

**Minister of Economy Announced the Increase of Iran's Cooperation With China, Eurasia, and BRICS in all Areas of the Economy, Including Energy, Banking, Foreign Exchange, Rail, and Port Transportation**

# IRAN NEWS

**Health Ministry Announced on Tuesday That the Number of Deaths From the Coronavirus Pandemic in Iran Increased to 144,667 With Three More Iranians Killed by the Virus Over the Past 24 Hours**

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DOMESTIC

**Iran Urges JCPOA Parties To Avoid Political Approach**



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## UN Calls on U.S. to Lift Iran Sanctions

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - The United Nations has called on the United States to lift or waive its sanctions against Iran as per the 2015 nuclear agreement, and to extend the waivers regarding the trade in oil with the country.

UN political chief Rosemary DiCarlo made the remarks in an address to a Security Council meeting on Monday on non-proliferation (implementation of resolution 2231), which endorses the 2015 nuclear deal, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

She said restoring the JCPOA, which was abandoned by the US in 2018, remains crucial to assure the international community of the peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear program and to allow the country to reach its full economic potential. "The agreement on the plan and its endorsement by the [Security] Council demonstrated a unity of purpose among its participants. Both the plan and the resolution support our common objectives of nuclear non-proliferation and regional security, in a manner that delivers tangible economic benefits for the Iranian people," she added.

She expressed regret that no agreement has been reached on reviving the JCPOA despite the "tireless efforts" of JCPOA participants since April 2021 to resolve the remaining differences. **See Page 7**

## Terrorist Attack on Shah Cheragh Brings Further Disgrace on Americans



IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN – Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei says the terrorist attack in the Shah Cheragh shrine in southern Iran will be recorded in the history of the country, stressing that it brought further disgrace to the United States.

The Leader made the remarks in a Tuesday meeting with the bereaved families of the martyrs of the terrorist attack deadly in the southern province of Fars late in October.

Ayatollah Khamenei said the United States was the creator and supporter of Daesh terrorist group, which claimed responsibility for the Shah Cheragh attack, adding that the criminal perpetrators and their founders are both complicit in the crime. **See Page 7**

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DOMESTIC

**Talks Underway to Use Iran's Frozen Assets In Other States**



> SEE PAGE 3

## Russia's VTB Bank Defies U.S. Sanction on Iran

MOSCOW (Dispatches)- VTB, the Kremlin's second-largest bank, has announced it will launch cross-border bank transfers in Iranian rials, in direct contravention of US sanctions, Kommersant newspaper reported on December 19.

Retail and commercial account holders of VTB will be able to transfer amounts of up to \$300,000 (RUB20mn) in an equivalent rial (IRR) amounts.

According to the bank, all transfers will pay a 1% commission at a minimum of RUB15,000 with funds credited to an Iranian bank account on the next business day.

"Cross-border transfers are available both in favor of individuals and legal entities in compliance with the requirements of currency legislation" the bank noted in its press release.

Customers will need to open a new Iranian rial account with VTB by purchasing currency from the bank via its mobile application. Transactions can also be done via depositing rials in VTB branches.

"We have become the first bank to implement international money transfers to Iran and, taking into account the strengthening of business ties, the growth of economic cooperation and the development of tourism, we expect that they will be in demand" the bank added. **See Page 7**

Confrontation With Production

## What Is the Government's Approach to Tire imports?



**Mohammad Reza Ganji**  
Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Tire Value Chain Employers Association

Another point in Iran's tire industry is the failure to issue the necessary license to increase the price in the last 9 months. This issue has caused factories to produce with a 30% direct loss, and exports are expected to compensate a part of this imposed loss. Meanwhile, the industry will not be allowed to export some of the products, and this is an important issue that the government should reconsider. From an economic point of view, the main purpose of investment is to earn profit, and when the producer produces with a 30% loss, is it practical to attract capital for the industry? Now the government has chosen the easiest path and instead of giving the currency to the producers, it pays the importers to import the product that is produced inside. Meanwhile, setting up a factory is very difficult, costly and risky, which requires government support more than imports. The Iranian manufacturer will bear the cost of setting up a tire factory of 600 billion tomans, but it will face a wave of imports of the same product, and this is despite the fact that the exchange rate of domestic production of tires is one dollar per kilo, and the exchange rate of importing this product is one dollar per kilo. A kilogram is six dollars and the government cooperates with importers more than producers.

For example, in domestic production, prices are controlled, but when the trader imports the goods, they are not subject to pricing. Therefore, it must be said that the government is not in favor of domestic production as much as it supports imports, and the slogan of supporting domestic production has practically not reached anywhere, and this is due to the authorities' ignorance of the conditions governing Iranian industries. On the other hand, governments do not believe in infrastructure measures and are looking for immediate results. When the tire is imported, the market needs are quickly met, but if it is to meet the market needs on a basic basis, it must build a factory,

and this requires infrastructure and the passage of time; Issues that the government is not easily burdened by and prefers to balance the market quickly and by any means, even if it is short-term and temporary. The result of this temporary view of the government can be seen by looking at the financial statements of the tire companies that despite all the efforts they make for proper production and sufficient supply and supply the market, they have become a victim of imports and all of them are facing hundreds of billions of tomans in losses and this is that the shares of many tire companies are offered in the stock market and the shareholders want profit and the losses of these companies are not acceptable for them. There are several basic components for price increases and decreases. Carbon makes up 25% of the tire, and the increase in the price of oil causes the price of carbon sold in the stock market to increase. But the government applies the same behavior to the entire supply chain, while providing the currency to the producer at a very high price. These contradictions in the government's behavior do not allow companies to sell their products with conventional profits, and this will continue to prevent investment, development of production lines, and market expansion, and the situation will worsen from what it is and will benefit Chinese companies and importers.

### Infrastructural Proposal for the Government

To solve these problems, it is necessary to set up three tire factories to solve the tire shortage in the country. On the other hand, the import of tires should be prohibited or its import should be subject to pricing, because in a balanced market, all challenges will be solved. Currently, the import tariff is four percent and there is no pricing, and as a result, traders import tires as much as they want. Today, four

million wire tire rings are enough for the country, while the import of this product reaches twice this figure, which means a serious threat to the industry and even attracts investors to this industry. To solve these problems, we need a quick and rational decision. Of course, it goes without saying that traders and importers are not willing to sacrifice their current interests for infrastructural decisions, and if the government decides to limit imports in any way from tomorrow, the lobby of tire importers will be activated at the decision-making points, and as a result, the pressure from above on We will witness the government. This means that in practice the officials do not support the domestic producer, and this is despite the fact that every manufacturing plant has supported thousands of workers and their families. But since the economic mindset of Iran is not production-oriented and import-oriented, the current challenges will continue. Unfortunately, despite the support of the Supreme Leader and Economic Outlook documents on the need to support domestic production, production is not supported in practice. This is despite the fact that in the distant years when the Ministries of Industries, Mines and Commerce were separate, the license to import any product was subject to the lack of domestic production of the same product; A policy that gradually lost color. Unfortunately, it must be said that governments do not appreciate the producer and are not aware of the love that producers have for the country's economy and industry. Producers can also import the world's best brands instead of Chinese brands and at much lower prices than the prices that are imported now, and take over the market, but Iranian manufacturers love production. Iranian producers do not expect much from the government; their only expectation is production and sales, even based on the cost price, and a 30% sales loss is not fair.

## Tehran Mulls Joint Production of Cars With Moscow

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran is considering joint production of automobiles with Russia, Iranian Ambassador to Russia Kazem Jalali has said, signaling a closer partnership between the two countries to thwart Western sanctions.

The two sides are discussing the issue, Jalali told reporters in Moscow, expressing hope that the plans would be realized.

Major Iranian automakers Iran Khodro and SAIPA, which participated in an auto parts exhibition in Moscow this past summer, have held talks with their Russian partners, he said.

Last month, president of the Association of Homogeneous Powertrain Industries and Parts Manufacturers Mohammadreza Najafi-Manesh announced that Moscow and Tehran had signed an MoU worth \$300 million for Iranian car exports to Russia.

Iran Khodro, the Middle East's leading automaker, is eyeing Russia's large market which the Europeans have abandoned amid the raging Ukraine conflict, an official said in August. **See Page 7**

## Washington Urged To Choose Diplomacy Over Pressure

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's permanent ambassador to the UN says if the United States really seeks the revival of the 2015 nuclear deal, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), it must choose diplomacy over pressure and confrontation.

Amir Saeed Irvani made the remark while addressing a Monday session of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) on the JCPOA and the implementation of the Security Council Resolution 2231, which upholds the deal.

The JCPOA was concluded in July 2015, lifting some of the United States' draconian sanctions against Iran in exchange for the Islamic Republic making certain voluntary changes to its peaceful nuclear energy program. Upon conclusion, the deal was adopted by the Security Council through its Resolution 2231.

"There is no doubt that the JCPOA can only be revived by addressing the root cause of its current situation, which is the US withdrawal from the accord on May 8, 2018," he said. The Iranian diplomat added, "Pressure, intimidation and confrontation are not solutions [for the revival of the JCPOA] and will get nowhere. If the United States really seeks the revival of the JCPOA, it must rely on diplomacy." **See Page 7**

## Tehran Expresses Sympathy With Afghanistan

TEHRAN (IP) – Foreign Ministry Spokesman expressed his sympathy with the people of Afghanistan regarding the tragic incident of the Salang tunnel

After the explosion of the fuel tanker in the Salang tunnel in Afghanistan on Saturday, rescue forces have so far evacuated 63 bodies from the accident site. According to the latest reports, the number of injured in this incident reached 37. This oil tanker, which was moving from Baghlan to Kabul, caught fire near the 2,700-meter-long Salang tunnel.

On Monday, Nasser Kanani expressed his condolences to the people of Afghanistan regarding the tragedy of the Salang tunnel. 219

## Iran Urges JCPOA Parties To Avoid Political Approach

TEHRAN (MNA) – Iranian top diplomat urged the JCPOA parties to avoid a political approach and adopt a constructive and realistic approach to make necessary decisions for an agreement.

Hossein Amirabdollahian made the remarks in a meeting with the EU Foreign Policy Chief Josep Borrell in the Jordanian capital of Amman on Tuesday on the revival of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

Amirabdollahian arrived in Amman early on Tuesday at the head of a delegation to take part in a second edition of the Baghdad Conference.

