

Judiciary Chief Approved the Release by Pardon of 3,000 Prisoners and Reduced Sentences For 16 Individuals Convicted to Death on the Occasion of Martyrdom Anniversary of Lieutenant General Qassem Soleiman

IRAN NEWS

Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister for Political Affairs Ali Bagheri Kani Says That the JCPOA Talks on Lifting the Illegal Sanctions Against Iran Have Not Been Stalled and Are Seriously Being Pursued

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Leader Stresses Importance of Scientific Progress

TEHRAN (MNA) – Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei on Monday stressed the importance of scientific progress and making achievements in the realm of knowledge while sticking to religious and revolutionary ideas.

Ayatollah Khamenei on Monday received a group of the members of the Union of Islamic Students Associations in Europe for a meeting in Tehran.

Referring to the importance of Islamic associations and dubbing them the treasures of the Islamic Republic, the Leader stated that taking steady steps, having impact on the surrounding environment, and explaining the new message of the Islamic Republic were among the missions of Islamic Associations.

Ayatollah Khamenei also added that introducing the fundamental and central thought of the Islamic Republic is of the duties of the Islamic Associations operating outside Iran.

He considered the explanation of the principles of the Islamic Republic as a key task and said, "What the Islamic Republic has offered as a new form of governance in addition to the involvement of the people, is that the principles of religion and faith also play a part."

Ayatollah Khamenei also called for keeping the Islamic Associations up to date while sticking to the principles.

"The issue of scientific progress and achieving cutting-edge science should not be forgotten," the Leader stressed, adding that paying attention to religious and revolutionary ideas shouldn't lay ground for ignoring scientific progress.

Disciples of Martyr Soleimani School to Expel U.S. From Region

TEHRAN (MNA) – Stating that the enemies were even afraid of the shadow of Martyr Soleimani, the commander of IRGC's Quds Force said that the disciples of Soleimani's school will expel the Americans from the region.

Referring to Lt. Gen. Qassem Soleimani's role in Resistance Front, Brigadier General Ismaeil Ghaani said that continuing the path of Martyr Soleimani is revenge for his blood.

General Soleimani, the former commander of the Quds Force of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC), and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, the second-in-command of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Units (PMU), were assassinated in US airstrikes in the Iraqi capital Baghdad on January 3, 2020, upon the former US president Donald Trump's direct order.

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No Evidence of Iran's Role In Ukraine War



IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Iran's foreign ministry spokesman says none of the parties that have accused Iran of involvement in the war in Ukraine has offered any evidence to support their claim, amid accusations that Iranian drones were used by Russia.

Nasser Kanaani said in his weekly presser on Monday that Iran is not a party to the war adding that Tehran has held talks with Ukrainian officials on their anti-Iran accusations.

Kanaani called on Ukrainian officials to stop leveling "accusations" against Iran, saying there is no proof that shows Iran is a party to the war.

The spokesman also turned to Israel's anti-Iran threats, saying Tehran attaches no significance to such rhetoric. He said the regime knows well that Iran will give a strong response to any act of aggression.

Kanaani noted that Israel is facing numerous internal crises and it uses a language of threat against Iran to distract attentions from its fragile internal situation.

The spokesman added that the Zionist regime has a long record of engaging in acts of aggression in the region, saying such crimes have only been possible thanks to the support the regime has received from the U.S. and some European countries.

Kanaani also talked about reports that foreign ministers of Canada, Sweden, Ukraine and the UK have called on Iran to accept a binding international arbitration on the issue of the downed Ukrainian aircraft in January 2020.

He said Iran has always stressed the need for consultations and negotiations on the issue in compliance with its international obligations and internal regulations.

The spokesman also turned to the talks for the revival of the 2015 nuclear deal.

He said Iran is fully prepared to conclude the negotiations for the removal of sanctions based on the draft agreement that is the result of months-long talks with involved parties.

Kanaani, however, stressed that this should be based on Iran's red lines and that Iran will not wait indefinitely on the issue. He also said that the Islamic Republic will spare no efforts to hold to account all culprits behind the U.S. assassination of the country's top anti-terror commander General Qassem Soleimani.

Kanaani praised the role of General Soleimani as a distinguished figure in the fight against terrorism and consolidation of the resistance front. "This glorious martyr devoted his life to faithfully serving the Iranian nation, Islam, and regional and international peace and security. He played a prominent role within the framework of the Islamic Republic of Iran's strategic policies to secure regional and global peace and stability. He took effective measures against international terrorism and terrorist groups in the region," he said.

He explained that the U.S. government, under former president Donald Trump, violated international regulations and legal principles and plotted and carried out the assassination of General Soleimani.

"This criminal act came as he was a top-ranking Iranian official and was on an official visit to Iraq. The criminal act of the United States in assassinating General Soleimani is a clear act of terrorism that was planned and implemented in an organized manner," Kanaani said.

"Under international legal conventions, the US bears full responsibility for the crime, while all architects, organizers and culprits are accountable for the terrorist crime. The [Iranian] Foreign Ministry, in cooperation with other state institutions and the Judiciary, has therefore exhausted all available legal channels to bring the criminals to justice, and will seriously continue its efforts in domestic, regional and international courts of law until a final settlement is reached," the Iranian diplomat stressed.

