

Health Ministry Announced on Sunday That the Number of Deaths From the Coronavirus Pandemic in Iran Increased to **144,688** With **Three** More Iranians Killed by the Virus Over the Past 24 Hours

# IRAN NEWS

TEDPIX, the Main Index of Tehran Stock Exchange (TSE), Lost 26,119 Points to 1.564m on Sunday and Per Report, Over 12.887b Securities Worth 69.993 Trillion Rials (About \$184m) Were Traded at the TSE


VOL. XXVIII, No. 7676 TEHRAN Price 50,000 Rials

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MONDAY JANUARY 2, 2023 - DEY 12, 1401

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## Western Sanctions Clear Example of "Media Dictatorship"

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The head of the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) has censured Western-led sanctions against it, saying the bans are in contravention of the principle of freedom of speech and a clear manifestation of "media dictatorship."

Peyman Jebelli made the remark in an interview while elaborating on the monopolistic and dictatorial approach of anti-Iran media as well as the West's imposition of strict sanctions on the IRIB and its subsidiaries following recent foreign-backed riots in Iran.

"For years, we have witnessed obvious inconsistency between the claims and actions of those who claim to be champions of free speech, democracy and respect for society, one of the examples of which is the US violation of human rights by sanctioning the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting," Jebelli told Fars News Agency.

"When the Western and international institutions move to boycott the IRIB, they show that dictatorship and the violation of speech freedom, with which they deafened the ears of the whole world for years, happen so easily," he added.

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## Foes Resort to Propaganda To Advance Agenda

TEHRAN (IRNA) - The enemies utilize severe political and media campaigns such as imposing sanctions to advance their own agenda, Head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran Mohammad Eslami said.

Addressing a seminar to commemorate the school of thought of Martyr Lieutenant General Qasem Soleimani in Tehran on Sunday, Eslami stated that the foes resort to political and media hype as well as incapacitating means like sanctions and deprivation of power to force Iran to succumb to pressures.

They also showcase their might and make use of a combination of the mentioned propaganda campaign in a bid to put forward its own agenda against the Islamic Republic, he added.

The enemies tried to involve villains from around the globe to destroy Syria and then implement the plot in Iran, the AEOI chief said, noting that the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution along with General Soleimani foiled the conspiracy of the foes.

A speech by General Soleimani in which he said that there would not be a sign of Daesh terrorists within the next three months was the result of such measures of wise Iranian authorities, he argued.

Organizers of the seminar also praised families of Iranian martyrs such as those who lost their lives in protecting the security of the Islamic country.

## Leader Hails Martyr Soleimani Role In Reviving Resistance Front



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei in a meeting with the family of Martyr Lt. Gen. Qasem Soleimani, hailed the role of the noble martyr in reviving the Resistance Front. Ayatollah Khamenei stated that General Soleimani preserved and revived the lasting and growing phenomenon (Resistance) against the Zionist regime, the U.S., and other arrogant powers.

Referring to the testimony of Seyyed Hassan Nasrallah over the endeavors of Martyr Soleimani, the Leader stressed that Nasrallah's testimony is a great chapter in understanding the importance of General Soleimani's efforts in reviving the Resistance.

Ayatollah Khamenei pointed to the progress of the Palestinians in confronting the Zionists and the achievements of the Resistance in Iraq, Syria and Yemen and added, "By using the experience of the Holy Defense years and advice of his friends, General Soleimani made the Resistance strong relying on the internal facilities of the countries."

The Leader also praised the role of Martyr Soleimani in defeating the ISIL terrorist group.

The Leader also emphasized that "one should not speak and act in such a way that the characteristics of the commander sound to be transcendental and unattainable."

Elsewhere in his remarks, the Leader considered the public honoring of General Soleimani and the spontaneous attendance of people in various ceremonies commemorating his memory as a result of his immaculate intentions. He also praised his outstanding characteristics including being courage, faith, responsible, risk-taking, and intelligent.

Ayatollah Khamenei also stressed the need to keep the memory of all martyrs alive and called for using all kinds of art in this regard.

Several IRGC top officials including the Commander-in-Chief of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) Major General Hossein Salami and the Commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps Quds Brigadier General Esmail Qa'ani were also present at the meeting.

He then lauded Brigadier General Qa'ani, the commander of the Quds Force of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC), and said, "The General's void has been filled in many cases."

"The resistance groups consider themselves as the strategic depth of the Islamic Republic and the wings of Islam, and the movement will continue in the same direction," Ayatollah Khamenei noted.

## ViewPoint

By: Hamid Reza Naghashian

## Standing Ovation for Martyr Soleimani's Bravery

On January 3, Iranians and most freedom-lovers in the world will commemorate the martyrdom anniversary of Martyr Lieutenant Qasem Soleimani who was a unique man in fighting with terrorists and Daesh group as he was a brave defender of Islam and Islamic values in the region and the world.

Iranians along with the people worldwide are preparing to mark the martyrdom anniversary of this brave man who lost his life in fighting with terrorists and world hegemony, and for this reason his name will be remembered as the "Hero of Hearts" and anti-terrorist fighter.

Soleimani, the chief commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Quds Force, was assassinated on January 3, 2020, in a U.S. air raid outside Baghdad International Airport under the direct order of then-U.S. president Donald Trump.

Nobody can deny his efforts and braveries in containing the atrocities of terrorist Daesh group and even the Westerners and Americans have confessed to the braveries of Martyr Soleimani and they believe Soleimani was the man who stopped the Daesh group which has been the product of the U.S. to confront the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Resistance Front.

An academic has described Iran's top anti-terror commander, Soleimani, as the "architect of resistance" and a "unifying figure" in life and death.

Pro-Palestine professor, David Miller, sacked by Bristol University over his criticism of Israel and Zionism, made the comments about General Soleimani in a TV program.

Miller mentioned the "practical effect" of Soleimani's legacy on enabling the Axis of Resistance as well as Palestinian factions to collaborate with each other.

"All the Palestinian factions got together and still remain unified, even though the Israelis tried to split them apart; I think that the resistance is unified much stronger than it has been for many years and that is directly because of Soleimani's activity," he said, adding that, "he was a unifying figure in life and death."

Miller also said that Soleimani was the "architect of resistance" and brought together the forces in the Axis of Resistance, a transnational organization, willing to fight US imperialism and target and fight Zionism.

He also lauded the anti-terror commander for his endeavors in bringing the resistance together despite the Shia-Sunni divide.

"He worked seamlessly across the sectarian divide, and the support from [the Palestinian resistance movement] Hamas, predominantly a Sunni organization, is unparalleled for any other particular leader in the Iranian government," he said.

"Soleimani is somebody who, during his life, accomplished military feats, for which the whole world should be grateful," Miller added.

Meanwhile Aamar Kazmi, an anti-imperialist political activist, also told Press TV that General Soleimani was certainly seen as a "steadfast ally of the Palestinian resistance."

"Many Palestinians, particularly those in Gaza, admire Soleimani, display portraits of him and even in the West Bank, and there are murals of him on the apartheid wall, so he is very well respected in Palestine and lots of tributes were paid to him upon his martyrdom," he said.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Kazmi said Soleimani was the architect of the defeat of Daesh (ISIS) terrorists in Iraq and Syria.

"Qasem Soleimani's role was quite unique; over the years, he was on the ground, literally all over the place in Iraq and Syria, building connections, planning and strategizing, providing inspiration and morale. Sometimes it is possible to attribute too much to a single individual but I do not think this is one of those cases," he concluded.

During his lifetime, General Soleimani played a significant and direct role all across the region.

In 2006, Soleimani sent military support to Hezbollah to help eject the Zionist invasion of southern Lebanon.

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## Proposals to Bolster Women Rights Bill Sent to Majlis

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - An Iranian judiciary official said Saturday that he submitted a series of proposals to strengthen the "Protection of Women Against Harms" bill to the parliament.

"In order to preserve and enhance women's rights to the highest possible degree, we submitted proposals to the Social Commission and the Presiding Board of the Parliament to bolster the bill "Improving Security and Prevention and Protection of Women against Harms," Secretary of Iran's High Council for Human Rights Kazem Gharibabadi said.

The items in the bill to strengthen the women's protection law includes proposals such as strengthening the laws against different kinds of violence against women; extending the bill to cover Iranian women that reside in other countries as well as non-Iranian women residing in Iran such as tourists or refugees; setting special courts for the women under the law; the social workers' reports on cases of violence and other cases of harassing women must be pursued by the Law enforcement forces seriously; determining punishment for cases of sexual harassment; establishing a fund for supporting women that have been the victims of violence and harassment; and finally preserving the information about the women as confidential.

The bill "Ensuring women's security against violence" was drafted in 2009 by the time Vice President for Women and Family Affairs in the 10th government, but due to its judicial nature, it was sent to the judiciary in 2017.

After going through several stages, finally, the bill entitled "Promotion of security and prevention and protection of women against harms" in December of this year passed the review process in the Social Committee of the Parliament and is now waiting for the draft to be discussed in an open session of the parliament.



## Iranian VP Attends President Lula da Silva's Inauguration

TEHRAN (Tasnim) – Iran's vice president for parliamentary affairs has traveled to Brasilia to take part in the inauguration of incoming Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva. Mohammad Hosseini arrived in Brazil and received a welcome from Iran's ambassador and director general of the Asia department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Brazil. In addition to participation in the inauguration of the Brazilian president, the Iranian vice president will hold meetings with a number of foreign officials during his stay in Brasilia.

## Iranian Submarines, Navy Copters Fire New Torpedoes in Drill

**TEHRAN (Tasnim) – The Iranian Navy's submarines and helicopters annihilated underwater targets by firing advanced homegrown torpedoes during a large-scale war game underway in the country's southeastern waters.**

On the third day of the Zolfagar 1401 drill, held in an area stretching from the eastern part of the Strait of Hormuz to the northern tip of the Indian Ocean, the Iranian Navy's Tareq submarine fired a homegrown torpedo, named Miad, for the first time. In another operation, the Fateh and Qadir submarines detonated targets in the Sea of Oman and the northern parts of the Indian Ocean with Valfajr-2 torpedoes. A SH-3D helicopter of the Navy also dropped the Mark 46 torpedo and successfully destroyed the hypothetical enemy's positions. In another operation, the Army's Air Defense units employed the Talash missile system to down a drone over international waters at a distance of 150 kilometers and at an altitude of 25,000 feet, which had been flown to simulate a hostile attack on sensitive sites at Iran's southern coastal city of Jask.