The Iranian foreign minister, in the meeting, condemned the approach of western countries in supporting the rioters and imposing illegal sanctions against Iran under false pretexts of protecting human rights.

He considered the protection of human rights to be one of the basic principles of the Islamic Revolution.

Recalling the approach of western countries in violating the human rights of the Iranian nation, Amirabdollahian called their approach in supporting Iranian people as unbelievable.

He also pointed to the Ukraine war and Iran's principled position and approach to



supporting the territorial integrity of Ukraine, emphasizing peaceful solutions to end the war and solve the crisis in the country.

The Iranian foreign minister also voiced Iran's readiness to resolve any misunderstanding in direct interaction with the Ukrainian side.

Borrell, for his part, emphasized the EU's determination to bring the JCPOA negotiations to a conclusion, saying that nuclear negotiations are separate from other issues on the agenda.

Iran's top negotiator in Vienna talks and Deputy Foreign Minister for Political Affairs Ali Bagheri Kani and EU Deputy Foreign Policy Chief Enrique Mora were also present in the meeting.

## Iran Should Downgrade Relations With UK

IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - An Iranian lawmaker says the Islamic Republic intends to reduce ties with the United Kingdom and revise relations with France and Germany for their "anti-Iranian moves".

Esmail Kowsari said Monday, "We have always witnessed the anti-Iranian actions of European countries, Germany, France and England," claiming that "we do not want relations with them at any cost."

He did not explain which action of the Europeans was anti-Iranian but referring to the law approved in 2011 to reduce diplomatic and economic ties with

Britain, he said "this should be pursued in the parliament, especially by the members of the National Security Commission."

In November 2011, Britain imposed sanctions on the Islamic Republic for its nuclear program and the banking relations of the two countries stopped.

The Iranian parliament voted in favor of reducing ties at the diplomatic level, and two days later, some protestors attacked the UK embassy in Tehran ransacking offices and stealing documents.

However, in 2016, the diplomatic relations between London and Tehran were once again improved and Britain sent a new ambassador.

## FM, Qatar Diplomat Confer on Ties, JCPOA Talks

TEHRAN (MNA) – The Iranian foreign minister and the Qatari deputy foreign minister discussed bilateral relations and the latest situation of the JCPOA talks between Iran and the P4+1 on the removal of sanctions.

Hossein Amirabdollahian and Qatar's Assistant Foreign Minister for Regional Affairs Mohammed bin Abdulaziz Al Khulaifi met on the sidelines of the third Tehran Dialogue Forum (TDF) in Tehran on Monday.

During the meeting, the top Iranian diplomat congratulated Qatar on its national day as well as the successful holding of the 2022 FIFA World Cup.

Moreover in the meeting, the issues of mutual interest and the latest status of talks to remove the sanctions between Iran and the world powers were discussed and the two sides emphasized the determination of the two countries in order to grow and develop their political and economic relations.

Speaking in the TDF, the Iranian foreign minister noted that Europe is paying the price for the US' policies in the Ukraine war.

## Pakistan's New Army Chief Urges More Cooperation With Iran

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Pakistan's new Army Chief Lieutenant General Asim Munir has called for increased cooperation with Iran, especially in the field of economy.

Munir made the statement in a Monday meeting with Iranian Ambassador to Pakistan Seyyed Mohammad Ali Hosseini at the headquarters of the Pakistan Army in Rawalpindi.

Iran's military attaché in Pakistan Colonel Mostafa Ghanbarpour was also present in the meeting.

During the meeting, Munir emphasized his country's support for Iran's positions in regional and global forums, especially in human rights debates and on the country's peaceful nuclear program.

He said Iran and Pakistan can expand their cooperation relying on a history of friendly and fraternal ties between the two neighboring countries.



Hosseini, for his part, congratulated General Munir on his appointment as Pakistan's top army commander and offered him the warm greetings of the Chief of Staff of Iran's Armed Forces Major General Mohammad Hossein Bagheri and Chief of the Iranian Army Major General Abdolrahim Mousavi.

The Iranian ambassador emphasized the importance of exchanging high-ranking military and defense delegations between the two neighboring countries to strengthen bilateral relations and to expand security cooperation along the borders.

He also said that Iran and Pakistan should do more to seize the economic opportunities that exist at their borders.

The two sides also discussed the latest developments on Iran-Pakistan relations as well as the situation in Afghanistan. Munir is the 17th army chief in Pakistan since the country gained independence from Britain in 1947.

## Judiciary Spokesman Blasts Iran's Termination of CSW Membership



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Judiciary spokesman called the termination of Iran's membership to the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women an attempt to cover up the anti-ethical policies against women all around the world and move against leading Iranian women whose status of progress in all fields has made a stunning leap.

Speaking at his presser, Masoud Setayeshi, Iran's Judiciary spokesman, stressed that the legal heresy and the unjust political action of the termination of Iran's membership to the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women can be evaluated in line with the continuation of political pressure on the people and especially the women of Islamic Iran.

Setayeshi further stated that the action is designed and implemented to cover up the claimant countries' anti-cultural and anti-ethical policies and destructive actions against the community of women worldwide.

The Judiciary spokesman said that the guidance and machination behind the action was carried out by those who represent the countries with the most gender oppression, legal and social inequalities against women take place.

Setayeshi went on to say that the cancellation of Iran's membership to the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women has been an action against the growth and development of each and every leading Iranian woman during the last four decades because during the period, the progress of Iranian women in all fields of management, academic research has made a stunning leap.

## Iran Among Top 5 in Red Crescent and Red Cross in World

TEHRAN (MNA) – The head of Iran's Red Crescent Society said that his society is among the top five Red Cross and Red Crescent countries out of 192 countries in the world.

"The Iranian Red Crescent Society is among the top five Red Cross and Red Crescents out of 192 countries in the world and has received the Henry Davison Award for its services," Vahid Salimi said.

Salimi made the comments in a ceremony in the western Iranian province of Ilam, where the Red Crescent Society of the province distributed cotton bags to replace plastic bags among the participants in the event in support of the environment.

Salimi also pointed to different services that his organization provides to the people of the country and singled out the services of the society in the million-march Arbæen pilgrimage.

The ceremony was held to commemorate the UN-backed International Volunteer Day (IVD).

## Iran to Use Foreign Funds to Pay for Car Imports

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Iran will use funds blocked in other countries because of US sanctions to pay for import of cars, according to a spokesman of the country's ministry of trade (MIMT).

Omid Ghalibaf said that some 200,000 cars will be imported into Iran in the six months to late June.

That comes more than four years after Iran imposed an outright ban on imports of finished cars in a bid to tighten hard currency spending and to shield its economy against U.S. sanctions.

Ghalibaf said new regulations adopted for car imports provide for easier and more innovative ways of settling payments to foreign suppliers.

"The car imports manual ... has set out some good options in this regard but the important point is that foreign reserves will be used to pay

for hard currency," he was quoted as saying by the official IRNA news agency.

Iran has tens of billions worth of hard currency funds in China, South Korea, Japan, Iraq and elsewhere which it cannot easily access because banks in those countries fear that processing the funds could expose them to sanctions-related risks.

Iran has used a small part of its blocked funds to settle barter trade payments or to pay for certain infrastructure projects. However, authorities insist the funds should be returned to Iran in their entirety regardless of whether the US sanctions on Iran will be lifted or not.

Central Bank of Iran Governor Ali Salehabadi said on Monday that Iran and South Korea would soon work out an agreement that would lead to the release of more than \$7 billion in Iranian funds in South Korea.

## Iran Exported Nanotech Products To 48 Countries Last Year

TEHRAN (MNA) - Iranian nanotechnology manufacturing companies have exported their products to 48 countries during the past Iranian year 1400 (March 21, 2021- March 20, 2022).

Turkey and Iraq are the most important importers of Iran-made nanotechnological products. Iranian knowledge-based companies have recorded more than \$10 million in exports to these two countries.

Other customers of Iran-made nanotechnological products include Russia, India, Kazakhstan, the US, the United Kingdom, Mongolia, Pakistan, etc.

According to the reports, Iranian nanotechnology companies exported \$62 million worth of products in 1400. The export of these products grew by 53% in 1400 compared to the previous year.

## Tehran-Dushanbe Weekly Flights to Reach 23

TEHRAN (MNA) – The number of weekly flights between Iran and Tajikistan will increase from the current nine to 23.

Following the signing of a memorandum of understanding on air transport cooperation between the Civil Aviation Organization of Iran and the neighboring country, the number of weekly flights between Iran and Tajikistan will increase from the current nine to 23, the news portal of Iran's Ministry of Roads and Urban Development reported.

After a two-year break, Tajikistan resumed air traffic with Iran as well as India in April, an official source with the Civil Aviation Agency under the government of Tajikistan told Asia-Plus in an interview.

"After a two-year break caused by the coronavirus pandemic, Tajikistan has resumed regular flights on the following air routes: Dushanbe-New Delhi-Dushanbe; Dushanbe-Nursultan-Dushanbe; and Dushanbe-Tehran-Dushanbe," the source said.

The Dushanbe-Tehran-Dushanbe flight is operated by the Iranian flag carrier Iran Air.

"If possible, Somon Air will also operate flights on this air route," the source added, Financial Tribune reported.

Somon Air is the first private airline in Tajikistan with an office in Dushanbe. The airline's operations are based at Dushanbe International Airport.

Iran Air is headquartered at the Mehrabad International Airport in Tehran.

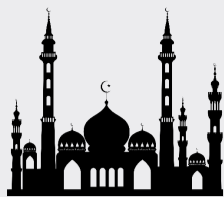
## Iran Trade With Persian Gulf States Tops \$20b in 8 Months

TEHRAN (MNA) – Iran's exports to Persian Gulf states reached 25.01 million tons worth \$8.87 billion while imports stood at 8.19 million tons worth \$11.35 billion.

Iran traded 33.2 million tons of goods (excluding crude oil exports) worth \$20.22 billion with the Persian Gulf's six littoral states, namely Iraq, Kuwait, Qatar, the UAE, Bahrain, and Saudi Arabia, during the first eight months of the current fiscal year (March 21-Nov. 21), registering a 19.33% fall in terms of weight, but a 0.86% rise in terms of value respectively, latest data released by the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration show.