Elsewhere in his Monday remarks, Kanaani touched upon the restoration of diplomatic ties between Iran and Egypt, saying Tehran welcomes any positive initiative in this regard.

He said that Iranian and Egyptian foreign ministers held talks last month on the sidelines of the second regional summit on Iraq in the Jordanian capital of Amman.

During the talks, the two sides agreed to continue negotiations to work out a solution on consular issues, the Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman explained.

"The two sides have basically no problems for [holding] dialogues, meetings, and bilateral exchanges of views," he said.

Kanaani also pointed to the diplomatic efforts to revive the Iran nuclear deal, officially called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

"There was a consensus that negotiations should continue with the aim of activating and finalizing the [Vienna] talks, and that the exchange of messages should go on at different levels."

"Iran is fully prepared to conclude the Vienna negotiations on the basis of a draft negotiation package, which is the outcome of months of hard and intensive negotiations and observes its red lines. This readiness is not everlasting, and the ball is now in the Western side's court," he said.

Kanaani also underscored Iran's principled policy of helping Afghan people and authorities to resolve problems in the war-ravaged country, saying that the Islamic Republic has been hosting millions of Afghan refugees for years even though it has not been offered any foreign assistance. He also called for efforts to promote the political settlement of the Syria crisis, emphasizing there is no military solution to end it.

Car Manufacturing Rises 18% in 9 Months on Year

TEHRAN (MNA) - Car manufacturing in Iran increased 18 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 the Ministry of Industry, Mining and Trade.

Based on the ministry's data, 876,000 vehicles were manufactured in the nine-month period of this year, while the figure was 743,000 in the same time span of the previous year.

The highest production during this period was related to the category of passenger cars with 760,000 vehicles, which constitutes 86.7 percent of the total production. This amount of production has grown by 13 percent compared to the output in the first nine months of the past year.

Also, the highest production growth of car manufacturing was recorded in the van sector with 360 percent. As reported, 2,500 vans were manufactured in the nine-month period of this year, while the figure was just 550 vehicles in the same period of time in the previous year.

Manufacturing of buses and minibuses also rose 49 percent to stand at 1,760 vehicles.

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Iran to Invest \$15b On Copper Production

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran plans \$15 billion of investment to boost its copper production in the next five years, that will increase exports of the strategic metal to more than \$10 billion from the current \$1.7 billion, Minister of Industry, Mining and Trade Reza Fatemi-Amin says.

The country is currently producing 280,000 tons of copper cathode a year, which it wants to increase to over one million tons, he said.

"In order to achieve this goal, the program to increase production by 750,000 tonnes started this summer, which requires \$15 billion of investment, he said, adding the projects will gradually come on stream by the Iranian year of 1406.

New explorations have started in South Khorasan province in eastern Iran and are being undertaken in other provinces.

Iran, having 1% of the world's population, has more than 6% of the world's copper reserves.

"With the discoveries made so far, we have ranked fifth in the world, and with the continuation of the exploration work, this rank will also improve," Fatemi-Amin said.

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Damascus Airport Shut Down Following Israel Attack

DAMASCUS (Dispatches) - Syria's military has announced that Israeli raids have killed at least two Syrian soldiers and put the country's main international airport out of service.

The volley of air-launched missiles came from the direction of Lake Tiberias in Israel at about 2am local time on Monday (23:00 GMT Sunday) and targeted the Damascus International Airport and its surroundings, the military said in a statement carried by the official SANA news agency.

The attacks resulted in the "death of two soldiers, the wounding of two others, some material losses" and put the airport out of service, the statement added.

There was no immediate comment from Israel.

The incident marked the second time the Damascus International Airport was put out of service in less than a year.

Israel frequently violates Syrian sovereignty by targeting military positions inside the country, especially those of the resistance movement Hezbollah, which has played a key role in helping the Syrian army in its fight against foreign-backed terrorists.

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Call for Remote Working Shifts in Tehran

TEHRAN (IFP) - Iran's health ministry is calling for remote working shifts for government employees and reduced working hours amid dangerously high pollution in the capital Tehran and other major cities.

Director of the ministry's air quality and climate change group Abbas Shahsavani says air quality index in Tehran is now over 200 in some areas, which is at the "very unhealthy" level.

He says this is unhealthy for all age groups, especially for sensitive groups including those with cardiac and respiratory problems and the over-60s, who should be a priority when considering remote working and reduced working hours.

President Calls for Making People's Feeling Better

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN – President Seyed Ebrahim Raisi described the delegation of authority in the field of cashing out the assets of the institutions as an important privilege for the government and urged the officials of the executive institutions, especially the ministers and governor generals, to use this delegation of authority well to provide the necessary financial resources to advance the necessary matters such as the completion of half-finished projects.

Speaking in the joint meeting of the members of the cabinet and the governor generals, Raisi called on all government officials and agents to consult with experts to form elite circles, and emphasized, "In addition to wisdom and forethought to move things forward, do not neglect to take advantage of the opinions of experts, even those who may think differently than this government".

