Health Ministry Announced on Monday That the Number of Deaths From the COVID-19 Pandemic in Iran Stayed Unchanged at 144,664 With Another Zero Death Day Over the Past 24 Hours



The 22nd International Home
Appliance Manufacturers
Exhibition, Also Known as HAMEX,
Is Scheduled to Be Held at
Tehran's International Fairground
On December 20-23

VOL. XXVIII, No. 7666 TEHRAN Price 50,000 Rials

www.irannewsdaily.com

TUESDAY DECEMBER 20, 2022 - AZAR 29, 1401

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Mossad Spy Network Busted

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's Intelligence Ministry has identified and arrested members of a spy network who were planning to sabotage the country's defense industry through front companies and security marketing.

Iran's Tasnim news agency reported on Sunday that Iran's intelligence forces uncovered a plot by a Mossad espionage network to gather information from Iranian knowledge-based companies that cooperate with Iran's defense industries.

The Israeli regime's Mossad spy agency hired data broker Frank Genin, who introduced himself as the chief of a spare parts manufacturer company and was able to contact several Iranian companies and employees, the report said.

The Mossad agent then invited his coworkers to a seminar in Malaysia, where he introduced them to another Mossad agent, Hadrien Lavaux.

As a cover-up, Lavaux has been the managing director of Triple A Industries, an Aerospace advanced alloys and composites company that was established in Singapore in 2017. Since then, the company started communicating with Iranian companies that provide carbon fibers, resin, and other metal alloys.

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Iran Offers China-Style Strategic Deal for India

NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - Iran has offered India a strategic cooperation pact on the lines of a deal it signed with China in 2021, two people aware of the matter said, as the sanctions-hit country tries to attract investments in its energy and infrastructure sectors.

Details of the Iran-China deal have remained under wraps. However, according to reports in the international media last year, Beijing will invest close to \$400 billion in Iran's infrastructure and energy sector under a 25-year cooperation agreement. In return, Tehran will provide China with a steady supply of discounted Iranian oil. The deal was seen as a major expansion of Beijing's footprint in West Asia and an effort by Iran to court non-Western sources for critical investments.

Iran has offered a similar deal to India to attract Indian investments and develop its transport and energy infrastructure, the people cited above said, adding that Ali Bagheri Kani, Iran's deputy foreign minister confirmed the offer during an interaction with a group of experts during his visit to New Delhi last month.

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Iran Ready to Cooperate With Neighbors in All Fields



IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Foreign Minister says that Tehran is ready to hold a joint meeting of foreign and defense ministers between Iran and the Persian Gulf states and other neighboring countries.

Speaking at the third edition of the Tehran Dialogue Forum (TDF), Hossein Amirabdollahian said that the policy of neighborhood is the centerpiece of the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran's foreign policy.

The administration uses all its might to build trust and strengthen the foundations of friendship with its neighbors in the region, he added.

The foreign minister noted that Iran has always been one of the foundations of stability and security in the

region and the frontline of the fight against ISIL terrorism, adding that Iran has always been at the forefront of fighting all kinds of terrorism in the region and the world.

Iran is ready to build trust and cooperate in all dimensions with its neighbors in the region and the Persian Gulf

Iran is ready to build trust and cooperate in all dimensions with its neighbors in the region and the Persian Gulf region to establish security and stability in the region, he underlined.

Tehran is ready to hold a joint meeting of foreign and defense ministers between Iran and the Persian Gulf states and other neighboring countries, Amirabdollahian said.

Stating that the policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran is to develop relations with its neighbor, he added that Ebrahim Raisi's administration is ready to focus more on the development of regional and international cooperation through constructive and forward-looking dialogue.

Iran has received a large number of Afghan refugees in the last year while it is under the most severe sanctions, said the Iranian foreign minister.

Iran believes that stable security in Afghanistan is possible only through the formation of an inclusive government, he added.

Iran has always welcomed China's regional cooperation with the countries of the region, said Amirabdollahian, adding that in recent years, Tehran and Beijing have raised the level of their relations to long-term strategic cooperation. "Last week, two Iranian and Chinese representatives held talks in Tehran to follow up on the implementation of the joint comprehensive program of strategic cooperation between the two countries."

Referring to the joint statement issued by the PGCC member states with the presence of China during Xi's visit to Saudi Arabia, he said Iran announced its displeasure and protest through diplomatic channels in an official form and sent an official note to the Chinese side.

Emphasizing the continuation of strategic cooperation with China, he noted that Iran won't allow anyone to comment on its territorial integrity.

The third Tehran Dialogue Forum (TCF) has kicked off in Tehran, with officials and representatives from different countries across the world taking part.

This year's initiative, which kicked off on Monday morning, is focused on the policy of the Islamic Republic toward its neighbors and its approach to friendship and trust-building. The forum is attended by nearly 70 officials and representatives of think tanks and research centers from 36 countries.

Meanwhile in the forum expressing Iran's readiness to return to its JCPOA obligations, the head of Iran's Foreign Policy Strategic Council said that for decades, Iran has been after a region free of nuclear weapons.

Kamal Kharrazi spoke about the recent development in Iran.

What happened in Iran in recent months was a hybrid war, Kharrazi said, adding that many foreign media, intelligence agencies, and terrorist operations were involved in this hybrid war.

Disturbing of public opinion is one of the features of this hybrid war, which is called cognitive war, he noted. "You have witnessed how some countries including France, the UK, and the US deal with riots," he said and stated that Iran is no exception.

He also referred to IAEA technical team's visit to Tehran, saying, "Now Iran is ready to return to its JCPOA obligations. Many problems have been solved so far except for the safeguard issues, and we hope that these issues will be resolved during this visit."

For decades, Iran has been after a region free of nuclear weapons, he said, stressing that Israel's nuclear weapons should also be destroyed and it should join safeguard.

Today, Iran has the necessary nuclear capability, but the country has no intention to build nuclear weapons, he underlined. Meanwhile on the sidelines of the event Amirabdollahian said that diplomats of the European Union and Iran seriously follow up on consultations on the resumption of the 2015 nuclear agreement.

Amirabdollahian said in a press conference that his Deputy Foreign Minister for Political Affairs Ali Bagheri Kani and Deputy Secretary-General European Union Enrique Mora as well as he himself and High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell continue consultations.

Borrell and Mora are going to visit Jordan concurrent with the arrival of the Iranian delegation to the second Baghdad Conference on December 20, the Iranian top diplomat said.

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Iran Eyes Rise in Trade with Kazakhstan

TEHRAN (Tasnim) – An Iranian deputy foreign minister called for the expansion on non-oil trade exchanges between Iran and Kazakhstan, including via the export of technical and engineering services.

The Headquarters for the Coordination of Foreign Economic Relations of Iran held a meeting on the "obstacles and approaches of Iranian companies exporting technical and engineering services and a review of the latest economic ties with Kazakhstan".

The meeting was chaired by Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister for Economic Diplomacy Mahdi Safari.

In the meeting, the Iranian diplomat described exporting technical and engineering services as a highly important move that have the potential to earn foreign currency for Iran.

Safari also noted that banking restrictions on issuing guarantees poses one of the most important hurdles to the export of technical and engineering services to neighboring countries and those beyond the region.

He stated that if the obstacle to the issuance of guarantees is removed, the pace of exporting technical and engineering services will increase, the Foreign Ministry's website reported.

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Iran Economy Expanded3.6% in September Quarter

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Central Bank of Iran (CBI) Governor Ali Salehabadi says the country's economy grew by 3.6% in the quarter to September 22.

Salehabadi announced the figure in a news conference where he dismissed criticism about CBI's failure to control rising foreign currency prices in Iran.

He said that Iran's economy had expanded by 3% in March-September with oil sector being the best performer among the economic sectors with a 6.6% growth reported over the period.

The top banker said other sectors of the Iranian economy, including manufacturing and mining, agriculture and services sectors, had also expanded over the two quarters to late September.

The remarks come days after the CBI dismissed rumors suggesting there would be an imminent change in the bank's leadership after Salehabadi was criticized in economic circles for his failure to control foreign currency prices.

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Indian Tea Exporters To Iran in a Quandary as Orders Dry Up

NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - Apart from tea, Iranian buyers haven't been registering for imports of basmati rice from India too, over the last many weeks.

Export of tea to Iran stood at Rs 515 crore in January-September 2022, up 7.3% from the year ago period.

Tea exporters to Iran, one of the largest markets, are facing uncertainties as the buyers from the West Asian country have stopped signing fresh contracts.

After a gradual drop of exports for the last two

years due to payment issues, shipping container shortages and the pandemic, year shipments of Indian tea to Iran was rising till a weeks ago, on the back of improvement in container availability and easing of freight rates. Apart from tea, Iranian buyers haven't been registering for imports of basmati rice from India too, over the last many weeks.

Export of tea to Iran stood at Rs 515 crore in January-September 2022, up 7.3% from the year ago period. There is a lack of clarity over the reasons for Iranian buyers' reluctance to get into new contracts with Indian exporters. Importers in Iran have to get proforma registrations from the authorities before shipments are allowed.

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President Felicitates Qatari Emir on National Day

TEHRAN (IRNA) - President Ebrahim Raisi, in a messagey, congratulated the Qatari Emir and people on the country's national day.

In his message to Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, the Iranian president wished health and success for the Emir and prosperity for the Qatari nation.

President Raisi expressed hope that in the light of religious and cultural common grounds, the two countries will witness further cooperation in different politico-economic and cultural areas as well as increased international and regional cooperation to help promote peace and stability.

Cooperation Between Friendly Nations Can Thwart U.S.-Led Pressures

TEHRAN (PressTV) - President Ebrahim Raisi says promotion of cooperation between friendly countries can thwart U.S.-led pressures against independent nations.

Raisi made the remarks during a meeting with Nicaraguan Foreign Minister Denis Moncada Colindres in Tehran.