The UAE was Iran's top trade partner among the countries under review with 15.69 million tons (up 2.51%) worth \$15.16 billion (up 16.67%). It was followed by Iraq with 13.31 million tons (down 42.5%) worth \$4.78 billion (down 30.04%) and Kuwait with 3.48 million tons (up 82.64%) worth \$134.69 million (up 47.45%), Financial Tribune reported.

Iran's non-oil exports to the six countries hit 25.01 million tons worth \$8.87 billion during the period, registering a 20.92% and a 4.2% decrease in terms of weight and value YOY, respectively.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	12:02
■ Evening (Maghreb)	17:14
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	05:40
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	07:10

84. He replied: "Behold, they are close on my footsteps: I hastened to thee, O my Lord, to please thee."

85. ((Allah)) said: "We have tested thy people in thy absence: the Samiri has led them astray."

Surah 20, Ta-ha (84 - 85)

# Talks Underway to Use Iran's Frozen Assets In Other States

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

**TEHRAN - Minister of Finance, in his presser, said on Tuesday that talks are going on to use the country's blocked assets in other countries.**

Minister of Finance and Economic Affairs and Economic Spokesman of the Government Ehsan Khandouzi said in his weekly press conference: "Perhaps we can say that in the last year, the most important economic approach of the government has been to return the economy to a disciplined path with the field of Iran's financial and monetary policies so that we can manage the fluctuations of the macro-economy."

In the last eight months, 80.5% of the public resources of this year's budget have been realized, which has increased by 56% compared to last year.

The Central Bank and the Money and Credit Council had some measures in the way of disciplinary action.

He said about the 1402 (2023) budget bill: "One feature of the budget is the transparency of the government's public resources in this bill. The second point is the



budget's approach towards the growth of the share of production revenues and the sale of government shares, and we tried not to increase the budget's dependence on oil (without increasing taxes)."

Another item raised in the budget is the agreement of the Government cabinet, with an average growth of 20% in the salaries of government employees in 2023.

He also mentioned the decrease in liquidity and said: "Liquidity is decreasing, and this shows the decrease in inflation."

In the field of currency policies, Khandouzi said: "Because our small amount of exports in October and November was more than one million barrels per day, therefore, the government's foreign exchange income in the last two to three months has been better than in the past. At the same time, talks are going on to use Iran's blocked assets in other countries."

# Khatam-al Anbiya Construction HQ Only Thinking of National Progress, Dignity

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Majlis Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf says that Khatam-al Anbiya Construction Headquarter only thinks of the progress and dignity of the country and its priority is that it would not forget the deprived and oppressed people wherever they are.



Speaking in the 14th meeting of managers and officials of Khatam-al Anbiya Construction Headquarter, Qalibaf said that it is a great honor to him that he is among crusaders and leaders of progress of the country whose concerns are to serve the noble people of Iran. He also thanked and hailed those who have tried to form this establishment through the years especially the late Rostam Qasemi who was one of the hardworking faces of this headquarter of the IRGC.

Khatam al-Anbiya Construction Headquarter is an Iranian engineering firm controlled by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC).

He then pointed to the performance of the IRGC since its first day of establishment especially penetration of its performance in every part of the country.

He noted that after the Iraqi-imposed war ended, some groups and organizations were formed under the construction headquarter which had been tasked to resolve problems of the war-hit areas and their reconstruction.

Qalibaf added that Iran, since three decades ago, has entered an economic war and the headquarter has played an important role to overcome sanctions, adding that the headquarter can be effective in thwarting sanctions and advance the work, and without any doubt this group can succeed.

He went on to say that the headquarter should act in a way that the private sector does not consider it as a main rival and the group should act in a way to support popularization of all infrastructures of the country.

Qalibaf reiterated that people should involve in production and economy because they can produce the goods with lower prices than a state-run sector and this approach of popularizing economy will help the economy, production and occupation in the country.

# Steel Production Hub of Eastern Country on Success Track

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The CEO of Khorasan Steel Complex Company (KSC) says despite all restrictions regarding energy supply and power cut in some period of this summer, his tireless colleagues in the company could create relative growth in all units comparing to the previous year.



Kasra Ghafoori said that the growth in tonnage in all production chain links, financial performance as well as the rise in sales all bespeak of strong and jihadi determination of his colleagues in different sectors of the company.

He also announced 28% growth in pellet production tonnage in 8 months of this year, 4% rise in direct reduction production, 7% increase in steel ingot production and 9% growth in production of final product (rebar) in the company.

Ghafoori noted that his colleague in the pellet-producing plant of the company posted the most production and posted 28% growth in 8 months comparing to the same period last year and they produced 1.316m tons of pellet.

As per remarks of the CEO of KSC, the company by mid-November saw 4% growth in production in direct reduction unit and they reached 850,000 tons while in the same period, the company produced over 646,000 tons of steel ingot and 412,000 tons of final product which show 7 and 9 percent growth in production in steel-making and rolling units of the company comparing to the same period last year.

Ghafoori reiterated that non-monopoly in sales and transparency in demand and supply are two properties of goods transactions of Khorasan Steel Complex Company.

He went on to say that in the first 8 months of the current year, the company by selling 351,219 tons of final product registered 11% growth in sale tonnage comparing to the same period last year.

The company by offering 305,504 tons of final product and 150,422 tons of steel ingot on Iran Mercantile Exchange could witness 23 and 50% growth in demand and supply of its products in the market, respectively.

# Non-Oil GDP Growth at 3.4% in H1



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN- The Statistical Center of Iran says the country's gross domestic product (GDP) excluding oil grew 3.4 percent in the first six months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21 - September 22) compared to the same period last year.

According to SCI data, the figure including oil increased by 3.3 percent, IRNA reported.

As reported by the center, based on the fixed prices in the Iranian year 1390 (ended on March 19, 2012), the country's GDP stood at 3.87 quadrillion rials (about \$10.115 billion) including the oil sector, and at 3.326 quadrillion rials (about \$8.7 billion) excluding the oil sector in the mentioned six months, while the figures were 3.745 quadrillion rials (about \$9.78 billion) and 3.217 quadrillion rials (about \$8.4 billion), respectively, in the first half of the previous year.

The SCI data indicate that in the first six months of 1401, the agricultural sector had negative growth of 2.2 percent, the industry and mining sector registered a five-percent growth, and the service sector grew by 2.6 percent compared to the first half of 1400.

Back in October, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), in its latest World Economic Outlook report titled "Countering the Cost-of-Living Crisis", said that Iran's economy will experience a positive growth of three percent in 2022, following its upward trend for the third consecutive year.

The fund anticipated that Iran's inflation rate and accounts balance will also improve in the current year.

The international body had put Iran's inflation rate in 2021 at 40.1 percent, adding that not only Iran's inflation rate will not increase in the current year as compared to a year earlier, but it will hit 40 percent at large, showing a bit decline.

The IMF also predicted that Iran's balance of its current accounts in 2022 will double as compared to the same period of last year.

# Iran, Nicaragua to Hold Joint Economic Cooperation Meeting

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iran's Energy Minister Ali Akbar Mehrabian on Monday said that the Islamic Republic and Nicaragua are working on plans to hold a joint economic cooperation meeting.



He added that the meeting will take place in Nicaragua.

The Iranian Energy Minister was speaking at a meeting with Nicaragua's Ambassador to Tehran, Isaac Lenin Bravo Jaen, and the country's Foreign Minister Denis Moncada.

Mehrabian said that the two countries have developed good ties over the past four decades, adding that bilateral relations will further grow as the current Iranian administration attaches paramount importance to expanding cooperation with Latin American states, including in the energy sector.

The Nicaraguan Foreign Minister, on his part, said that ground is already paved for the expansion of ties between Iran and Nicaragua in many fields including agriculture, industry and university affairs.

# Iran Develops Radiopharmaceutical for Cancer Treatment

TEHRAN (Tasnim) - A research center of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) has produced a radiopharmaceutical used for the treatment of cancerous tumors.

Scientists at the AEOI's Nuclear Science and Technologies Research Center have developed the Rhenium-188-based radiopharmaceutical for the treatment of neuroendocrine tumors (NETs).

The new drug containing radioactive isotopes, named 188Re-TOC, is recognized as a promising radiopharmaceutical for diagnosing and curing neuroendocrine tumors. Iranian experts in the pharmaceutical industry have in recent years made great headways in producing medicines used to cure a broad range of diseases.

The Nuclear Science and Technologies Research Center of Iran has already produced dozens of radiopharmaceuticals for diagnostic and therapeutic procedures and for research and development.

# Daily Energy Use Equivalent of Over 1b Liters of Fuel

TEHRAN (PressTV) - A top Iranian Oil Ministry official says the country's daily use of energy has reached the equivalent of 1.05 billion liters of fuel.

Jalil Salari, a deputy oil minister and CEO of the National Iranian Oil Refining and Distribution Company (NIORDC), said on Monday that only a 10% reduction in energy usage in Iran would enable the country to significantly ramp up its exports and use the proceeds for investment in mega energy projects.

Salari said that since late March the NIORDC had delivered around 10 billion liters of gas oil to Iranian power plants that still use liquid fuel as feedstock.

"With a gas oil price of \$0.8 per liter, that (amount) is worth \$8 billion which can be used as investment for building two refineries," he said.

The official also touched upon the ultra-cheap prices of fuels in Iran and said that natural gas supplied to motorists in the country was almost free of charge considering the fees paid by the NIORDC to gas stations.

Salari said households in hard-to-reach regions of Iran currently pay 1,500 rials (one third of a cent) for each liter

of kerosene, adding that jet fuel supplied to airlines is still worth 6,000 rials per liter, a price announced in 2014.

Iran has some of the cheapest energy prices in the world which expert believe are a main reason behind lavish energy use in the country.

Officials have warned Iran could be forced to resume imports of gasoline and diesel after more than a decade of self-sufficiency if domestic consumption is not controlled.

# 950 Transportation Projects Underway Across Iran

TEHRAN (MNA) - The managing director of Iran's Construction and Development of Transportation Infrastructures Company (CDTIC) has said that 950 railway and freeway projects are currently underway across the country many of which will be inaugurated by the next Iranian calendar year 1402 (starts in March 2023).

As IRNA reported, speaking to the press on the sidelines of the sixth Exhibition of Transportation, Logistics, and Related Industries on Tuesday, Kheirollah Khademi said five railway projects and five freeways with over 80 percent of physical progress have been prioritized to go operational early next year.

According to the official, with the mentioned projects going operational, railway construction in the next Iranian year will be three times more than the average figure.