Referring to the recent combined war of the enemy against the Islamic Republic of Iran, the President emphasized to the government officials that they should make the necessary predictions by carefully and fully following up on the matters related to their field of work, so that they can have appropriate and timely prevention and treatment.

Raisi emphasized the need for the officials and managers of the government to be healthy both inside and in action, and considered the government officials and especially the governor generals as the border guards of people's livelihood, health, business and life.

In another part of his speech, the President advised the governor generals to give real space to the private and cooperative sector in order to increase investment as a driver of economic growth, and stated, "Another important issue in the field of improving productivity in the provinces is the issue of delegating powers to the governor generals, the framework and examples of which are the authorities can be assigned to the governor generals".



The President referred to some issues raised by the governor generals in this meeting, including decentralization, facilitating banks, allocating the revenues of the anti-narcotics headquarters to the provinces that are at the forefront of the fight against drug trafficking, establishing bazaars and organizing border, clarifying, "These are issues that should be defined in the system of interaction issues between governor generals and ministers and steps should be taken to resolve them".

Raisi also emphasized the necessity of the efforts of the governor generals to implement the provincial resolutions, as well as the close cooperation and interaction of the ministers and governor generals in managing affairs and solving problems, and pointed out, "Ministers and governor generals can consult all the trustees to perform their duties, including the selection of officials and managers".

The President described the delegation of authority in the field of cashing out the assets of the institutions as an important privilege for the government and urged the officials of the executive institutions, especially the ministers and governor generals, to use this delegation of authority well to provide the necessary financial resources to advance the necessary matters such as the completion of half-finished projects.

Raisi also pointed out the favorable results obtained from the pilot implementation of the smart flour distribution plan in some provinces, and pointed out that the relevant authorities should prepare the preparations for its full implementation at the country level by carefully analyzing the data of the pilot implementation of this plan.

The President mentioned the four areas of food supply, health care, organizing the car and housing market as the basic issues of the government's attention and added, "The 13th Administration is trying to make people's condition better by meeting the needs of the people in these four areas".

Referring to the government's slogan of "Strong Iran and Popular Administration", Raisi considered honoring the people as one of the main duties of the 13th administration and addressed the statesmen and governor generals, "Visit your subordinate offices regularly to see how the people's work is being done and how they are treated".

New Order Emerging In World, Region

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - A top military advisor to the Leader of the Islamic Revolution referred to the US mistakes in the region, saying that a new order is emerging in the world and the region.

Major General Yayha Rahim Safavi made the remarks at the conference of the school of martyr Soleimani and the new world order held at the Supreme National Defense University in Tehran on Monday.

Referring to the US's repetitive strategic mistakes in the region and world, he said that one of the main strategic mistakes that the US made was the martyrdom of the two great commanders, Martyr Haj Qasem Soleimani and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis.

Pointing to the forming of the new world order in the near future, Major General Safavi highlighted that a new order is emerging in the world and in the region that defeats the US plans on forming new world order based on hegemonic power and unilateralism.

Referring to the faceoff between the Global Arrogance Front (Western Powers) and the Resistance Front, he underscored that they are witnessing a confrontation on a global, continental and regional scale.

Iran's Maragheh University, Brazil's UEL University Ink MoU

TEHRAN (MNA) – Iran's University of Maragheh signed cooperation MoU with the Brazilian State University of Londrina (Universidade Estadual de Londrina).

The memorandum includes cooperation in the fields of guiding research projects, as well as benefiting from experimental, research, and laboratory facilities.

Doing research, developing educational objectives, and exchange of professors and students are among other fields of cooperation between the two universities.

The University of Maragheh is a public university in the city of Maragheh, in East Azerbaijan Province, Iran. The university is a state-funded institution that has 4 faculties and 14 departments. Coming from different parts of Iran, approximately 3000 students attend Maragheh University.

Londrina State University is one of the public universities of the State of Paraná, Brazil.

IRGC Promoting Gen. Soleimani's School of Thought

TEHRAN (IRNA) - The Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) has declared that multiplying martyr Qasem Soleimani's like-minded individuals and promoting his school of thought in Iran and the region are among the unconcealed strategies of the entity.

The Public Relations Department of the IRGC issued a statement on Monday, warning that taking revenge from perpetrators of the assassination of General Soleimani in a due time is a definite and inviolable issue.

Three years after the martyrdom of the great commander of the Quds Force of the IRGC, his name and cause is focused on in the West Asia region in particular by young justice-seeking nations; and his bravery enhanced the discourse of resistance and anti-arrogance movements throughout the world.

Martyr Soleimani was an exemplary figure in the face of the enemies because of his revolutionary acts and deep belief in the almighty God. His thoughts and deeds opened a path, which is called "Martyr Soleimani's School of Thought," to stand against the global arrogance and the Zionist regime.

He shined as a military commander and at the same time as an experienced diplomat, who had a deep understanding of conditions and considerations based on guidelines of late Imam Khomeini and then Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei in defending the Islamic country and standing against terrorism.