Talash is a mid-range air defense missile system that can hit high-altitude targets, including fighter jets, bombers, helicopters and drones, with Sayyad-3 missiles. The infantry and armored units as well as mechanized regiments of the Army's Ground Force, air defense systems, subsurface, surface and flying vessels and rangers of the Navy have taken part in the war game. The drill is aimed at improving planning skills, conducting, directing and evaluating joint operations and synergizing the defense power of the Army's four main divisions.

## Martyr Soleimani Belongs to All Freedom-Seekers

TEHRAN (IP) - The Deputy Coordinator of the Basij Organization said that Lt. Gen. Qassem Soleimani is just not a hero but a man of hearts. The consultation meeting for the formation of the media resistance front was held in Tehran. General Hossein Maroufi stated in the meeting that the ideology of Martyr Qassem Soleimani does not just belong to Iran and the Iranian nation, but to all freedom-seekers in the world. Attending the ceremony, the spokesman for the Islamic Revolution Guard Corps (IRGC), Brigadier General Ramazan Sharif, also highlighted the most important characteristics of martyr Qassem Soleimani, saying: "When his name is mentioned, the world pays him respect." He stressed: Soleimani was very brave, which was due to his spirituality. He is beloved by freedom-seekers in the world, Brigadier General Ramazan Sharif went on to conclude.

## Images Sent by Khayyam Satellite Meet Domestic Needs

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Spokesman of Iranian Space Agency Hossein Dalirian said that high-quality images sent by Khayyam satellite are being provided to both state and private sectors of the country and have helped meet part of domestic needs in different areas such as agriculture, natural resources, environment, water resources, mines, border monitoring and management of unprecedented crises.

Dalirian made the remarks speaking to reporters on the latest conditions surrounding Khayyam satellite which was put into orbit some five months ago.

Khayyam is a remote-sensing satellite capable of imaging the earth's surface with an accuracy of one meter. The satellite is presently in an orbit of 500 kilometers from the earth, receiving and executing commands and sending data and images to the ground stations of the Iranian Space Agency.

The sending of commands and controls of Khayyam satellite is carried out by Iranian experts in the country's space agency, Dalirian said, adding that the sending of commands and receiving information from this satellite is also done according to an encrypted and highly secure algorithm that was previously embedded in the satellite by the cryptography experts of the Iranian Space Agency.

He said that the satellite will carry out all its tests within the next one or two weeks and will become fully operational.

"So far, we have received high-quality color images of different regions of our country from Khayyam satellite...some of which have even been displayed to some officials, and images of attractive regions of Iran are also being prepared for being released to the public."

## SCEC Stresses Accelerating Provision of Forex Needs of Various Sectors

TEHRAN - The Supreme Council of Economic Coordination convened a meeting on Saturday evening under the chairmanship of President Seyed Ebrahim Raisi.

In this meeting, which was attended by the heads of the legislature, judiciary and other members, the issue of the need to meet the foreign currency needs of various sectors, including the country's economic actors, was discussed and the members emphasized on speeding up in this regard.

Meanwhile on Saturday evening, the heads of the three branches discussed the most important issues of

### IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK



inflation control, and economic drivers.

The heads of the three branches emphasized the necessity of strengthening economic stability, continuing to reduce the inflation rate, and developing and strengthening investment.

the country in the meeting held at the President's office.

In this meeting, which was held with President Raisi, Majlis Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf, and Judiciary Chief Hojatolislam Gholamhossein Mohseni Ejei taking part, Dr Mohammad Mokhbar, the First Vice President, presented a report on the country's progress in the field of investment,

## University of Birjand, Afghan Universities Sign MoU

BIRJAND (IRNA) - Birjand University in the east of Iran and two Afghan universities of Ashna and Maiwand signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on educational, research, skill, and technology ties.

According to Iran's Birjand University Public Relations, the memorandum of understanding on educational, research and technological cooperation was signed at the presence of the presidents of Ashna and Miwand universities of Afghanistan and Iran's University of Birjand.

Considering the importance of educational, research and technological cooperation between universities and research centers, this memorandum was signed for the active participation of university teachers and researchers in the field of science and technology to develop scientific ties between Birjand University and Ashna and Maiwand universities.

University student exchange in the agreed fields, exchange of information, books, scientific publications, scientific and research documents, student theses, microfilm and computer software in the fields of education, research and technology are among the provisions of this MoU.

According to the MoU, Iran's Birjand University announced its readiness for the participation of students of Maiwand Higher Education Institute in short-term Persian language courses.



## Health Sector on Alert as 8th Wave of Covid-19 Begins

TEHRAN (IFP) - The Iranian Health Ministry orders all hospitals and health facilities to make preparations to face an eighth wave of infections with the coronavirus, driven by new sub-variants of the Omicron strain.

Deputy Health Minister Hossein Farshidi said three sub-variants of Omicron have so far been detected in the country over the past days, namely BQ1, XBB, BA5.

He warned against the lightning speed of the new sub-variants' spread, stressing the need to monitor and control borders to detect suspected patients.

Farshidi said the new wave of infections started on Saturday and is expected to reach a peak across Iran within four to six weeks.

The official urged the public to receive booster shots against the disease.

Shahnam Arshi, who heads the Infectious Diseases Management Department of the Health Ministry, said Saturday that the new wave of infections is expected to be less severe than the previous ones.

According to the latest Health Ministry figures, most Iranian cities are currently categorized as "blue" or "normal" on the country's Covid-19 tracking map, but the number of cities with various degrees of infection risk is expected to rise sharply in the coming weeks.

## VP Appoints Caretaker for Int'l Center for Science and Technology Interactions

TEHRAN (IFP) - Vice President for Science, Technology and Knowledge-based Economy Ruhollah Dehghani Firouzabadi has appointed Amir-Hossein Mirabadi as caretaker of the Center for International Science and Technology Interactions.

In a decree addressed to Mirabadi, Dehghani highlighted the lofty goals of the Center, which he said is expected to design special missions aimed at speeding up the promotion of knowledge-based economy in the country.

Dehghani Firouzabadi said the Center's mission include "effective development of knowledge-based exports using all the existing capabilities in the private, state and public sectors," "targeted strengthening of export-related infrastructure and tools



especially in the field of specialized financing and export guarantees," "development of institutional and legal support for knowledge-based export with active participation and decision-making at all levels of governance," "maintaining and upgrading the productivity of Iranian-made technology and innovation houses in different countries and turning them into active marketing and market-building bases," among other things.

He also thanked the Center's outgoing head, Mahdi Ghaleh Noei, for his efforts during his term in office and wished him success.

Mirabadi, a PhD holder, has previously served in a variety of relevant posts.

## Army's Mission in Pacific Lifts National Morale

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Commander-in-Chief of the Iranian Army Major General Abdulrahim Mousavi has hailed an ongoing mission by the Army's 86th Naval Fleet in the Pacific Ocean as a sign of the country's self-reliance and a boost to the nation's morale.

Mousavi made the remarks on Sunday in a phone conversation with the commander in charge of the Iranian mission in the Pacific.

The call was made concurrent with the Zolfagar 1401 Military Drills which is held by the Iranian Army in south of Iran.

Mousavi described the current Navy mission in the Pacific as a sign of Iran's determination to be present in remote waters, adding that the mission provides an opportunity for Iranian army forces to gain naval experience.

The major general added that flying the Iranian flag in remote oceans is another achievement of the 86th Fleet's mission in the Pacific, adding that it is a further boost to the morale of the Iranian people and nation.

## Oman Welcomes Investment In Iran's Renewables Sector



TEHRAN (MNA) - Rashid Al-Ghilani, Oman's Chargé d'affaires in Tehran, has said his country welcomes investment in Iran's renewable energy sector.

Al-Ghilani made the remarks in an Iran-Oman business forum in Tehran on Sunday, the portal of the Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA) reported.

The forum, focusing on the trade and investment opportunities of Iran and Oman, was hosted by Trade Promotion Organization (TPO).

The forum was also attended by the head of the Iran-Oman joint chamber of commerce and a group of businessmen and private sector representatives.

## Iranian Security Guard Martyred By Thugs

TEHRAN (IFP) - A member of Iran's security personnel was martyred by armed thugs during sporadic unrest and riots in the central city of Semirom.

On Sunday, General Morteza Amou Mahdi, a senior official with the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) in Esfahan Province, identified the victim as Mohsen Rezaei, a member of the IRGC's Basij Force.

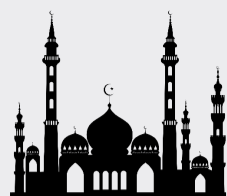
He said a number of illegal gatherings were held in Semirom on Saturday and they turned ugly as rioters engaged in clashes with security guards.

Iranian cities have been the scene of on-and-off protests and deadly riots since September 16, when a young woman died in police custody in Tehran.

Taking advantage of protests over the death, thugs and rioters have engaged in acts of violence, including deadly attacks on police and civilians, vandalism, and desecration of sanctities.

Iranian officials say they have evidence of links between the masterminds of the riots and foreign enemies of the country.





## PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	12:08
■ Evening (Maghreb)	17:22
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	05:44
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	07:14

98. But the god of you all is the One Allah, there is no god but He: all things He comprehends in His knowledge.

99. Thus do We relate to thee some stories of what happened before: for We have sent thee a Message from Our own Presence.

Surah 20, Ta-ha ( 98 - 99 )

# Iran, Kazakhstan To Launch Joint Commission

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

**TEHRAN - Head of Iran-Kazakhstan Joint Chamber of Commerce says Iran and Kazakhstan have had some good talks in the field of corridor between the two countries and they are working to launch the joint commission.**

Speaking to ILNA, Amir Abedi said that currently Iran and Kazakhstan are in the beginning of their course for launching the joint commission, and viewpoints of Kazakhs have not been finalized yet. He added that different organs are currently busy with summing up the raised issues in the joint commission of both states and it seems the roadmap of Iran-Kazakhstan Joint Commission to be prepared in the next two weeks.

He termed Kazakhstan as one of the major producers of red meat products and light livestock and added that Kazakhstan can be one of the meat suppliers in the region and there is possibility considerable cooperation to be shaped between the two states in this field but currently the trade between the two countries in this field has not started and Brazil is the main meat supplier of Iran.

