday morning was reported to be 134, meaning it is unhealthy for the sensitive groups including those suffering from heart complications, the elderly and children.

The figure is expected to rise toward the end of the day. Tehran, along with other large cities, have been grappling with severe air pollution for more than a week on Saturday.

In the face of the crisis, in-person classes at education centers have been canceled in Tehran, a city of 15 million, over the past days.

Director General of Tehran Province's Crisis Management Hamed Yazdi Mehr on Saturday recommended the people of Tehran to avoid unnecessary traffic in the open air and have food rich with antioxidants and beta-carotene to better protect themselves against air pollution.

Air Pollution Annually, with a drop in temperatures, a phenomenon known as temperature inversion occurs during which cold air underpins warm air at higher altitude, leading to the entrapment of air pollutants in Tehran and other metropolises, causing heavy smog.

Iran Appoints New Ambassador to Afghanistan

IRAN (IP) - Iran has appointed a new ambassador to neighboring Afghanistan after the current envoy's tenure came to an end.

Abbas Badrifar the attaché of the Iranian Embassy in Kabul revealed the appointment of Hassan Kazemi Qomi as the new ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran to Kabul.

Iran's newly-appointed envoy to Afghanistan will be in his office in Afghanistan after finishing his administrative work in Tehran, he stated.

Earlier, the Iranian Embassy to Kabul had announced that the tenure of Bahador Aminian, the former Iranian envoy to Kabul, had come to an end.

Hassan Kazemi Qomi has served as the Special Envoy of the Iranian President for Afghanistan Affairs so far since President Raisi assumed office last year in August.

In addition, Qomi had previously served at the Iranian Consulate General in Afghanistan's Herat.

No Meeting Scheduled Between Iran-Saudi Officials in Jordan

TEHRAN (IFP) - The official Iranian news agency says no meeting has been scheduled between the Iranian and Saudi sides on the sidelines of an upcoming meeting in the Jordanian capital, amid a lull in the diplomatic process between the two neighbors designed for reconciliation.

IRNA, citing informed sources, reported on Sunday that there has been no schedule so far for a meeting between Iranian and Saudi delegates on the margins of the Baghdad Conference for Cooperation and Partnership slated for December 20 in Amman.

Some Arab media reported on Saturday that the two sides are scheduled to hold talks in the Jordanian capital.

Iran and Saudi Arabia have held several rounds of negotiations in the Iraqi capital, Baghdad, with the goal of narrowing down their differences and restoring bilateral ties.

The talks were making progress but they apparently came to a halt after Tehran accused Riyadh of playing a role in a set of anti-government protests and deadly riots in Iran by supporting terror groups and launching a media war against the Islamic Republic.

It is unclear whether the new wave of tensions will hinder the diplomatic process between the two sides.

Saudi Arabia cut off diplomatic ties with Iran in January 2016 after Iranian protesters, enraged by the Saudi execution of prominent Shia cleric Sheikh Nimr Baqir al-Nimr, stormed its embassy in Tehran.

Iran has been criticizing the kingdom for pursuing what it calls a confrontational foreign policy toward the Islamic Republic.

Bangladesh Envoy Emphasizes Unity, Cooperation Among Muslim States

TEHRAN (IP) - The Bangladesh ambassador to Tehran stressed unity and cooperation among all Muslim countries.

Speaking on the sidelines of the ceremony of installing 2021 Mustafa Prize Laureates' busts, Gousal Azam Sarker stated: “Definitely we emphasize unity and more cooperation among Muslim countries in many fields, especially in research, development, trade, commerce, and investment.”

The Muslim countries are better at cooperating and working with each other, he said.

The 2021 Mustafa Prize Laureates' busts were installed at Pardis Technology Park (PTP) on Dec 17, 2022.

The President of the PTP, Mehdi Saffarinia, and Bangladesh



ambassador to Tehran, Gousal Azam Sarker attended the ceremony.

The Mustafa Prize is awarded in four categories of information and communication science and technology, life and medical science and technology, nano-science and nanotechnology, and all areas of science and technology.

The Mustafa Prize seeks to encourage education and research and play a pioneering role in developing regional relations between science and technology institutions working in the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) member countries.

It was launched in 2013, with high-profile universities and academic centers of the OIC member states defining its policies.

KBCs to Help Delay Natural Drop in Iran Oil Output

TEHRAN (Shana) -- The National Iranian South Oil Company (NISOC) is planning to ramp up its cooperation with domestic knowledge-based firms in order to delay the natural drop in oil output of Iran's fields.

Alireza Daneshi, the NISOC CEO, considered the natural decline in the annual production by 350,000 barrels of crude oil per day as one of the most important challenges of NISOC, and said: “In this field, we need to cooperate as much as possible with knowledge-based companies.”

Addressing a specialized panel entitled “Introduction of Technological Needs and Challenges” at the first conference and exhibition of management of knowledge-based products in Iran's oil industry on Wednesday, Mr. Daneshi underlined the support of NISOC for knowledge-based compounds in the oil industry of Iran.

“Currently, about 80% of the goods needed by this company are provided by domestic and local manufacturers,” he said.

The NISOC CEO, emphasizing that knowledge-based companies should take action as soon as possible to develop the export of technical and engineering services, added: “The natural drop in annual production by 350,000 barrels of oil per day is one of the most important challenges of NISOC.”

The first conference and exhibition of technology management of knowledge-based products in Iran's oil industry started on Tuesday (December 13) with the reading of the message of Iranian Minister of Petroleum Javad Owji and ended on Thursday, December 15.

Iran's Controversial Dam Project May Delay Initial Filling

TEHRAN (PressTV) - A controversial dam project in southwestern Iran may delay plans for its initial filling amid growing concerns that the project could cause significant environmental damage.

The contractor in charge of the Chamshir Dam project said on Saturday that an initial filling of the dam planned for January may be delayed to the next calendar year starting in late March if permits for the filling are not issued by relevant government agencies.

Speaking to reporters in a news briefing in Tehran, Mahmoud Mahzamia said that the project had received all necessary permits, approvals and licenses during its construction phase.

The Chamshir Dam has been built on Zohreh River in southwestern Iran and will provide power and water to three big provinces in the region.

Environmental critics believe that if filled with water, the dam will increase the amount of salt in Zohreh, leading to irreversible damage to farming communities in southwest Iran.

They also say the dam's operation will lead to a major increase in sand and dust storms in the region. The Chamshir dam has been built using loans and technical assistance from China. Design and construction costs of the dam have amounted to around \$2 billion, according to Abbas Bohrud, a professor at the University of Tehran.

Bohrudi told the ILNA news agency that studies carried out on environmental aspects of the project were unreliable. If filled with water, Chamshir it will become Iran's fifth largest dam with a reservoir capacity of 1.8 billion cubic meters.

Exports From Mining Sector Stand at \$7.86b in 8 Months

TEHRAN (MNA) - Iran exported 30.3 million tons of minerals and mining products worth \$7.86 billion in the first eight months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21-November 21), the data released by the Industry, Mining and Trade Ministry showed.

As reported, the eight-month export from the mining sector rose one percent in terms of weight but dropped five percent in terms of value year on year.

Iran exported around \$10.532 billion of minerals and mining products in the previous Iranian calendar year 1400 (ended on March 20), registering an increase of 91 percent year on year, an official with Iran's Trade Promotion Organization (TPO) has announced.

According to Head of TPO's Minerals and Mining Industries Desk Elaheh Mokri, the exports amounted to 9.15 million tons in weight, showing a 12-percent rise compared to the year 1399.

Steel ingot with \$4.156 billion worth of exports was the top exported item in the previous year, followed by long steel products with \$1.621 billion, copper cathodes with \$1.357 billion, aluminum ingots with \$607 million, and flat-rolled steel products

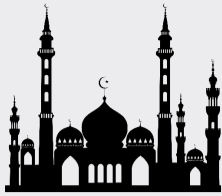
with \$494 million, zinc ingots with \$477 million, iron ore and concentrate with \$280 million and sponge iron with \$238 million worth of exports, she said.

The above-mentioned products with a total value of \$9.230 billion accounted for approximately 87.6 percent of the total exports of metals and minerals in the year 1400, the official said.

Having 81 different types of minerals, Iran is one of the top 10 mineral-rich countries across the globe. In this regard, the Iranian government has been seriously pursuing several programs for promoting the mining sector as a major contributor to the country's economic growth.