General Soleimani made an all-out effort to protect the security, tranquility and honor of the Iranian nation; so, the people showed that they are grateful for his self-sacrifice.

All Legal Channels to Be Use to Bring Those Involved in Martyr Soleimani Assassination to Justice

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Iran's foreign minister says the country continues to exhaust all available legal, political, and diplomatic channels to bring all those involved in the assassination of the country's top anti-terror commander, Lieutenant General Qasem Soleimani, to justice.

"[All] necessary measures have been taken in this regard," Hossein Amirabdollahian said in an interview.

"In addition to following all [available] legal channels, we have declared and registered then US administration's responsibility in the assassination through an official memo, and will follow up on our lawsuit through its own natural path," Iran's top diplomat stated.

Amirabdollahian added, "Unfortunately, both the Americans and [other] Western [countries are trying to] stonewall and obstruct the process of legal pursuit of the case."

"The Islamic Republic's hands are not tied, though," he asserted, noting that, in parallel to its legal efforts, the country is taking other punitive measures against those responsible for the assassination of General Soleimani.

Among these measures, Amirabdollahian said, Iran has placed the names of 60 relevant American officials, who have had a hand in the assassination, on its terrorist blacklist.

According to the foreign minister, the latter measure has not set well with the Americans, who have been demanding the Islamic Republic to take the names of those individuals out of the list.

The American side has, through indirect channels, explained to the Islamic Republic that the blacklisting has prompted Washington to invest "exorbitant expenses" in ensuring those officials' safety both inside the United States and during their overseas trips, Amirabdollahian said.

Iran has, however, stood firm by its decision, calling the blacklisting a "precise and correct" measure, said the foreign minister. "We will follow up on this [measure] through political, legal and international channels, so these individuals will be brought to justice," he said, reiterating that the Iranian Foreign Ministry would not spare any effort as it pursues the case of the assassination.

Iran Not Disturbed by Zionist Regime's Threats

TEHRAN (IRNA) - An Iranian foreign minister aide says the country is not worried about threats made by the Zionist regime of Israel.

Ali-Reza Enayati, and aide to the Iranian foreign minister who also serves as the head of the Persian Gulf Department of Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, told Aljazeera TV network late on Sunday that the country is ready to respond to any potential aggression by the Zionists.

Enayati said Iran is not disturbed by threats leveled against the country by the Zionists.

As to the issue of Baghdad Conference that was held last month in Jordan, Enayati said that Tehran welcomes initiatives that support Iraq and promote the mood for cooperation in the region.

Enayati also described a meeting between foreign ministers of Iran and Saudi Arabia on the sidelines of the conference in Amman as friendly, adding that doors are open for reviving the mutual ties between the two countries.

Iran seeks good relations with its neighbors, he said, adding that Tehran has signed security deals with certain neighboring countries, including with Saudi Arabia.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Enayati referred to efforts by some of Iran's neighboring states to help revive the 2015 nuclear deal between the country and world powers, which is known as the JCPOA, noting that the Tehran welcomes such initiatives.

He further stated that Jordanian King Abdullah II bin Al-Hussein and Iran's Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian had discussed the road ahead of the two countries for expanding bilateral ties.

Tax Revenues at Over Rls 348 Trillion in 9 Months

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Figures by the Iranian Ministry of Economic Affairs and Finance (MEFA) show the country collected more than Rls 3,487.37 trillion (\$8.7 billion) in tax revenues in the nine months to December 21.

The figures published on Sunday showed that Iran's March-December tax revenues were more than last calendar year's total of Rls 3,250 trillion.

The nine-month tax income exceeded a target of Rls 3,396.07 trillion set in Iran's annual budget for the entire calendar year to late March, said MEFA.

It said direct tax had accounted for Rls 2,190 trillion or nearly 63% of all receipts in the nine months to late December of which some Rls 1,440 trillion was corporate tax, adding that Iran's

revenues from income tax and tax on wealth had reached Rls 624 trillion and Rls 130 trillion, respectively, over the same period.

Tax on goods and services reached a total of Rls 1,280 trillion in the March-December period, said MEFA.

It cited figures by the Iranian National Tax Administration (INTA) showing that its tax receipts had reached Rls 380 trillion in the calendar month to late December.

MEFA said several reasons had contributed to better tax revenues for Iran, including a decision earlier this year to link more than 9.5 million point-of-sales machines to INTA's database which the ministry said had helped significantly reduce tax dodging in the country.

Housing Price Increases 2.9% In Tehran city

TEHRAN (MNA) - Average housing price rose 2.9 percent in the capital Tehran during the ninth Iranian calendar month Azar (ended on December 21, 2022), compared to the previous month, according to a report by the Central Bank of Iran (CBI).

Based on the CBI data, the average price for one square meter of a residential unit in Tehran stood at 480.7 million rials (about \$1,265) during the mentioned month.

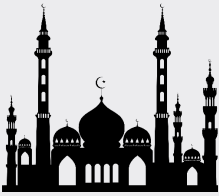
As reported, the number of real estate deals stood at about 10,200 in the capital city in the ninth month of this year, up 27.2 percent and 4.7 percent compared to the previous month and the same month in the past year, respectively.