When asked whether Kazakhstan is able to produce and export warm and frozen meat to Iran, Abedi said that the answer is positive but the reason that Iran and Kazakhstan have not started trade of meat yet is the domestic ties, and of course electricity and forex supply for it are important.

Abedi went on to say that Inchebron Corridor between Iran and Kazakhstan is active but activities are not considerable because it is used less and it is because of market demand, adding that we should consider this point that Kazakhstan is considered a transit route and it is not considered as the origin and destination of providers of goods in the corridors and it is just considered as passages.

He said that some good talks have been held between the two countries in the



field of corridor and some tentative works have been done and goods are exchanged in this route.

Abedi went on to say that the trend of trade between Iran and Kazakhstan in the first seven months of the year has been upward, adding that agriculture is one of the capacities that can be noted but the potentials of both states in the field of exports and imports and volume of transit are very considerable. He added that in the field of trade of technical and engineering services and construction industry, there are considerable capacities in both states.

He pointed to revoking visa for a 14-day visit between the two states and said that this issue can help both countries to develop trade and remove hurdles in the way of their trade. He added that the tariffs between the two countries have become based on the EEU standards, adding that Kazakhstan is the second powerful country in the region which is not under any sanction and it has good political interactions with the world and 90% of the goods are on the list of eliminating tariffs.

He also called for investment in the field of developing ports, transportation, logistics and fleet, adding that stability in the domestic trade and forex policies are the preconditions for broadening trade. He said that currently the private sector continues its trade and it has no problem and Iranians can take advantage of Kazakhstan route for broadening exports of their products to other countries.

Agro, live-stock and food products, home appliances, oil products, electronic devices, industrial machineries, bag, shoes and apparel, minerals and agro tools are of the major exports of Iran to Kazakhstan and some basic goods and road construction machineries are of the major exports of Kazakhstan to Iran.

## NICICO Eyes Expansion of Exploration

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The CEO of National Iranian Copper Industries Company (NICICO) says in the last Iranian calendar year 130,000 meters of drilling was carried out in the field of exploration in the copper industry and this amount has reached 200,000 meters so far this year.



Dr. Ali Rostami believes there are good opportunities for developing copper industry to earn the country more forex and urged the elites to enter this industry and help the national economy to boom.

He went on to say that in the field of copper, only 7% of copper reserves of the country has been discovered, adding that considering recent discoveries by his colleagues in the copper group, they have reached 19m tons of minerals and they can definitely take advantage of opportunities for exploring and discovering new reserves.

Mr. Rostami added that most of Iran's copper reserves are in Kerman and Azarbaijan provinces, adding that some copper mines have been also discovered in Sistan and Baluchestan and Yazd provinces and extraction operation is underway. He noted that they should direct the attention of investors to investment in the field of exploration.

He added that last year some 130,000 meters of drilling was carried out in the field of exploration and the figure this year has reached 200,000 meters this year.

He then pointed to the launch of two exploration companies, adding that one more is coming soon and it will be launched in the next month. He went on to say that the company welcomes cooperation of university graduates in the field of mining and said that to increase exploration from 7% to 15% all capacities are needed to be multiplied and the industry should use high capacities of Kerman Province through using graduate of fields of mining.

Rostami reiterated that the main concentration of NICICO is exploration and discovery of copper fields and all plans of the company are to boost this field and it needs cooperation of companies in extracting minerals.

He stated that during the recent visit of Minister of Industry, Mine and Trade to Belarus a MoU for purchasing 500 dump trucks was signed and talks with HEPCO Company are underway for manufacturing mining machineries.

Rostami noted that four international companies have announced readiness for transfer of engineering technology and equipment to Iran which provides the ground for development in the copper industry in using state-of-the-art technology for concentrate production.

## Daily Gasoline Demand up 16% y/y

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iranian motorists pumped 16% more gasoline in the 10 days leading to the end of December compared to the same period last year as a senior Oil Ministry official describes the rising demand for the fuel as unprecedented during winter months.

CEO of National Iranian Oil Products Distribution Company (NIOPDC) Ali Akbar Nejad Ali said that domestic demand for gasoline had reached an average of 111 million liters per day in the 10 days to December 31.

"That is unprecedented figure for the year's cold seasons. The country's gasoline consumption had reached such records only during high-travel days over the summer," said Nejad Ali.

He said this winter is a first on record in which Iran's demand for gasoline has not ebbed in comparison to the annual average.

The official said average demand for gasoline in Iran had increased by 21% year on year in March-December.

The statement comes amid unconfirmed reports suggesting that more than 10 million liters of motor fuel are being smuggled out of Iran every day mainly because there is a massive gap in prices between the country and its neighbors.

Iranian authorities have repeatedly warned in recent months that rising domestic demand for gasoline and diesel fuel would force the country to resume imports more than decade after it declared self-sufficiency in motor fuel production.

A senior Oil Ministry official said last week that Iran had halted taking new orders for exports of gasoline amid rising demand for the fuel inside the country.

## Ground Prepared for Iran-Finland Cooperation in Water Industry

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Finland's Ambassador to Iran Kari Kahiluoto said that there is ground for the two countries to have cooperation in the water sector in the long term.

The Finnish ambassador made the comment as he paid a visit to the 18th Iran International Water and Wastewater Exhibition that kicked off in the capital Tehran on December 30, running for four days.

Kahiluoto referred to the existing sanctions against the Islamic Republic that make it difficult to do business with the country, expressing hope that Finnish companies can have a good presence in Iran in the long term in terms of technical knowhow and selling products in the water and energy sector.

The Finnish diplomat also expressed willingness to get more information on Iranian knowledge-based companies and startups active in that sector.



## First Direct Shipping Line Launched Between China, Chabahar

CHABAHAR (IRNA) - The first container ship departing from China docked at Iran's key port of Chabahar on Saturday, marking the establishment of the first direct shipping line between China and Iran's southeastern seaport.

The announcement was made by Amir Moghaddam, the managing director of the Chabahar Free Zone Organization.

He said that Chinese ships previously unloaded in Bandar Abbas, the capital city of the southern province of

Hormuzgan, with their cargos then being transferred to Chabahar in Sistan-Baluchistan Province via smaller ships.

With the establishment of the direct shipping line between China and Chabahar, cargos are delivered ten days earlier, while cost of loading and unloading is reduced by 400 dollars per container, the official explained.

In addition, the establishment of that shipping line plays a great role in the development of transit via Chabahar Port, he added.

## 1st Methanol to Synthetic Ethanol Plant to Be Built in Iran

TEHRAN (Shana) - A methanol-to-synthetic ethanol conversion plant will be built for the first time in the country's petrochemical industry with the signing of the technology transfer agreement for this project between Zagros Petrochemical Company and China's Dalian.

According to Zagros Petrochemical Plant, the technical know-how transfer agreement for Zagros Petrochemical Plant's methanol to synthetic ethanol conversion project with a production capacity of 300,000 tons was signed between Zagros Petrochemical Company and China's Dalian.

Matin Didari, the CEO of Zagros Petrochemical Company, in the signing ceremony of the technical know-how transfer agreement, said: "With the signing of this contract, the first 300,000-ton plant for converting methanol to synthetic ethanol in the country will come on stream within 36 months, and Zagros Petrochemical Company will take a major step to complete the value chain and move towards converting methanol to synthetic ethanol for the first time in the country's petrochemical industry."

Zagros Petrochemical Company, one of the world's largest methanol producers, aims to complete its downstream chain and create value-added from this item by launching such projects.

## Over \$394m Allocated to SMSDF for Supporting Small Shareholders

TEHRAN (MNA) - The government has allocated 150 trillion rials (about \$394.7 million) to the country's Capital Market Stabilization and Development Fund (CMSDF) in the budget bill for the next Iranian calendar year 1402 (begins on March 21) to support small shareholders.

As Tasnim news agency reported, the government has decided to supply the mentioned fund from the shares of state-owned companies to protect small shareholders against the risks of the capital market.

Also, in order to strengthen the companies active in the market, a part of their profit which is allocated to increasing their capital is going to be exempted from tax; this will encourage such companies to increase capital and expand their activities.

In late October 2022, Iran's Securities and Exchange Organization (SEO) unveiled a comprehensive support package to encourage activities in the capital market as shareholders were getting reluctant to invest in the market.

One of the major measures considered in this package was the insurance of shareholders' capital and dividends over the next Iranian calendar year.

## Cement Production Up 5.7% in 9 Months

TEHRAN (MNA) - The production of cement in Iran has risen 5.7 percent during the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21-December 21, 2022), as compared to the same period of time in the past year, according to the data released by Industry, Mining and Trade Ministry.

The ministry's data put Iran's nine-month cement production at 33.943 million tons, while the figure was 32.109 million tons in the same time span of the previous year.

As reported by IRIB citing international statistics released in the previous month, Iran produced 63 million tons of cement in 2021 to be ranked the world's seventh biggest cement producer.

The Islamic Republic also exported 14.4 million tons of cement in that year to stand in fourth place among the world's top cement exporters.

The Islamic Republic was ranked the world's fifth biggest cement producer in 2020, producing 69 million tons of the product.

The Iranian cement industry has a history of more than eight decades of activity.

Currently, there are 96 cement production lines active in 74 factories across Iran, and nearly half of them are less than 10 years old. This is an indication that new production units have a greater share of the total output in this sector.

Neighboring countries are not only consumers of Iranian cement but also demand the transfer of the cement industry's technology to their countries.



## Former Pope Benedict XVI Dies Aged 95

VATICAN (Dispatches) - Former pope Benedict XVI has died at the age of 95, the Vatican announced, almost a decade after he became the first pontiff to resign in six centuries.

"With sorrow I inform you that the Pope Emeritus, Benedict XVI, passed away today at 9:34 in the Mater Ecclesiae Monastery in the Vatican," Vatican spokesman Matteo Bruni said in a statement.

The German pope emeritus, whose birth name was Joseph Ratzinger, had been living a quiet life in a former convent inside the Vatican grounds since his shock decision to step down in February 2013.



## Bolsonaro Lands in Florida, Avoiding Lula Handover

BRASILIA (Dispatches) - Outgoing Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro landed in Florida, after delivering a teary message to his supporters less than two days before his fierce leftist rival Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva is set to take office.