He decried the U.S. and the West's exploitation of issues such as human rights against independent and resilient countries, saying such "new plots" have already failed due to Washington's miscalculations.

He said Iran and Nicaragua have good relations and positive, constructive cooperation in international organizations, adding that resistance against US hostilities and pressures is among the factors that led to enhanced cooperation between the two countries.

Raisi noted that the great potential of Iran and Latin American countries is a suitable ground for the expansion of their ties.



For his part, the Nicaraguan foreign minister hailed Iran's resistance against US pressures and sanctions and highlighted the importance of increasing Managua's trade exchanges and economic cooperation with Tehran.

He urged the two countries to implement the comprehensive plan for economic and trade cooperation between Iran and Nicaragua, which was signed by the two countries' foreign ministers earlier in the day.

Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian and his visiting Nicaraguan counterpart signed the document in Tehran on Sunday.

Three Basij Members Martyred



IRGC Officer,

In Southeast Iran

ΓΕΗRAN (PressTV) - A senior officer of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) and three members of the Basij volunteer force have been killed in clashes with terrorists, who opened fire on them in an area in the country's southeastern province of Sistan and Baluchestan close to the border with Pakistan.

The IRGC Ground Force's Quds Base said in a statement on Monday that Second Lieutenant Mohammad Gouradzi and three Basij members, identified as Rahim Bakhshparaki, Hamidreza Abedi and Mahmoud Nikkhaah, lost their lives when IRGC forces engaged in a fierce exchange of fire with counterrevolutionary elements in the Saravan region of the province.

The statement added that the terrorists had to flee toward Pakistan after they were confronted by the powerful presence of IRGC forces.

Sistan and Baluchestan province, which borders Pakistan, has witnessed several terror attacks targeting both civilians and security forces over the past years.

Terrorist groups carrying out attacks against Iranian interests in southeastern and southwestern parts of the country have known links to a number of repressive regimes in the Persian Gulf region.

Iran's security forces have invariably protected the border areas and managed to repel almost all terrorist attacks by foreign-backed anti-revolution elements across the country.

Last month, a top IRGC commander warned of nemies' plots to create chaos in Sistan and Baluchestar province, urging vigilance in the face of such efforts.

Addressing a group of senior Shia and Sunni clerics and elders of Sistan and Baluchestan on November 10, Brigadier General Mohammad Pakpour, commander of the IRGC's Ground Force, said the enemies would commit every crime and carry out whatever move to disrupt security and create chaos in the province. He added that unity among Shia and Sunni clerics would restore peace to the province and thwart enemies' plots to hinder progress and development by spreading insecurity.

Iraq Ready for Mutual CPD Travel System With Iran

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iraq's ambassador to Tehran Nasir Abdul-Muhsin said that his government is fully ready to help reduce the costs of land travel between the two countries by issuing Carnet de Passages en Douane (CPD) documents that allows passengers to easily import their vehicles and other valuable items.

Abdul-Muhsin made the announcement in a Monday meeting with head of the Touring & Automobile Club of the Islamic Republic of Iran (TACI) Mohammad-Hossein Sufi in Tehran.

He appreciated TACI's efforts at international organizations to revive the CPD system between Iran and Iraq after years of war and insecurity in Iraq, adding that Iraq is fully ready to cooperate with Iran in this respect. Sufi, for his part, explained TACI's efforts including the implementation of the CPD system to facilitate land travel between Iran and Iraq.

Tehran Blasts CIA Chief's Claims

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman has dismissed recent claims by the head of the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) accusing Iran of cooperation with Russia in the war in Ukraine, saying such allegations are part of the "propaganda war" against the Islamic Republic.

Nasser Kanaani made the remark after CIA Director William Burns said Washington was concerned the growing cooperation between Russia and Iran would become a "full-fledged defense partnership" between the two sides.

The CIA director also claimed that the nascent defense partnership between Tehran and Moscow has affected the battlefield in Ukraine.

"American officials, in continuation of their baseless political claims and illegal measures against the Islamic Republic of Iran, are questioning the conventional defense and military cooperation between Iran and Russia," Kanaani said.

"This propaganda war by the Americans, which is based on lies and deception, is carried out with various goals, including exerting political pressure on the Islamic Republic of Iran, fueling Iranophobia and covering up their warmongering attitude," he added.

As it has been stated many times, he said, the cooperation between Iran and Russia in various fields, including defense, is expanding within the framework of shared interests, is in line with the international rights and obligations of the two countries, and is not against any third country.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran, in accordance with its national interests and while observing international laws and regulations, acts independently in regulating its foreign relations and seeks no permission from anyone," Kanaani added.

Iran-Made Search Engine to Help Persian-Speaking Users on Internet

TEHRAN (IRNA) - An Iran-made search engine has been developed to provide new capabilities to Persian-speaking users, especially those active on social media platforms.

A senior official at Toorin Tan Company, which has developed the search engine, said on Monday that the application can serve as an appropriate supplement to foreign search engines on the internet.

Mehdi Amaani told Iran's Vice Presidency for Science and Technology's website that the Iranian search engine can be used for online and offline searches, adding that

users can easily access updates for the program.

The technician said the engine has other features, including options to speed up updates and to provide users with locally-sourced data and news.

He added that the Iranian search engine also enables users to search content on the internet that have been written in various Iranian dialects, including Kurdish and Luri dialects.

Amaani urged government authorities in Iran to support technology companies to help create more jobs in the country.

Tehran, Kabul Can Cooperate in a Number of Sectors

IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Iran's deputy ambassador, diplomats and representatives of Iranian state and private media met with Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi on Sunday in Kabul to discuss a range of issues including economic relations. In a meeting with Hussain Mortazavi, the deputy ambassador of Iran, other diplomats, officials, and representatives of Iranian media outlets discussed economic, agricultural, and social issues in the two countries, the foreign ministry said.

In the meeting Muttaqi said that Afghanistan and Iran have a lot in common and they can cooperate in the economic, trade and agriculture sectors.

Muttaqi also asked representatives of the media to present the real picture of Afghanistan to the people and world. Representatives of Iranian media described the situation in Afghanistan as good and expressed their determination to portray the current situation in Afghanistan in a realistic manner.

The deputy minister of foreign affairs in a tweet said that the purpose of Iranian media representatives' visit to Afghanistan is to review the situation in the country and reflect it in the media.

72% Rise in Coal Concentrate Output in March-Nov.

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's state mining and metals company IMIDRO says coal concentrate output in its two mines rose by 72% year on year in the eight months to November 21.

An IMIDRO statement published on Sunday said that concentrate output by the company rose to more than 0.526 million metric tons (mt) in the March-November period, up from over 0.305 million mt reported over the same period last year. The statement said a bulk of the output, more than 0.455 million mt, had come from Tabas Coal Mine in eastern Iran while the rest had been supplied from Central Alborz Coal Mine that is located to the north of

the capital Tehran. IMIDRO figures showed that the company's supply of coal concentrate to domestic customers had increased by 60% year on year in the eight months to late November to top over 0.511 million mt.

The company said its coal ore output had also increased by 82% year on year in March-November to reach nearly 1.497 million mt.

Iran has reported a boom in its mining and metals sector since 2018 when the United States imposed sanctions on oil exports from the country. The boom has given Iran an opportunity to diversify its hard currency revenues by relying more on exports of metals and mining products.

The government has also relied on increased activity in the sector to create more jobs for Iran's youth population.

Iran Considering Joint Car **Production with Russia**

TEHRAN (Tasnim) - The Iranian Ambassador to Russia, Kazem Jalali said Tehran is considering the possibility of joint automobile production with Moscow.

He told Russian reporters that the two parties were discussing the issue and that he hoped the plans would be achieved.

Jalali added that Iran's two major manufacturers, Iran Khodro and SAIPA, both of which participated in an auto parts exhibition in Moscow this summer, had also held conversations with Russian partners.

Mohammadreza Najafi-Manesh, the head of the Iranian association of auto parts makers, stated in late November that Moscow and Tehran had inked a \$300 million memorandum of understanding for Iranian car exports to Russia. He indicated that Iran Khodro, the Middle East's largest carmaker, is eyeing the Russian market following the exodus of European, American, and Japanese manufacturers.

According to data from Russia's Autostat agency, there were 10,400 Iran Khodro cars in Russia as of July 2022, which are represented by the Samand model (a Class C sedan), a car based on the Peugeot 405.

Iran Honors Victim of Terror On Occasion of Human Rights Day

TEHRAN (IP) - On the occasion of International Human Rights Day, the daughter of Martyr Sabzalizadeh, the victim of the terrorist attack on the Imam Khomeini Mausoleum, was honored in a ceremony to honor Iranian victims of terror.

Zeinab was only 9 when she heard that her father, Maziar Sabzalizadeh, was martyred in the ISIS terrorist attack on the Imam Khomeini Mausoleum in the south of the Iranian capital of Tehran. Martyr Maziar Sabzalizadeh, the only martyr of the 2017 terrorist attack on Imam Khomeini Mausoleum, was one of the service employees.

Back on 7 June 2017, the Islamic Republic of Iran suffered a hideous terrorist attack on its soil, which killed and injured dozens of people.

The attacks took place on Wednesday morning at the Imam Khomeini Mausoleum just South of Tehran and at the Iranian Parliament or Majlis at the heart of Tehran.

"A father is a hero of a girl's life," says Zeinab with a lump in her throat while recalling those days after five years.

In the ceremony to honor the victim of the ISIS terrorist group, which was held on Monday in Robat Karim city, Tehran province, she added: "A daughter's support is her father who stands behind her like a mountain, but I was deprived of the presence of my dear father who should have been by my side.'

Increasing Share of Knowledge-Based in National Economy to Boost Resistance Economy IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN- The CEO of Persian Gulf Petrochemical Industries Holding says increase in the share of the knowledge-based in the national economy will lead to boost in resistance economy.