As previously reported by the Central Bank of Iran, the average housing price rose 16 percent in the capital Tehran during the last month of the past Iranian calendar year 1400 (ended on March 20, 2022), compared to the same month in the preceding year.

Based on the CBI data, the average price for one square meter of a residential unit in Tehran stood at 351.2 million rials (about \$924) during the last month of the past year, up 6.2 from the previous month, and 16 percent from the same month of the preceding year.

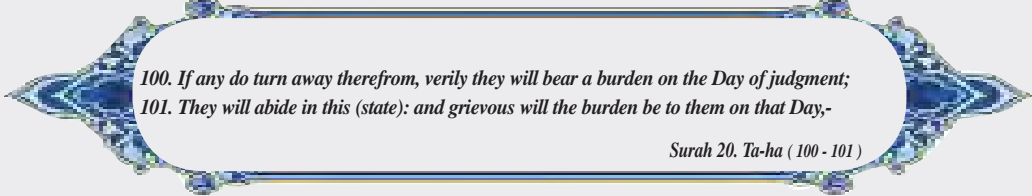
Housing prices in Iran have been constantly rising over the past three years due to various internal and external factors.

Although, in early May 2022, the chairman of Real Estate Agencies Union said, "This [Iranian] year is the year of lower housing prices; this condition will continue in the country for the next two years, and we will see a continuous decrease in housing prices".



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	12:08
■ Evening (Maghreb)	17:23
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	05:45
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	07:14



100. If any do turn away therefrom, verily they will bear a burden on the Day of judgment;
101. They will abide in this (state): and grievous will the burden be to them on that Day,-
Surah 20. Ta-ha (100 - 101)

Iran Has Lost \$100b For Oil Sanctions

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Head of Tehran Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Mine and Agriculture (TCCIMA) says currently Iran’s economy is around \$500b behind Turkey and the investment growth ratio to amortization has increased.

Speaking in an event on developing ecosystem in the petrochemical industry, Masoud Khansari pointed to the efforts of the youth to keep the hopes alive in the country and said that everybody knows that social and economic conditions have become difficult but all together should guide the condition to a better one.

He added that TCCIMA will celebrate its 139th anniversary of foundation soon as the chamber since its first day of establishment has been seeking importing modern innovation and many industries like electricity has been imported by the chamber.

He said that since three years ago the commission on digital innovation has been established in the chamber and it seems, despite decline in investment and flight of capital from the country, saving the national economy has been tied to the innovation and development in the digital economy, and the chamber intends to support the youth who are on this course.

Khansari went on to say that Iran and Turkey’s economies were close to each other in 1979 and currently Turkey’s economy is \$500b ahead of Iran and by the way the investment growth ratio to amortization in Iran has declined.



He pointed to the double digit inflation rate in Iran in the recent four decades and noted that the inflation rate in Iran in recent years has been 30 to 40 percent and national currency has lost its value day in day because of the inflation, and at the same time the country faces losing social capital and currently the only hope which has remained is digital development which can compensate the country’s lag.

He also said that sanctions on oil and failure in oil sales has inflicted damages worth of \$100b on Iran’s economy, adding that growth in the petrochemical industry is considerable as Iran’s petrochemical products was 3m tons in 1979 which it reached 80m tons in 2018 and it is hoped the amount to reach 133m tons in 2025.

Khansari went on to say that after oil, petrochemicals have the most earnings for the country and expressed hope with new innovations the earnings would increase in this field.

He noted that currently the flight of capital from the country has reached \$10b and it is expected the figure to rise and unfortunately elites in all fields are also leaving the country but active youth in the field of startups and knowledge-based sector can improve the economic condition.

Necessity for Protecting Symbolic Capitals For Rebuilding Social Capital

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN – The Managing Director of Specialized Association of Model Leaders and Employers Mr. Mohammad Reza Rezaei Nejad in an article emphasized the necessity of protecting the symbolic capitals for rebuilding the social capital.



Rezaei Nejad believes everybody knows that in the current condition, the safest and most legal structure for managing the liquidity is the structure of cooperatives. He added that critical condition of national economy goes without saying but finding solution to get out of this crisis is more important than explaining the condition.

He noted that if we look realistically to the issue, we will see that one of the factors behind the current condition is the decline in tendency towards turning into an employer in the country, and the considerable volume of flight of capital from the country by many of investors and employers is an endorsement to this issue. He added that unfortunately high costs of being an employer forced the elites of the country to leave from this field more and more.

He pointed to the complicated bureaucracy and cumbersome laws and regulations which prevail themselves in the sanctions condition and pressures on employers are intensified because of these problems.

Rezaei Nejad added that these costs ultimately lead to weakening of the symbolic capitals. Symbolic capital means famous individuals which have been revered by different walks of the people in their cities and homelands through the years. This popularity among the people provides possibility for rebuilding and fixing the social capitals by the symbolic capitals, and in case these symbolic capitals are discouraged and weakened, we will see the decline in the social capital and motivation among the human forces and flight of capital from the country, and ultimately, the economic growth will turn negative.