An official Brazilian plane landed in Orlando, Florida, flight tracking website FlightAware showed. Although Bolsonaro's destination has not been officially confirmed, his security staff were already in place in Florida.

Bolsonaro's exit from Brazil came after he repeatedly said he would not hand over the presidential sash to Lula at Sunday's inauguration, breaking with Brazil's democratic tradition. He may also face legal risks from remaining in Brazil as his presidential immunity expires when Lula takes office.



## Countries Around the World Begin to Ring in 2023



LONDON (Dispatches) - The world's eight billion people began ushering in 2023 on Saturday and bidding farewell to a turbulent 12 months marked by war in Europe, stinging price rises, Lionel Messi's World Cup glory and the deaths of Queen Elizabeth, Pele and former pope Benedict.

Many will be looking to cut loose this New Year's Eve after a few pandemic-dampened years, setting aside pinched budgets and a virus that is increasingly forgotten but not gone.

Sydney will be among the first major cities to ring in 2023, restating its claim to be the "New Year's Eve capital of the world" after two years of lockdown and coronavirus-muted festivities.

Australia's borders have reopened and the crowds gathering at Sydney's sparkling harbour to watch 100,000 pyrotechnics illuminate the southern sky were expected to number more than one million.

"It's been a fairly good year for us; getting past Covid of course is great," David Hugh-Paterson told AFP as he waited near the Sydney Opera House in a growing crowd.

"Looking forward to the future as well," the 52-year-old said.

Sydney authorities expected almost half a billion more people would see the festivities online or on television.

"If we can bring everyone together in celebration and looking to the year ahead with renewed optimism and joy, then we'll see that as a job well done," said fireworks organizer Fortunato Foti.

For some, 2022 was a year of Wordles, the Great Resignation, a new Taylor Swift album, an Oscar slap and billionaire meltdowns.

It also saw the deaths of Queen Elizabeth II, Brazilian football icon Pele, Mikhail Gorbachev, Jiang Zemin, and Shinzo Abe. Former pope Benedict XVI died on New Year's Eve.

In November the global population surpassed the historic milestone of eight billion people.

But 2022 is most likely to be remembered for armed conflict returning to Europe -- a continent that was the crucible of two world wars.

More than 300 days into Russia's botched invasion of Ukraine, about 7,000 civilians have been killed and 10,000 more injured, according to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.

About 16 million Ukrainians have fled their homes.

For those who remain, an 11:00 pm to 5:00 am curfew will be in place amid periodic blackouts and Russian missile barrages.

While some will mark the occasion with quiet candlelit prayers, others intend to party through the night in a collective show of resolve.

In past years, "people always stayed with us until three or four in the morning, so staying here for another hour or two will not be a problem", said Kyiv restaurateur Tetyana Myrofanov.

There seems to be a dulled appetite for grand celebrations in Vladimir Putin's Russia.

Moscow has cancelled its traditional fireworks show after Mayor Sergei Sobyenin asked residents to vote on how to mark the occasion.

Muscovites such as Irina Shapovalova, a 51-year-old nursery worker, said their main wish for 2023 was for "a peaceful sky above our heads".

State-owned broadcaster VGTRK has promised to provide a "New Year's atmosphere, despite the changes in the country and the world".

## Russia Strikes Ukraine Hours Before the New Year

KYIV (Dispatches) - Russian strikes targeted Ukraine, including the capital Kyiv, just hours before New Year's Eve celebrations while President Vladimir Putin told Russians that "historical rightness" was on their side.

As Russian regions in the Far East rang in 2023, the Russian leader delivered his midnight address -- usually set against the backdrop of the Kremlin -- standing among servicemen and women who fought in Ukraine.

At around the same time, explosions shook the Ukrainian capital where AFP journalists heard around 10 loud blasts in the early afternoon.

Kyiv mayor Vitali Klitschko said on social media that at least one person died as a result of the attacks and 20 others were injured.

An explosion tore open one corner of the four-star Hotel Alfavito in Kyiv, spilling rubble into the street, an AFP reporter saw. Nearby sidewalks were covered in glass from blown-out windows in the area, including from Kyiv's National Palace of Arts.



## Venezuelan Opposition Votes to Dissolve Guaido-Led Interim Gov't

CARACAS (Dispatches) - The Venezuelan opposition on Friday dissolved the "interim government" led by Juan Guaido, once the popular and internationally recognized face of a failed drive to oust leftist leader Nicolas Maduro.

The vote came in an online session of the opposition-controlled National Assembly, a body elected in 2015 and now largely symbolic as it was replaced by a legislature loyal to Maduro.

The tally was 72 in favor of dissolving the interim government, 29 against and eight abstentions.

Almost four years ago, in January 2019, Guaido won the recognition of more than 50 nations including the United States as the legitimate albeit acting leader of Venezuela, after widely disputed presidential elections that kept Maduro in power.

But while the opposition holds the purse strings to some of Venezuela's assets abroad, Guaido's failure to find a winning strategy to oust Maduro has caused his public support to plummet.

Maduro is blamed for overseeing an oppressive regime and running Venezuela's economy into chaos and poverty for years, with widespread shortages of food and medicine and other essentials.

And Guaido's international backers, led by the United States, have adopted a more nuanced approach. Backing for him abroad has dwindled over time as he failed to dislodge Maduro.

While there was no immediate comment from Washington on Friday, a senior US official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said this week that Washington would continue to support Venezuela's democratic opposition and the interim government, regardless of what form it takes.

At the same time, President Joe Biden's administration rewarded the Maduro government's decision to return to talks with the opposition, with a slight easing of sanctions on the Venezuelan oil industry.

Filmmaker Yaroslav Mutenko, 23, lives in a nearby apartment complex and said he was in the shower preparing to go to a New Year's Eve party when he heard a boom.

He said there had been similar explosions in the area during a previous attack in October, but nothing as loud as Saturday's explosion.

As he watched rescue workers cordon off the street in front of the hotel, he told AFP he still planned to go to the party at a friend's house.

"Our enemies the Russians can destroy our calm but they cannot destroy our spirit," he said.

"Why do I go celebrate with friends? Because this year I understand that it is important to have people near."

The attacks come as Putin's invasion of Ukraine enters its 11th month, with Russian strikes systematically targeting energy infrastructure, leaving millions in the cold and dark in the middle of winter.

According to mayor Klitschko, 30 percent of Kyiv's residents were left without electricity due to emergency power cuts after the strikes on Saturday.

## North Korea Fires Three Ballistic Missiles

SEOUL (Dispatches) - North Korea fired three short-range ballistic missiles, Seoul's military said, adding a final salvo to Pyongyang's record-breaking blitz of launches this year.

Military tensions on the Korean peninsula have risen sharply in 2022 as the North has conducted sanctions-busting weapons tests nearly every month, including firing its most advanced intercontinental ballistic missile ever.

The launch comes a day after South Korea successfully tested a solid-fuel space launch vehicle, and follows the incursion of five North Korean drones into the South's airspace earlier in the week.

South Korea's military said it had detected "three short-range ballistic missiles launched by North Korea into the East Sea from the area of Chungwha County, North Hwanghae Province, at around 08:00 (2300 GMT)", referring to the body of water also known as the Sea of Japan.

The missiles flew about 350 kilometres (217 miles) before splashing down, it added.

"Our military maintains a full readiness posture while closely cooperating with the US and strengthening surveillance and vigilance," the Joint Chiefs of Staff said.

Monday's North Korean drone incursion was the first such incident in five years and prompted an apology from Seoul's defense minister after the military failed to shoot down a single drone despite scrambling jets for a five-hour operation.

South Korean president Yoon Suk-yeol called the

incident "intolerable" and added that the South should ensure that Pyongyang realized that "provocations are always met with harsh consequences".

Seoul's military staged drills Thursday that the country's top brass said would improve its defenses against any future drone provocations.

And on Friday, South Korea successfully tested a new space launch vehicle as part of its drive to strengthen space-based reconnaissance and surveillance capabilities, the defence ministry said.

Pyongyang earlier this month said it conducted an "important final-stage" test for the development of a reconnaissance satellite, claiming it had developed advanced technologies to take images from space.

"The purpose of North Korea's missile launch today is to respond to Seoul's solid-fuelled space launch vehicle. Pyongyang seems to be thinking of this as a competition," Yang Moo-jin, a professor at the University of North Korean Studies in Seoul, told AFP.

North Korea is currently holding a major party meeting in Pyongyang at which Kim and other senior party officials are outlining their policy goals for 2023 in key areas including diplomacy, security and the economy.

Earlier this year, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un said he wanted his country to have the world's most powerful nuclear force and declared the North an "irreversible" nuclear state.



## Croatia Enters Euro, Borderless Europe Club

ZAGREB (Dispatches) - Croatia counted down the hours on Saturday ahead of a switch to the euro and entry into Europe's passport-free zone -- two major milestones for the country after joining the EU nearly a decade ago.

At midnight (2300 GMT Saturday) the Balkan nation bode far farewell to its kuna currency and become the 20th member of the eurozone.

It is now the 27th nation in the passport-free Schengen zone, the world's largest, which enables more than 400 million people to move freely around its members.

Experts say the adoption of the euro will help shield Croatia's economy at a time when inflation is soaring worldwide after Russia's invasion of Ukraine sent food and fuel prices through the roof.

But feelings among Croatians are mixed -- while they welcome the end of border controls, some worry about the euro switch, with right-wing opposition groups saying it only benefits large countries such as Germany and France.

"We will cry for our kuna, prices will soar," said Drazen Golemac, a 63-year-old pensioner from Zagreb.

Many Croatians fear that the introduction of the euro will lead to a hike in prices -- in particular that businesses will round up prices when they convert. For tourist agency employee Marko Pavic "Croatia joins an elite club". "The euro was already a value measure, psychologically it's nothing new while entry into Schengen is fantastic news for tourism," he told AFP.

Use of the euro is already widespread in Croatia. Croatians have long valued their most precious assets such as cars and apartments in euros, displaying a lack of confidence in the local currency.

About 80 percent of bank deposits are denominated in euros and Zagreb's main trading partners are in the eurozone.

Officials have defended the decision to join the eurozone and Schengen, with Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic saying Wednesday that they were "two strategic goals of a deeper EU integration".

Croatia, a former Yugoslav republic of 3.9 million people that fought a war of independence in the 1990s, joined the European Union in 2013.