Addressing the opening of a conference on the application of new technologies in the petrochemical industry (called Petrofan) in Tehran, Ali Askari said that shaping the culture of innovation in this holding from the worker to expert and manage levels as well as attaching importance to the innovative ideas is very necessary

He then highlighted important actions of this holding with the aim of supporting ideas and knowledge-based companies and said that petrochemical industry is a national advantage that can generate billions of dollars of wealth.

Referring to the Supreme Leader's emphasis regarding the resistance economy, he said that increasing the share of the knowledge-based in the national economy can improve the national resistance economy which is in line with the depicted policy of the Supreme Leader.

Askari went on to say that if the knowledge-based companies and elites find no scene to perform, all will hurt and in this line the ground for maximum presence of the knowledge-based companies in the big industries should be provided because the penetration of these knowledge-based companies in big industries can provide the ground for big economic and scientific developments in the country.

He reiterated that today instead knowledge-based companies run for big companies, the big companies should run for them because any lag in state-of-the-art n the big industries is a serious threat for continuation of profitability and even existence of big industries.

Askari added that Karoun Petrochemical Company is moving towards registering as a knowledge-based company, adding that this move in the holding for other affiliate companies will continue and the holding would become leading one in being knowledge-based.

07:10

Noon (Zohr) 12:01 **Evening (Maghreb)** 17:14 **■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)** 05:40

■ Tomorrow's Sunrise

82. "But, without doubt, I am (also) He that forgives again and again, to those who repent believe, and do right, who,- in fine, are ready to receive true guidance.' 83. (When Moses was up on the Mount, Allah said:) What made thee hasten in advance of thy people, O Moses?"

Surah 20, Ta-ha (82 - 83

Good Things Happen In Iran Refineries

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Oil Minister Javad Owji said the 13th administration has initiated sizable movements in the country's refining industry including quality improvement in Abadan Refinery and all the refineries across the country.

According to ICANA, Owji spoke about the quality improvement of the Iranian refineries: "Fortunately, good things have happened regarding the quality improvement of the refineries in the 13th administration to the point that the quality improvement of the Isfahan Refinery has reached the operational stage and we will soon put this project into operation in the presence of the President so that 15 million liters per day of Euro5 gasoil will be added to the country's diesel production capacity."

Regarding the country's need to invest in the oil and gas sector, he added: "To date, we have signed nearly \$100 billion worth of MoUs and contracts in the upstream and downstream sectors of oil and gas for domestic and foreign investment, of which \$20 billion are contracts, although according to estimates, we need nearly \$250 billion of investment."

The Oil Minister said: "Although some of these investments were made by foreign companies, we also tap the capacity of domestic companies and banks. For example, 7 domestic banks have joined the development of the massive Azadegan field and



we have invited domestic economic heavyweights to join us in the project, too.' Meanwhile the installed capacity of Persian Gulf Petrochemical Industries Company (PGPIC) is planned to hit 46 million tons per year by 2026 from currently 28 mt/y, an official with the holding says.

Hassan Neshanzadeh Moghadam, PGPIC's director of planning and business development, said on Sunday that PGPIC's strategy under the new leadership is to reach Germany's BASF, which is achievable due to the existence of huge feedstock resources and knowledge-based companies in Iran.

Pointing out that Iranian knowledge-based companies are more than a century away from large European companies, he noted that each of them is, nevertheless, competitive in their field.

5 Personnel of HOSCO Become **Evaluators of Excellence Award**

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Manager of Industries Engineering of Hormozgan Steel Company (HOSCO) says five personnel of this company after passing intensive courses in the organizational excellence center of



Industrial Management Institute were chosen as the evaluators for the national award and ambassadors of the organizational excellence of HOSCO.

Ms. Marzieh Hamidi said that in the last Iranian calendar year and in line with the strategic goal "Boosting Organizational Excellence, a project dubbed "Training Excellence Ambassadors" was defined whose main goal was to have approved individuals in the field of organizational excellence ward and since they are themselves evaluators they will have better view and approach regarding the organizational excellence issue and they can guide their organization towards better evaluation. The approved individuals with participating in the evaluation process in the big and reputed organizations can be present as the ambassadors of HOSCO and improve the brand of the company. These people can earn valuable experiences for the company and implementing them through their presence in the evaluation processes in other companies.

These personnel passed different courses in four stages and after passing the tests in September were chosen as the evaluators of the company.

Ms. Hamidi, Seyed Hamzeh Seyed Mohseni, Ali Kharazmi, Ms. Fatemeh Moradi and Mandana Soltani were the HOSO personnel who could pass the courses and to become ambassadors of the company.

LSEZ to Continue Fulfilling Social Responsibilities

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The CEO of Lamerd Special Economic Zone (LSEZ) in the first meeting of the administrative council after his appointment expressed his views and approaches regarding acceleration in growth and development of the Lamerd Special Economic Zone.

Eng. Kourosh Fattahi who was speaking among the board of directors, managers and officials of the energy site of the zone pointed to the existence of capable human resources in Lamerd and noted that he sees all strong points of the town of Lamerd as capacities and all capacities should be used.

He also hinged the development of Lamerd on the growth and development of the LSEZ and noted that development is a collective identity and no one can claim he has by himself been behind the growth and development in the region.

He stipulated that parallel to developing the infrastructures, the zone should act seriously in attracting investment and creating and nourishing the sustainable revenue sources is very important for development and stability of the region.

Fattahi once again reiterated that the zone is determined to continue fulfilling its social responsibility and all should work for turning LSEZ to a big and stable organization.

Persian Gulf Star

Leader in Holding "Passengers of Progress" Camps



lo introduce achievements and capabilities of young experts of the country in the biggest gas condensates refinery of the world, "Passengers of Progress" camps are set up in this refinery in weekly basis. As per report of the public and international relations of the Persian Gulf Star Oil Company, the CEO of the Persian Gulf Star Oil Company stated: "In line with the implementation of the Supreme Leader's orders regarding Jihad of explanation and the important priority of historiography and recounting the achievements of the Islamic system in all areas, including the oil industry, the best solution for disambiguating and identity building for people, especially young people who are exposed to poisoned news feed, is to explain these achievements.

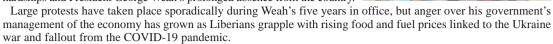
lireza Jafarpour stated that the enemies) conspiracies are to stop the Iranian nation from the path of the peaks of knowledge and progress, and noted: "In this era when the enemies seek to weaken the spirit of the youth who are the future builders of our beloved country, this stratum by raising the practical level and their own evil plan of culture will bring them to destruction."He continued: "Persian Gulf Star Refinery, as the world's largest gas super powers."He said: "In line with the condensate refinery, is considered a national achievement, which was built and launched by the domestic experts of our dear country Iran at the height of the cruel sanctions of global arrogance, and now has a share of more than 40% in the gasoline production is in charge of the country." Jafarpour added: "Before the establishment of this refinery, we were importers of gasoline, and with the increase of hostile sanctions, the enemies sought to create bottlenecks for the entry of gasoline into the country that the youth of this country with the launch of such a refinery not only could destroy their vicious plot but also could reach selfsufficiency in gasoline production and for the first time the country turned into a gasoline exporting country among the



explanation of the Jihad that has taken place in the Persian Gulf Star Refinerv in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Student Basij, weekly camps are being held under the title of "Passengers of Progress" where the visitors get acquainted with achievements of the young experts of the biggest gas condensates refinery of the world."This official stated: "Due to the need to narrate Jihad in the refinery, these camps have been implemented and so far more than 1,500 students have visited this refining star of the country. In the end, he said: "I hope that the future makers of this border and region will be more efficient and successful day by day by following the path of the martyrs and bring glory to Islamic Iran as before."

Liberians Protest Over economic Hardship and President's Absence

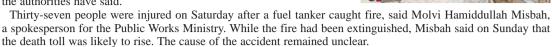
PAYNESVILLE (Dispatches) - More than a thousand people joined a demonstration in a suburb of Liberia's capital, protesting over economic hardships and President George Weah's prolonged absence from the country.



The rally in Monrovia's Paynesville district was organized by a coalition of Liberia's four largest opposition parties, but internal disputes led all but one, the Alternative National Congress (ANC), to pull out at the last minute.



KABUL (Dispatches)- At least 12 people were killed in an accident in the Salang Tunnel, which connects Afghanistan's capital Kabul to its north, the authorities have said.



"When we went inside the tunnel in the morning, we saw bodies that were not recognisable, as they were severely burnt. Women, men and children were among them," Ajab Gul, an eyewitness, told the Afghan Tolo news agency.





BEIJING (Dispatches) - Streets in major Chinese cities were eerily quiet as people stayed home to protect themselves from a surge in COVID-19 cases that has hit urban centers from north to south.

China is in the first of an expected three waves of COVID cases this winter, according to the country's chief epidemiologist, Wu Zunyou. Further waves will come as people follow the tradition of returning en masse to their home areas for the Lunar New Year holiday next month, he said.

China has not reported any COVID deaths since Dec. 7, when it abruptly ended most restrictions key to a zero-COVID tolerance policy following unprecedented public protests. The strategy had been championed by President Xi Jinping.

As part of the easing of the zero-COVID curbs, mass testing for the virus has ended, casting doubt on whether official case numbers can capture the full scale of the outbreak. China reported some 2,097 new symptomatic COVID infections on Dec. 17.

In Beijing, the spread of the highly transmissible Omicron variant has already hit services from catering to parcel deliveries. Funeral homes and crematoriums across the city of 22 million are also struggling to keep up with demand amid staff shortages as workers and drivers call in sick.

At Beijing's largest funeral parlour in Babaoshan, also known for handling the bodies of top Chinese officials and leaders, several hearses a minute could be seen entering on Sunday, while the parking area for private cars was also full.