The official had earlier said that 1,035 kilometers (km) of freeways are also under construction across the country of which 291 km is planned to go operational in the next year. He put the total length of the country's freeways at 2,800 km.

Mentioning the highway projects underway across Iran, Khademi said 6,100 km of highways are also under construction in the country.

# Company Starts SUV Tire Production

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Iran's Kavir Tire has completed a \$25-million (€23 million) expansion project to add capacity for SUV tires at its manufacturing facility in the eastern city of Birjand.

The project increases output capacity by 14 kilotonnes per annum to 45ktpa and employs "local technologies", said Kavir Tire in a release.

The production technologies, it said, include curing presses and tire-building machinery made by the company. The inauguration also marked the start of a new project at the site to add a 50ktpa production capacity for all-steel truck & bus tires as well as farm and mining tires at the existing plant. The company has earmarked IRR58,000 billion (€133 million) for the project, which is expected to be completed within three years.

Once in full operation, the project is expected to create 1,600 job opportunities.

## Thai Navy Hunts for 33 Missing Marines

BANGKOK (Dispatches) - Thailand's military deployed warships and helicopters today to try to locate 33 marines missing after a corvette sank overnight in choppy waters in the Gulf of Thailand, the navy said.

Three navy vessels and two helicopters were sent to find the missing off Prachuap Khiri Khan province, south of Bangkok, after the HTMS Sukhothai warship suffered an engine malfunction and went down just before midnight about 20 nautical miles off the coast.

An overnight rescue mission in bad weather secured 73 of the 106 people aboard, the navy said, with the remaining 33 forced to abandon ship.



## Russia, China to Hold Joint Naval Drills

MOSCOW (AP) — Russian warships set off Monday to take part in a joint naval drills with China, an exercise that showcases increasingly close defense ties between the two countries as they face tensions with the United States.

The Russian Defense Ministry said the Varyag missile cruiser, the Marshal Shaposhnikov destroyer and two corvettes of Russia's Pacific Fleet would take part in maneuvers in the East China Sea starting Wednesday.

The ministry said the Chinese navy planned to deploy several surface warships and a submarine for the exercise. Russian and Chinese aircraft will also take part in the drills, according to the ministry.



## Putin Visits Belarus as He Eyes Next Steps in Ukraine War



KYIV (Dispatches) - Russian President Vladimir Putin made a rare trip Monday to Moscow's ally Belarus as his forces pursued their campaign to torment Ukraine from the air amid a broad battlefield stalemate almost 10 months into the war.

Putin's visit came hours after Russia's latest drone attack on Ukraine. Moscow has been targeting Ukraine's power grid since October as part of a strategy to try to leave the country without heat and light during the bitterly cold winter.

The Russian leader's brief trip to Minsk could herald more military support for the Kremlin's war effort, after Belarus provided the Kremlin's troops with a launching pad for the invasion of Ukraine last February.

Belarus is believed to have Soviet-era weapons stockpiles that could be useful for Moscow. Lukashenko, meanwhile, needs help with his country's ailing economy. It was a rare trip to Minsk by Putin, who usually receives Lukashenko at the Kremlin.

Moscow has kept up its war effort despite Western sanctions and the supply of Western air defense systems to Ukrainian forces.

Sitting beside Lukashenko before their talks in the capital of Minsk, Putin emphasized the allies' close military-technical ties. He said they include not only mutual supplies of equipment but also joint work in high-tech military industries.

Analysts say the Kremlin might look again for some kind of Belarusian military support for its Ukraine operations. But the winter weather and Russia's depleted resources mean any big Russian attack probably won't come soon, according to the Institute for the Study of War, a think tank in Washington.

"The capacity of the Russian military, even reinforced by elements of the Belarusian armed forces, to prepare and conduct effective large-scale mechanized offensive operations in the next few months remains questionable," the think tank said in an assessment published Sunday.

It also concluded that "it is unlikely that Lukashenko will commit the Belarusian military (which would also have to be re-equipped) to the invasion of Ukraine."

In Ukraine, multiple explosive drones attacked the capital before dawn. The attack came three days after what Ukrainian officials described as one of Russia's biggest assaults on Kyiv since the war started.

Russia launched 23 self-exploding drones over Kyiv while the city slept, but Ukrainian forces shot down 18 of them, the Kyiv city administration said on Telegram. No major casualties were reported from the attack, although the Ukrainian president's office said the war killed at least three civilians and wounded 11 elsewhere in the country between Sunday and Monday.

The drone barrage caused emergency power outages in 11 central and eastern regions, including the capital region, authorities said.

Monday was St. Nicholas Day, an occasion that marks the start of the Christmas holidays in Ukraine and is when children typically receive their first gifts hidden under pillows.

"This is how Russians congratulated our children on the holiday," Serhii Kruk, the head of Ukraine's State Emergency Service, wrote on Telegram, attaching photos of firefighters barely distinguished amid the flames of an infrastructure facility that was hit.

"In the night when everyone is waiting for a miracle, the terrorist country continues to terrorize the peaceful Ukrainian people," said Ukraine's human rights chief, Dmytro Lubinets.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy described the unrelenting daily barrages as "terror" and once again pleaded for Western countries to send sophisticated air defense systems as winter tightens its grip.

## Sudanese Forces Fire Tear Gas At Rally Against Post-Coup Deal

KHARTOUM (Dispatches) - Sudanese security forces fired tear gas at protesters in Khartoum who rallied against a tentative deal aimed at ending the crisis provoked by last year's military coup, AFP correspondents said.

Thousands of pro-democracy activists took to the streets in Sudan's capital to reject the agreement signed by military and civilian leaders on December 5, which critics have dismissed as vague.

"We will not accept anything other than a civilian government," said protestor Samira Hassan.

The protesters chanted, "You will not rule us with this deal," according to an AFP correspondent.

Others called on the military to go "back to the barracks".

Security forces later fired tear gas to disperse the crowd, the AFP correspondents said.

The demonstration coincided with the fourth anniversary of the outbreak of months-long mass protests that ousted long-time autocrat Omar al-Bashir in April 2019.

Bashir's three-decade rule was followed by a short-lived transition to civilian rule, upended in October 2021 when army chief Abdel Fattah al-Burhan led a coup, deepening Sudan's political and economic turmoil.



## Dutch Leader Apologizes for Netherlands' Role in Slave Trade

THE HAGUE (Dispatches) - Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte apologized on behalf of his government for the Netherlands' role in slavery and the slave trade, in a speech welcomed by activists as historic but lacking in concrete plans for repair and reparations.

"Today I apologize," Rutte said in a 20-minute speech that was greeted with silence by an invited audience at the National Archive.

Ahead of the speech, Waldo Koendjibiharie, a retiree who was born in Suriname but lived for years in the Netherlands, said an apology was not enough.

"It's about money. Apologies are words and with those words you can't buy anything," he said.

Rutte told reporters after the speech that the government is not offering compensation to "people — grandchildren or great grandchildren of enslaved people."

Instead, it is establishing a 200 million-euro (\$212 million) fund for initiatives to help tackle the legacy of slavery in the Netherlands and its former colonies and to boost education about the issue.

Rutte apologized "for the actions of the Dutch state in the past: posthumously to all enslaved people worldwide who have suffered from those actions, to their daughters and sons, and to all their descendants into the here and now."

Describing how more than 600,000 African men, women and children were shipped, "like cattle" mostly to the former colony of Suriname, by Dutch slave traders, Rutte said that history often is "ugly, painful, and even downright shameful."

Rutte went ahead with the apology even though some activist groups in the Netherlands and its former colonies had urged him to wait until July 1 of next year, the anniversary of the abolition of slavery 160 years ago and said they had not been sufficiently consulted in the process leading up to the speech.

Activists consider next year the 150th anniversary because many enslaved people were forced to continue working in plantations for a decade after abolition.

## North Korea Says Latest Launches Tested 1st Spy Satellite

SEOUL (Dispatches) - North Korea said it fired a test satellite in an important final-stage test for the development of its first spy satellite, a key military capability coveted by its leader Kim Jong Un along with other high-tech weapons systems.

The North's official Korean Central News Agency also released low-resolution, black-and-white photos showing a space view of the South Korean capital and Incheon, a city just west of Seoul, in an apparent attempt to show the North is pushing to acquire a surveillance tool to monitor its rival.

The rocket carrying the test satellite was launched Sunday to assess the satellite's photography and data transmission systems, KCNA said.

The country's National Aerospace Development Administration called the test results "an important success which has gone through the final gateway process of the launch of reconnaissance satellite." It said it would complete the preparations for its first military reconnaissance satellite by April next year, according to KCNA.

"From the images released, the resolution does not appear to be so impressive for military reconnaissance," Soo Kim, a security analyst at the California-based RAND Corporation, said. "I'd note, however, that this is probably an ongoing development, so we may see more improvements to North Korea's military

reconnaissance capabilities over time."

South Korea, Japan and U.S. authorities said Sunday they had detected a pair of ballistic missile launches by North Korea from its northwestern Tongchang-ri area, where the North's satellite launch pad is located. They said the two missiles flew about 500 kilometers (310 miles) at a maximum altitude of 550 kilometers (340 miles) before landing in the waters between the Korean Peninsula and Japan.

This meant North Korea likely fired two missiles with different types of cameras — one for black-and-white imagery and video and the other for color, given the North's state media said that Sunday's test involved both types of cameras, said Lee Choon Geun, an honorary research fellow at South Korea's Science and Technology Policy Institute.

An analysis of a photo of the launch also showed the missiles were likely a new type of a liquid-fueled weapon that can be used for a military purpose as well as sending a satellite into orbit, Lee said.

Geon Ha Gyu, a spokesperson for South Korea's Defense Ministry, told reporters Monday that the South Korean and U.S. assessments that North Korea fired the two medium-range ballistic missiles remain unchanged. He said South Korean and U.S. intelligence authorities were analyzing further details of the launches but declined to elaborate.



## UK Plan to Send Asylum-Seekers to Rwanda Is Legal

LONDON (Dispatches) - Britain's High Court ruled that a plan to send asylum-seekers on a one-way trip to Rwanda is legal but the government must consider the circumstances of each case before deporting anyone, a judgment that sets the controversial policy up for further legal battles.

Several asylum-seekers, aid groups and a border officials' union filed lawsuits to stop the Conservative government acting on a deportation agreement with Rwanda that is intended to deter migrants from trying to reach the U.K. on risky journeys across the English Channel.