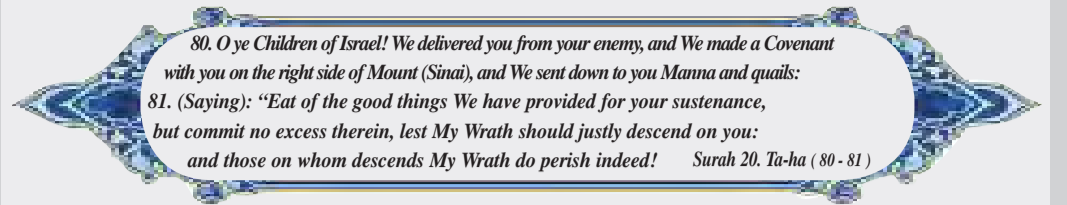
Iran's proven iron ore reserves are 2.7 billion tons, while the country's copper reserves are 2.6 billion tons. The country also has 11 million tons of zinc reserves.

The total proven reserves of Iran's mines are estimated at about 60 billion tons, which is expected to reach more than 100 billion tons with the implementation of the Industry, Mining, and Trade Ministry's exploration programs over 500,000 square kilometers of new mineral zones.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	12:01
■ Evening (Maghreb)	17:13
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	05:39
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	07:09



Iran Gas Output From South Pars Hits 0.7bcm/d

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The CEO of Pars Oil and Gas Company (POGC) said the daily gas production from the South Pars joint gas field has reached 700 million cubic meters.

According to Pars Oil and Gas Company, Mohammad Hossein Motejali said the company raised its gas production from the massive gas field due to the cold snap in the country and the increase in gas consumption in the country.

He listed the priorities of Pars Oil and Gas Company in two sectors, development and operation, and referring to the important role of this company in managing the country's gas production and consumption balance in the cold months of the year, said: "Implementation of the production maintenance plan from the South Pars gas field is one of the most important priorities of this company."

The CEO of Pars Oil and Gas Company stated that in addition to the gas pressure boosting projects from this field, the development of other fields such as North Pars, Bilal, Farzad and Phase 11 of South Pars are on the agenda as well.

Meanwhile Pars Oil and Gas Company (POGC) is planning to invest \$2 million in a project for laboratory modeling of corrosion together with a knowledge-based company.

Abbasali Porteghali, POGC's head of research and technology and thinking center, said: "For the development of infrastructure and laboratory modeling of the corrosion of this field, a project has been defined with more than \$2 million investment with a knowledge-based company."



Addressing a specialized panel entitled "Introduction of technological needs and challenges" at the first conference and exhibition of management of knowledge-based products in Iran's oil industry, Mr. Porteghali said aligning the plans and executive policies of POGC with the capabilities of domestic knowledge-based companies, purchasing domestically produced items and supporting the localization of goods and engineering services, and updating the domestic procedures and regulations of the company are among the most important actions of POGC for supporting the economy of domestic knowledge-based companies.

He considered the most critical need of Pars Oil and Gas Company in the field of knowledge and technology to maintain the health of the company's sea pipelines, and said: "There are currently more than 3,000 kilometers of 32-inch pipelines and 3,000 kilometers of 4-inch pipelines under the management of this company. Every year, more than 100 kilometers of these pipelines need major repairs, currently, the repair and replacement of each kilometer of marine pipelines cost a lot for the company."

Pointing to the 30-month implementation period of this project, Porteghali continued: "With the cooperation and assistance of the National Iranian Oil Company, this project will begin by 2024."

Isfahan Refinery Has Not Used Even One Drop of Fuel Oil

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

ISFAHAN – The CEO of Isfahan Petro Refining Holding refuted claims that the company has used gas oil for running the refinery and said that they have never used a drop of fuel oil in refining process.



Touching upon some remarks made by the urban management of Isfahan regarding fuel oil consumption in Isfahan Refinery, Dr. Mohsen Ghadiri said that the refinery does not use heavy fuel, namely, fuel oil, in any condition, adding that currently even one drop of fuel oil is not used as fuel in this industry.

He added that refinery does not need using fuel oil as fuel, noting that if in any case the condition for using gas as fuel becomes critical, the refinery will reduce the feed according to decisions.

He reiterated that all chimneys of Isfahan Refinery have been equipped with online refining of pollutants since 2016, adding that the results are sent to the laboratory trusted by the department of environment and so far no polluting deviation has been seen in the chimneys of the refinery.

Ghadiri went on to say that most of torches of Isfahan Petro Refine Holding have become enviro-mix for years and there is no possibility for using liquid fuel and those torches which can use liquid fuel are fueled through re-gassing of liquid gas.

He also invited all officials to visit the furnaces of the refinery in any time of the day and measure the amount of pollution in-person.

Ghadiri went on to say that Isfahan Petro Refine Holding with implementing drip environmental projects will not use fuel oil in production from 2026.

Envoy Hails Trade Ties Between Iran and Armenia



AHVAZ (IRNA) - Armenian Ambassador to Iran Arsen Avakian has hailed the growing trade ties between the two countries.

Avakian made the remarks as he was visiting the Razi Yeast and Alcohol Company in the Iran's southwestern province of Khuzestan.

The ambassador said exports of 450 metric tons of yeast from Iran to Armenia last year was a sign that food industry ties between the two countries are at a good level.

He then asked for yeast exports from Khuzestan to Armenia to be increased in the upcoming years.

Avakian added that Iran's Sugarcane and By-Product Development Company had accepted during negotiations with the Armenian officials to boost its yeast exports to Armenia. He also expressed hope that a suitable business partner could be found in Armenia for Razi Yeast and Alcohol Company to further facilitate cooperation between the two sides.

Outcome of Research Actions Should Lead to Satisfaction

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – The CEO of Etka Organization says the outcome of research actions should lead to satisfaction, adding that the outcome should lead to the decrease in final cost, costs of production and increase in quality of products and competitiveness.

Speaking in the second specialized research festival with the slogan of the year "production, knowledge-based and job creation", Morteza Alami said that fortunately Etka Organization with its planning has materialized the slogan of the year with considerably increasing its sales. He went on to say that Etka Organization earned 15,000b tomans last year, adding that since the beginning of the current year, Etka Organization has sold over 25,000b tomans and it is predicted the figure to increase to over 30,000b tomans by the yearend.

Alami went on to say that they should have required planning through identifying opportunities and damages, adding that Etka Organization could provide and supply masks and alcohol through its jihadi actions during the COVID pandemic and it also could export its products.

He went on to say that today they should have innovation in the field of packing the products in order to win major share of the market and therefore in the seventh Five-Year Plan of the organization, equipment, innovation and technology have been taken into serious consideration.



Alami also stressed that all research programs and actions should lead to satisfaction and also to the decrease in the final cost, production costs and also to the rise in quality of product and competitiveness.

The second research festival in Etka Organization was held on December 14-18 in the fields of food industries, agriculture, animal husbandry, stores companies and e-trade.

Meanwhile in the festival, head of coordination in Defense Ministry Admiral Mehdi Khajeh Amiri, for his part, said that the country and the organization should have economic power, adding that economic power means capability of a country in maintaining and increasing the livelihood of the people through provision of goods and services in the domestic market and presence in the foreign markets.

He went on to say that to reinforce and develop economic actions, they should take advantage of studies and researches of the knowledge-based companies in the operational and decision-making levels.

He also said that to offer better services to the public and to the families of the armed forces, one should use the opinions of the elites and fortunately these opinions of exports have been used in the seventh Five-Year Plan of Etka Organization and it will be unveiled soon.

HOSCO Shines at 19th Festival of Top PRs

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Hormozgan Steel Company (HOSCO) won two statue and plaque of honor in strategic management and effective communication in the 19th festival of top public relations of Iran.

According to reports, the 18th International Symposium on public relations and 19th festival of top public relations of Iran was held on December 13 at IRIB Conference Hall in presence of tourism and culture minister, vice-president and head of department of environment as well as managers of public relations of different organs and organizations of the company.

In the festival, companies affiliate to Mobarakeh Steel Company shone and beside Hormozgan Steel Company which won two statue and plaque of honor in strategic management and effective communication, Mobarakeh Steel Company also won the award for top public relations of the country by winning 2 statue and plaque of honor.

Meanwhile some of affiliate companies of Mobarakeh Steel Company like Sangan Steel Company, Sefid Dasht Steel Complex of Chahar Mahal Bakhtiari and Tokafoolad Investment Group were honored in the festival.



Event for Identifying and Removing Technology Challenges in Copper Industry Winds Up

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – The closing ceremony of the conference on Identifying and Removing Technology Challenges in Copper Industry ended on December 14 in the town of Sarcheshmeh and in presence of the CEO of National Iranian Copper Industries Company (NICICO) Dr. Rostami and some of copper industry officials.

Addressing the ceremony, the CEO of Rostami said that today all should act based on collective decision and active behavior in choosing the technology which is effective in the growth and development.

He added that copper consumption in the world is on the rise and Iran should take advantage of this opportunity.