He added therefore the first action for getting out of the current condition is trust to employers and investors and especially symbolic capitals and helping them. Now that the country is in an uneven war, the most important weapon for victory is trust to employers and in case the trust gets pale, the hope of victory will lost its color.

Rezaei Nejad noted that the second point is the high volume of liquidity in the hands of the people and this should be directed towards production in any way. He added that creating value added to this amount of liquidity is the only way for controlling it and currently the most legal and safest structure for managing liquidity is the structure of cooperatives.

Iran Eyes \$10b of Annual Copper Export by 2027



TEHRAN (MNA) - The managing director of the National Iranian Copper Industries Company (NICIC) said his company has targeted \$10 billion of annual copper exports by the Iranian calendar year 1406 (begins in late March 2027), IRIB reported.

Speaking on national TV on Sunday evening, Ali Rostami said: “With the increase in exploration activities, it is planned that the country’s copper export capacity will reach more than 10 billion dollars a year by 1406.”

According to Rostami, NICIC managed to export \$1.6 billion worth of copper products in the previous Iranian calendar year (ended on March 20, 2022).

Rostami put the country’s current total copper reserves at 19 billion tons, saying that these reserves are enough to supply NICIC’s feed for the next 200 years at the current production level.

In late December, Rostami said his company conducted 130,000 meters of explanatory excavation in the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21-December 21, 2022).

He noted that considering the current trend in exploration projects, it is expected that NICIC’s total explanatory excavation operations reach 200,000 meters by the end of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20, 2023), which is an unprecedented record for the last 50 years.

The official said the conducted discovery excavations have added two billion tons to the country’s copper reserves to improve Iran’s place among the world’s top countries in terms of copper reserves from seventh to fifth place.

“We have started production development plans and hope to increase the NICIC’s production capacity from 250,000 tons to more than one million tons in the next few years, in which case the current reserves will supply our products for more than 60 years,” he added.

\$200b Earmarked for Iran Major Projects

TEHRAN (Shana) - The first vice president said 200 billion dollars have been earmarked for the country’s major projects in various sectors, including oil, industry, water, and electricity.

According to the government’s information website, Mohammad Mokhber said on the sidelines of the meeting of the board of ministers and governors of the country, that the country’s progress train has started, stressing: “In various sectors of oil, industry, water and electricity, works and large projects worth \$200 billion including domestic and foreign investment have started, and some of these projects have entered the implementation stage.”

He added: “A number of these projects are in the stage of understanding and agreement, and some of them are in the planning process. Naturally, since these projects are going to be implemented in different provinces of the country, the governors should do the necessary follow-up.”

The first vice president said: “Fortunately, in the 13th government, from the president to other members of the government, extensive fieldwork has been started from the beginning, and in the joint meetings of the government with the governors, the main issues of the country are reviewed in a four-hour meeting.”

SP Supplies 140 bcm of Gas to National Network in 9 Months

TEHRAN (MNA) - Iran’s South Pars gas field has supplied 140 billion cubic meters (bcm) of natural gas to the country’s network in the first nine months of the current Iranian year (March 21-December 21, 2022), according to the managing director of South Pars Gas Complex (SPGC).

Ahmad Bahoush said due to the significant decrease in temperature over the past two weeks and the surge in domestic gas consumption, the complex has boosted its supply to the network, so that during December 22-31 more than 5.956 bcm of gas was injected into the national network, Shana reported.

He noted that engineers and employees of the South Pars Gas Complex are working day and night to ensure sustainable gas production and supply during the cold season.

According to the official, SPGC currently accounts for more than 75 percent of the country’s natural gas production.

The huge South Pars gas field, which Iran shares with Qatar in the Persian Gulf, is estimated to contain a significant amount of natural gas, accounting for about eight percent of the world’s reserves, and approximately 18 billion barrels of condensate.

SPGC operates 13 refineries that process the natural gas extracted from the field.

Iran 8-Month Petchem Output at 47 mt

TEHRAN (Shana) – Iran’s petrochemical output reached 47 million tons in the first 8 months of the current Iranian calendar year which began on March 21.

The director of production control at the National Petrochemical Company (NPC) said that the figure was 7% higher than in the same period last year.

According to NPC, Bijan Chegeni stated: “The country’s petrochemical complexes have produced a total of 47 million tons of petrochemicals with 71% of the nominal capacity in the first eight months of this [calendar] year.”

According to him, 2.5 million tons of aromatics, 5.4 million tons of polymer materials, 5.6 million tons of fertilizers and related materials, 14.1 million tons of hydrocarbon materials and 19.5 million tons of basic and chemical materials from the beginning of this year were produced by Iran’s petrochemical industry during the period.

The NPC official further said that production grew by 8% in the Assaluyeh petrochemical hub (23 million tons) and 14% in Mahshahr and other areas (13 and 11 million tons, respectively).

Chegeni continued: “1.303 million tons of feedstock were injected into the West Ethylene Pipeline in the period, while the figure was 1.297 million tons last year.”