The U.K. plans to send some migrants who arrive in the U.K. as stowaways or in small boats to the East African country, where their asylum claims would be processed. Those granted asylum would stay in Rwanda rather than returning to the U.K.

"The court has concluded that it is lawful for the government to make arrangements for relocating asylum-seekers to Rwanda and for their asylum claims to be determined in Rwanda rather than in the United Kingdom," said Clive Lewis, one of two justices who made the ruling.

The judges said the policy did not breach Britain's obligations under the U.N. Refugee Convention or other international agreements. But they added that the government "must decide if there is anything about each person's particular circumstances" which meant they should not be sent to Rwanda, and had failed to do that for the eight claimants in the case.

U.K. Home Secretary Suella Braverman, who has called the Channel crossings an "invasion of our southern coast," responded to the ruling by saying it "thoroughly vindicates the Rwanda partnership."

"The sooner it is up and running, the sooner we will break the business model of the evil gangs" of people-smugglers, Braverman told lawmakers in the House of Commons.

The immigration spokesperson for the opposition Labour Party, Yvette Cooper, slammed the plan as "unworkable, unethical (and) extremely expensive."

Rwandan government spokeswoman Yolande Makolo said the court ruling was "a positive step in our quest to contribute innovative, long-term solutions to the global migration crisis."



# Syria Fuel Crisis Sows Down Life in Damascus



DAMASCUS (Dispatches) - Syrian student Ziad al-Ezz can no longer get to university as severe fuel shortages cripple the capital Damascus, pushing residents to seek alternatives for heating and shuttering businesses.

With the country's economy battered by more than a decade of war, authorities have announced four fuel price hikes since the start of the year as well as rationing of petrol and fuel oil supplies.

"Our struggle for fuel starts at home and doesn't end" in the classroom, said Ezz, 20, who studies literature at the University of Damascus.

"At home it's extremely cold without heating, and on the street it's not easy to find transport."

In a city where winter can be bitterly cold, the price of heating fuel has gone through the roof, so his mother has told him to make do with piling on layers of covers for warmth.

Syria blames the fuel shortages on Western sanctions that severely restrict imports, and the country's major oil fields lie in areas outside government control.

Ezz works part time doing food deliveries by bicycle, but the trip to university is too far to pedal, while rare public buses are packed and taxis are too expensive, he said.

Universities have dropped classes to three days a week due to the fuel crisis.

"People are only thinking about how to stay warm over winter," said Ezz.

"How can I even think of university and studying in this situation?"

Daily life has gotten tougher in recent weeks in Damascus, where severe electricity rationing means residents receive just two hours of daily state power.

Some people have opted for burning pistachio shells or the remains of pressed olives to keep warm.

Peak-hour traffic jams in the capital are now almost non-existent, with many motorists leaving their cars at home except in case of emergency.

Taxi drivers used to be able to buy fuel at subsidised rates once a week, but now that has dropped to once a month, pushing many to the black market for fuel supplies and ramping up taxi fares.

Black market fuel used to cost around \$1 per liter but prices doubled this winter, in a country where civil servants earn on average \$21 a month.

"The (subsidised) fuel allowance only lasts me two working days," said taxi driver Bassam Zahrawi.

Prime Minister Hussein Arnous told reporters on Thursday that the government was forced to hike official fuel prices to prevent key services including transport, hospitals and bakeries from grinding to a halt.

Zahrawi said he no longer cruises the streets of Damascus, but waits for people to phone him for fares.

"Before, we used to look for clients, but now they're seeking us out," the 39-year-old said.

Syria's civil war has killed nearly half a million people since it began in 2011, fragmenting the country and ravaging its economy and infrastructure.

Ninety percent of the population now live below the poverty line and 12.4 million people are food insecure, according to the United Nations.

The government has recently introduced further austerity measures, including temporarily reducing public servants' working days this month and announcing extra holiday closures between Christmas and New Year.

Some call centers of the country's main telecommunications companies were temporarily out of service earlier in December after running out of generator fuel.

Bassam Qalaaji, head of the bakers' association, told a local radio station last week that half of the capital's private bakeries had stopped work due to the shortages.

# Japan's Teachers Battle for Change



TOKYO (Dispatches) - In one of his last diary entries, Japanese teacher Yoshio Kudo lamented workdays that started early and could last until nearly midnight. Two months later, he suffered "karoshi" — death from overwork.

Kudo's taxing schedule was far from an exception in Japan, where teachers work some of the longest hours in the world, saddled with tasks from cleaning and supervising school commutes to after-school clubs.

A 2018 OECD survey found Japanese middle school teachers work 56 hours a week, versus an average 38 hours in most developed countries.

But that still fails to account for astonishing amounts of overtime.

One probe by a union-affiliated think tank showed school teachers work an average 123 hours of overtime each month, pushing their weekly workload well beyond the so-called "karoshi line" of 80 hours.

Teachers say they are reaching the breaking point, and some have challenged the culture through lawsuits. This year, Japan's ruling party established a task force to study the issue.

That came too late for Kudo, a middle school teacher, who died of a brain haemorrhage aged 40 in 2007.

At his funeral, stunned students told his wife Sachiko that the lively physical education teacher was the "furthest imaginable person from death".

"He just loved working with kids," Sachiko, 55, told AFP.

But in his final weeks, he was struggling with his hours.

"Towards the end, he was telling me that teachers should stop working like this and that he wanted to lead that change in the future," his widow said.

Japanese authorities have ordered steps including outsourcing and digitalizing some tasks.

"Our measures to reform work conditions for teachers are making steady progress," education minister Keiko Nagaoka told parliament in October.

But she acknowledged that many "continue to work long hours" and "efforts need to be accelerated".

Education ministry data shows a gradual decline in overtime, but experts see little fundamental change.

From reams of paperwork to tasks like lunch distribution, leading daily cleaning sessions with students and monitoring children on their way to and from school, teachers in Japan "have in a way become handymen", school management consultant Masatoshi Senoo said.

"What should really be the responsibility of parents sometimes spills over onto teachers, who can even be sent to apologise to local residents when students misbehave at parks or convenience stores," he said.

One of the most all-consuming tasks is the supervision of student sports and cultural "club" activities, typically conducted after school and on weekends.

"Being assigned as primary supervisor of one of these clubs usually means you have to kiss your weekends goodbye," said Takeshi Nishimoto, a high school history teacher in Osaka.

In June, Nishimoto, 34, won a rare lawsuit seeking compensation for stress from overwork.

He filed the suit after coming close to a nervous breakdown in 2017, when the then-rugby club supervisor worked 144 hours of overtime in a single month.

Experts say teachers are particularly vulnerable to overwork because of a decades-old law that essentially prevents them from being paid for overtime.

Instead, the law adds eight hours' worth of extra pay to their monthly salaries, a framework that Nishimoto says results in "making teachers work without limits for fixed pay".



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## Dutch Inflation to Stick Around 5%

AMSTERDAM (Reuters) - Inflation in the Netherlands is set to remain at a relatively high level of around 5% in the next two years as soaring energy costs feed into the prices of other goods and services, the Dutch central bank (DNB) said.

Inflation in the euro zone's fifth largest economy is expected to drop to 4.9% in 2023, after jumping to

11.5% this year as Russia's invasion of Ukraine caused a global energy crisis.

But inflation is likely to remain at 5% in 2024, the central bank said, as surging energy bills lift prices across the board and the tight labor market continues to drive up wages.

The European Central Bank last week said it expected inflation in the whole euro area to ease to 3.4% on average by 2024.



## UK Recession to Last Until End of Next Year

LONDON (Dispatches) - The UK economy is on track to shrink by 1.3% in 2023 amid a recession which is set to last until the end of next year, according to a new economic forecast.

Economists at KPMG have predicted that the UK has already entered a "shallow but protracted" recession amid continued inflation and higher interest rates.

Yael Selfin, chief economist at KPMG UK, said increases in food and energy costs this year have dragged back households' spending power.

KPMG predicted that the country entered recession in the third quarter of 2022.

Official figures from the Office for National Statistics showed that the economy shrank by 0.2% in the third quarter, between July and September.

A technical recession is defined as at least two consecutive quarters of contraction.

The latest economic outlook report predicted that output could also fall by 1.9% next year as businesses feel the pressure from reduced consumer spending and higher borrowing rates.

As consumers cut back on spending, we anticipate a sharp reduction in non-essential categories of spend by those households most affected by the rise in energy and food costs

Earlier this month, the Bank of England increased interest rates to a 14-year high of 3.5%. They are expected to reach at least 4% by next spring.

KPMG also predicted that the UK labour market will start deteriorating from the first half of next year.

It said the rate of unemployment, which rose to 3.7% for the three months to October, could reach 5.6% by mid-2023, representing an increase of around 680,000 people.

The new report also raised its predicted rate of inflation to 7% for next year, having previously forecast 5.6% for the year.

Mr Selfin said: "Households are expected to rein in spending on discretionary items in 2023 in response to the squeeze on income.

"As consumers cut back on spending, we anticipate a sharp reduction in non-essential categories of spend by those households most affected by the rise in energy and food costs, including spending on eating out and entertainment.

"The outlook could turn more positive, particularly if energy costs drop back to previous levels.

"However, risks are probably skewed to the downside, given the state of public finances as well as some companies' balance sheets, which could make it harder for them to absorb any potential further shocks in the short term."

## South Korea Warns of Deepening Economic Slump

SEOUL (Dispatches) - South Korea has warned of a deeper economic slowdown than expected next year, extending sales tax breaks on some fuel oil products and passenger cars by a few months.

"Our economy's growth is expected to slow next year due to the effects from a global economic slump, and the difficulty will be focused on the first half," Finance Minister Choo Kyung-ho said on Monday at a meeting with the ruling party leadership, adding the economy was slowing at a more rapid pace than expected.

The government is expected later this week to announce its economic policy strategies for next year, which will be the first full-year statement for President Yoon Suk-yeol's administration since its launch in May.

South Korea's economy, the fourth-largest in Asia, relies heavily on exports ranging from cars and ships to chips and smartphones. It is widely expected to see growth fall below 2 percent next year, down from close to 3 percent this year.

The central bank last month cut its projection for next year's economic growth to 1.7 percent from the previous 2.1 percent in its scheduled revision, citing falling exports and the resultant reduction likely in corporate investment.