"The euro certainly brings (economic) stability and safety," Ana Sabic of the Croatian National Bank (HNB) told AFP.





# How to Ease a Sore Throat Quickly

LONDON (Dispatches) - There are many reasons for experiencing symptoms of a sore throat. Sore throats can be felt for a few minutes and go away, or they can persist for days. Sore throats make us irritable. The throat can feel irritated, scratchy, or downright painful. However, there are many home remedies that will help ease a sore throat before a cause is discovered.

Sore throats can be transitory or last for days or weeks.

Sore throats can be a result of minor irritation or inflammation or be a sign of other causes such as infection.

Home remedies for sore throats are proven, safe, and effective in alleviating many mild or moderate symptoms.

Persistent sore throats or those associated with other symptoms such as fever warrant further medical evaluation and possible treatment.

Sore throats can be a result of infection, typically viral or bacterial such as Strep, inflammation, allergy, trauma, toxins, or even malignancy. A sore throat can be caused by something we eat or drink, heartburn, a symptom of a cold infection, or discomfort from our teeth or gums.

It is important to understand that not every sore throat is serious enough to warrant seeing a healthcare provider. Fortunately, there are ways to treat a sore throat at home.

What are some home remedies to alleviate a sore throat?

There are remedies already available in your kitchen pantry or medicine cabinet. No matter what the cause of the sore throat is, most, if not all of these methods will help to some extent.

If the sore throat persists or other symptoms develop such as fever or worsening difficulties breathing or swallowing, then it is imperative to seek medical attention.

## Hot or cold liquids

Either hot or cold liquids may be beneficial. Trial and error is the best method. Hot or warm liquids may include classic suggestions such as hot tea or chicken soup or broth. Chamomile tea seems to be preferred along with lemon juice. Clove and green tea are believed to have antibacterial and anti-inflammatory characteristics.

Many herbal teas help soothe the throat. Peppermint tea can provide some numbing of the back of the throat. Be aware that many teas contain caffeine which can cause nervousness.

Lemon juice is thought to boost the immune properties of chicken soup, so add it just before serving to avoid bitterness. Chicken soup isn't an old wives' tale; studies have shown it can help reduce inflammation, including a sore throat. Cold or frozen liquids can include popsicles or crushed ice. Staying hydrated is also important.



## Saltwater or baking soda

Gargling with salt water or baking soda can help break up the mucus, resolve the potential pH imbalance, and neutralize any acid reflux from the esophagus. Baking soda solutions are particularly helpful if there is severe discomfort, and the recommendation is to do this three to four times a day. The formula is to stir one teaspoon of salt or baking soda into one cup of water.

Be aware that many over-the-counter types of mouthwash may be too harsh to use with a sore throat. Occasionally, a small amount of hydrogen peroxide mixed with water can be soothing.

## Throat lozenges and cough drops

Anything that stimulates saliva is going to be beneficial for sore throat symptoms. Keeping the mouth and throat moist will ease any pain. Lemon drops or lemon-flavored drops can produce an abundance of extra saliva and can help even with patients who have poorly functioning salivary glands from dehydration or other causes.

## Analgesics

Ibuprofen or acetaminophen are good options for the reduction of sore throat discomfort. They are useful if there is associated fever or chills with body aches. It is important to remember that children under 18 years of age should not receive aspirin because they are at risk of Reye's syndrome, which can be fatal. Also, children under two years of age should not be given acetaminophen.

Caution should be taken in taking antihistamines instead of or in addition to analgesics. Antihistamines may improve nasal congestion and post-nasal drip, but they can work against you in drying out your throat and increasing the sore throat symptoms.

## Humidification

A sore throat may be a result of nasal or throat dryness. Humidification is a key mechanism for improving dryness. It can be achieved by using a room humidifier or steam from a shower or hot soup or tea as already described.

Pictures of people leaning over a bowl of hot water, while wearing a towel over their heads may seem old-fashioned and ridiculous, but the method can be very effective. Sometimes, there is no other better way to concentrate the steam better.

## Rest and head elevation

Rest may be one of the most overlooked remedies. Sometimes our bodies rebel against our being exhausted or our need for sleep and rejuvenation.

When you try to sleep, elevating your head can help. If at all possible, try sleeping on your side, as lying on your back may worsen any throat swelling.

## Over-the-counter throat sprays

Some of these sprays may provide relief but be aware that the relief is usually temporary. The sprays are not a treatment but rather a means of neutralizing the discomfort. Caution should be taken in using these sprays in children under two years of age. Also, these sprays can alter the ability to swallow and there is a risk of choking.

## Even more home remedies

Your grandmother may have recommended other home remedies, many of which can be found in commercially-made cough remedies.

## Licorice root

This can be mixed with water for gargling. Licorice root tea may also be helpful.

## Sage and echinacea

Some claim sage and echinacea to be as effective as over-the-counter throat sprays because they can break up mucus and soothe sore throats.

## Peppermint oil

Peppermint can be effective. It is even recommended by the American Cancer Society for the relief of sore throats.

## Marshmallow root

This refers to an herbal preparation containing dry ivy leaf extract as the main ingredient along with thyme, aniseed, and marshmallow root. There have been studies that suggest that the mixture is helpful for reducing sore throat and cough.



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## Swiss National Bank Steps Up Forex Sales During Q3

ZURICH (Dispatches) - The Swiss National Bank increased its forex sales to 739 million Swiss francs (\$799.35 million) during the third quarter of 2022, the central bank said, showing how its focus has switched from stemming the safe-haven currency's strength to fighting inflation.

The figure was an acceleration from the 5 million francs in foreign currencies the SNB sold during the second quarter of 2022, and continues its changed approach after buying 353 billion francs of forex since 2015.

The SNB has instead recently been selling foreign currencies to strengthen the Swiss franc, whose high value has helped dampen inflation caused by more expensive imports.



## Huawei Sees Business as Usual as U.S. Sanctions Impact Wanes

SHANGHAI (Dispatches) - Chinese tech giant Huawei Technologies Co Ltd estimated its 2022 revenue remained flat, suggesting that its sales decline due to U.S. sanctions had come to a halt.

Despite sales increasing a mere 0.02%, rotating chairman Eric Xu struck an upbeat tone in the company's annual New Year's letter, where he revealed the figure.

"U.S. restrictions are now our new normal, and we're back to business as usual," Xu wrote in the letter that was addressed to staff and released to media. Revenue for the year is expected to be 636.9 billion yuan (\$91.53 billion), according to Xu.

That represents a tiny increase from 2021, when revenue hit 636.8 billion yuan, and marked a 30% year-on-year sales tumble as the U.S. sanctions on the company took effect.

Xu's letter did not mention Huawei's profitability. The company typically discloses its full annual results in the following year's first quarter.

Revenue for 2022 still remained well below the company's record of \$122 billion in 2019. At the time the company was at its peak as the top Android smartphone vendor globally.

In 2019, the U.S. Trump administration imposed a trade ban on Huawei, citing national security concerns, which barred the company from using Alphabet Inc's Android for its new smartphones, among other critical U.S.-origin technologies.

The sanctions caused its handset device sales to plummet. It also lost access to critical components that barred it from designing its line of processors for smartphones under its HiSilicon chip division.

The company continues to generate revenue via its networking equipment division, which competes with Nokia and Ericsson. It also operates a cloud computing division.

The company began investing in the electric vehicle (EV) sector as well as green technologies around the time sanctions took effect.

"The macro environment may be rife with uncertainty, but what we can be certain about is that digitization and decarbonization are the way forward, and they're where future opportunities lie," said Xu in the letter.

## White House Confident About Economic Recovery in 2023

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Despite the ongoing turbulence caused by the coronavirus pandemic and the shock of war in Eastern Europe, the American economy is in sound health, top Biden administration economist Jared Bernstein asserted in an end-of-year interview with Yahoo News.

The upcoming year may not be one of blockbuster gains or growth but will instead, Bernstein predicted, see the American economy avoid both the inflation that haunted 2022 and the recession that materialized later in the year as the Federal Reserve raised interest rates to stem price increases.

"I think there are reasons to be optimistic," Bernstein said. "There are tailwinds and headwinds in this economy, and I spend my days tracking both of them," he added. In his view, the headwinds are subsiding (inflation, still high, is falling) while the tailwinds are picking up (the pandemic is over, sort of).

Twelve months from now, Bernstein and other economists want nothing more than for the U.S. economy to be coasting along at cruising altitude, a year remarkable only for how unremarkable it is. That, in 2023, is what winning may look like.

"It's going to be gloriously, boringly normal," University of Michigan economist Justin Wolfers recently predicted. "I'm not saying there's no recession. But if there's a recession, it'll be a boring recession. And if it's a boom, it'll be a boring boom."

Critics counter that confidence in Biden's management of the economy is unwarranted. In particular, they argue that it was Biden's spending, not the pandemic or the war, that caused inflation to spike in the first place. That argument has been challenged by the fact that other countries currently have much higher inflation rates, meaning that the problem is global.

Some of the criticism is reserved for Federal Reserve Chairman Jay Powell, who has acknowledged that, throughout 2021, he did not see inflation coming. Biden frequently voices his respect for the Fed's independence when asked about the health of the economy. Whether intentionally or not, the president thus reminds people that, if the recovery goes astray, Powell should shoulder some of the blame.

The most obvious danger facing the U.S. economy in the coming year is a recession; A Bloomberg poll of economists says there is a 70% chance of one in 2023. Huge job cuts at some of the biggest Silicon Valley firms have led to the by-now-familiar exchange of I-told-you-so recriminations and nothing-to-see-here reassurances in Washington, where every new shred of economic news is often regarded as a referendum on the White House.



## Soybeans Set to Gain for 4th Year Amid Argentina Drought, China Demand

LONDON (Dispatches) - Chicago soybeans rose on Friday, with the market poised to gain for a fourth straight year, lifted by a drought in key supplier Argentina and expectations of strong demand from China.

Wheat futures edged higher, putting the market on track to finish 2022 largely unchanged, having jumped to an all-time high in March after Russia's invasion of Ukraine curbed global supplies.

"Argentina is expecting more dry and warm conditions to follow this weekend's light rains," the Hightower said in a report. "This will likely increase crop stress and add to an already stressful situation there."

The most-active soybean contract on the Chicago Board of Trade (CBOT) rose 0.7% to \$15.26-1/4 a bushel, wheat gained 0.2% to \$7.75-3/4 a bushel and corn rose 0.1% to \$6.80-1/4 a bushel.