"Right now it is difficult to book a hearse so many relatives transport the body with their own vehicles," said an employee on condition of anonymity.

Smoke billowed out of crematoriums, where groups of people were gathered to collect the ashes of the deceased. It was not

immediately clear to what extent a rise in COVID-related deaths was responsible.

Social media posts also showed empty subways in the city of Xian in China's northwest, while in Shanghai, the country's commercial hub, there was none of the usual bustle in the run up to the New Year.

"Festive vibes are missing," said a resident who gave her name as Alice. In Chengdu, streets were deserted

but food delivery times were improving, said a resident surnamed Zhang, after services began to adapt to the recent surge in cases.

Getting hold of antigen test kits was still difficult however, she said, explaining that she had been told the kits she ordered ecently had been diverted to hospitals

In Shanghai, authorities said schools should move most classes online from Monday, and in nearby Hangzhou most school grades were encouraged to finish the winter semester early.

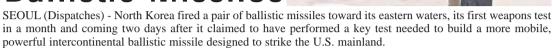
In Guangzhou, those already doing online class as well as pre-schoolers should not prepare for a return to school, said the education bureau.

Speaking at a conference in Beijing on Saturday, chief epidemiologist Wu of the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention said the current outbreak would peak this winter and run in three waves for about three months, according to a state media report of his speech.

The first wave would run from mid-December through mid-January, largely in cities, before a second wave would start from late January to mid-February next year, triggered by the movement of people ahead of the week-long New Year holiday.

China will celebrate Lunar New Year starting on Jan. 21. The holiday normally sees hundreds of millions of people travelling home to spend time with family.





South Korea's military detected the launch of two North Korean ballistic missiles from its northwest Tongchangri area. The missiles flew across the country toward its eastern waters, South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said in a statement.

It said the missiles were fired about 50 minutes apart but gave no further details, like precisely what type of weapons North Korea fired and how far they flew. The Joint Chiefs of Staff said South Korea's military has bolstered its surveillance posture and maintains a readiness in close coordination with the United States.

Nine Iraqi Officers Killed in Suspected IS Attack

KIRKUK (Dispatches) - Gunmen in northern Iraq where remnants of the Islamic State group are active blew up a vehicle carrying policeman before opening fire killing nine, police sources said.

No group immediately claimed responsibility for the attack, one of the deadliest in Iraq in recent months.

The bomb blast in the Kirkuk area hit a vehicle transporting members of Iraq's federal police.

It was followed by "a direct attack with small arms" near the village of Shalal al-Matar, a federal police officer told AFP on condition of anonymity, attributing the assault to IS.

"An assailant has been killed and we are looking for the others," the officer said. Two policemen initially reported as being wounded later died, bringing the total killed to nine.

IS jihadists seized large swathes of Iraqi and Syrian territory in 2014, declaring a "caliphate" where they ruled with brutality before their defeat in late 2017 by Iraqi forces backed by a US-led military coalition.

IS lost its last Syrian bastion, near the Iraqi border, in 2019.

Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani condemned the violence as "cowardly terrorist attack".

Security forces should show "vigilance, carefully inspect the roads and not provide any opportunity for terrorist elements", he said.

The US-led anti-IS coalition continued a combat role in Iraq until December ast year, but roughly 2,500 American soldiers remain in the country to assist in the fight against the jihadists.

IS cells, however, remain active in several areas of Iraq.

On Wednesday, three Iraqi soldiers were killed and three others injured

when a bomb exploded as their patrol vehicle passed through farmland in Tarmiya, a rural municipality located about 30 kilometres (20 miles) north of the capital Baghdad.

Japanese officials said the two missiles fell in the waters between the Korean Peninsula and Japan and that no damage to ships or human injuries have been reported. Japanese Vice Defense Minister Toshiro Ino told reporters that both missiles flew a distance of 500 kilometers (310 miles) at a maximum altitude of 550 kilometers (340 miles). He criticized North Korea for threatening the safety of Japan, the region and the international community.

The Tongchangri area is home to North Korea's Sohae Satellite Launching Ground, where the country in past years launched satellite-carrying long-range rockets in what the U.N. called a disguised test of ICBM technology.

North Korea said Friday it tested a "high-thrust solid-fuel motor" for a new strategic weapon in the Sohae facility the previous day, a development that experts say could allow it to possess a more mobile, harder-to-detect arsenal of intercontinental ballistic missiles that can reach the U.S. mainland.

Qatar Says Inaccurate Information in Belgian Corruption Probe

DOHA (Dispatches) - A Qatari official has said that a Belgian investigation into an alleged attempt to influence the European Parliament relied on "inaccurate" information and could "negatively" impact relations between the two countries.

The statement on Sunday from a diplomat of Qatar's mission to the European Union reiterated a previous rejection of attempts to associate the Persian Gulf country with misconduct.

"Qatar was not the only party named in the investigation, yet our country has been exclusively criticized and attacked," the statement said. "We have observed this week's selective condemnation of our country with great alarm.'

According to media reports, Moroccan interests also face scrutiny in the investigation.

The diplomat added: "It is deeply disappointing that the Belgian government made no effort to engage with our government to establish the facts once they became aware of the allegations."

Four people - including Eva Kaili, a Greek European Parliament vice president - have been charged in Belgium after investigators said a series of raids uncovered about 1.5 million euros (\$1.59m).

Prosecutors said the money was part of an influence campaign by a Persian Gulf state, which various media outlets later identified as Qatar, the country currently hosting the 2022 World Cup.

Last week, the European Parliament voted to suspend Qatari representatives' access to the body. Members also paused legislative work related to Qatar, including a visa waiver for Qataris and Kuwaitis travelling to the bloc and an EU-Qatar aviation agreement.

The Qatari diplomat condemned those moves on Sunday, saying they were premature.

"The decision to impose such a discriminatory restriction that limits dialogue and cooperation on Qatar before the legal process has ended will negatively affect regional and global security cooperation, as well as ongoing discussions around global energy, poverty and security," the diplomat said.

The statement also highlighted the "close" relationship between Oatar and Belgium.

"Our nations cooperated during the COVID-19 pandemic, and Qatar is an important supplier of LNG liquified natural gas] to Belgium," it said.

Kaili, a socialist once considered an ascendant Greek politician, was dismissed from her role as a European Parliament vice president following the arrest. She was also dismissed from the Greek socialist PASOK party.

EU legislators have warned that the allegations risk undermining the bloc's credibility.



Tunisia Opposition Calls for Saied to Quit After 🛭 Voters Shun Election TUNIS (Dispatches) - Tunisia plunged into political uncertainty as its main opposition alliance

called on President Kais Saied to "leave immediately", a day after voters elming snubbed elections for a neutered parliamen

That comes with Saied's government negotiating a nearly \$2-billion package to bail out the North African country's crippled public finances. Ahmed Nejib Chebbi, president of the National Salvation Front alliance, said Saied had "lost all legal legitimacy".

The electoral board said 8.8 percent of the nine-million-strong electorate had turned out for Saturday's polls, the culmination of a power grab by Saied in the only democracy to have emerged from the Arab Spring.

An abstention rate of more than 91 percent "shows that very, very few Tunisians support Kais Saied's approach", Chebbi told AFP by telephone. He said the result showed "great popular disavowal" of the process that began when Saied, elected in 2019, seized executive powers last year.

The president in July 2021 sacked the government, froze parliament and surrounded it with military vehicles, following months of political deadlock and economic crisis exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic.

Saied, a former law professor, followed up by seizing control of the judiciary and pushing through a constitution that consolidated his near-absolute power in a widely boycotted referendum in July.

His moves, a decade after the ouster of dictator Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, have sparked fears of a return to autocracy.

The National Salvation Front, which includes Saied's nemesis the Islamist-inspired Ennahdha party, boycotted Saturday's election, saying it was part of a "coup" against Tunisia's democracy.

"Today the situation is critical. We should agree on a high-ranking judge to oversee immediate presidential elections," Chebbi said.

A presidential decree earlier this year gave Saied the power to fire judges, and he sacked 57 of them but an administrative court in August revoked most of those firings. Chebbi said his bloc would reach out to "all social and political actors"

Germany Cuts the Ribbon On First LNG Terminal

BERLIN (Dispatches) - Germany inaugurated its first liquefied natural gas (LNG) terminal, built in record time, as the country scrambles to adapt to life without Russian energy.

The rig in the North Sea port of Wilhelmshaven was opened by Chancellor Olaf Scholz at a ceremony on board a specialist vessel known as an FSRU, named the Hoegh Esperanza.

"It's a good day for our country and a sign to the whole world that the German economy will be able to remain strong," Scholz said from the boat.

The Hoegh Esperanza sounded its horn as the chancellor, dressed in a high visibility jacket, approached.

The ship has already been stocked with gas from Nigeria that could supply 50,000 homes for a year, and the terminal is set to begin deliveries on December 22.

Germany plans to open four more government-funded LNG terminals over the next few months as well as a private terminal in the port of Lubmin.

Together, the terminals could deliver 30 billion cubic metres of gas a year from next year, or a third of Germany's total gas needs -- if Berlin can find enough LNG to service them.

LNG terminals allow for the import by sea of natural gas which has been chilled and turned into a liquid to make it easier to transport.

The FRSU stocks the LNG, then turns it back into a ready-to-use gas.

Until now, Germany had no LNG terminals and relied on cheap gas delivered through pipelines from Russia for 55 percent of its supply.

But since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, gas supplies to Germany have been throttled and Berlin has been forced to rely on LNG processed by Belgian, French and Dutch ports, paying a premium for transport costs.

The government decided to invest in building its own LNG terminals as quickly as possible and has spent billions of euros (dollars) on hiring FSRUs to service them.

However, Germany has not yet signed a single major long-term contract to begin filling the terminals from January.

"The import capacity is there. But what worries me are the deliveries," Johan Lilliestam, a researcher at the University of Potsdam, told AFP.