Rostami noted that in recent years some good actions have been taken that researchers should talk about



them in order to reach some wise solutions in increasing copper production as well as reducing pollution.

He also pointed to the forex earning from copper exports and support from the knowledge-based companies and stated that they should not undermine the role of NICICO in national development and they should magnify its role. He added that so in this regard they should support researchers and help knowledge-based companies to grow.

Rostami went on to say that this spring they announced that they would pursue smartization of copper industry and they should reach the fourth industrial revolution of the world through smartization and it will not be materialized but through interaction and communication with the elites and researchers, and pursuing knowledge-based solutions in line with removing challenges.

He reiterated that the company will fully support researchers, innovators, engineers and ideators.

MSC Seeks Creating Hope in Society Through Job Creation

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

ISFAHAN – Head of Human Resources and Organizing of Mobarakeh Steel Company (MSC) says creation of job in MSC is an effective stride for creating hope in the society and progress of national economy.



On the sidelines of recruitment examination of the company, Mehdi Kefayat said that the company every several years and based on needs in its units hire some human capitals through holding a recruitment examination.

He added that the examination is held based on the existing standards which have been devised by the company and was held at Isfahan University of Technology and some 1103 will be hired through this examination. Kefayat noted that this examination is one of the biggest examinations in the steel industry of the country where participants compete in two levels of university graduates and undergraduates.

He noted that some 25,000 people have enrolled for these tests and this volume of applicants has intensified the competition.

He reiterated that today MSC considers its staff as human capitals and it seeks pumping more hope into the society through job creation which will help the national economy to progress.

Jordan Arrests 44 After Deadly Fuel Protests

AMMAN (Dispatches) - Jordan has arrested dozens of people accused of involvement in protests against rising fuel prices in which a senior police officer was gunned down, the country's security agency said.

Colonel Abdul Razzaq Dalabeh, the deputy police chief of Maan province, died of a gunshot to the head in the town of Al-Husseiniya on Thursday while confronting what the authorities called "riots".

"Forty-four people who participated in the riots in a number of regions in the kingdom have been arrested and they will be brought before the courts," the Public Security Directorate said in a statement.



More Than 20 Dead In Malaysia Landslide

KUALA LUMPUR (Dispatches) - Rescue workers scoured muddy terrain for survivors and bodies on Saturday as the death toll from a landslide at an unauthorized campsite in Malaysia rose to 24, including seven children, authorities said.

Nine people were still missing after a predawn landslide hit the site located at an organic farm near the town of Batang Kali just outside the capital Kuala Lumpur on Friday.

Selangor state fire and rescue director Norazam Khamis said the chances of finding survivors in the mud and debris a day after the disaster were "slim."



Peru President Urges Congress To Bring Elections Forward



LIMA (Dispatches) - Peruvian President Dina Boluarte, who has said she is leading a transitional government, urged the country's Congress to pass a proposal to bring forward general elections in a news conference from the presidential palace. Boluarte, formerly Peru's vice president, assumed the presidency earlier this month after leftist ex-President Pedro Castillo tried to illegally dissolve Congress and was arrested.

Since then, protests have broken out across the country, and at least 17 people have been killed. Another five have died of indirect consequences of the protests, according to authorities.

Boluarte on Saturday countered protesters asking for her to step down, saying "that does not solve the problem" and that she had done her part by sending the bill to Congress.

On Friday, Peru's Congress rejected the proposed constitutional reform to move elections forward to December 2023. Some members of Congress have called for the legislature to reconsider the proposal.

"I demand that the vote to bring elections up be reconsidered," Boluarte said, criticizing Congress members who had previously abstained from voting.

She also dismissed calls for a constitutional assembly, saying it was "not the time." Some leftist leaders have called for the assembly, which would redraft Peru's 1993 constitution, to boost the state's role in the economy.

Boluarte said there would be a reshuffling of her Cabinet in the coming days as well, following the resignation of the education minister and culture minister Friday.

"We will have a recomposition of the Cabinet, to be able to install knowledgeable ministers in each sector," she said.

The Cabinet departures Friday raise questions about the longevity of Boluarte's government, which has been rocked by political turbulence.

Protests since the arrest of former President Castillo, who is in pre-trial detention while facing charges of rebellion and conspiracy, have crippled Peru's transport system, shuttering airports and blocking highways.

On Wednesday, Boluarte's government announced a state of emergency, granting police special powers and limiting citizens' rights, including the right to assembly.

Protesters have also blockaded Peru's borders, leaving tourists stranded and strangling trade.

"We want the immediate closure of Congress; we want the resignation of Dina Boluarte," Rene Mendoza, a protester at the border with Bolivia, told Reuters. "Today the Peruvian people are in mourning... The whole of Peru is in a struggle."

Meanwhile pressure rose on Peru's fledgling government on Friday as two Cabinet members resigned following deadly protests that have rocked the country since former President Pedro Castillo's removal from office and arrest last week.

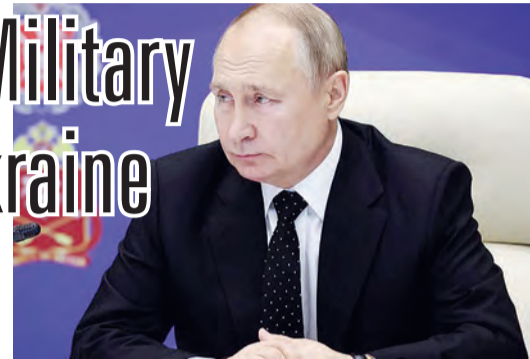
Education Minister Patricia Correa and Culture Minister Jair Perez announced their resignations on Twitter, citing the deaths of individuals during the unrest.

Putin Sounds Out Military Commanders on Ukraine

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - President Vladimir Putin has sought proposals from his armed forces commanders on how they think Russia's military campaign in Ukraine should proceed, during a visit to the operation's headquarters, the Kremlin said.

A series of defeats in 10 months of fighting, resulting in Russian withdrawals from areas around the capital Kyiv and Ukraine's second city Kharkiv and most recently from the city of Kherson, have forced Putin to call up reservists and generated rare public criticism from military bloggers and some allies.

Since the appointment in October of Air Force General Sergei Surovikin to lead the campaign, Russian ground forces have focused more on defense than attack, while waves of air strikes on cities have left millions of Ukrainian civilians without heat, light or water for days on end as winter sets in.



Turkey's Courts to Fix Any Errors After Imamoglu Jailing

ANKARA (Dispatches) - Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said that the courts would correct any mistakes in an appeal process after a court sentenced the mayor of Istanbul to more than two-and-a-half years in prison on charges of insulting members of the Supreme Electoral Council.

Erdogan made his first direct comments after the court on Wednesday sentenced Ekrem Imamoglu, a key opposition politician and a potential challenger to Erdogan, to two years and seven months in prison and handed him a political ban.

Imamoglu was prosecuted for insulting public officials in 2019 when he criticised a decision to cancel the first round of municipal elections that he won and became the mayor of Istanbul. His win was seen as a blow to Erdogan and his AK Party.

"There's still no final court decision yet. The case will go to the Court of Appeals and the Court of Cassation," Erdogan said. "If the courts have made a mistake, it will be corrected. They're trying to pull us into this game."

Erdogan also said he did not care who the opposition candidate in next year's elections is.

On Friday, thousands of people in Istanbul gathered to protest against the conviction and political ban, voicing criticism of Turkey's government ahead of elections next year that are set to pose a big test to Erdogan's 20-year rule.

"There have been many court rulings that we have harshly criticized ourselves, but that doesn't give anyone the right to insult judges or to ignore court rulings," Erdogan told a rally at Mardin in Turkey's southeast.

Imamoglu himself called the sentence "political and unlawful".

Imamoglu was tried for defamation over a speech after the Istanbul mayoral elections in June 2019 in which he said those who annulled an initial vote held three months earlier were "fools". The AK Party refused to acknowledge Imamoglu's initial win.

Tunisians Trickle in to Vote in Elections as Opposition Boycotts

TUNIS (Dispatches) - Polls have opened in Tunisia for parliamentary elections marked by a general sense of apathy among much of the population.

Some 9.3 million registered voters were eligible to cast their ballot in Saturday's elections, but the field of parliamentary candidates is much smaller than usual, with some constituencies only having one candidate who will automatically be declared the winner.

More than 1,000 candidates will be running in this year's elections, compared with 15,500 in 2019.

Tunisia's electoral system has significantly changed after a new constitution was introduced by President Kais Saied, and it is much criticized by the country's opposition, the majority of whom are boycotting the elections.

The new constitution was voted on in a referendum on July 25 this year. It was passed, but only 30 percent of registered voters took part. The document consolidates legislative, executive and judicial powers in the hands of the president, making parliament beholden to him.