For the year, soybeans are up almost 14% while wheat, which has closed higher for the last five years, has added less than 1%. Corn has gained about 15%.

A severe drought is likely to reduce soybean output in Argentina just as demand in China, by far the world's top importer, is expected to recover after the country eased strict COVID-19 controls.

Resumption of wheat exports from Ukraine under a U.S.-brokered deal has weighed on wheat prices in the second half of 2022, although harsh cold weather across North America has raised concerns over 2023 supplies.

Deliveries against CBOT January soybean futures should be thin on Friday, reflecting relatively firm domestic cash markets for the oilseed, traders and analysts said on Thursday.

Some participants booked profits after the rally in grains that may have been amplified by thin holiday volumes, traders said. Argentina's estimated wheat production for the 2022/2023 season could be slashed again in the coming weeks due to lower-than-expected yields, the Buenos Aires grains exchange said on Thursday.

Late frosts and a historic drought have caused the exchange to cut its estimate for the South American country's wheat crop to 12.4 million tons from an initial estimate of 20.5 million tons seen at the beginning of the season.

U.S. wheat markets remained capped by Russian exports, highlighted by a purchase of 200,000 tons of Russian wheat by Egypt this week.

## Economic Weakness Set to Weigh on Oil Price in 2023

LONDON (Dispatches) - Oil prices are set for small gains in 2023 as a darkening global economic backdrop and COVID-19 flare-ups in China threaten demand growth and offset the impact of supply shortfalls caused by sanctions on Russia, a Reuters poll showed.

A survey of 30 economists and analysts forecast Brent crude would average \$89.37

a barrel in 2023, about 4.6% lower than the \$93.65 consensus in a November survey. The global benchmark has averaged \$99 per barrel in 2022.

U.S. crude is projected to average \$84.84 per barrel in 2023, versus the previous month's \$87.80 consensus.

"We expect the world to slip into recession in early 2023 as the effects of high inflation and rising interest rates are felt," said Bradley Saunders, assistant economist at Capital Economics.

Brent has fallen more than 15% since early November and was trading around \$84 a barrel on Friday as surging COVID-19 cases in China depressed the outlook for oil demand growth in the world's largest crude oil importer.

"The oil market is still tight despite a weakening global demand outlook as recession fears run wild," said Edward Moya, senior analyst with OANDA, adding that China will be the primary focus in the first quarter of next year.

Most analysts said oil demand will grow significantly in the second half of 2023, driven by the easing of COVID-19 restrictions in China and by central banks adopting a less aggressive approach on interest rates.

The impact of Western sanctions on Russian oil is expected to be minimal, the poll showed.

"We do not expect an impact from the price cap, which was designed to give bargaining power to third-country buyers," analysts at Goldman Sachs said in a note.

Moscow this week signed a decree that bans the supply of oil and oil products to nations participating in the Group of Seven (G7) price cap from Feb. 1 for five months.

"In the event of a severe drop to Russian exports (which we do not expect to occur), OPEC+ will likely be ready to increase output to prevent prices from rising too high," data and analytics firm Kpler said.

## Turkey's Central Bank Targets 60% Lira Deposits In Banks by Mid-2023

ANKARA (Dispatches) - Turkey's central bank said it aims to lift the share of lira deposits to 60% of all deposits in the banking system over the next six months, and vowed to continue using regulations to support access to credit.

In its annual monetary policy report, the central bank said it was maintaining its long-held 5% medium-term inflation target, as the annual inflation rate begins edging down from a 24-year high above 85% in October.

"Policies will continue to be used in order to permanently increase the weight of the Turkish lira on both the asset and liability sides of the banking system," the bank said.

The central bank, which has undertaken a "liraization" policy of stabilizing the currency pressured by its interest rate cuts, repeated it had no exchange rate target level and would not buy or sell hard currencies to direct the lira.

Inflation has surged since autumn 2021, stoked by an unorthodox monetary easing cycle that President Tayyip Erdogan pushed for to boost economic growth and investment, but which sparked a historic currency crash late last year.

A year ago, hard currencies accounted for some 65% of all deposits in the banking system, reflecting years of lira depreciation and high and volatile inflation rates.

But after dozens of regulations were adopted in 2022 meant to dissuade foreign currencies' use - including state-backed depreciation-protected lira deposits - their share has fallen to 47% of all deposits as of last week.

The lira, propped up by indirect foreign exchange sales to the market, has steadied since August, while inflation is expected to fall sharply next year with economists predicting it will dip to 40% by the time Erdogan faces tight presidential and parliamentary elections, expected in June.

The central bank also said in its report that it would ensure a "steady" increase in international reserves in support of the lira.

Analysts expect the current 9% policy to remain steady until the election, after which it will depend on whether Erdogan is re-elected.

The opposition has promised a return to orthodox policies and rate hikes.

For 2022, the central bank expects inflation to drop to 65.2% by year-end, thanks largely to base effects in December, compared to a median estimate of 69% in the latest Reuters poll.

## Rupee May Stage a Comeback in H2 of 2023



NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - Forecasting a fate for Indian Rupee, Shinhan Bank, a premiere South Korean Investment Bank, has said that USD/INR is expected to weaken in the first half of 2023, due to economic slowdown but is likely to rebound in the second half. The expected annual range for USD-INR is 77-84.5, says the bank in its recently published report. Despite weakness in currency, the report believes that India may attract Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) worth \$475 billion in next five years due to institutional and policy reforms initiated by the government.

Due to the unstable external factors including continued strong dollar and global economic slowdown, USD/INR is expected to receive upward pressure. However, slowdown in U.S. Federal Reserve's rate hike may trigger downward movement of USD/INR in second half of the year, the report says. In 2022, the foreign exchange (FX) rate weakened as USD/INR rose above 80 level due to the Fed's aggressive tightening and strengthening of the US dollar.

Apart from external factors, the bank also cited India's deteriorating fiscal condition for weakness in Rupee. The report states that as subsidies increased in order to defend this year's high inflation, fiscal spending also increased, enlarging the fiscal deficit. If it continues, FX market supply will worsen, since India is a structurally current-account deficit country that will put downward pressure on rupee, the report says.

The report cites a previous IMF forecast that expected the global economic growth in 2022 to be 3.2%, and 2.7% in 2023.

In line with slowing global growth, India's economy is also expected to slow down in 2023, accelerating the global economic slowdown as the aftermath of the Russia-Ukraine War and global monetary policy tightening. India's economy is expected to grow 6.8% in '22 and 6.1% in '23. Despite downward revision of 2022 outlook, India's economic growth is comparatively higher than other major Asian countries.



## Taremi Ranks 4th in Top Scorer Ranking of 2022

TEHRAN (MNA) – Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) introduced the top scorers of 2022, and the Iranian striker who plays for FC Porto and the national Iranian football team, Mehdi Taremi was ranked 4th on the list.

Kylian Mbappé has finished as the top Europe-based goalscorer for club and country for the first time, the Paris Saint-Germain forward coming in

comfortably ahead of Erling Haaland and the man who ended the last three years top of the pile, Robert Lewandowski, UEFA.com reported.

It added that Mbappé, 24, scored 56 goals in as many games in all competitions for club and country, including five hat-tricks and eight penalties. Haaland was ten goals behind the Frenchman after playing 13 games fewer – the Norwegian averaged better than a goal per game in 2022.



## Chinese Airlines Primed to Take Advantage of Border Opening

SYDNEY (Dispatches) - Chinese airlines will be the early winners of the country's international reopening, analysts say, having kept most widebody planes and staff ready while foreign carriers struggle with capacity constraints after previous border openings.

Less than one-fifth of China's widebody fleet of about 500 planes is in storage, according to a McKinsey analysis using Cirium data, with most planes active but flying fewer hours than usual on domestic routes and limited international and cargo flights.

Chinese airlines also retained most pilots and cabin crew during the pandemic, and airports kept about 90% of their workers, a move that should help carriers avoid the chaotic ramp-up seen in North America and Europe, said Steve Saxon, a Shenzhen-based McKinsey partner who leads its Asia travel practice.

"The profitability is going to be good in the short term... because even if the Chinese carriers activate quite quickly, what we've seen around the world is the demand comes back faster than supply," he said. "And that typically means that prices are therefore high."

About 62% of tickets to and from China were sold by Chinese carriers and 38% by foreign carriers in 2019, ForwardKeys data shows, reflecting the strong outbound market dominating traffic flows.

State-owned Air China, China Southern Airlines and China Eastern Airlines received financial support during the pandemic and kept narrowbody planes active on domestic routes so the aircraft can be redeployed quickly to Asian destinations.

"The Chinese airlines have a front seat," Singapore-based independent analyst Brendan Sobie said of the recovery, citing advantages including a large sales base in China and the ability to deploy capacity quickly on routes with the most demand.

"Foreign airlines don't have that flexibility and it will be hard for them to forecast and project how fast demand returns on their China routes," he added.

Many foreign carriers also retired large numbers of widebody planes during the pandemic and have struggled to add capacity even before China opened.

Carriers including Lufthansa, United Airlines, Singapore Airlines and Qantas Airways said this week they were examining their plans for China flights but did not announce immediate increases.

The Chinese travel industry had expected a border opening around March and was not prepared for the Jan. 8 date, according to a research note from Tianfeng Securities.

International flights to and from China are at just 8% of pre-pandemic levels,



VariFlight data shows, and carriers require confirmation of traffic rights and airport slots as they look to ramp up capacity.

Ticket prices remain high, and other initial travel hurdles include an expected backlog of passport renewals and visa applications, as well as fresh testing requirements for Chinese travellers put in place by countries including the United States, Japan, India and Italy, Saxon said.

He expects international capacity to and from China will rise to about 20% to 30% of pre-pandemic levels by March and reach maybe 50% by summer.

For travel to China, a large market for business and leisure, July is the most searched month, according to Skyscanner data from this week provided to Reuters.

"From a pricing perspective, there may be some short-term fluctuations due to large amounts of demand, but we anticipate that airlines will mobilise aircraft and crews quickly and reintroduce capacity to keep prices attractive," a Skyscanner spokesperson said.

## Germany's Energy Crisis Powers Hydrogen Switch



KELHEIM (Dispatches) - From the moment Russian gas exports to Germany were first disrupted in June, German firm Kelheim Fibers began casting around for alternative options to keep its engines running.