A contract has been signed with Qatar for LNG to supply the Wilhelmshaven terminal but deliveries

are not set to begin until 2026.

Suppliers want long-term contracts, while the German government is not keen to be locked into multi-

year gas deals as it wants the country to become climate-neutral by 2045.

"Companies need to know that the purchasing side in Germany will eventually diminish if we want

to meet climate protection targets," economy minister Robert Habeck has said.

Environmental campaigners have criticised the LNG project, with the DUH association announcing

it will take legal action. A handful of protestors turned out in Wilhelmshaven with placards demanding an "End to gas".

Germany could initially be forced to buy LNG from the expensive spot markets, which would lead to higher prices for consumers.

The market could also be squeezed next year by renewed demand in China as it emerges from strict Covid-19 curbs, Andreas Schroeder, an expert at the ICIS energy research institute, told AFP.



Global Cholera Surge Likely Accelerated By Climate Change

GENEVA (Dispatches) - Climate change has driven an "unprecedented" number of larger and more deadly cholera outbreaks around the world this year, the UN health agency, WHO, said.

"The map is under threat (from cholera) everywhere," said Dr. Philippe Barboza, from the World Health Organization, speaking in Geneva, via Zoom.

Available data points to cases of infection in around 30 countries, whereas in the previous five years, fewer than 20 countries reported infections, on average.

"The situation is quite unprecedented, for not only we are seeing more outbreaks, but these outbreaks are larger and more deadly than the ones we have seen in past years," said Dr. Barboza, WHO Team Lead for Cholera and Epidemic Diarrhoeal Diseases.

"This increasing number of cholera outbreaks is occurring after several years of regular reduction in the number of cases and deaths."

Dr. Barboza explained that all the "usual factors" had played their part in the global uptick of cholera in 2022, not least conflict and mass displacement.

Added to this was the "very visible impact" of climate change, he insisted.

"Most of these larger outbreaks and the fact that they are simultaneously occurring - which makes the situation much more complex - is a direct impact of the increase in adverse climate troubles."

The cholera crisis has been playing out across the Horn of Africa and the Sahel accompanied by "major floods, unprecedented monsoons (and) a succession of cyclones", the WHO cholera expert said. Many other countries have also been affected, including Haiti, Lebanon, Malawi and Syria, where there are large outbreaks.

In Pakistan, where previous years have seen only sporadic cases of cholera, there have been more than 500,000 reported cases of watery diarrhoea this year after devastating summer floods, but "less than a few thousand" laboratory-confirmed cases of cholera.

Equally worrying is the WHO assessment that the situation is "not going to change quickly" in 2023, because meteorologists have forecast that the La Nina climatic phenomenon is likely to persist for a third successive year. Natural disasters associated with La Nina are prolonged droughts and rains and an increase in cyclones, "so we are very likely to see (a) similar situation that we saw at the beginning of 2022", Dr. Barboza said, indicating that the worst-hit areas were likely to be in Eastern and Southern Africa, the Caribbean and Asia. Under WHO emergency response to the Cholera outbreak in Lebanon, the first shipment of Cholera (medicines & supplies) kits arrived over the weekend from WHO Dubai hub in an effort to support the Ministry of Public Health's efforts to control the Cholera ...

Under WHO emergency response to the Cholera outbreak in Lebanon, the first shipment of Cholera (medicines & supplies) kits arrived over the weekend from WHO Dubai hub in an effort to support the Ministry of Public Health's efforts to control the Cholera outbreak.

Although cholera is preventable, a global shortage of vaccines persists, with sole producers South Korea and India, already at "maximum production" of a reported 36 million shots per year.

A South African initiative to produce the vaccines there is underway, but this could take "a few years" to materialize, Dr. Barboza said. He explained that vaccines are so scarce, the International Coordinating Group (ICG) had to decide in October to reduce its global vaccination strategy from two doses to one, to tackle cholera outbreaks.



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Saudi Index Falls on Economic Worries

RIYADH (Dispatches) - Saudi Arabia's stock market ended lower on Sunday, ending three sessions of gains, in response to Friday's fall in oil prices and global shares.

Oil - a key catalyst for the Persian Gulf's financial markets - fell by more than \$2 per barrel on Friday, swept up in a wider rout in global equities on fears of a looming recession, after central banks across Europe and North America signalled they will continue to battle inflation aggressively.

Saudi Arabia's benchmark index dropped 0.4%, snapping a three-day winning streak, hit by a 2.5% fall in Riyad Bank.





ANKARA (Dispatches) - Trade with the United States has achieved momentum that has helped Turkey's shipments to the world's largest economy reach an all-time high, making it its second-biggest export market this year, according to official data.

The pace comes despite diplomatic ups and downs that have frayed the decades-old partnership between the two NATO allies over recent years. Yet, intensified talks between the two countries leaders and diplomats so far this year, the launch of a strategic mechanism and Ankara's efforts in the Ukraine war seem to have contributed to warming the relations.

Despite rifts, bilateral trade flow maintained a steady course over the recent years, before booming this year, while businesspeople say they expect the U.S. to become Turkey's most important export market in the near future.

Sales of Turkish goods to the U.S. rose to nearly \$13.2 billion from January through November this year, an increase of almost 15% versus a year ago, according to data from the Turkish Exporters Assembly (TIM).

The figure means some 5.71% of all outbound shipments in the 11-month period went to the U.S. and made it Turkey's second biggest export market after Germany, which received some \$17.34 billion worth of Turkish goods so far this year.

The U.K. and Italy followed with \$11.25 and \$9.53 billion, respectively, according to the data, also reiterating Europe's high rank in Turkey's trade.

Shipments are expected to approach \$15 billion and bilateral trade volume is seen reaching up to \$28 billion as of the end of the year, says Turkish-American Business Association - American Chamber of Commerce (TABA AmCham) head Süleyman Sanlı.

The U.S. reached a level where it is the second most important country in Turkey's export market, Sanlı said. "It previously ranked fourth, now it has jumped to second place. We expect it to rise to the leadership in a short time," he told Anadolu Agency (AA).

Ankara and Washington have set an ambitious goal of quadrupling their trade to \$100 billion a year, a target endorsed by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and his American counterpart, Joe Biden, despite tensions and disagreements on various matters.

Ties between Ankara and Washington have been strained over such issues as Turkey's acquisition of S-400 missile defense systems from Russia and policy differences in Syria, Libya and the Eastern Mediterranean.

The U.S. sanctioned the Turkish defense industry in December 2020 over the S-400s and expelled its NATO ally from its F-35 fighter jet program. Ankara has called the moves unjust, but the allies have since been working to set aside differences and focus on cooperation, including on Ukraine.

Recent positive developments regarding Turkey's request to purchase dozens of F-16 fighter jets from the U.S. are expected to efforts to improve ties.

China's Economic Output to Exceed 120 Trln Yuan in 2022

SHANGHAI (Dispatches) - China's economic output is likely to exceed 120 trillion yuan (\$17.2 trillion) this year, state media quoted a senior Chinese Communist Party official as saying.

COVID-induced disruptions, weaker demand at home and abroad, and a property downturn have brought headwinds to the world's second-largest economy this year. "There is a gap between economic growth and the expected target set at the start of the year, but many other indicators were better accomplished," Han Wenxiu, deputy nead of the party's office for financial and economic affairs, was quoted by state broadcaster CCTV as saying.

Han's expectation that total economic output would exceed 120 trillion yuan in 2022 equates to a 4.9% xpansion in gross domestic product from a year earlier, according to a Reuters calculation based on official data. China's economy grew just 3% in the first three quarters of the year. Many economists expect it to stay around that rate for the full year, well below the official target of "around 5.5%".

"Judging from the deteriorating COVID situation and high-frequency data month-to-date, December may ee further weakening," analysts at Goldman Sachs said in a note on Friday.

"Given the near-term headwinds, we revised down our Q4 GDP growth forecast to -4% quarter-on-quarter (which) pulls down our full-year projection to 2.6%.'

China will focus on stabilizing its \$17-trillion economy in 2023 and step up policy adjustments to ensure targets are hit, said a statement published by the official Xinhua news agency, following an agenda-setting

meeting this week, as Beijing scrambles to cushion the impact of a surge in COVID infections.

CAIRO (Dispatches) - The International Monetary Fund's new \$3 billion financial support package for Egypt aims to reduce government debt to less than 80% of gross domestic product (GDP) in the medium term, a cabinet report released.

The IMF did not require the Egyptian network for citizens.

The IMF executive board approved on Friday a 46-month, \$3 billion financial support package for the Arab world's most populous country, saying it would catalyze additional funding of about \$14 billion.

Egypt negotiated its latest IMF loan as the economic fallout from the war in Ukraine exacerbated a foreign currency shortage resulting from Egypt's large trade deficit.

In a background document on Egypt, the IMF said the new program would fund some of the country's foreign currency financing gap, and that Cairo had secured \$5 billion in new financing for the fiscal year ending in June 2023.

Of that, \$2 billion would come from the sale of equity in private sector companies and \$3 billion from multilateral support, separate to the rollover of deposits by Persian Gulf states in Egypt's central bank.

Economists say one reason Egypt has struggled to attract investment despite repeated IMF programs and reform plans is the prominent role of the state and the military in the economy, and the advantages afforded to state-owned enterprises (SOEs) over private sector firms.

The IMF's background document said its program aimed to support plans by Egypt to reduce the state's footprint in the economy, increase transparency around SOEs, and create a level playing field for all economic actors.

An Egyptian cabinet statement on Saturday said the government was acting quickly to issue a political document outlining economic sectors from which the state would withdraw. It said the cabinet approved a final draft on Nov. 30.

The IMF document said Egyptian authorities had also committed to the publication by the finance ministry of biannual accounts of SOEs along with information on subsidies to SOEs.