As the economy has now to rely more on domestic consumption to offset cooling export demand, the finance ministry has extended by as much as six months tax breaks on fuel oil products and passenger car sales beyond their original end-2022 expiry.

The ministry is due to unveil its 2023 economic projections and strategies on Wednesday.

President Yoon, struggling against low approval ratings, says exports are the best choice for the manufacturing-heavy country to overcome its slump.

China, South Korea's top export market, is facing its own problems as its economy feels the effect of years of strict controls to fight COVID-19.



## German Business Sentiment Improves Considerably

BERLIN (Dispatches)- German business sentiment improved "considerably" in December, according to a survey released on Monday by the Ifo Institute.

The business climate index rose to 88.6 from 86.4 in November, coming in ahead of expectations for a reading of 87.4.

The current situation index improved to 94.4 from 93.2, while the expectations gauge increased to 83.2 in December from 80.2 a month earlier.

Ifo president Clemens Fuest said: "German business is entering the holiday season with a sense of hope."

The index for the manufacturing sector rose to -5.6 in December from -11.5 the month before, while the gauge for services improved to -1.2 from -5.3.

The trade index was -20 in December versus -26.9 in November, while the construction gauge printed at -22.2 from -21.5.

Capital Economics said: "The further increase in the Ifo business climate index in December and the general improvement in the surveys over the past two months suggests the outlook for the German economy has improved. But we still think Germany will experience a recession, albeit a shallower one than we initially feared."

Carsten Brzeski, global head of macro at ING, said: "At the end of what has once again been a challenging year for the German economy, hope has returned: hope that the economy might even avoid a winter recession or at least hope that it will only be a mild one.

"Indeed, implemented and announced government fiscal stimulus packages and the lockdown-related backlogs have prevented the economy from falling off a cliff. At the same time, however, the cold winter spell of the last days has shown how quickly filled national gas reserves and gas consumption reductions can disappear again.

## Spain's Labor Reform Leads Youth to Jobs

MADRID (Dispatches) - An upgrade to Spain's labor policy rules has led to a 142% rise in young workers with permanent contracts in a country where youth unemployment and under-employment rates have been among the highest in Europe since the global financial crisis erupted.

The increase is evidence that the Socialist-led government's 9-month-old labor reform is reversing the easy hire-and-fire regime after the sovereign debt crisis a decade ago. The set labor rules at the time were hailed as placing the country on a low-cost, competitive footing, but also criticized for eroding workers' rights and prompting many young Spaniards to emigrate.

Youth unemployment rates that reached more than 55% in the years after the financial crisis

fell to 31% in the third quarter - against an overall unemployment rate of 12.6%, according to the National Statistics Office (INE).

Youth unemployment is a chronic problem in southern European countries, whereas one in four young people was unemployed in Italy during the summer, according to Eurostat data.

Greece, whose rates of youth unemployment are similar to Spain's, wants to reduce its youth unemployment rate to 18% by 2030 and is introducing subsidies for pension and health fund costs to reduce labor costs and special training programs.

While youth unemployment rates improved in Spain with the economic upturn after the financial crash, by the summer of 2021, seven out of every ten under-24s had a temporary contract. That rate fell by 13 percentage points in the third quarter of 2022 following the new labor regulations, making Spain slightly better off than, or prosperous such as the Netherlands or Italy.

The labor reform negotiated with employers and unions and introduced in March abolished most temporary jobs to provide job stability and reduce the unemployment rate. Previously, employers used temporary contracts as a safety net in times of crisis.

"Finding an apartment is going to be easier now," said Cristina Garcia, 24, who secured her first permanent contract as a receptionist at a multinational company in Madrid in September.

According to the Spanish Youth Council, Garcia's case is an anomaly in Spain, where the number of young people aged 16-24 who were able to move out of their parent's home in the first half of 2022 was just 4%, compared to the EU average of 17.7%.

Even so, young people say things are changing. After five years as a computer scientist at a technology company in Madrid, Sami Khalaf, 28, signed his first permanent contract in February.

"I intend to save money, I see things differently," said Khalaf, who moved out of his parent's house some months ago.

## Chinese Business Confidence Falls to Lowest in Almost a Decade

BEIJING (Dispatches) - China's business confidence fell to its lowest since January 2013, a survey by World Economics showed, reflecting the impact of surging COVID-19 cases on economic activity with the abrupt lifting of many pandemic control measures.

The index fell to 48.1 in December from 51.8 in November, showed the World Economics' survey of sales managers at over 2,300 companies conducted Dec. 1-16. The index was the lowest since the survey began in 2013.

The survey results were among the first indicators of how business sentiment has taken a hit in the world's second-biggest economy, after the sharp relaxation of strict COVID containment measures on Dec. 7 triggered a still-growing wave of domestic COVID cases across China.

"The survey suggests strongly that the growth rate of the Chinese economy has slowed quite dramatically, and may be heading for recession in 2023," World Economics said.

China's GDP is expected to grow just 3% this year, its worst performance in nearly half a century.

The survey showed business activity fell sharply in December with the sales managers indexes in Manufacturing and Service Sectors both below the 50 level.

"The percentage of companies that claim to be currently negatively impacted by COVID has risen to a survey high, with more than half of all respondents now suggesting their operations are being harmed in one way or another," the London-based data provider said.

China has recently dismantled some key parts of the world's toughest anti-COVID curbs and lockdowns. The measures were championed by President Xi Jinping but impaired the economy and sparked popular protests unprecedented in his decade-long rule.

The top leaders and policymakers will focus on stabilizing the economy in 2023 and step up policy adjustments to ensure key targets are hit, according to an agenda-setting meeting ended on Friday. read more

"It may take at least another quarter before things turn around," said Dan Wang, chief economist at Hang Seng Bank China.

"Many small businesses have run out of liquidity, especially restaurants, gyms, hotels and other city services."

## India's Economic Activity Looks Set to Slow



NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - India's economy appeared to slow rather than accelerate last month, as high-frequency indicators tracked by Bloomberg signaled worsening business and consumption activity.

Although a dial measuring so-called animal spirits showed activity was steady for a fifth straight month in November, the needle was just one bad data point away from swinging to the left. Exports, a key growth lever in the past year, was among three of eight metrics that performed poorly. The rest were unchanged.

Bloomberg's dashboard reflects a broadly grim outlook for 2023 as tighter global interest rates take a toll on demand. The gauge uses a three-month weighted average to smooth out volatility in single-month readings.

Purchasing managers' surveys for November showed that activity across the services and manufacturing sectors improved, though the three-month weighted average was still weak. New orders expanded at faster rates in both sectors, while output prices rose at the quickest pace in three months.

Pollyanna De Lima, economics associate director at S&P Global Market Intelligence, said the latest results are good news, even if the trend for inflation is somewhat concerning. "Evidence of stubborn inflation may prompt further hikes to the policy rate at a time when global economic challenges could negatively impact" India's growth, she said.

Exports barely improved last month, increasing 0.6% from a year ago after declining 16.7% in October, data released by the trade ministry showed. Only half of the 30 sectors posted growth. The government attributed the tepid performance to weak demand for engineering and iron ore products.

Imports climbed 5.4%, keeping India's trade gap above US\$20 billion for the eighth consecutive month. That adds pressure to the country's current account deficit, a key vulnerability for the economy and the rupee, the worst-hit major Asian currency this year after the Japanese yen.

## Perpetrators of Izeh Terrorist Attack Arrested

TEHRAN (MNA) - Two people involved in a deadly terrorist attack in Izeh, a city in Iran's southwestern province of Khuzestan, were arrested in a joint operation of the Intelligence Ministry, Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, and the Police. The general prosecutor of Khuzestan province made the announcement on Tuesday, saying that four people involved

in Izeh terrorist attack were identified during the joint operation carried out by the forces of the Intelligence Ministry, IRGC, and the Police.

Two of the perpetrators of the deadly attack were arrested and the two others were killed in the operation, the judiciary official added.



## EU Strikes Key Deal on Carbon Trading to Slash Emissions by 2030

BRUSSELS (Dispatches) - EU member states and parliamentarians announced an agreement for a major reform to the bloc's carbon market, the central plank of its ambitions to reduce emissions and invest in climate-friendly technologies.

The deal aims to accelerate emissions cuts, phase out free allowances to industries and targets fuel emissions from the building and road transport sectors, according to a European Parliament statement.

The EU Emissions Trading System (ETS) allows electricity producers and industries with high energy demands such as steel and cement to purchase "free allowances" to cover their carbon emissions under a "polluter pays" principle.

The quotas are designed to decrease over time to encourage them to emit less and invest in greener technologies as part of the European Union's ultimate aim of achieving carbon neutrality.

Negotiators representing member states and the parliament had spent more than 24 hours in intense talks before reaching an agreement on Saturday night that widens the scope of the European Union carbon market.

The deal means emissions in the ETS sectors are to be cut by 62 percent by 2030 based on 2005 levels, up from a previous goal of 43 percent. Concerned industries must cut their emissions by that amount.

The agreement also seeks to accelerate the timetable for phasing out the free allowances, with 48.5 percent phased out by 2030 and a complete removal by 2034, a schedule at the center of fierce debates between MEPs and member states.

The carbon market will be progressively extended to the maritime sector, intra-European flights and waste incineration sites depending on a favorable report by the commission.

A "carbon border tax", which imposes environmental standards on imports into the bloc based on the carbon emissions linked to their production, will offset the reduction of free allowances and allow industries to compete with more polluting non-EU rivals.



The agreement also aims to make households pay for emissions linked to fuel and gas heating from 2027, but the price will be capped until 2030.

The commission had proposed a second carbon market targeting building heating and road fuels, but the plan raised concerns as European households grapple with soaring energy prices exacerbated by Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

If energy prices continue to spiral, the application of this part of the agreement will be delayed by a year.

Funds from this second market will go to a "Social Climate Fund" designed to help vulnerable households and businesses weather the energy price crisis.

## Robotic Arm to Inspect Leaky Soyuz Spacecraft



MOSCOW (Dispatches) - A 17-metre-long Canadian-made robotic arm on the International Space Station will inspect a docked Soyuz spacecraft after a leak was noticed just before a spacewalk last week, Russia's state space corporation said.

After the spacewalk was called off on Dec. 15, Roscosmos said there had been damage to the outer skin of an instrument assembly compartment of the Soyuz MS-22 capsule. It said there was a coolant leak.