The opposition argues these changes have moved Tunisia away from the gains of the 2011 revolution, which overthrew former longtime leader Zine El Abidine Ben Ali.

Political parties can no longer run campaigns or fund candidates. Under the new rules, all candidates must run as individuals and fund campaigns themselves, whereas previously Tunisia's parliamentary elections were based

on a proportional representation list system, and the state provided funds to give a broader scope of candidates a chance to run for office.

Twelve political parties, including the Muslim Democratic Ennahdha and the centrist Qalb Tounes, which together held the largest bloc in the old parliament, have declared they are boycotting the election entirely.

The powerful labour union UGTT also said it rejected the election process entirely.

Human Rights groups have decried the new system, arguing women are losing out with only 122 female candidates running, compared with 936 men.

One of the few people at a polling station in Tunis said that she was voting to support Saied. "I want to support my country and to support my president. I want the country to go forward and get better and that's why I voted today," said local businesswoman Manoubia Shagawi.

The European Union has said it will not observe the ballot, while leading Tunisian election observer, Mourakiboun, which has monitored all post-revolution elections, will only carry out random data sampling, as opposed to the detailed monitoring it previously conducted.

However, Farouk Bouasker, the president of the official election commission, the ISIE, has publicly welcomed observers from the African Union and the Civil Chamber of the Russian Federation in the run-up to the vote.



Pentagon's UFO Investigation Finds No Evidence of Alien Activity

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - The Pentagon's new push to investigate reports of UFOs has so far not yielded any evidence to suggest that aliens have visited Earth or crash-landed here, senior military leaders said.

However, the Pentagon's effort to investigate anomalous, unidentified objects - whether they are in space, the skies, or underwater - has led to hundreds of new reports that are now being investigated, U.S. defense officials said.

In June 2021 the Office of the Director of National Intelligence reported that between 2004 and 2021, there were 144 encounters with UFOs, 80 of which were captured on multiple sensors.

So far, "we have not seen anything, and we're still very early on, that would lead us to believe that any of the objects that we have seen are of alien origin", Ronald Moultrie, undersecretary of defence for intelligence and security, told reporters.

Sean Kirkpatrick, director of the Pentagon's newly formed All-domain Anomaly Resolution Office (AARO) - which is investigating the sightings - did not rule out the possibility of extraterrestrial life and said he was taking a scientific approach to the research.

"I would just say that we are structuring our analysis to be very thorough and rigorous. We will go through it all," Kirkpatrick said, speaking at the first news conference since AARO was established in July following more than a year of attention on UFOs that US military pilots had observed but were sometimes reluctant to report due to fear of stigma.

"We've had lots more reporting," Kirkpatrick said.

When asked to quantify the number of new reports on potential UFO sightings, Kirkpatrick said "several hundred".

Sightings of aircraft that do not appear to match known technology or that appear to defy the laws of physics have long been cited by amateur observers and sleuths as evidence of extraterrestrial life, with many speculating the U.S. government has more evidence of UFOs than it has revealed.

An updated report from the Director of National Intelligence that will provide specific figures on new UFO reports received since 2021 is expected by the end of the year, officials said.

EU Unity Over Russia Sanctions Falters as Europe's Economy Wilts



BRUSSELS (Dispatches) - European Union unity over sanctions on Russia has started to falter as jitters about the impact on Europe's own stumbling economy weakens resolve to punish Moscow for war in Ukraine.

EU leaders agreed to a ninth package of sanctions but talks were acrimonious, with Poland and the Baltic states that neighbor Russia campaigning for tougher measures, while states further west, such as Germany, were more hesitant.

Some, such as Belgium and Greece, as well as Hungary which still relies heavily on Russian energy imports, pushed back against further sweeping measures, EU diplomats told Reuters.

"It is becoming increasingly difficult to impose sanctions that hit Russia hard enough, without excessive collateral damage to the EU," a spokesperson for Belgium's government said ahead of the deal at the EU leaders' summit.

After Russia invaded Ukraine in February, starting the biggest conflict in Europe since World War Two, the European Union showed a united front and responded with swift steps against Russia, unusual for the 27-nation bloc where opposing voices often turn debates into marathon meetings.

Sanctions have already been imposed on a range of companies and Russian individuals, while overflights by Russian planes have been banned and business with several Russian banks barred.

But finding common ground now has become tougher.

After this week's talks, Lithuanian Foreign Minister Gabrielius Landsbergis described the latest sanctions deal as a "missed opportunity", saying he was disappointing that EU states spent more time discussing exemptions than tougher steps.

The latest measures targeted entities connected to Russia's military, clamped down on drones and froze assets of two Russian banks among other curbs.

But strains were felt during talks. Lithuania and others objected to moves to secure carve outs to exempt a handful of Russian oligarchs involved with agriculture and fertilizers, although that dispute was defused in the end, sources said.

Poland and the Baltic states, closer to the frontline, circulated a proposal in recent weeks for more far-reaching sanctions, including on Russian gas and its nuclear industry, and arguing against exemptions, such as on sales of Russian steel and diamonds.

Some in that group want Gazprombank, central for energy payments to Russia, to be targeted, said one person familiar with the matter. The person said many countries were reluctant but added these issues would be discussed in 2023.

For some European politicians, such as those from Poland which faces fighting on its doorstep, the hesitancy of other states to support sterner steps has proved frustrating.

"We will demand Germany change its policy. It's not fair for Germany to rely on Poland to defend it from the threat of war," said Radosław Sikorski, Poland's former foreign minister and now a member of the European Parliament. "Just because you are richer and bigger doesn't mean you are always right."

Russia says sanctions have boomeranged against the West, driving up inflation as energy prices have rocketed higher. Moscow says its own economy is resilient.

Meanwhile, existing EU measures are not always watertight. The EU imposed a price cap on seaborne Russian oil deliveries, but its crude is selling below that level, so revenues still flow to Moscow.

India's Textile Industry Faces Tough Times as Consumers Cut Spending



NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - India's \$200 billion textile and apparel industry is facing a crisis as consumers in the United States, Europe and other big markets have cut spending on clothing following a surge in inflation after the war in Ukraine, industry officials said.

While the overall economy is relatively strong and is outperforming major economies, the textile sector is a notable exception and orders suggest the downturn will continue well into 2023, raising the risk of layoffs in an industry that employs more than 45 million people.

Exports, which constitute about 22% of the industry, have fallen for five months in a row - declining over 15% year-on-year in November to \$3.1 billion. Domestic sales are sluggish despite strong growth in the overall economy because of high costs and cheap imported garments, manufacturers say.

After bumper sales earlier this year, local textile factories are now cutting production - contributing to a 4.3% contraction in manufacturing output in July-September quarter that has raised concerns among policymakers.

The shock comes as Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government struggles to create employment for millions of youngsters entering the job market each year.

After 18 months of robust growth through mid-2022, global retail sales of clothing have been dragged down by high inflation and depressed consumer sentiment, and prospects for 2023 look gloomy, a McKinsey report said last month.

In India, the manufacturing sector, contributing 16% of GDP, has been hit by rising raw material costs and weak demand, despite bright growth elsewhere. Manufacturing showed no signs of growth in the first half of the current April-March fiscal year while the overall economy, helped by agriculture and services, expanded 6.3%.

Textile manufacturers, along with makers of footwear, furniture, electronic and electricals, have been hit as companies battle to pass on rising input costs, while consumers have cut expenditure on these products as they spend more on food and fuel.

In the textile industry, manufacturers say higher domestic cotton prices and other costs have hit profit margins, while overseas orders for next summer are down by about one-third and domestic demand remains weak.

Sahid Khan, a garments manufacturer in Ahmedabad, the textile hub in Modi's home state of Gujarat, said despite a fall in cotton prices by about 40% from record highs hit in 2022, profit margins were down due to lower sales in the domestic market.

"Interest rates on bank loans have gone up along with labour costs, but my sales are down," he said adding that domestic cotton prices remained high compared to global prices, and manufacturers were unable to compete with cheap imports from Bangladesh.

Local cotton is at least 10% more expensive than global benchmarks, said Atul Ganatra, president of the Cotton Association of India (CAI).

"The government needs to scrap the 11% import duty on cotton so local textile mills can have a level playing field," Ganatra said. "This will allow mills to have options to import cotton from overseas which is nearly 10 cents per pound cheaper than local supplies."

Shares of leading textile companies like Arvind Ltd, Vardhman Textiles, Trident and Nahar Spinning Mills have plunged between 20% and 40% this year, while the benchmark Nifty is up over 7%.