It said Cairo had further committed to publishing data including audit reports on fiscal accounts, procurement contracts of more than 20 million Egyptian pounds (\$811,360), and an annual report on tax breaks, exemptions and incentives.



part of his old gray Mercedes breaks, 62-year-old Beirut cab driver Abed Omayraat faces a tough choice: Go

into debt to import an expensive car part, or raise fares for customers whose wallets are already drained by severe economic crisis.

It's a dilemma he said has become more acute in recent months as Lebanon's government moved to increase tariffs on imported goods about tenfold in a country that ships in more than 80% of what it consumes – including spare parts he needs.

"My tires are finished now, you can see they're worn-out. When it rains, I'm worried the car will slide. Changing them is necessary, but I can't afford it," said Omayraat.

Lebanon's economic meltdown, now in its fourth year, has seen the currency lose more than 95% of its value and left eight in 10 Lebanese poor, according to the United Nations.

With foreign currency coffers dwindling, the state has already lifted subsidies on fuel and most medication.

Hiking the rate at which customs fee is calculated, officials say, will boost state revenues and is a step toward unifying various exchange rates.

They are among preconditions set by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in April for Lebanon to get a \$3 billion bailout, but the lender of last resort says reforms have been too slow. The tariff jump came into effect on Dec 1. Import taxes began being calculated at an exchange rate of 15,000 Lebanese pounds per dollar instead of the old 1,507, meaning traders suddenly had to pay much more to bring in products like home appliances, telephones or car parts.

That is set to pile even more financial pressure on people struggling to make ends meet.

Omayraat says many passengers already ask for discounts to the standard 40,000 Lebanese pounds (\$26) ride fee.

"Do you tell a person that you want a 100,000 pound fare? I'm basically telling them: Don't ride with me. Neither can he (afford it), nor can I take him. He's not able to eat and I won't be able to eat," Omayraat lamented.

Rabih Fares, an architect from northern Lebanon who began importing used cars when business slowed down, said the new rate was forcing car dealerships to boost prices or go out of business.

"You need to work four to five years just to be able to afford the customs rate on a car now," said Fares, who estimated fees to import one used car could average 94 million Lebanese pounds, or about 156 times the minimum monthly wage.

Bangladesh Tea Exports Rise For High Quality, Retail Packs



DHAKA (Dispatches) - Bangladesh export of tea has slightly increased in recent times apparently for quality enhancements, focus on retail packs and production being higher than domestic consumption.

Manufacturers are expressing optimism, saying that if the amount of investment in gardens increases in the coming days, Bangladesh would be able to attain its export target.

But state-run Bangladesh Tea Board (BTB) has exorbitant expectations, saying the export target for 2025 was anywhere from 15 million kilogrammes (kgs) to 20 million kgs.

It is a far cry from trends in the past two decades or so. The highest amount of tea exported in a year was 13.65 million kilogrammes (kgs), but it was way back in 2002, according to the BTB.

The annual export figure has since greatly fluctuated, reaching as low as 0.54 million kgs in both 2013 and 2015.

It hovered at around 0.6 million kgs in 2018 and 2019 before spiking to 2.17 million kgs in 2020 and then falling to 0.68 million kgs in 2021.

Till November this year, around 0.75 million kgs have been exported.

Exports depend on production which has mostly catered to domestic consumption.

The highest amount produced was 96.50 million kgs in 2021. Domestic consumption for that year is not available.

But it is available for 2019, when production stood at 96.07 million kgs, slightly higher than the domestic consumption of 95.20 million kgs.

The amount left after local demand is met is exported and the BTB is working to increase that figure, Ashraful Islam, chairman of Bangladesh Tea Board, told The Daily Star recently.

Tea testing and quality control courses were introduced earlier this year, he said.

Egypt's New IMF Deal Aims to Reduce Gov't Debt

government to cut spending on subsidies, the report said, adding that the new program aimed to strengthen the social protection

Four Leaders Sign Agreement to Bring Green Azeri Energy to Europe

BUCHAREST (Dispatches) - The leaders of Azerbaijan, Georgia, Romania and Hungary signed an agreement on Saturday on the construction of an electric cable running under the Black Sea to carry green Azeri energy from planned Caspian Sea windfarms to Europe.

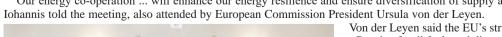
The agreement involves a 1,100 km (685 mile), 1,000 MW cable running from Azerbaijan to Romania as part of wider European Union efforts to diversify energy resources away from Russia amid the Ukraine war.

Hungarian Foreign Minister Peter Szijjarto said the European Commission had earmarked 2.3 billion euros (\$2.4 billion) to support the construction of the cable, which would be the longest of its kind in the world, and Azerbaijan was inviting investors to build the turbines.

He said a feasibility study would be completed by the end of 2023 on the cable project, which would then take three to four years to build.

At the same meeting Azerbaijan also said it plans to slightly increase its natural gas exports to Europe next year as Brussels seeks to replace falling energy supplies from Russia. Romanian President Klaus Iohannis told the meeting: "Given the current security context marked by the military aggression

against Ukraine, we need to cooperate better and show more solidarity to mitigate common challenges. "Our energy co-operation ... will enhance our energy resilience and ensure diversification of supply and transport routes,"





Von der Leyen said the EU's strategy to turn its back on Russian fossil fuels and diversify towards what she called "reliable energy partners" was working. She said the EU was ready to provide financial support to the project pending the results of the feasibility study.

"To integrate a growing share of renewables, we need indeed stronger electricity interconnections. This is why the Black Sea energy cable between Romania, Georgia and Azerbaijan is so important," von der Leyen said.

Von der Leyen said the Black Sea cable could transform Georgia into an electricity hub and integrate it into the EU internal power market, while it could also help start rebuilding Ukraine's energy system and aid the country's reconstruction.

IAEA Team Concludes Visit to Iran

TEHRAN (MNA) - An IAEA delegation who had visited Tehran early on Monday met with Iranian officials at the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI). They also left Tehran for Vienna on Monday.

The delegation from the International Atomic Energy Agency was headed by Massimo Aparo, chief of Department of Safeguards and the IAEA deputy director.

The IAEA officials held talks with the chief of the Iranian Foreign Ministry Department for International, Legal and Parliamentary Affairs and the director for the Foreign Ministry Department for Arms Control and International Security. The IAEA team also held talks with AEOI chief Mohammad Eslami.



Japan Is Bringing Back Nuclear Power to Protect Its Energy Security

TOKYO (Dispatches) - Japan is bringing back nuclear power as a key energy source, looking to protect its energy security in the crisis that has led to surging

The Japanese government confirmed a new policy for nuclear energy, which the country had mostly abandoned since the Fukushima disaster in 2011.

A panel of experts under the Japanese Ministry of Industry decided that Japan would allow the development of new nuclear reactors and allow available reactors to operate after the current limit of 60 years.

Japan, which had vowed to reduce nuclear power as a source of electricity in the wake of the Fukushima disaster, is now considering using nuclear power for longer. In a major U-turn in August, the Japanese government said it wanted to restart more nuclear plants that were idled after Fukushima and is interested in developing small nuclear reactor technology amid an energy crisis that has led to calls on consumers to conserve energy this summer.

Nuclear power has been an essential part of Japan's energy mix because of the country's resource scarcity, which has made it highly dependent on imported fossil fuels. Yet the Fukushima disaster in 2011 turned public opinion strongly against nuclear, and the tide is only now turning again—this time in favor of nuclear.

Per information from the International Energy Agency (IEA), Japan relies on fossil fuels for 88 percent of its primary energy supply, which makes it one of the most



fossil fuel-dependent members of the organization

Faced with an unprecedented energy crisis, Western governments are rethinking their long-held positions on the role of nuclear power generation, setting the stage for what could be the biggest energy source 'comeback' story of recent times.

Support for nuclear has grown in recent months as policymakers see nuclear energy as an alternative to the most expensive gas countries have ever paid to import, and as a zero-emission electricity source that would help keep climate ambitions and targets alive.

Iran Ready to...

FROM PAGE 1

The conference in Amman is a proper opportunity to accomplish talks on the revival of the 2015 nuclear deal officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), he said, expressing hope that despite the Americans' attitude in the last three months, a change of approach and realistic behavior from the American side would be seen.

As to the negotiations with Saudi Arabia on resumption of diplomatic ties, he noted that the talks are in the path of official diplomacy and Iran is ready, whenever the Saudis are prepared, to reopen embassies and return the relationship to a normal mode, so this is the Saudi side that should decide how to pursue a constructive approach towards Iran.

He further said that the second Baghdad Conference can provide an atmosphere to get away from challenges and that the main message of the event should focus on regional cooperation without foreigners' intervention.

The Islamic Republic has always embraced dialogue and collaboration with regional nations, including Arab littoral states of the Persian Gulf, the foreign minister underlined

Iran Offers China-Style...

FROM PAGE 1

Details of the proposed India-Iran pact are not yet clear. However, the matter is under consideration of the ministry of external affairs, sources said. The MEA did not respond to a query.

An equivalent deal with India assumes significance given that India was among Iran's top oil customers till the sanctions took effect. A new compact with oil-rich Iran will help the world's third largest oil consumer deal with high energy prices.

Iran has often reiterated its willingness to supply oil to India, and even assured New Delhi that it could help meet the country's energy needs amid the volatility due to the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

Iran Eyes Rise...

FROM PAGE 1

Safari described Kazakhstan as an important and strategic country in terms of exports and imports, food security, mines, transportation, and energy.

He noted that cooperation with Kazakhstan has many benefits for Iran, adding that it is necessary for all ministries to cooperate with the Iran-Kazakhstan Joint Economic Commission and pursue the matter so that the volume of non-oil trade exchanges between the two countries would reach the projected levels.

The other participants in the meeting also presented their views and explored ways to remove the obstacles to the export of technical and engineering services.

Iran Economy...