As a result, the Bavarian-based firm, whose fibres are used in anything from teabags to tampons, will be able to use heating oil instead of gas starting mid-January.

The downside is that will increase carbon emissions and for the longer term, the firm is considering a switch to hydrogen, which is a much cleaner energy source provided it is produced using renewable power.

"We want to be one of the first large companies in Bavaria to switch to hydrogen," Craig Barker, managing director of the 87-year-old firm, told Reuters.

Energy costs account for over 60%-70% of the company's variable expenses, overtaking that of its main raw material, Barker said.

Kelheim Fibers is one of many small and medium-sized companies that form the backbone of Europe's biggest economy, and that are seeking to diversify their energy mix to maintain output.

Russia's reduction of gas supplies to Germany following Moscow's invasion of Ukraine in February, has forced Berlin to reactivate or extend the lifespan of its coal-fired power plants, putting greenhouse emissions targets in jeopardy.

However, ifo economist Klaus Wohlrabe said the crisis could eventually lead to greener production.

"Relying on fossil fuels for the long term ... has proven to be a risky path. So in the medium term, at least, companies have no choice but to reorientate themselves," Wohlrabe said.

Kelheim Fibers, which has so far covered 85% of energy needs with gas, is in talks with stakeholders over hydrogen imports with an expected annual consumption of about 30,000 tons, starting from 2025, Barker added.

"We definitely need infrastructure," he said, adding that a pipeline will be needed to connect to the German refinery Bayernoil and a port to cover the demand the company cannot meet from domestically produced hydrogen.

Earlier this month, Germany's Economic Affairs Ministry approved the construction of the country's first hydrogen pipeline network. It also announced an action plan to support small and medium-sized companies as they switch to climate-neutral production, including expanding hydrogen infrastructure.

## Japan Tests All China Arrivals for COVID Amid Surging Cases

TOKYO (Dispatches) - Japan started requiring COVID-19 tests for all passengers arriving from China as an emergency measure against surging infections there and as Japan faces rising case numbers and record-level deaths at home.

Japan reported a record 420 new coronavirus deaths on Thursday, one day after reaching an earlier single-day record of 415 deaths, according to the Health Ministry.

The numbers are higher than the daily deaths at the peak of an earlier wave in August, when they exceeded 300. Experts say the reason for the latest increase is unclear but could be linked to deaths from the worsening of chronic illnesses among elderly patients.

Japan tightened its border measures on Friday, making the antigen test that was already conducted on entrants suspected of having COVID-19 mandatory for all people arriving from mainland China. Those who test positive will be quarantined for up to seven days at designated facilities and their samples will be used for genome analysis.

The measures began ahead of the New Year holidays marked by travel and parties. Direct flights between China and Japan will be limited to four major Japanese airports for now, government officials said.

Flights from Hong Kong and Macao will be allowed to land at three other airports — New Chitose Airport in Hokkaido, Fukuoka Airport and Naha Airport in Okinawa — provided there are no passengers who have been to mainland China within seven days prior to the flight.

Hong Kong authorities called the restrictions "unreasonable" and requested Japanese authorities to withdraw them. Prior to adding the three airports for flights from Hong Kong and Macao, authorities said that 60,000 travelers and some 250 flights would be affected between December and January 2023.

Japan earlier this year stopped requiring COVID-19 tests for entrants who had at least three shots — part of



the country's careful easing of measures after virtually closing its borders to foreign tourists for about two years. This year's holiday season is the first without virus restrictions other than recommendations for mask wearing and testing.

The country is now reporting about 200,000 known daily cases.

At a meeting earlier this week, experts cautioned that the rapid spread of influenza this winter also has the potential to add pressure to medical systems.

China recently reversed its anti-virus controls that kept the country in isolation for nearly three years and announced this week plans to reissue passports and visas for overseas trips. This could send many Chinese abroad for the Lunar New Year holiday in January, raising concerns about the possible spread of the virus.

India, Italy, South Korea and Taiwan have also responded to the Chinese wave of infections by requiring virus tests for visitors from China. The United States said Wednesday it would require testing of all travelers from China beginning Jan. 5.

South Korea on Friday announced that it will also require travelers from China to show negative PCR test results within 48 hours or rapid antigen tests within 24 hours of their departures, beginning Jan. 5.

Effective Monday, all visitors from China will be also required to take PCR tests within a day of arriving in South Korea, said Jee Youngmee, commissioner of the Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency. South Korea will also restrict the number of flights from China and restrict short-term visas for Chinese nationals, except for those visiting for diplomatic, essential business or humanitarian reasons, at least until the end of February.

Thailand authorities said they were considering requiring a negative virus test and other restrictions on travelers from China.

## Coal, Gas Lead 2022 Commodities Rally; Recession Fears Greet New Year

SINGAPORE (Dispatches) - Coal and natural gas markets ended 2022 with strong gains after a global energy crisis triggered by the Russia-Ukraine war stoked a sharp upswing in prices, while tighter supplies expected in 2023 could fuel more gains.

Industrial metals, iron ore and rubber are on track to finish in negative territory, pushed down in 2022 by China's strict zero-COVID policy and fears of a world recession.

Agricultural markets, including grains and palm oil, jumped to all-time highs in March on adverse weather and pandemic-related supply disruptions, triggering food inflation, but those commodities gave up much of their gains in the second half.

"Despite the recent price declines, commodities will still likely finish the year as the best performing asset class..." Goldman Sachs said in its 2023 commodity outlook.

"From a fundamental perspective, the setup for most commodities next year is more bullish than it has been at any point since we first highlighted the supercycle in October 2020."

Global gas markets were roiled this year after Russia cut supplies to Europe and a major pipeline was damaged amid the war in Ukraine, leading European countries to import record volumes to ensure winter supplies.

The additional demand for liquefied natural gas (LNG) amid tighter supplies of piped gas placed enormous strain on the global market, spurring an energy crisis that pushed gas prices to historic highs.

Newcastle coal futures have soared almost 140% in 2022, the biggest jump since 2008. U.S. gas futures and Dutch wholesale gas prices have jumped by more than 20%, rising for a third consecutive year.

Power-generation fuels - coal, natural gas and gasoil - outperform other energy products in 2022 following cut in Russian energy supplies to Europe

Because Europe will continue importing LNG to rebuild gas inventories next year after winter, gas prices are expected to remain elevated amid limited new supplies coming on-stream.

Dismantling of tight pandemic controls in China, the world's second-largest LNG importer, could also promote economic recovery and greater LNG consumption next year.

However, a European cap on gas prices starting in February could help keep a lid on the market and reduce the volatility seen this year.

## Standing Ovation for...

FROM PAGE 1

In Syria, Soleimani assumed personal control of the Iranian intervention. He reportedly coordinated the war from a base in Damascus with Syrian officers, Hezbollah, and Iraqi Shia militia forces.



These are not the only ones who have hailed Martyr Soleimani as a real hero in fighting for the global peace, and many people in the world have such a feeling as some dare to express their feeling and some fear they may face backlash because the Westerners and especially their media outlets have tried to paint a negative picture of this Hero of Hearts and they even cannot tolerate a simple comment on the social media and shut down the account of anybody who puts a post or a story in his account.

But the West and enemies of the Islamic Revolution and the Resistance Front should know that Iranians and freedom-lovers in the world will never forget this brave hero and his memory will be remembered for ever and his path will be followed as well, and the West and its media and servants in other states will be unable to ruin the personality of this great Personality of the World and his bravery and endeavors for uprooting the threat of Daesh will never be forgotten.

Martyr Soleimani has been and is the only brave military man in the contemporary history who won the hearts with fighting for the safety and security of nations rather than for winning and occupying the land and for this reason world has to give a standing ovation for this man who sacrificed his life fearlessly for others.

## Western Sanctions...

FROM PAGE 1

Stressing that the IRIB is Iran's national media, Jebelli said the organization produces content and provides information in accordance with the needs of the society, and contributes in the progress of the country.

"If there is supposed to be freedom of expression, [Iran's] national media as a platform for expressing people's views and managing public opinion will do its job, and their media will also do their job, and both sides should have the freedom [to do their job]," the IRIB CEO said.

"How come the anti-Iran media, which are busy day and night with encouraging sedition, training riots, creating subversion and undermining Iran and other countries' security, operate freely in the heart of Europe and none of the media regulatory guidelines are applied to them," Jebelli added.

"But the IRIB, which is a media specific to the Islamic Republic of Iran's boundaries and operates according to the law, violates the rules in their opinion and they cannot even tolerate the existence of this organization and this media on satellites?"

The head of the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting stressed that, "This is one of the very obvious examples of media dictatorship that we have clearly faced in recent events."

In November, the U.S. Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) targeted with sanctions the IRIB Chief Jebelli, Head of the IRIB World Service and CEO of English-language Press TV television news network Ahmad Norouzi, the IRIB Vice Director General Mohsen Barmahani, Director of Press TV's Programs Department Yousef Pour-Anvari, as well as the IRIB senior correspondents Ali Rezvani and Ameneh Sadat Zabihepour.

OFAC claimed that the IRIB had broadcast "hundreds of forced confessions of Iranian, dual national, and international detainees in Iran" during recent riots over the death of a young woman of Kurdish descent in the capital, Tehran.



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**E-Mail Address:**  
 info@irannewsdaily.com  
**ISSN 1024-6053**  
**P.O. Box:** 15875-8551  
**Address:** No 13, Pajouhesh St.,  
 Golestan II St, Golestan St. Marzadaran  
 Blvd., Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran  
**Printed by:** Honar Sarzmin Sabz  
**Distributed by:**  
 Cities of Iran Cultural and  
 Artistic Institute  
**Managing Director:** Fereydoon Taherpour Asl

## Qatar Coach Sanchez to Leave

DOHA (Dispatches) - Qatar coach Felix Sanchez will leave his post at the end of the month after the country's FA (QFA) said on Friday that they had mutually agreed not to renew his contract, with the World Cup hosts having lost all of their group games at the tournament.  
 The QFA said Sanchez, 47, wanted to pursue new opportunities and that the two parties parted ways on Dec. 31. "The past 5-1/2 years with Qatar's senior national team have been a once in a lifetime opportunity," Sanchez said in a statement.