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Grain Deal Allowed 14m Tons of Grain to Leave Ukraine

ANKARA (Dispatches) - Over 14 million tons of grain have been exported from Ukraine under the Black Sea deal with Russia, easing global food prices, the United Nations said. Rebeca Grynspan, head of the U.N.'s trade and development agency, UNCTAD, which helped broker the Black Sea Grain Initiative (BSGI), said it reduced world food prices for seven straight months. "We have surpassed 14 million tons of food that has come out through the Black Sea Grain Initiative," Grynspan told reporters at the U.N. in Geneva. "The volumes that we are talking about are very significant for the market."



China Agrees to Formation of Global Sovereign Debt Roundtable

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - Chinese officials have agreed to participate in a global sovereign debt "roundtable" that would include a wide variety of stakeholders, including private sector creditors, International Monetary Fund chief Kristalina Georgieva said.

Georgieva told an event hosted by the IMF that she was feeling "a bit more optimistic" about the prospects for dealing with major debt issues facing low- and middle-income countries after high-level meetings with Chinese authorities last week.

The IMF chief last week she had a "fruitful exchange" with her Chinese counterparts on the need to accelerate debt relief for countries like Zambia and Sri Lanka, adding that she saw "space for a platform for more systematic engagement on debt issues, where China can play an active role."

Georgieva said she had a "very constructive engagement" with Chinese leaders on the debt issue during her meetings after repeated calls for reforms to accelerate debt treatments under the Group of 20 common framework and expand it to include middle-income countries.

U.S. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen and other Western officials have expressed mounting frustration about what they see as foot-dragging by China, now the world's largest sovereign creditor, in providing relief under the G20 framework.

China has argued that private creditors and multilateral development banks should be required to accept debt "haircuts" to make the process fair.

Kevin Gallagher, director of the Global Development Policy Center at Boston University, said a broader, more systemic solution was clearly needed.

"Systemic could be music to all of our ears, if it means really bringing together all the different creditor classes, including the multilateral development banks, but especially the private bondholders and the Chinese," he said.

He said it was also essential to move away from the case-by-case approach of the G20 framework toward the more systemic approach of earlier debt restructurings.

Georgieva said the discussions in China yielded some progress.

"We agreed that we should form a global sovereign debt roundtable at the highest level - the key creditors, some of the borrowers, the private sector - with the World Bank, the IMF and the G20 presidency being the co-conveners," she said.

"We need that place ... We cannot have solutions for systemic risk with the parties to this solution being in different rooms and not talking to each other at the same time. That just cannot happen," she said.

The proposed roundtable offered a structure to help improve the debt treatment process and avoid a systemic debt crisis, she said.

No further details were immediately available about the roundtable and when it could have an initial meeting.

Georgieva, World Bank President David Malpass and other financial leaders met in China's Anhui province last week with officials from the People's Bank of China, China's finance ministry and its EXIM Bank and China Development Bank.

Malaysia's Economy to Moderate in 2023

KUALA LUMPUR (Dispatches) - The Malaysian economy will moderate in 2023 amid challenging external conditions and slowing domestic demand, economists said. Maybank Investment Bank Research said in its recent report that it expects Malaysia's full-year growth to moderate to 4% in 2023 from 2022's growth forecast of 8%, mainly reflecting moderation in domestic demand, reported Xinhua. The research house sees slower growth in private consumption next year as pent-up spending from full economic re-opening dissipates, compounded by the effects of high inflation and high interest rates on cost of living and real disposable income.

It also sees moderation in public consumption growth in line with the lower government operating expenditure allocation in Budget 2023. In addition, it said the outlook of slower global economic growth results in exports and imports of goods and services slumping. Meanwhile, MIFD Research foresees Malaysia's gross domestic product (GDP) growth to moderate to 4.2% for 2023 mainly due to deceleration in external trade performances as a result of slower global demand. According to the research house, Malaysia's real exports growth is projected to slow to 2.8% from the 2022 growth estimate of 12.5%, partially supported by improving services exports given the expectation of a more robust tourism activity. However, on the trade of goods, it believes Malaysia will continue to benefit from commodity exports especially palm oil, petroleum and liquefied natural gas (LNG) as the average prices of crude palm oil (CPO) and Brent crude oil are forecasted to stay elevated at RM3,500 ringgit (\$794.1) per ton and US\$96 (RM424) per barrel for next year. MIFD Research is optimistic the Malaysian domestic economy will be fuelled by continuous upbeat consumer spending, further improvement in tourism-related activities and revival of infrastructure projects. Open economy



Turkish House Sales to Foreigners Down 17.4% y/y in November

ANKARA (Dispatches) - Housing sales to foreigners in Turkey decreased by 17.4% annually in November, according to official data, while Russian citizens again took the first place in sales.

A total of 117,806 houses were sold in Turkey in November, according to data by the Turkish Statistical Institute (TurkStat). Housing sales in the January-November period increased by 1% compared to the same period of the previous year.

The number of residences sold to foreigners throughout the country was 6,083. Housing sales to foreigners decreased by 17.4% on an annual basis and the share of house sales to foreigners in total house sales was calculated as 5.2%, the TurkStat data showed.

The Mediterranean coastal city of Antalya took first place in house sales to foreigners with 2,616 houses. This province was followed by Istanbul with 1,733 house sales and southern Mersin with 567 house sales, respectively.

In November, Russian citizens bought 2,575 houses from Turkey. Iranian citizens followed Russian citizens with 510 residences, Iraqis with 331 residences and Ukrainians with 277.

Between January and November, house sales to foreigners increased by 20.4% compared to the same period of the previous year to reach 61,104.

Meanwhile, new house sales decreased by 32.9% in November compared to the same month in 2021 and fell to 37,380. The share of recent housing sales in total housing sales was 31.7%.

South Korea's Trade Deficit Reflects Global Economic Challenges

SEOUL (Dispatches) - South Korea posted a trade deficit of \$3.8 billion in September 2022 — higher than experts predicted in a Reuters poll at the end of September but slightly lower than South Korea's Customs Services forecast. The latest official data of South Korea shows that the trade deficit reached \$7 billion in November and the cumulative trade deficit has reached \$42.6 billion since the first deficit in April 2022.

Two major conclusions can be drawn from looking at South Korean imports and exports.

First, the government has implemented a trade strategy towards the Southeast Asian market. Second, trade relations between China and South Korea are undergoing major changes.

One reason for the deficits is the increasing value of energy imports. In the first eight months of 2022, South Korea imported US\$145 billion of energy, accounting for 29.4 per cent of its total import quota. Energy spending in the first eight months of 2022 has surpassed 2021's total and is nearly \$64 billion higher than the same period.

A more important factor contributing to South Korea's massive trade deficit this year is the decline in Korean exports. This was mainly caused by a sharp drop in semiconductor-related exports. In January–August 2022, semiconductor exports fell by 49.4 per cent from 2021 to \$36.2 billion. Semiconductor exports accounted for 7.7 per cent of South Korea's total exports in 2022, down from 17.7 per cent in 2021. This is the biggest drop among all South Korean export categories.

China is South Korea's main export destination for semiconductor-related products. In recent years, China has imported over 40 per cent of South Korea's semiconductors. In the first eight months of 2022, South Korea exported US\$12.2 billion of semiconductors to China, a year-on-year decrease of 58.9 per cent from 2021. The Chinese market share has dropped from 40 to 33.7 per cent. This instability has not been seen since China and South Korea formally established diplomatic ties in 1992. At the same time, South Korean semiconductor-related exports to Vietnam, Taiwan and Singapore have increased significantly.

In 2021, more than half of South Korea's trade was conducted with China, the United States, Japan, Vietnam and Taiwan — accounting for 23.9 per cent, 13.4 per cent, 6.7 per cent, 6.4 per cent and 3.8 per cent of South Korea's total trade respectively. In the first nine months of 2022, China's share decreased the most, close to 1.9 per cent. The decline of Chinese–South Korean trade is one of the most important reasons for its trade deficit.

Debt-Laden Italy Lashes Out at Crazy ECB After Rate Hike

BRUSSELS (Dispatches) - Three senior Italian ministers from Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni's new right-wing government lashed out at the European Central Bank (ECB), labeling as "baffling" and "crazy" a decision to hike borrowing costs that raised the financial pressure on one of the euro zone's most indebted countries.

The minister took aim after the ECB on Thursday raised its benchmark rate by 50 basis points (bps) as widely expected and signaled further increases ahead while laying out plans to reduce its bond purchases.

As that message drove Italian borrowing costs higher on financial markets on Friday, policymakers at the bank lined up to reinforce expectations that euro zone rates would continue to rise in an effort to tame stubbornly high inflation.

In unusually stark comments likely to fuel concerns abroad about eurosceptical tendencies within Meloni's right-wing government, Deputy Prime Minister Salvini branded the ECB's conduct "unbelievable, baffling, worrying."