FROM PAGE 1

The U.S. dollar sold for 395,000 Iranian rials on Sunday, up from 385,000 rials reported on Thursday, according to currency monitoring websites and reports published in local economic newspapers.

Salehabadi said prices in the unofficial currency market were not transparent although he admitted that the CBI does not reject them altogether.

He also said Iran was still in talks with South Korea to work out a mechanism that could lead to the release of more than \$7 billion in Iranian funds that have remained blocked in the East Asian country since 2018 because of U.S. sanctions on Iran.

Turkmenistan Is the Center of A Geopolitical Tug Of War

Petroleum Reserve

U.S. Begins Buying

Back Oil for Strategic

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - The U.S. Energy Department said on Friday it will begin buying back oil for the Strategic Petroleum Reserve, or SPR, the first purchase since this year's record 180 million barrel release from the stockpile.

The department will buy up to 3 million barrels for delivery in February, a senior official told reporters.

President Joe Biden announced the 180 million sale in late March to combat surging gasoline prices that boosted inflation after the February invasion of Ukraine by Russia, the world's largest exporter of fossil fuels.

The sale shrunk levels in the SPR to about 380 million barrels, their lowest since 1984, raising concerns about energy security.

"We'll be releasing a solicitation to purchase 3 million barrels of oil for delivery in February of next year, 2023," the official said. Contracts will be awarded to energy companies

by Jan. 13.

"This approach will lock in a price upfront when companies submit their bids," the official added.

To help relieve supply shortages at refineries after an oil spill last week shut down the Keystone crude pipeline, the Energy Department will also execute an exchange of about 2 million barrels from the SPR, that companies will have to send back at a later date.

"We are able to do that at the same time we're doing the 3 million barrel buy-back," the official said.

The White House said in October it would buy back oil for the SPR when prices at or below about \$67-\$72 per barrel, a bit below where U.S. benchmark futures were trading on Friday at about \$75.

"We're gonna try to be nimble and flexible here," the official said, adding that the department likes where prices are now for exploring buy-backs.

"It'd be very useful to put this notice out now and to see what the market would provide in terms of interest and at what price level for that," the official said.

The Energy Department said buying oil back at about current prices is "an opportunity to secure a good deal for American taxpayers by repurchasing oil at a lower price than the \$96 per barrel average price it was sold for, as well as to strengthen energy security."

Mossad Spy...

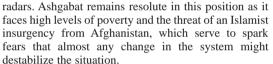
FROM PAGE 1

It is worth mentioning that Triple A Industries' website says that Frank Genin is the chairman of the company, which explains the close cooperation between Genin and Lavaux.

Lavaux's associates in Iran attended different exhibitions, monitored scientific conferences, and identified the latest needs of Iran's defense industries.

LONDON (OilPrice) -

Since gaining independence in 1991, Turkmenistan has attracted only sporadic attention due to its extreme level of isolation from the outside world, which rivals that of North Korea. As a result of this posturing, developments within the country fly under most



This is most likely because of Ashgabat's muchballyhooed policy of strict neutrality, a principle enshrined in that Central Asian country's constitution that has kept it from joining either Moscow-led organizations, such as the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), or Ankara-led ones, such as the Organization of Turkic States (OTS). But now all this seem likely to change, as Turkmenistan is becoming the object of intense geopolitical competition between outside powers, East and West, which want the country to become more closely linked to them, and Moscow, which hopes to maintain Turkmenistan's neutrality to block that from happening. With a new president this year—Serdar Berdimuhamedov replaced his father Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov in March 2022— Turkmenistan itself has become more active internationally. In part, of course, this reflects what some see as the new leader's efforts to build his own authority and escape, in part, his father's shadow. But a more important motivating factor comes from abroad, the result of efforts by powers ranging from China and Iran to Turkey and the European Union to draw Ashgabat into their orbits. China, Iran and Afghanistan have all made inroads in Ashgabat, with Beijing being especially successful, while Tehran and Kabul are making strides as well (see EDM, December 17, 2021; July 19, 2021; February 10, 2021). But the more consequential moves on this geopolitical chessboard have been those of the EU and Turkey—and Moscow's efforts to counter their approaches. These moves have come with dizzying speed in recent

days. On December 6 and 7, Turkmenistani Foreign Minister Rashid Meredov met with his Russian counterpart, Sergey Lavrov, who stressed that Moscow views Ashgabat as "our closest friend and strategic partner," words that Meredov reciprocated. But in an indication that Moscow did not make much progress on its hopes to include Turkmenistan in the CSTO or the Eurasian Economic Community, the meeting ended with agreements only on marginal issues, including student exchanges and the opening of representation for the national railway agencies of each country in the other (Mfa.gov.tm, December 6; Minobrnauki.gov.ru, December 6; Turkmenportal.com, December 9).

Then, on December 11, Terhi Hakala, the Finnish diplomat who serves as the EU's special representative for Central Asia, traveled to Ashgabat to take part in celebrations of the International Day of Neutrality, marking the 27th anniversary of Turkmenistan's declaration of that status. While there, as Ashgabat highlighted, Hakala discussed with her Turkmenistani hosts a wide variety of issues all centered on the expansion of ties between Turkmenistan and the EU, thereby redefining the nature of neutrality while celebrating it, an approach that directly contradicts Moscow's method (Mfa.gov.tm, December 11; Casp-geo.ru, December 15).



On December 14, President Berdimuhamedov together with his father, the former president, hosted Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev at a resort on the shores of the Caspian. That summit, which was originally scheduled more than a

year ago but was delayed, has worried Moscow, which feared that it would become an occasion for Turkey to gain a more established foothold in Central Asia at Russia's expense. Moscow is concerned both by the possibility that Turkey secures Ashgabat's agreement to join the OTS and the potential expansion of the flow of Turkmenistan's gas across the Caspian to Turkey—rather than southward across Iran as the Kremlin prefers (Nezavisimaya gazeta, December 13; Casp-geo.ru, December 15).

During the event, Turkey and Azerbaijan did not achieve everything they wanted. Turkmenistan refrained from committing to joining the OTS, leading to jubilation in Moscow (Nezavisimaya gazeta, December 14). Yet, despite efforts by Russian commentators to play down the importance of the session, the three did agree to expand earlier efforts to ship more Turkmenistani gas westward across the Caspian, thus bypassing Russia and helping Turkey expand its influence across the region (see EDM, January 27, 2021). And while Moscow observers suggested that Ashgabat had organized the meeting to directly correspond with the Day of Neutrality and thus reaffirm its independence, where the meeting took place may have been more important than when.

Symbolically, the meeting on the Caspian shows that Ashgabat is looking westward rather than northward to Russia, or southward to Iran; and practically, this location calls special attention to both the resolution of disputes over offshore oil and gas facilities between Baku and Ashgabat and the growing strength of the Turkmenistani navy in the South Caucasus, where it is growing powerful enough to potentially challenge Russia's long-dominant Caspian Flotilla (Nezavisimaya gazeta, December 9). Taken together, this means that, geopolitically, Turkmenistan today is more in play than it has ever been before.

Indian Tea...

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"We have received several reports from exporters that their importers from Iran are having trouble registering new contracts. We do not know the reason for it. We have requested the government to look into it and apprise us of the situation," Indian Tea Exporters Association chairman Anshuman Kanoria told FE.

There have been unconfirmed reports attributing the situation to anti-hijab protests in Iran and geo-political situation. A section of export community also since India stopped importing kiwi and apple from Iran, the Iranian authorities may have retaliated by stopping imports of tea and basmati rice from India. But these assumptions too are unsubstantiated and there is no official word on this yet. "As soon as India allows the imports of kiwi and apple, Iran may also allow importing Indian tea and basmati rice," a trader said, requesting anonymity.

Tranian importers are not registering new proformas, they are not giving new import licences. At the moment they are importing tea under contracts signed earlier," said Anup Kumar, managing director, SSK Exports Ltd. According to sources, the Tea Board India has received representations from the trade about the issue. Apart from India, Iran buys teas from Kenya, Indonesia, China and Sri Lanka.

"Iran is a very vital market for us, especially for Assam orthodox tea. This year export to that country was rising compared to last year. Demand for Indian orthodox in Iran was rising as a result of our marketing initiatives there. But now the situation is tea shipments to Iran from India have stopped. We have not got any information about the Iran issue from the government so far," Sujit Patra, secretary, Indian Tea Association (ITA), said.

In the calendar years 2021 and 2020, Iran imported around 26 million kgs and 35 million kgs of tea, respectively, from India. While Iran has remained the second largest importer after Russia, other major importers of Indian tea are the UAE and the US.



Team Thomas Lead PNC Championship

IAMI (dispatches) - Tiger Woods and son Charlie, trying to improve on their runner-up finish of last year, were chasing Justin Thomas and his dad, Mike, in the PNC Championship family golf tournament.

The Thomases, who won the light-hearted 36-hole scramble at the Ritz-Carlton in Orlando, Florida, in 2020, were atop the leaderboard after combining for two eagles and 11 birdies in a 15-under par 57.

The Woods family shared second on 13-under with former Masters champion Vijay Singh and his son, Qass Singh.

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Address: No 13. Paiouhesh St.. Golestan II St, Golestan St. Marzdaran Blvd., Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran

Printed by: Honar Sarzmin Sabz Distributed by:

Cities of Iran Cultural and Artistic Institute

Managing Director: Fereydoon Taherpour Asl

MacNeil Shatters 100m Fly Record

MELBOURNE (Dispatches) - Canada's Maggie MacNeil destroyed the 100m butterfly world record Sunday and the United States shattered the women's 4x100m medley relay mark to wrap up the six-day World Short Course Championships.

A third record tumbled in the final race at Melbourne with Australia and the United States finishing in a dead heat to jointly set a new best time in the men's 4x100m medley.