Roscosmos said cosmonauts Sergey Prokopyev, Dmitry Petelin and Anna Kikina were enjoying a day of rest on the Space Station and would then watch the final of the World Cup.

"The Soyuz MS-22 spacecraft will be inspected with cameras of the SSRMS, the Space Station Remote Manipulator System," Roscosmos said in a statement. "The results were to be transmitted to earth on Monday."

Commonly known as Canadarm2, the SSRMS is a 17-metre-long arm which performs maintenance, moves supplies and grapples vehicles to the space station.

"The temperature in the Soyuz MS-22 manned spacecraft was reduced due to the actions of specialists from the Mission Control Center near Moscow, remaining within the specified limits," it said.

Preparations are underway for the launch of the Soyuz MS-23 from Baikonur in Kazakhstan, and Russia's space agency said that launch could be accelerated if needed.

## Philippines Extends Tariff Cuts On Imported Rice, Other Food Items

MANILA (Dispatches) - Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr has approved the recommendation of the economic ministry to extend up to the end of next year lower tariff rates on rice and other food items to help combat inflation, his office said.

The modified rates approved in 2021 were due to expire at the end of this year, but an inflation rate running at 14-year highs warranted an extension of the tariff reprieve until Dec. 31, 2023.

That means the tariff rate for imported rice will stay at 35%, while the import levies on corn and pork products will remain at 5%-15% and 15%-25% respectively, the press secretary's office said in a statement.

The tariff for coal imports, a key fuel in power generation, will remain at zero beyond the end of next year, but will be reviewed regularly.

"Through this policy, we shall augment our domestic food supplies, diversify our sources of food staples, and temper inflationary pressures arising from supply constraints and rising international prices of production inputs," Economic Planning Secretary Arsenio Balisacan said in the statement.

## UN Deal Calls for \$20b Int'l Biodiversity Aid, According to Draft

MONTREAL (Dispatches) - A draft UN deal to save nature calls on rich countries to increase financial aid to the developing world to \$20 billion annually by 2025, rising to \$30 billion per year by 2030, documents showed.

It also called on countries to "ensure and enable that by 2030 at least 30 percent of terrestrial, inland water, and coastal and marine areas" are effectively conserved and managed.

The compromise text, brokered by China which is presiding over a summit called COP15 in Montreal, was quickly welcomed by conservationists, though it still needs to be agreed upon by the 196 signatories to the Convention on Biological Diversity before it is finalized.

The text "demonstrates that China is ready to lead a 'race to the top,' building on the ambition expressed by Parties during COP15," said Alfred DeGemmis, of Wildlife Conservation Society.



"China will now need to defend the ambition contained in this document, bringing any hesitant Parties on board with the overwhelming global consensus that biodiversity loss is an urgent crisis that needs immediate action," DeGemmis also cautioned however that much of the text was too focused on action by 2050, as opposed to more immediate achievements by 2030.

The issue of how much money rich countries will send to the developing world, home to most of the planet's biodiversity, has been the biggest sticking point.

Lower income nations point out developed countries grew rich by exploiting their resources and therefore they should be paid to protect their own ecosystems.

Current financial flows to the developing world are estimated at around \$10 billion per year.

Delegates are working to roll back the destruction and pollution that threaten an estimated one million plant and animal species with extinction, according to scientists that report to the United Nations.

## Imran Khan Claims Elections Only Option to Avoid Default

ISLAMABAD (Dispatches) - Former prime minister and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Chairman Imran Khan claimed that the only option to save the country from default is to hold fresh elections, Aaj News reported.

While interacting with a delegation of the Council of Pakistan Newspapers Editors (CPNE) at his Lahore's Zaman Park residence, Imran Khan said that "looters" have brought the country to the verge of default.

"The country cannot achieve economic stability without political stability. And in the current economic situation, the only way out is fresh elections," Imran Khan said.

He said that the ruling coalition does not want early elections because they can foresee their defeat.

### Tehran Mulls...

FROM PAGE 1

The company's first exports to Russia occurred notably between 2007 and 2009. Some Iran-made automotive components such as engine cooling systems, suspension and casting parts have been exported to the Russian market in recent years.

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 car based on Peugeot 405.

The Ukraine war has upended car production in Russia which is the eighth-largest automotive market in the world. Several global manufacturers have halted deliveries to Russia, while others have been forced to pause production due to a lack of parts.

Last month, Venezuelan Minister of Transport Ram3n Vel3squez announced the shipment of 1,000 cars built in Iran to Venezuela, stating that they were among 80,000 requests registered for the products of an Iranian car manufacturer in his country.

Last week, Deputy Industry, Mining and Trade Minister Manochehr Manteghi said Iran and Russia were discussing joint production of passenger planes with a capacity of 70-150 seats.

Iran has also signed a contract with Russia to supply it with 40 turbines to help its gas industry amid Western sanctions, the ministry of petroleum's Shana news agency reported in October.

### Russia's VTB Bank...

FROM PAGE 1

VTB has past experience with dealing with bank transfers with Iran but was fined \$9.5mn by the US for violating bank sanctions in 2014.

Earlier in November, the bank announced it was shutting down operations in London after a "100+ year history" in the City of London, according to its latest regulatory filing.

The London operation, which can trace its lineage back to Tsarist times via its Moscow Narodny subsidiary based near Cannon Street since the Revolution in 1917, has been a prestigious calling card for the Kremlin in the UK.

The US Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control penalized Bank of Moscow (a VTB subsidiary) for authorizing 69 financial transfers, worth roughly \$41mn, for a Russian subsidiary of Iran's Bank Melli between 2008 and 2009.

### Terrorist Attack...

FROM PAGE 1

They are such inveterate liars and are so hypocritical that hoist the human rights flag in words but create dangerous terror groups in practice, Ayatollah Khamenei added.

The Leader said killing pilgrims is quite different from other acts of terror and brings further disgrace to the enemy.

A heavily-armed terrorist assaulted the well-known shrine at approximately 5:45 p.m. local time (1415 GMT) on October 26, just before the evening prayers, killing 15 pilgrims — including a lady and two children — and injuring at least 40 others.

The attacker opened fire indiscriminately on visitors within the shrine, according to the police commander of Fars province. The perpetrator was wounded and taken into custody by security personnel. He later succumbed to his wounds.

Soon afterward, Daesh claimed responsibility for the act of terror.

Ayatollah Khamenei also urged culture and art institutions to pay attention to the tragic incident and other historical issues and hand them over to future generations.

Iran's young generation does not have enough information about past incidents such as the anti-Iran terrorist group best known as the Mujahedin-e-Khalq Organization (MKO), the Leader said.

Ayatollah Khamenei stated that cultural and media bodies should produce artistic products about the Shah Cheragh incident and other historical issues, noting that there are shortcomings in media works about issues pertaining to the history and events of the Islamic Revolution and the enemies' crimes.

### UN Calls on U.S...

FROM PAGE 1

The UN official emphasized that lasting peace and security for all member states depend on dialogue and cooperation, saying, "We encourage all parties and the United States to resume their efforts to resolve the outstanding issues lest the gains achieved by the plan after years of painstaking efforts be completely lost."

Pointing to the "shrinking" space for diplomacy, the top UN official said since the last meeting of the Security Council on Iran's nuclear program, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has reported on the Islamic Republic's intention to install new centrifuges at the Natanz nuclear facility and to produce more uranium enriched up to 60% at the nuclear site.

Iran in November started enriching uranium to the purity level of 60% at its Fordow nuclear facility after it officially informed the IAEA of its decision.

Tehran said the move was a strong message to the latest anti-Iran resolution passed by the IAEA's Board of Governors, which criticized the country for what it called a lack of cooperation with the agency. The resolution was put forward by the United States, Britain, France and Germany, in continuation of their political pressures on Iran. Russia and China voted against it.

Permanent Representative of Russia to the United Nations Vasily Nebenzya said at the meeting that the allegations about deliveries of drones by Iran to Russia for use in Ukraine are "patently concocted and false."

The permanent representative of Iran also denied claims that the country had supplied UAVs for use in the Russia's war on Ukraine while Moscow has also expressed its serious concerns regarding the requests of these member states.

Both Iran and Russia have repeatedly denied claims that Tehran has provided Moscow with drones to be used in the Ukraine war.

The anti-Iran claims first emerged in July, with US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan alleging that Washington had received "information" indicating that the Islamic Republic was preparing to provide Russia with "up to several hundred drones, including weapons-capable UAVs on an expedited timeline" for use in the war.

Addressing the same Security Council meeting, Deputy Head of the European Union delegation to the United Nations Silvio Gonzato said the bloc continues to recognize that Iran has faced and continues facing "very serious negative economic consequences" following Washington's move to unilateral withdrawal from the JCPOA and re-impose previously lifted US unilateral sanctions, expressing his deep regret in this regard.

Speaking on behalf of the EU foreign policy chief, Josep Borrell, he added that the U.S. has imposed additional nuclear-related sanctions against Iran, including in the area of oil and petrochemicals since June.

### Washington Urged...

FROM PAGE 1

In another part of his address, Iravani emphasized Iran's commitment to dialogue and diplomacy, saying, "We are ready to resume the Vienna talks [on the revival of the JCPOA], to cooperate for achievement of an acceptable solution, and even arrange a [foreign] ministerial meeting as soon as possible to declare the revival of the JCPOA."

He said in order for these goals to be achieved, "The United States must show real political resolve and be ready to work toward a satisfactory solution. It must accept to completely fulfill its obligations" under the JCPOA.

The Iranian ambassador added that "the ball is now in US court" and it is the United States that must prove itself to be reliable and capable of living up to its promises.

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## Kenyan 100m Sprinter Handed Two-Year Doping Ban

**NAIROBI (Dispatches)** - Sprinter Mark Otieno and two marathoners were on Monday banned from competing for up to three years, the Athletics Integrity Unit (AIU) said, adding to the long list of Kenyans sanctioned for breaching anti-doping rules. Otieno tested positive for the banned anabolic steroid methasterone and was suspended from the Tokyo Olympics in 2021 moments before he was due to compete in the 100m heats. The 29-year-old will serve a two-year ban starting July 2021, the AIU said.

## Marcaccio Joins Nadal's Coaching Staff

**LONDON (Dispatches)** - Argentine Gustavo Marcaccio will be a new member of Rafael Nadal's coaching staff for the 2023 season, the Spanish player said. The announcement comes three days after Spanish coach Francis Roig said he would be stepping down from his role on Nadal's team after 18 years to take on new projects. "I would like to inform you about the addition of Gustavo Marcaccio to the technical team," Nadal, 36, wrote on Twitter.