Formed in October, Meloni's government is also holding out on ratifying the euro zone's bailout fund. Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani, also a deputy prime minister, meanwhile said the ECB's moves would harm economic growth, with the fallout for markets and households when inflation in Europe was in his view largely due to the war in Ukraine.

Defense Minister Guido Crosetto, a close ally of Meloni and co-founder of her Brothers of Italy party, said on Twitter that raising interest rates "makes no sense" and called the ECB's move to start winding down its sovereign bond purchases "crazy."

On Thursday Crosetto, alongside a chart showing a widening of the gap between German and Italian borrowing costs, sarcastically thanked ECB President Christine Lagarde for her "Christmas present" of higher rates.

ECB policymakers from across the euro zone defended the bank's decision-making on Friday.

France's central bank governor Francois Villeroy de Galhau said this was needed to bring euro zone inflation, currently at 10%, back to the ECB's 2% target "by the end of 2024 (or) end 2025."

Estonian governor Madis Mueller said rates would probably need to rise more than markets had expected so far, while Finnish central bank chief Olli Rehn said 50 bps hikes were likely at each of its next two meetings.

The ECB has raised the rate it pays on bank deposits from 0.5% in July to 2% on Thursday when it said it expects to raise them further at a steady pace.

It will also, from March, stop replacing some of the 5 trillion euros (\$5.32 trillion) worth of bonds it has bought over the past eight years to stimulate inflation when it was too low.

India Rupee Settlement Mechanism Draws Interest From More Nations



NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - India's rupee trade settlement mechanism, a means of using rupees instead of dollars and other big currencies for international transactions, is attracting interest from more countries.

Tajikistan, Cuba, Luxembourg and Sudan have begun talking to India about using the mechanism, according to two sources and an official document reviewed by Reuters. It has already been used by Russia following the imposition of sanctions on Moscow over the Ukraine war.

The government is looking to bring countries that are short of dollars into the mechanism, said a government official and an industry source aware of the development. The sources declined to be named, as the matter is confidential.

The four countries have shown interest in opening special rupee accounts, called vostro accounts, but partner banks in India have not yet provided those facilities, documents showed. Opening of these accounts needs approval from the Reserve Bank of India.

Mauritius and Sri Lanka have also shown interest, and have seen their special vostro accounts approved by the RBI, documents showed.

India's central bank has given approval to banks to open 12 vostro for trade in rupees with Russia, according to the document. Six other accounts, including five for trade with Sri Lanka and one for trade with Mauritius have been authorised, the same document showed.

Queries sent to the federal finance ministry, commerce ministry and RBI remained unanswered.

India continues to discuss denomination of trade in rupees with larger trading partners, including key oil suppliers Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates.

Iran, Nicaragua FMs Sign Comprehensive Cooperation Document

TEHRAN (MNA) – In a meeting held on Sunday, the Iranian and Nicaraguan foreign ministers signed a comprehensive cooperation document between the two countries.

Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian received his Nicaraguan counterpart, Denis Moncada, on Sunday at the venue of the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

During the meeting, the Iranian and Nicaraguan foreign ministers signed a comprehensive cooperation document.

Earlier in September 2022 on the sidelines of the 77th session of the United Nations General Assembly, the two diplomats held talks to review the latest developments in bilateral relations between the two countries.



Japan Tax Reform to Target Low-Emission Cars, Shift to Investment

TOKYO (Dispatches) - Japan will extend tax breaks on low-emission cars and seek to shift its massive household savings into investment in the government's annual tax code revision approved by the ruling coalition.

The government will also raise corporate, income and tobacco taxes to pay for a scheduled doubling of Japan's defense spending to 2% of gross domestic product (GDP) by 2027 - a response to an increasingly assertive China and North Korea's missile launches.

Below are key changes under the revised tax code, which will take effect in the next fiscal year beginning in April 2023, upon approval by parliament.

Japan will extend tax breaks on low-emission cars past the end of 2023, while increasing the required level of emissions reduction for eligible vehicles in several stages from 2024. The revision, to remain in place until April 2026, will cover half of all new automobiles.

The government will also exclude gasoline-powered cars beginning in 2025 from tax cuts that were granted to the automobile sector to help it overcome supply constraints.

Under his flagship "new capitalism" initiative aimed at redistributing income, Prime Minister Fumio Kishida has sought to shift Japan's 2 quadrillion yen (\$14.52 trillion) in household assets away from savings and into investment.

As part of this initiative, the government will make permanent a program that offers tax breaks for households' stock investments. Specifically, it will triple the limit on investments eligible for tax breaks from 2024.

The capital gains tax rate is uniform across income brackets in Japan, unlike the income tax, which is progressive.

As part of a symbolic effort to address income disparities, the government in 2025 will apply an additional tax to 200 to 300 individuals who earn an annual income of more than 3 billion yen from investments in stocks and real estate.



Kishida's administration has stressed the need to nurture more start-ups that could give a boost to Japan's anaemic economic growth.

The government will expand preferential tax breaks for retail investors when they buy and sell stocks in start-up firms.

Profits from the sale of start-up shares will be exempt from income tax if they are reinvested in other venture businesses.

Iran Hosting Millions of Migrants

TEHRAN (IRNA) - The Islamic Republic of Iran has warmly welcomed millions of migrants and refugees in recent decades in particular following the U.S.-led invasion of regional countries, which forced people to leave their homelands.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) designated December 18 as International Migrants Day. The total number of refugees throughout the globe amounts to about 270 million, consisting of 3.6 percent of the world's population.

For years, Iran has been hosting a great number of refugees and migrants from Afghanistan and Iraq.

The first wave of migration of Iraqi nationals to Iran dates back to 1980 when Saddam Hussein's Baathist regime forced thousands of people of Iranian origin to leave the Arab country. This second wave of migration happened when the then-Iraqi regime started a crackdown on Shia movements in southern Iran.

When it comes to Afghanistan, there have been four rounds of mass migration of Afghan refugees to Iran in terms of historical developments.

The first wave of migration from Afghanistan to Iran happened in 1979 concurrent with the aggression of the Soviet Union on Afghanistan, the second one was amid the fall of the Afghan government in 1990, the third one was in 2001 when the U.S. invaded Afghanistan, and the fourth wave happened as the result of the collapse of Ashraf Ghani's government in August 2021.

Now the number of Afghan migrants and refugees in Iran amounts to more than five million people.

Ali Bahreini, the Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nation and other international organizations in Geneva, emphasized that over 700 thousand Afghan pupils and 58 thousand university students are studying at Iranian public schools and universities and that the Islamic Republic has provided the Afghan migrants with public health insurances and vaccinations.

It is worth mentioning that the Islamic Republic of Iran hosts millions of migrants and asylum-seekers, while the country is suffering from illegal and unilateral sanctions imposed by the US and its allies.

Britain Takes Fight to Restore Investor Faith Into 2023

LONDON (Dispatches) - Major investors are rethinking their support for Britain's economy following months of political turmoil and persistent Brexit uncertainties, as experts predict its recovery from a global recession will be slow and painful.

While governments worldwide are grappling with high inflation and low growth, UK policymakers are still rebuilding fiscal and political credibility following the brief, chaotic premiership of Liz Truss.

Top financial industry figures say that even with Truss gone, a tight labour market, low business investment and weak exports mean the economy will lag peers next year. Worries about growth are leading some investors to limit their holdings of the pound and British debt.

"For the time being, we think the risks are too high compared to the rewards," said Vincent Mortier, chief investment officer at Amundi, Europe's largest fund manager, which manages 1.9 trillion euros (\$1.98 trillion) in assets.

Foreign investors have traditionally been attracted by Britain's strong rule of law, stable governance and thriving financial and professional services sector. But an open economy means any change in perception can have a large impact.

The fact that Truss - elected by her party, not the country - could pile pressure on the Bank of England and sow mayhem in markets, has heaped scrutiny on Britain's politics and finances.

Her replacement by ex-finance minister Rishi Sunak calmed UK assets, but investors are still brooding over the near-collapse of pension funds and how close Britain came to a financial disaster entirely of its own making.

UK equity funds saw their second-biggest monthly outflows on record in November, data from funds network Calastone shows, a sign investors remain wary since the September crash.

Sterling remains down 9% against a strong U.S. dollar and 3.5% lower versus the euro in what is set to be its worst year since the Brexit vote roiled markets in 2016.

Like other governments, Britain - which plans to raise just over 300 billion pounds, mostly by selling bonds in



financial year 2023/24 - has seen borrowing costs rise sharply in 2022.

The benchmark 10-year gilt yield is now above 3%, up more than 200 basis points - in line with U.S. and German yields, but making 2022 the worst year for UK government debt since 1994.