## No Decision on Russia's Potential Switch to Asian Confederation

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - The Russian Football Union's (RFU) Executive Committee members have not expressed their intention to switch to the Asian confederation even as the country remains suspended by European soccer body UEFA, RFU head Alexander Dyukov said.  
 Both UEFA and global football's governing body FIFA had decided in February that all Russian teams - whether national or club sides - would be suspended from participation in their competitions following Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

# LeBron's 47 Points Spark Lakers to NBA Win

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - LeBron James celebrated his 38th birthday by scoring a season-high 47 points, grabbing 10 rebounds and adding nine assists to spark the Los Angeles Lakers to a 130-121 victory in Atlanta.

It was his first 40-point effort of the season, the second achieved in a birthday contest and the 70th 40-point performance of his spectacular 20-season NBA career.

Even more amazing, teammates were congratulating him for saying before the game he would deliver a 40-point birthday beatdown against the Hawks.

"I called it," James said. "I told them before the game. I had to make it happen. After starting 1-for-5 I didn't know if it was going to happen."

James, playing his third game in four nights, actually began shooting 1-for-6 but finished 18-of-27 from the floor, 4-of-6 from 3-point range, and 7-of-9 from the free throw line.

"I didn't even know it was three in four nights. I just knew I had to get my mind and body ready to go," James said. "Make sure my body stays fresh but my mind more importantly."

James became only the fourth player in NBA history to score 45 points in a game at age 38 or older, joining Michael Jordan, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar and Jamal Crawford.

The Hawks, powered by 29 points from Trae Young, led by as many as 15 points in the first half before James rallied the Lakers, scoring 16 points in the second and fourth quarters and 13 in the third.

The only birthday contest in which James scored more points was when he got 48 against Atlanta in 2009.

James, only one assist shy of the NBA's first birthday triple double, is on pace to overtake Abdul-Jabbar and become the NBA's all-time scoring leader in February.

The Lakers (15-21) were without star big man Anthony Davis, out with a foot injury. Having his wife, mother and many other relatives and friends watching helped inspire James.

"It's a treat," James said. "To have them here and support me on the road, on my birthday, is very important to me because they are the rock of everything I do, my mom and my wife and my family."

The night's best 1-2 punch came at New Orleans, where the Pelicans got 42 points from C.J. McCollum and 36 by Zion Williamson to beat Philadelphia 127-116 for their fifth consecutive victory.



McCollum hit 13-of-20 from the floor, including a record 11 3-pointers on 16 shots from beyond the arc, while Williamson netted 13-of-19 shots from the floor.

Joel Embiid scored 37 in a losing cause with James Harden adding 20 points and 10 assists for the 76ers (20-14).

The Pelicans improved to 23-12 to keep a share of the Western Conference lead with Denver, which outlasted visiting Miami 124-119.

Serbian center Nikola Jokic had a triple double with 19 points, 12 rebounds and 12 assists to spark Denver, which had eight double-digit scorers. Tyler Herro led Miami with 26 points.

Jordan Poole scored 41 points, Klay Thompson added 31 and the defending NBA champion Golden State Warriors closed the game on a 16-2 run to beat visiting Portland 118-112.

The Warriors stretched their win streak without injured Stephen Curry to four games while Damian Lillard scored 34 points to pace Portland.

Greek star forward Giannis Antetokounmpo scored 43 points and grabbed 20 rebounds to lead the Milwaukee Bucks over visiting Minnesota 123-114.

The Bucks snapped a four-game losing streak while the Timberwolves saw their losing slide stretch to five games.

Zach LaVine scored 43 points on 15-of-20 shooting to spark Chicago's 132-118 home victory over NBA doormat Detroit.

At Sacramento, Kevin Huerter scored 30 points, including a game-winning 3-pointer with nine seconds to play, to give the host Kings a 126-125 victory over Utah.

Gary Trent Jr. scored 35 points to lead Toronto over Phoenix 113-104, the Raptors snapping a five-game home losing streak.



## Ronaldo Joins Saudi Arabian Club Al Nassr Until 2025

RIYADH (Dispatches) - Portugal captain Cristiano Ronaldo has joined Saudi Arabian club Al Nassr on a 2-1/2 year contract, the club announced, after leaving Manchester United to become a free agent.

Ronaldo departed Old Trafford last month following an explosive television interview in which the 37-year-old forward said he felt betrayed by the club and did not respect their Dutch manager Erik ten Hag.

Al Nassr issued a statement saying the five-time Ballon D'or winner will join on a deal until 2025 but did not disclose any financial details. Ronaldo's contract has been estimated by media to be worth more than 200 million euros (\$214.04 million).

"I am fortunate that I have won everything I set out to win in European football and feel now that this is the right moment to share my experience in Asia," Ronaldo said in the statement.

"I am looking forward to joining my new team mates and together with them help the Club to achieve success."

Ronaldo will arrive in Saudi Arabia with a vast collection of club honours after a glittering spell at Spanish giants Real Madrid from 2009-18 where he won two LaLiga titles, two Spanish Cups, four Champions League titles and three Club World Cups.

## Jabeur Predicts Special 2023

ADELAIDE (Dispatches) - Ons Jabeur missed two opportunities to become the first Arab player to capture a Grand Slam singles title this year, but the Tunisian said on Saturday that 2023 can be special for her as she chases her dream.

Jabeur, whose sublime skills and endearing personality won her fans around the world in 2022, was beaten by Elena Rybakina in the Wimbledon final before another heartbreaking loss to the top-ranked Iga Swiatek in the U.S. Open final.

"I was ready to win it this year. But it didn't happen and didn't happen for a reason. I'm glad that I got the experience of two finals in a Grand Slam," world number two Jabeur said before her season opener in Adelaide.

"We've worked really hard to improve a lot of things during the pre-season. We're more aware of my game. I'm more aware of my body. It's a great thing. I feel like this year (2023) is going to be very special for me," she said.

"I put in the hard work during practice, and I'm hitting the ball good. What has to be done is to play good matches and do whatever I did in practice and follow that."

"I'm doing everything possible to win a Grand Slam, and for me, I'm just going to go for it. This year, 2023, is about just being free and playing my game on the court."

But Jabeur expects to be tested by her rivals, with the women's field as competitive as ever despite Swiatek scooping eight titles in 2022 and the retirement of former world number one Ash Barty in March, not long after the Australian won the season-opening major.

"I just like the idea of not knowing who's going to win," Jabeur said. "I feel like it's been the same. When you play a top-10 player, it's always tough to beat. We're always trying to maintain at that level."

"With Iga's result, she gave us a lot of confidence to go after her and that's competitive, which is good because Ash was doing that, now Iga's doing the same thing."



# Rashford Hits United Winner at Wolves

LONDON (Dispatches) - Marcus Rashford gave the perfect response to his benching for disciplinary reasons as the Manchester United forward's late strike clinched a 1-0 win at Wolves.

United manager Erik ten Hag sprang a pre-match surprise when he revealed Rashford had been dropped because of an "internal disciplinary" issue.

The 25-year-old had been in excellent form for Ten Hag's side this season and also scored three goals for England at the World Cup, so United fans were started to learn of his demotion.

Ten Hag did not give any further details when pressed on the decision to axe Rashford

during his pre-match interview with BT Sport, adding it was "our rules".  
 But Rashford's exile only lasted until half-time when he was sent on by Ten Hag in a move that proved the catalyst for United to seal their fifth successive win in all competitions.

Rashford looked determined to prove Ten Hag was wrong to drop him as he rampaged through the Wolves defense to score his 11th goal in all competitions this season and his third in three appearances since the World Cup.

United climbed into fourth place in the Premier League, two points above Tottenham who have a game in hand, as they bid to qualify for next season's Champions League.

Julen Lopetegui's Wolves remain in the relegation zone after the Spaniard's first defeat in three games since replacing the sacked Bruno Lage.

Just before kick-off there was a poignant minute's applause in tribute to Brazilian legend Pele, who died on Thursday aged 82.

## Barca Drop Points in Heated Catalan Derby

BARCELONA (Dispatches) - Barcelona stumbled in the Spanish title race with a 1-1 draw against rivals Espanyol in a bad-tempered Catalan derby on Saturday, levelling Real Madrid at the top of La Liga.

Xavi's side threw away the two point advantage they had earned before the World Cup break, with Joselu's penalty pegging Barcelona back after Marcos Alonso's opener.

Both teams finished with 10 men as Jordi Alba and Vinicius Souza were sent off, with referee Mateu Lahoz allowing the game to spiral out of control at Camp Nou.

The teams were at loggerheads before a ball as kicked because Barcelona started Robert Lewandowski, who had been banned before a late court ruling allowed him to play.

The forward, due to miss three league matches, was only allowed to play thanks to a controversial decision announced on Friday, suspending his punishment.

It greatly angered Espanyol, whose president and directors boycotted the match, while Barca coach Xavi admitted his team had prepared all week expecting to be without the division's top goalscorer.

The Spanish football federation said in a statement on Saturday they could not override the court's decision.

Lewandowski was not at his best but Barcelona took the lead after just seven minutes with Alonso capitalising on shoddy set-piece defending from Espanyol to head home.



## Norrie Stuns Nadal to Give Britain Lead

SYDNEY (Dispatches) - Rafa Nadal's preparations for his Australian Open title defense got off to a wobbly start as Cameron Norrie handed him a 3-6 6-3 6-4 defeat in the United Cup to give Britain a 1-0 lead over Spain in the mixed team tournament.

The 22-times Grand Slam champion, who lifted the trophy in Melbourne Park this year and added another French Open title in an otherwise injury-ravaged season, eased through the first set but gifted Norrie a way back into the contest in the next.

Nadal dug himself out of a hole with an ace to hold for 2-1 in the decider but surrendered his serve shortly after as world number 14 Norrie got sharper as the contest wore on and held on for the first win over the world number two in five attempts.

"It was pretty crazy... I was thinking I've never won a set against him before and I wanted to come out and firstly do that and I had to stay super patient," Norrie said in his on-court interview. "It was a super physical match. I really enjoyed it, it was huge to get through that one and finally beat him. It's a great way to end the year."

Norrie credited his pre-season training for being able to dictate the baseline exchanges at Ken Rosewall Arena. "I've had a really good off season, played a lot of matches and it's been good for me. I felt like I was finding really good depth in my shots and dictated the play... I wasn't letting him do too much damage with his forehand," Norrie added.