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

800 Starlink Internet Devices Already In Iran

TEHRAN - An Iranian official has said that around 800 Starlink satellite internet receivers have been imported to Iran, saying the technology would be used more in future.

Head of the Tehran Telecom Traders Union Mehdi Mohebi quoted an “official” who did not want to reveal his identity that 800 Starlink satellite internet terminals have entered the country so far.

This comes as the American tycoon Elon Musk said last week that the use of satellite internet services in Iran has increased and around 100 Starlink devices are active in the country now.

Musk said in a tweet that “approaching 100 Starlinks active in Iran”, three months after he confirmed he would activate the service in the country to help Iranians circumvent internet restrictions imposed by the government amid nationwide protests.

Back in September the billionaire, who is now also a social media player by controlling Twitter, had announced he would activate Starlink in Iran as part of the United States’ effort “to advance internet freedom” and facilitate “the free flow of information” to Iranians.

Iran Imports 26,300 New Road Freight Fleets

TEHRAN (MNA) – 26,300 new road freight fleets will be added to Iran’s fleet, Dariush Amani, head of Iran Road Maintenance and Transportation Organization (RMTO), announced.

Out of this number, 10,000 fleets have been cleared from customs and 4,000 fleets are already under operation. The rest are expected within the next two months.

Moreover, RMTO is to renew 40% of its road maintenance machinery by purchasing 2,600 machineries from abroad and supplying 1,400 machineries from domestic producers. Currently, RMTO has 9,600 machineries, Amani explained.

Last year, 103,000,000 passengers were transported via the road network in Iran which is expected to increase by 10 percent.

Additionally, since March 2022, 6,400,000 tons of freight transited through Iran’s road networks which are estimated to reach 10 million tons by March 2023, he further reported.

Iran has 15 neighboring countries and it has 26 cross-border terminals. Given the 20 million tons target in freight transit in 2023 along the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC), the country aims to promote its capacity for freight transit.

Two Dead, 200 Rescued in Lebanon Migrant Boat Sinking

TRIPOLI (Dispatches) - Two migrants died and another 200 were rescued when their boat sank off Lebanon's northern coast, from where increasing numbers make the risky journey to flee a collapsed economy.

An AFP correspondent in the impoverished port city of Tripoli said men, women and children -- mostly refugees from Syria but also about 50 Lebanese -- were on board the vessel when it got into difficulty.

"Three naval ships, accompanied by another from UNIFIL (the UN mission in Lebanon), arrived at the site... off Selaata and personnel saved some 200 people," the army said on Twitter. A separate tweet said two people had died.



Taiwan President Offers Aid to China

TAIPEI (Dispatches) - Taiwan's President Tsai Ing-wen extended an olive branch to Beijing, pledging to offer assistance if needed as coronavirus cases surge in China after its abrupt lifting of pandemic restrictions.

"As long as there is a need, we are willing to provide necessary assistance based on humanitarian concerns," Tsai said in her customary New Year's Day speech.

She added that she hoped Taiwanese aid could "help more people out of the pandemic and have a healthy and safe New Year".

China is facing an explosion of Covid-19 cases after dropping its stringent "zero-Covid" containment policy last month, three years after the coronavirus first emerged in the city of Wuhan.



Lula Sworn In as New President of Brazil



BRASILIA (Dispatches) - Leftist leader Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva was sworn in as president of Brazil on Sunday under tightened security in the capital Brasilia following threats of violence by supporters of his far-right predecessor Jair Bolsonaro.

In a speech to Congress, Lula said he was receiving a ruined country where hunger had returned under Bolsonaro, whose government he said had depleted resources for education, health and the conservation of forests, and undermined human rights.

He accused Bolsonaro's "negationist" administration of committing "genocide" by failing to respond properly to the COVID-19 pandemic that killed more than 680,000 Brazilians.

Lula said he won October's election against opponents who had attacked the country's internationally-praised voting system.

"If we are here, it is thanks to the political awareness of Brazilian society and the democratic front that we formed," he said. "Democracy was the great victor, overcoming the greatest mobilization of public and private resources ever seen and the most violent threat to freedom to vote."

After the swearing-in, Lula was due to drive in an open-top Rolls-Royce to the Planalto palace to don the presidential sash before a crowd of 30,000 supporters, while tens of thousands gathered to celebrate on Brasilia's esplanade.

The mood in the city was tense after the most fraught election in a generation.

Lula, 77, narrowly defeated Bolsonaro in October to win an unprecedented third presidential term after a hiatus that saw him spend a year and a half behind bars on corruption convictions that were later overturned.

His 580 days in prison reinforced his sense of social justice and convinced him of the need to prioritize ending poverty over boosting profits, allies said.

In his previous years as Workers Party (PT) president from 2003-2010, the former union leader lifted millions of Brazilians from poverty during a commodity boom that buoyed the economy.

Now, he faces the daunting challenge of improving Brazil's stagnant economy while also uniting a country that has become painfully polarized under Bolsonaro.

"A lot is expected of Lula. He'll have the difficult mission to restore normality and predictability in Brazil, and above all to rapidly deliver results that improve the quality of life for its inhabitants," said Creomar de Souza, director of Dharma Political Risk consultancy in Brasilia.