The Bank of England's sales of bonds from its balance sheet will put further pressure on gilts prices by increasing supply.

Britain is expected to endure a protracted recession, with official forecasts pointing to a 1.4% contraction next year. In March, before the full impact of the Ukrainian war was felt, the projection was for 1.8% growth.

Ratings agency Moody's sees UK government debt remaining above 100% of gross domestic product for years. Saker Nusseibeh, CEO, International at Federated Hermes, which managed \$669 billion in assets at Dec. 31, said Truss's botched plan for Britain to borrow its way out of its slow growth rut had inflicted heavy reputational damage overseas.

But he told Reuters that Truss deserved credit for acknowledging something radical needed to happen to halt years of stagnant growth.

"While the government attends to fixing past problems, the focus on the big picture long-term is missing from the rhetoric right now," said Nusseibeh, calling for stronger trade ties with the United States and European Union, which Britain left in 2020.

TS Lombard economist Dario Perkins, credited with coining the term "moron premium" to describe the repricing of UK assets under Truss, told Reuters nobody knew how to "fix the UK today".

"I think most investors realise that Brexit has been a sort of disaster and that the Bank of England can't really solve the problems we face," he said.

When former BoE Governor Mark Carney warned in 2016 that Britain was reliant on the "kindness of strangers", foreign direct investment (FDI) represented nearly half the net inflows of funds from abroad.

In the latest data, up to the second quarter of this year, FDI represented more than half the net outflow - a result of strong UK investment abroad but weak inward investment too. The data may also be subject to pandemic-related disruption.

"The UK does look and feel like it's a different bet for international investors than it did 10 years ago," Vivek Paul, UK chief investment strategist at the BlackRock Investment Institute, part of the \$10 trillion money manager, told Reuters.

Britain has increasingly financed its enormous current account deficit by selling financial services and bonds to the world, rather than attracting FDI into UK companies.

There are also concerns about how much companies in Britain are prepared to invest in equipment, buildings and staff training to spur growth from the bottom up.

Its business investment performance now sits 6% below its level in mid-2016 as of the second quarter of 2022 - compared to increases of 23% for France, 19% for the United States and 4% for Germany, according to a Reuters analysis of OECD data. That underperformance on investment means productivity is lagging, with the Confederation of Business Industry expecting output per worker to be 2% below pre-pandemic levels by end-2024. It has warned of "a lost decade of growth".

Iran, Ivory Coast to Sit for 2nd Joint Meeting Soon

TEHRAN (IP) - The ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran to Ivory Coast announced the holding of the second meeting of the joint commission of Tehran and Yamoussoukro in the near future.

Ivory Coast is a country in West Africa and nearly 43% of its people are Muslims.

The authorities of the Islamic Republic of Iran have held several meetings with African authorities in recent months in order to expand relations.

The ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the Ivory Coast, Amir-Hossein Nikbin, announced plans to hold the second meeting of the joint commission of the two countries in the near future.

According to the Ministry of Cooperatives, Labor and Social Welfare, in a meeting to review the ways of development and expansion of trade and commercial relations, Nikbin said: "The continuous holding of the joint commission is a suitable platform for the development of economic cooperation and the conclusion of a memorandum of understanding, agreement and commercial contract."

Nikbin added: "Abidjan port in Ivory Coast is the second largest port in Africa and the connection point for exports to West African countries, which should be used well."

The ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran to Ivory Coast noted: "There are suitable fields for cooperation in the pharmaceutical fields for export and registration. In this context, the capacities of the Red Crescent in Ivory Coast should be used."

Nikbin went on to say: "There are also good capacities for cooperation in various fields, including gas, bitumen, and agriculture."

UN, Int'l Body Or...

FROM PAGE 1

The West and especially the U.S. has for decades tried to weaken the Islamic Republic of Iran and even resorted indirectly to regime change but what it has done has been in vain because Iranians themselves decide their own fate and history shows that

Iranians will not bow down to any pressure and will not surrender under the aliens' pressure and attack.

The Westerners are better to read the history of Iran and learn from the history that Iran is not a land to be easily occupied or surrender and they have to pay dear price for invasion and currently the Islamic Republic of Iran is in a such a position that no hostile country is able to think evil against it because Iranians with their strong determination and advanced weapons will expel any attack and will give a due lesson to anyone who thinks bad against their land.

So the West and predominantly the U.S. is better to stop such useless game and putting under countries under pressure for voting against Tehran in the international bodies and the UN is recommended not to act as the agency of the West because it will lose its reputation among the nations and its fate may be like what happened for League of Nations which had lost its effectiveness and reputation among the nations.

Since the U.S. has failed to bringing Tehran to its knees by threats and sanctions, it has resorted to new game of putting pressure on Iran by using these international bodies but Washington and its allies should know that the ship of Islamic Republic of Iran will sail safely to the shores of prosperity and grandeur and small waves of the enemies will be unable to stop this ship.



Iran to Send at...

FROM PAGE 1

Nahid-2 satellite is one of the satellites with telecommunication communication technology equipped with a thruster and capable of performing maneuvers and orbital corrections, and it can be considered an important step in the construction of low-altitude telecommunication systems.

The Iranian ICT minister further pointed out that other satellites are also in line to be launched.

Referring to the design and construction plan of research and operational satellites, Zarepour added that one of the plans of his ministry is to have at least two satellite launches until the end of the year, information of which will be released to the media later.

Zarepour also said he has no authority on the restrictions placed on the U.S.-based Instagram photo and video sharing platform, and any decision regarding the bans concerns Iran's National Security Council.

He added, "It is up to the National Security Council to decide whether Instagram will be re-opened. I'm not even a member of the body," which is under the authority of the Iranian Interior Ministry.

Iran imposed a ban on Instagram and the WhatsApp messaging services after accusing them of playing a destructive role in a wave of anti-government protests and riots, which have gipped Iran since mid-September.

Tehran is critical of Instagram for taking no action against posts with footage that trains for violence and terror in breach of its own declared terms of use.

Iran says Instagram and WhatsApp need to have representatives in the Islamic Republic in order for Tehran to reconsider lifting the restrictions.

Resistance Groups...

FROM PAGE 1

Israeli occupation soldiers and settlers have been noticeably escalating their attacks against Palestinian civilians in the West Bank and other areas, in an attempt to forcibly expel Palestinians from their land and make way for expanding Israeli settlements.

Israeli forces have also been conducting overnight raids and killings in the northern occupied West Bank, mainly in the cities of Jenin and Nablus, where new groups of Palestinian resistance fighters have been formed.

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

Raducanu Hires Sachs as Coach

LONDON (Dispatches) - Emma Raducanu has appointed Sebastian Sachs as her new coach, British media reported, as the German became the fifth person in 18 months to take the role. Last year's US Open champion Raducanu was watched by Sachs yesterday as she lost to world number two Ons Jabeur on her injury return in an exhibition match in Abu Dhabi. Sachs, 30, guided Belinda Bencic to Olympic gold last year and was earlier part of the coaching team of Victoria Azarenka, a former world number one.

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Curry Relieved to Avoid Surgery on Injured Shoulder

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - Four-time NBA champion Stephen Curry said he was relieved that he won't need surgery on his partially dislocated left shoulder, but had no timetable for his return. Curry suffered the injury when he tried to make a steal during the reigning NBA champion Golden State Warriors' 125-119 loss at Indiana on Wednesday. An MRI on Thursday showed the extent of the damage and confirmed he would not need an operation to repair the shoulder.

Croatia Claim World Cup Bronze After Beating Morocco

DOHA (Dispatches) - Walid Regragui had called it the booby prize, but it was reward enough for Croatia's great overachievers. Silver medallists in 2018, they now pocket the bronze for coming third to mean the greatest World Cup campaign by an African side culminates in a fourth-place finish for Morocco.

If neither scenario felt likely when these teams shared a stalemate to kick off their campaigns in forgettable fashion, a relatively low-pressure match had a liberating effect and afforded rather more entertainment. Perhaps Croatia were stung by the criticisms that, penalty shootouts apart, they had only defeated Canada but they scored two brilliant goals. Josko Gvardiol got the first and perhaps the finest centre-back of the World Cup showed that his tournament should be remembered for much more than being embarrassed by Lionel Messi. The decider came from the outstanding Mislav Orsic; granted only 26 minutes before this - which was still enough time for him to get an assist against Brazil - he suggested he had been underused.

As Zlatko Dalic made five changes, his charges indicated a small country still boasts some strength in depth. Lovro Majer was hugely influential, offering Croatia hope for their midfield when Luka Modric finally gives way. The captain himself ended his World Cup career with an inadvertent assist of sorts for Morocco, but also with some typically elegant passing and a display of doggedness; a prematurely youthful 37, he completed the 90 minutes. Meanwhile, Ivan Perisic's assist at the right end put him joint top of the

If Modric and Perisic could not quite emulate their achievements four years ago, this Croatia side at least equalled the team of 1998, who also lost a semi-final to France and finished third.