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Messi and Argentina **Beat France on Penalties To Win World Cup**

DOHA (Dispatches) - Lionel Messi crowned his glittering career with victory in the World Cup as Argentina beat France on penalties in a final for the ages, triumphing 4-2 after Kylian Mbappe's hat-trick ensured the game ended level following extra time. Gonzalo Montiel rolled in the deciding penalty to give Argentina their third World Cup and prevent France becoming the first team in 60 years to retain the trophy

But a truly remarkable game saw Messi and Mbappe both live up to their billing, with Messi scoring twice and Mbappe becoming the first player since England's Geoff Hurst in 1966 to net a World Cup final hat-trick in a game that ended 3-3 after extra time.

Messi had opened the scoring from the penalty spot midway through the first half before Angel Di Maria doubled Argentina's lead at the end of a brilliant counter-attack in the 36th minute.

But the astonishing Mbappe breathed life into the holders as he pulled one back from the penalty spot with 10 minutes to go before equalizing in stunning fashion just 60 seconds later to force extra time.

Messi then seemed to have decided the contest in Argentina's favor once and for all when he converted a rebound in the 109th minute, only for Mbappe to net from another spot-kick, bringing the game level at 3-3 and forcing a shoot-out.

The third World Cup final penalty shoot-out started with Messi and Mbappe both scoring, but Kingsley Coman's next kick for France was saved and Aurelien Tchouameni then crucially missed the target.

Alcaraz Confident of Hitting top Form For Australian Open

ABU DHABI (Dispatches) - World number one Carlos Alcaraz is confident he will be ready to compete at his best level at next month's Australian Open, despite an abdominal injury that shortened his preseason training block.

The 19-year-old Spaniard recovered from a muscle tear in his left abdomen that ruled him out of the ATP Finals and Davis Cup Finals at the end of his last campaign and only started practicing fully a week ago.

Two defeats to Andrey Rublev and Casper Ruud at the Mubadala World Tennis Championship in Abu Dhabi this weekend helped Alcaraz dip his toes back into action and he believes he has enough time to train and find his game before the first Grand Slam of 2023 comes along on January 16.

"I would say the key is to practice a lot, spend a lot of hours on court. With that, you're going to reach your best level and be ready for the season," the reigning US Open champion told reporters in the UAE capital.

"I have one month before the Australian Open, so I have time to keep training, trying to reach my level and I would say I will be ready and 100 per cent heading into Australia."

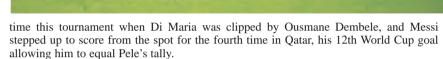
The Spanish teenager, who is the youngest world No.1 in ATP history, will not contest any official tournaments prior to the Australian Open, but will participate in an exhibition at the Kooyong Lawn Tennis Club in Melbourne between January 10 and 12.

Alcaraz is aware 2023 will come with new experiences for him now that he is a Grand Slam winner and is at the summit of the rankings.

"I have to be prepared for that, the pressure. The people, the players as well, are going to have all their eyes on me and I'm going to have to be prepared for that," he explained.

But he also believes the fact that he is coming off an injury and has not had much time to train could relieve some of the pressure entering Australia.

"Probably it's going to help me a little bit to try not to think about the people, the expectations, and the ranking, and that kind of stuff," he said on Sunday.



The expected response from the defending champions was not forthcoming and Argentina increased their lead in the 36th minute.

Messi and Julian Alvarez combined to release Alexis Mac Allister bursting through the middle, and he played a first-time ball to the back post for Di Maria to finish.

Having hardly featured in the knockout rounds due to injury, Di Maria had returned here and appeared tearful as he celebrated his goal, which was a World Cup final classic.

France had not even mustered a shot and Deschamps moved before the interval to replace Olivier Giroud and the struggling Dembele.

On came Randal Kolo Muani and Marcus Thuram, as Mbappe moved into the middle of the attack. Argentina had famously blown a two-goal lead before eventually emerging victorious in their last World Cup final triumph 36 years ago, but there appeared little prospect of a

However, the French were suddenly given hope when they won a penalty 10 minutes from time as Kolo Muani was brought down by Nicolas Otamendi.

Mbappe smashed the spot-kick into the net and the watching French President Emmanuel Macron rose to his feet. France had hope, and within another minute they were level.

Messi was robbed of possession by Coman in the lead-up, before Mbappe found Thuram and then met his partner's knockdown with a stunning volley.

It will go down as one of the most dramatic moments in World Cup history, and the French players on the bench raced across the pitch to celebrate with their teammate.

Argentina, who lost the 2014 final in extra time, looked shattered, and yet it seemed again that they had won it when Messi followed up to score early in the second extra period after Lautaro Martinez's shot was saved. But France were again saved by Mbappe as he converted another penalty following a

Montiel handball. It was end to end, and Argentina needed a brilliant Martinez save from Kolo Muani to take it to penalties and Montiel's kick proved decisive to spark wild Argentinians celebrations.

ONDON (Dispatches) - Gareth Southgate will remain as England manager despite the crushing disappointment of their quarter-final exit at the World Cup, the English Football Association confirmed.

The 52-year-old said after last week's defeat to defending champions France in Qatar that he would take his time before making a decision over his future.

But he is now set to stay at the helm until after the 2024 European Championship.

"We are delighted to confirm that Gareth Southgate is continuing as England manager and will lead our Euro 2024 campaign," said FA chief executive Mark Bullingham.

"Gareth and (assistant coach) Steve Holland have always had our full support and our planning for the Euros starts now." England have not won a major trophy since their World Cup victory in 1966 but under Southgate they reached the semi-finals of the 2018 tournament and the final of last year's

European Championship. His current deal runs until December 2024. England's latest bid to end their long wait for a major trophy ended in last Saturday's 2-1 defeat to France, who went on to reach the final against Argentina.

Harry Kane blazed over from the penalty spot when handed a chance to equalize late in the game, having earlier scored from the spot.

England's first Euro 2024 qualifier is against Italy on March 23. Ukraine, North Macedonia and Malta are also in the same group.



It is the second time in five World Cups

that France have lost the final on penalties

after they were beaten by Italy in 2006, and

it is Argentina who are champions for the

The win allows Messi, at 35, to complete

his glorious career by emulating Diego

Maradona, and this will be remembered as

his tournament despite the best efforts of

Mbappe, who finished as the tournament's

top scorer on eight goals, one more than his

France's quest for history had been

threatened by a virus in the days leading up

to the final and they appeared sluggish

France conceded a penalty for the fourth

Paris Saint-Germain teammate Messi.

before Argentina went ahead.

first time since 1986.

Braathen Claims Alta Badia Giant Slalom

ALTA BADIA (Dispatches) - Lucas Braathen won the World Cup giant slalom at Alta Badia as reigning champion Marco Odermatt extended his lead at the top of the discipline and overall standings.

Braathen clocked a combined time of two minutes, 36.35 seconds to pip fellow Norwegian Henrik Kristoffersen by just 0.02sec and claim his second win of the World Cup season after taking the slalom honours in Val d'Isere last weekend.

"It's incredible, I'm going to remember this day forever. Winning is like a drug, you always need more of it," said Braathen.

The 22-year-old will be competing in another giant slalom on Monday as the world's best stay in Alta Badia.

"I'm so happy that I'm further along than I thought I could be in GS. I'm going to enjoy this for as long as I can and it's going to be a battle tomorrow... I'd better be ready.'

Braathen now sits fourth in the men's giant slalom standings on 179 points, 81 behind Odermatt who bounced back from a poor first run to finish third, 0.10sec off the pace. Swiss Odermatt increased his lead after chopping over three seconds off his first run time, which had left him in ninth ahead of his second charge down the piste.

"I wasn't sure if it was going to happen today after the first run, it was difficult for me to find the right speed. I didn't think it would be so tight for first place," said Odermatt. Olympic giant slalom champion Odermatt is now 75 points ahead of Zan Kranjec, who led after the first run but finished 0.69sec back in fifth, and Kristoffersen.

Odermatt's impressive recovery means he is 171 points ahead of Aleksander Aamodt Kilde in the overall World Cup table after the Norwegian failed to finish his first run following his downhill win in Val Gardena on Saturday.

Norrie Wants Russians Back At Wimbledon

ABU DHABI (Dispatches) - British number one Cameron Norrie wants Russian players like Daniil Medvedev and Andrey Rublev back playing at Wimbledon next year after a "tough year" being banned from the Grand Slam.

"For me, I want the best players in the world to be playing," 14th-ranked Norrie told reporters at the Mubadala World Tennis Championship in Abu Dhabi on Saturday.

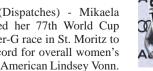
"I felt last year was tough for those guys, especially for Daniil and for Andrey, who have a chance of winning Wimbledon; especially I know how much those guys sacrificed with their careers and their goals are obviously very high to be winning Slams.

"So I really did feel bad for those guys."

Russian and Belarusian players were banned from the third Grand Slam of the year in response to the invasion of Ukraine with the tournament stripped of ranking points as a result.

Shiffrin Wins Super-G to Close in On World Cup Record

ST. MORITZ (Dispatches) - Mikaela Shiffrin claimed her 77th World Cup victory in the Super-G race in St. Moritz to close in on the record for overall women's victories of fellow American Lindsey Vonn.



The two-time Olympic gold medallist and reigning overall World Cup champion edged Italian Elena Curtoni by 0.12sec with France's Romane Miradoli third at 0.40sec.

The 27-year-old from Colorado has returned to success in Super-G, nearly three years after her last victory in the discipline, claiming her third win of the season after Levi's two slaloms. She is approaching the women's record of 82 World Cup victories set by Vonn, who retired in 2019, and is also on track for the 86 World Cup victories of Swedish great Ingemar Stenmark.

"That was the best run I could possibly have," said Shiffrin, who claimed her fifth Super-G victory and first since January 2020.

"I don't know if it felt perfect, but what I've learned over the years in super-G is that you can't really do it perfect.