# Jokic's 40-Point Triple-Double Carries Nuggets

**LOS ANGELES (Dispatches)** - Nikola Jokic joined rare NBA company with a 40-point, 27-rebound, 10-assist triple-double for the Denver Nuggets in a 119-115 victory over the Charlotte Hornets.

Jokic showed all the skills that saw him scoop the last two NBA Most Valuable Player awards, and became the first player to record at least 40 points, 25 rebounds and 10 assists in a game since the great Wilt Chamberlain in 1968.

Denver led by 10 after his three-pointer with 6:45 to play, but the Hornets were just two back after PJ Washington's dunk with 13.5 remaining.

Jokic made a pair of free throws to seal the win and cap his 81st career triple-double.

Brooklyn's Kevin Durant and Golden State's Jordan Poole had big nights, too, both scoring 43 points to lead their teams to impressive wins.

The Nets erased a 17-point halftime deficit to beat the Pistons 124-121 in Detroit while the reigning champion Warriors earned just their third road win of the season with a 126-110 victory over the Raptors in Toronto.

Durant said defense was key to the Nets' sixth straight victory.

Trailing 71-54 at halftime, the Nets out-scored the Pistons 44-25 in the third quarter and held on for the win.

Durant scored 26 points in the third period alone. Kyrie Irving added 38 points for the Nets, whose seven-point lead was cut to one by Bojan Bogdanovic's running three-pointer with 40.1 seconds to play.

Irving made two free throws to push the lead back to three, but a basket by Detroit's Alec Burks pulled the Pistons back within one before Durant made two free throws to clinch it.

Durant said physical defense was the key to the Nets' comeback.

In Toronto, Poole's 43 were a career high. Klay Thompson and Draymond Green scored 17 points apiece for the Warriors, whose star Stephen Curry missed his second game with a left shoulder injury.

Poole made five of the Warriors 18 three-pointers, connecting on 14 of 23 shots from the field overall.

## After World Cup, Qatar Seeks Olympic Gold

**DOHA (dispatches)** - After the World Cup earned Qatar both plaudits and censure, the energy-rich Persian Gulf state is now starting a marathon to secure the 2036 Olympics and a place as a pillar of world sport.

Even as Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo scored goals and shed tears in Qatar's multi-billion-dollar stadiums, its sports administrators were booking new victories off the pitch.

During the tournament, Qatar was awarded the 2025 world table tennis championships and the opening race of the world endurance championship in 2024, adding to its packed sports calendar.

Formula One returns in 2023, and a major renovation of Qatar's race track went ahead during the World Cup shutdown.

Qatar also stepped in when China withdrew from holding the 2023 Asian Cup football and is to stage the world swimming championships in 2024.

Its beIn Sports channel with its growing viewership and rights portfolio only adds to Qatar's sports muscle.

Hosting events is "a very powerful game-changing tool," said Michael Payne, a former head of marketing for the International Olympic Committee.

Qatar is ploughing ahead with its sporting ambitions despite criticism of its rights record — particularly the treatment of foreign workers who built the stadiums and power the economy of one of the world's richest countries.

FIFA president Gianni Infantino repeatedly said Qatar was hosting the "best ever" World Cup, and other federations have also welcomed Qatar's largesse.

An official with the International Table Tennis Federation said "Qatar stepped in to help organize events when Covid devastated the calendar, and its facilities are all in place".

Qatar won an overwhelming majority in the ITTF vote against Spain for the 2025 championships.



"We needed to get a big-time win on the road against a really good team," Poole said. "We were just connected and we executed from the beginning of the game."

In Boston, NBA top draft pick Paolo Banchero scored 31 points to lead surging Orlando to a 95-92 victory — the Magic's second win over the Celtics in three days.

Banchero, who scored 22 points in the first half, connected on six of his seven three-point attempts and the Magic — whose slow season start included a nine-game losing streak — have now won six straight.

Their second consecutive win in Boston meant the Celtics, who fell to 22-9, slipped a hair behind the 21-8 Milwaukee Bucks atop the Eastern Conference.

The Celtics were without their leading scorer, Jayson Tatum, who missed the game for personal reasons.

Jaylen Brown led Boston with 24 points, Marcus Smart added 15 and Grant Williams chipped in 14.

After struggling to find shots in the first half, the Celtics put together a 16-6 scoring run in the third and took a 71-68 lead into the fourth quarter.

Down by one in the final minute they came up empty on two possessions, unable to get the ball inbounds on one in the face of Orlando's defense.

In Minneapolis, Anthony Edwards scored 37 points and D'Angelo Russell added 28 as the Minnesota Timberwolves routed the Chicago Bulls 150-126.

The T'Wolves set a season high with 23 three-pointers and a franchise high for points in a game.

Jalen Brunson scored 30 points to propel the New York Knicks to a seventh straight victory, 109-106 over the Indiana Pacers.

It came down to the wire in Los Angeles, where LeBron James scored 33 points and Thomas Bryant — starting at center for injured star Anthony Davis — delivered the game-winning dunk with 7.4 seconds remaining in the Lakers' 119-117 victory over the Washington Wizards.

## Benzema Ends France Career

**PARIS (Dispatches)** - Ballon D'Or winner Karim Benzema announced he was ending his international career on Monday, the day after France lost in the World Cup final to Argentina.

"I made the effort and the mistakes it took to be where I am today and I'm proud of it! I wrote my story and our ends," Benzema, 35, wrote on Twitter.

Benzema, who scored 37 goals for France in 97 appearances, had to withdraw from France's World Cup squad before their first match due to a left thigh injury.

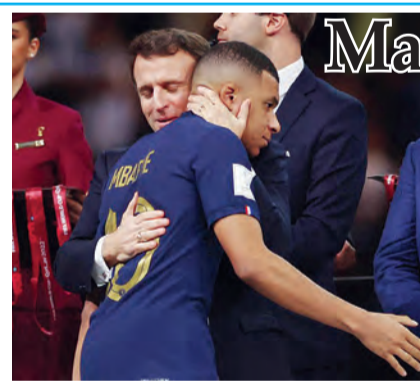
The Real Madrid player, who won the Ballon d'Or award in October, had been desperate to feature in Qatar having not been selected when France won the World Cup in Russia four years ago.

He was frozen out of the France team for five and a half years because of his involvement in a blackmail scandal over a sextape involving his former teammate Mathieu Valbuena.

In a trial last year he was handed a one-year suspended prison sentence and fined 75,000 euros (\$79,500).

For the Qatar World Cup, coach Didier Deschamps opted not to call up a replacement and France still had depth in their squad, particularly in an attack led by 23-year-old Kylian Mbappe.

Paris Saint-Germain forward Mbappe won the World Cup Golden Boot award with eight goals, including a hat-trick in Sunday's penalty shootout defeat by Argentina following a 3-3 draw at the end of extra time.



## Macron Stirs Critics With World Cup Final Role

**PARIS (dispatches)** - From leaping from his seat in the VIP box to consoling crestfallen players on the pitch, French President Emmanuel Macron delivered a wide-ranging performance at the World Cup final that was not to everyone's taste.

The 44-year-old was an unmissable presence at the game at the Lusail stadium in Qatar yesterday, even making an appearance in the team's changing room to deliver an emotional post-game pep talk.

"You're an amazing team," Macron told the players, pounding his fist in his hand for effect.

"No other team would have got here and come back on two occasions and being so close to winning it.

"You had the heart, the hunger, the desire and the talent to get here and that's why I wanted to come and say thank you," he added, according to a video posted on his social media accounts.

France were 2-0 behind until the 80th minute before a quickfire double by Kylian Mbappe levelled the game.

In extra time, Argentina went ahead 3-2 thanks to a second goal from Lionel Messi before another Mbappe penalty led to a shoot-out to settle the final.

Macron strode onto the pitch after the game, notably grabbing Mbappe in front of the cameras and holding the striker's head to his chest.

In front of a record domestic TV audience, he could be seen talking animatedly to the distraught player who stared blankly ahead, barely acknowledging the head of state.

"I told him that he was only 24 years old," Macron told RMC radio afterwards, adding: "I was as sad as he was." Mbappe turned 24 on Tuesday.

## Messi to Continue Argentina Career After World Cup Win

**DOHA (Dispatches)** - Argentina star Lionel Messi on Sunday vowed to continue playing for his country despite finally realizing his lifetime ambition of winning the World Cup.

"I want to keep experiencing a few more matches as world champion," Messi, 35, told Argentine television following the country's epic penalty shoot-out victory over France in the World Cup final in Doha.

But Messi admitted his career was almost finished after the Argentina captain landed the one major international trophy missing from his collection.

The Paris Saint-Germain forward scored two goals in the stunning and chaotic final that ended 3-3 after 120 absorbing minutes, before the seven-time Ballon d'Or winner netted his spot-kick in the shoot-out that Argentina won 4-2.

"Obviously I would like to end my career with this, I cannot ask for more," said Messi. "My career is nearly over because these are my last years."

And after so many disappointments on the biggest stage in football, including losing the 2014 World Cup final to Germany in Brazil, Messi said he always felt his time would come.

"It's crazy that it happened at the time it happened, but it's amazing," he said.



## Odermatt Wins Alta Badia Giant Slalom

**ALTABADIA (Dispatches)** - Switzerland's Marco Odermatt extended his alpine skiing World Cup lead after claiming victory in the giant slalom at Alta Badia.

Reigning World Cup champion Odermatt won in the Italian Dolomites with a combined time of two minutes and 38.27 seconds, 0.20sec ahead of Norwegian Henrik Kristoffersen and 0.92sec in front of Slovenia's Zan Kranjec.

The 25-year-old had set himself up for victory by building a 0.60sec cushion between him and Kristoffersen in the morning's blistering first run which allowed him to be only 21st fastest in the second run and still claim the win.

"This was probably the biggest fight ever, I was so tired already at the start and it didn't get better while racing," said giant slalom Olympic champion Odermatt after his fourth win of the season.

"It was a tight battle again but luckily it went for me this time."

Odermatt now leads Kristoffersen by 95 points in the giant slalom standings, with Kranjec a further 20 points behind in third, after his third win from four races in the discipline this season.

He now has 12 straight giant slalom podiums stretching back to the start of last season and has been on the podium after nine of this campaign's races across all disciplines.