But while Croatia were vibrant going forward, showing they can do much more than just play for penalties, Morocco were less resilient in defense than they had been, instead demonstrating the attacking verve they also produced against France.

They were without the trio of defenders Regragui had originally selected against France, but who did not make it out for the second half then, in Nayef Aguerd, Romain Saiss and Noussair Mazrouai. They looked flimsier in their absence and when Jawad El Yamiq went off, Sofyan Amrabat, arguably the best defensive midfielder of



the World Cup, ended up in the back four.

If it felt a private competition for the title of the tournament's best goalkeeper, both conceded in a two-minute spell and Bono could have found his own net before then, a woefully misdirected pass almost resulting in an embarrassing own goal.

When he was defeated, however, there was much to admire about Croatia's opener. It was perhaps the second best free-kick routine of the tournament, after Wout Weghorst's equaliser against Argentina. With Modric looking likely to take a free kick, Majer instead chipped it to Perisic, who headed it back across the box. Gvardiol supplied a similarly precise header.

A second free kick brought a second goal, albeit aided by a dash of fortune. Hakim Ziyech's free kick looped up off Modric and Achraf Dari reacted swiftest to head past Dominik Livakovic from close range.

Dominic was denied a valedictory goal by Bono, the goalkeeper was left clawing at thin air by Orsic, whose audacious curling effort went in via the far post. In the process, the Dinamo Zagreb forward offered himself as a challenger for Perisic's position on the left wing while Croatia's second-highest scorer stood in at left-back.

But Morocco were not subdued; certainly their supporters, who had their last 90 minutes of whistling for this World Cup, were not muted. Youssef En-Nesyri had three chances to equalise, glancing a header just wide, being denied by a terrific save by Livakovic, and heading over deep in stoppage time. They had a series of penalty appeals and Gvardiol was needed to excel. While Mateo Kovacic almost added a third for Croatia, they got the third that mattered on the day: third place, and Modric could bow out with another medal.

Kilde Wins At Val Gardena to Extend Lead

VAL GARDENA (Dispatches) - Aleksander Aamodt Kilde continued his dominance of alpine skiing downhill racing after winning at Val Gardena to claim his fourth victory of the season.

Reigning downhill champion Kilde finished top of the pile with a time of two minutes and 2.35 seconds in the Italian Dolomites.

His third win in four downhill races extended to 89 points his lead in the discipline over Marco Odermatt.

The 30-year-old Kilde finished 0.35sec ahead of unfortunate French veteran Johan Clarey, who was denied his first ever World Cup win at the age of 41.

Clarey, who took downhill silver at the last Winter Olympics, was hoping for a historic win on the weekend his country contend the football World Cup final after topping the times with 13 runs completed.

But he finished second, 0.07sec ahead of third-placed Italian Mattia Casse who found his way to his first ever World Cup podium late on.

World Cup champion Odermatt was 0.92sec off the pace in seventh, allowing Norwegian Kilde to also cut his Swiss rival's lead in the overall standings to 111 points.

Woods Says Time With Son Priority Over Recovery

MIAMI (Dispatches) - Fifteen-times major winner Tiger Woods said he did not care whether competing in this weekend's PNC Championship would set back his recovery from injury, so long as it means he can compete alongside his son Charlie.

Woods withdrew ahead of this month's Hero World Challenge after developing plantar fasciitis and told reporters at the Ritz-Carlton Golf Club in Orlando, Florida, that progress was slow.

"I can practice. I just can't walk," said Woods. "It's just one of those things where I need rest and I haven't exactly been doing that."

While he conceded that the injury could impact his plans for 2023, he insisted that competing alongside his 13-year-old son was his top priority - even if it means he may spend more time recovering later.

"I don't really care about that," said Woods. "Being there with and alongside my son is far more important, and get to have a chance to have this experience with him is far better than my foot being a little creaky."

The pair finished second in the 36-hole tournament a year ago to twice major winner John Daly and his son, John Daly II, in what was Woods' first competitive golf just 10 months after a devastating car accident that nearly cost him his leg.

He produced a comeback for the ages when he made the cut at the Masters just months later, an extraordinary achievement despite finishing near the bottom of the leaderboard.

"It's been a lot harder than people probably imagine," said Woods, who struggled at the British Open before missing the cut in July.

"There's some of the players who are very close to me know what I've kind of gone through, and they're the ones that keep encouraging me to back off a little bit.

"But that's not really in my nature. My nature is trying to get better."

The sight of Charlie on the course at Friday's pro-am dazzled fans, who could not help but notice the uncanny similarities between father and son, from swing to mannerisms.



The 35-year-old has been named recipient of the Arthur Ashe Humanitarian Award in recognition of his gesture.

Murray's Ukraine Pledge Nets \$630,000

PARIS (Dispatches) - Former world number one Andy Murray said his pledge to donate all of his season's prize money to humanitarian relief in war-ravaged Ukraine netted \$630,000.

Three-time major winner Murray decided in February that his on-court earnings in 2022 would be donated to UNICEF projects in Ukraine following the Russian invasion.

"When Russia invaded Ukraine everyone was very worried about what it would mean. When all the images on the news showing what was happening to families began pouring in, it was devastating," Murray wrote in an essay posted on atptour.com.

"Houses were bombed and families were displaced. Young children were affected by this, with many injured and in some cases dying. I wasn't sure what I could do to help.

"Shortly after I decided that from Indian Wells onwards, I would donate my prize money for the rest of the season to UNICEF's humanitarian response - the final total was just over \$630,000."

Russian players, as well as those from ally Belarus, were banned from Wimbledon this year. However, they are allowed to keep playing in ATP and WTA tournaments although not under their national flags.

Zakir Hits Ton for Bangladesh But India Sniff Win

CHITTAGONG (Dispatches) - India broke through tough resistance from Bangladesh including a century by Zakir Hasan on his debut to be within four wickets of victory on day four of the first Test.

Set a colossal target of 513 runs in Chittagong, Bangladesh reached 272-6 at the close, still needing 241 runs, with skipper Shakib Al Hasan on 40 and Mehidy Hasan on nine.

Earlier opener Zakir put on a 124-run opening stand together with Najmul Hossain, a record against India, the pair having hung on in the final session of day three and to lunch on day four.

But in the second session, Umesh Yadav got the breakthrough and ended their stand when Najmul edged the ball into the slips.

Virat Kohli initially dropped it at first slip but wicketkeeper Rishabh Pant dived to his left to grab the deflection and Najmul departed for 67.

Axar Patel, who was the pick of India's bowlers on the fourth day with 3-50, soon grabbed India's second wicket bowling Yasir Ali for five.

Kuldeep Yadav removed danger man Liton Das for 19 before Zakir swept Axar for a four to bring up his debut Test hundred.

But Zakir, only the fourth Bangladeshi to achieve the feat, scored no more runs and fell for 100 in the final session when Ravichandran Ashwin made him his only wicket so far in the Test.

Zakir played a defensive shot but could manage only an inside edge, which took a deflection off his pad to Kohli at slip.

"I only tried to bat as long as possible since we were chasing a big total," Zakir said after his 224-ball ton with 13 fours and one six.



Goggia Dominates Downhill

ST. MORITZ (AFP) - Sofia Goggia returned from overnight surgery on broken fingers to crush the competition in the second women's World Cup downhill race in Saint Moritz.

The Italian broke two fingers on the way to second place in the downhill the day before and travelled to Milan for an operation.

She returned to Saint Moritz in time for the start of the weekend's second race and, with her left hand taped to her ski pole, flew down the course in 1min 28.85sec.

"Yesterday it was broken, today it was already fixed," Goggia said after claiming her third downhill win of the season 0.43sec ahead of Slovenia's Ilka Stuhec with Germany's Kira Weidle third at 0.52sec.

"I'm really happy today," she continued.

"If I'm here today and I'm doing this interview it's just because I have to say huge thanks to the people who helped me out here yesterday, from the doctor to the driver who brought me."

Goggia raced with a plate and nine screws inserted in the left hand and also had holes cut into her glove.

She still skied a typically aggressive run in sunny conditions after Friday's fog lifted on the full-length Corviglia course and won her 11th victory in the last 16 World Cup downhill races she has competed in.

"I couldn't push at the start gate and this is why I didn't have the gap of the training runs, but half a second is enough," she said of the victory margin. "Also one hundredth of a second is enough."

"I really understand that it was a bit risky, but I said to myself that after Beijing (when she recovered from a knee injury to win silver), I could endure everything and this is exactly what I did."