Bolsonaro left Brazil for Florida on Friday, avoiding having to hand over the sash to his rival, whose victory he has yet to recognize, while also removing himself from any immediate legal risks related to his time in office.

Kim Calls for Exponential Increase of N. Korea's Nuclear Arsenal

SEOUL (Dispatches) - North Korea's Kim Jong Un has called for a major increase in the country's nuclear arsenal, including mass producing tactical nuclear weapons and developing new missiles for nuclear counterstrikes, state media said.

In a report at the end of a key party meeting in Pyongyang, Kim called "for an exponential increase of the country's nuclear arsenal", the official KCNA reported.

Citing what it called US and South Korean hostility, the report said the North needed "mass-producing of tactical nuclear weapons" and to "develop another ICBM (intercontinental ballistic missile) system whose main mission is quick nuclear counterstrike".

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



Colombia Agrees Ceasefire With Five Largest Armed Groups

BOGOTA (Dispatches) - Colombia's government has agreed to a six-month ceasefire with the five largest armed groups operating in the country, President Gustavo Petro announced on New Year's Eve.

The truce was the main objective of Petro's "total peace" policy, which aims to end the country's armed conflict, which has persisted despite the dissolution of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) in 2017.

The armed groups still operating in Colombia, the world's largest cocaine producer, are locked in deadly disputes over drug trafficking revenues and other illegal businesses, according to the Institute for Development and Peace Studies (Indepaz), an independent think tank.

"We have agreed to a bilateral ceasefire with the ELN, the Second Marquetalia, the Central General Staff, the AGC and the Self-Defense Forces of the Sierra Nevada from January 1 to June 30, 2023, extendable depending on progress in the negotiations," Petro tweeted.

Despite the government's efforts to negotiate with Colombia's various armed groups, which include a combined total of more than 10,000 fighters, it has so far failed to contain the spiral of violence engulfing the country. Indepaz recorded nearly 100 massacres last year. The National Liberation Army (ELN), the last recognized insurgency in the country, has been negotiating with the government since November.

The Segunda Marquetalia and Estado Mayor Central groups -- splinter factions of FARC which broke from the 2016 peace pact -- have held separate talks with the government.

AGC, the country's largest drug gang, is made up of the remnants of extreme right-wing paramilitaries that demobilized in the early 2000s.

The government is offering the groups "benevolent treatment from the judicial point of view" for the armed actors "in exchange for a surrender of assets, a dismantling of these organizations and the possibility that they stop exercising these illicit economies", Senator Ivan Cepeda recently told AFP.

Russia's New Year Raids on Ukraine Kill Three, Wound Dozens

KYIV (Dispatches) - Russia's New Year assault on Ukraine left three people dead and wounded another 50 as Moscow claimed to have thwarted Kyiv's "terror attacks" on the homeland.

The Ukrainian capital and other cities came under fire from missiles and Iranian-made drones.

The Ukrainian air force said Sunday 45 Iranian-made drones had been destroyed overnight.

Thirteen were shot down at the end of 2022 and another 32 after midnight, the air force said.

Andriy Nebitov, the head of the Kyiv police, posted on Facebook a picture of wreckage of a downed drone that featured the words "Happy New Year" in Russian.

"That is everything you need to know about the terror state and its army," he wrote.

Kyrylo Tymoshenko, deputy head of President Volodymyr Zelensky's office, said two people died in Kyiv and the southern region of Kherson and 50 more, including children, were injured as a result of the Russian strikes.

A 22-year-old woman was badly wounded in the western city of Khmelnytskyi and later died from her wounds, governor Sergiy Gamaliy.

On New Year's Eve, Russian artillery hit the village of Naddniprianske outside the southern city of Kherson, severely wounding a 13-year-old and his 12-year-old sister, the Ukrainian presidency said.

The Russian pounding also left the city of Kherson and the surrounding settlements without electricity on Saturday night, the presidency added.

Russian forces in November withdrew from Kherson, the only regional capital that was held by Moscow, but has continued to batter the city ever since.

In the eastern region of Donetsk, pro-Russian separatist authorities said Ukrainian shelling killed a civilian in the town of Yasynuvata.

The attacks came as President Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine enters its 11th month.

"Moral, historical rightness is on our side," Putin declared as he delivered his midnight address standing among men and women dressed in military uniform.

After a series of humiliating military defeats, Russia in October began targeting Ukraine's infrastructure, leaving millions in the cold and dark.

Moscow said its New Year attacks on Ukraine targeted the pro-Western country's drone production.

Russia's defense ministry said a strike hit "the facilities of the military-industrial complex of Ukraine" which is involved in the production of drones.

A family watches the televised New Year address by Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow

"Storage facilities and launch sites" for the drones have also been destroyed, the ministry said in a statement.



EU Urges Rwanda To Stop Supporting M23 Rebels In DR Congo



KIBUMBA (Dispatches) - The European Union on Saturday urged Rwanda to stop supporting the M23 rebel group, which has captured swathes of territory in North Kivu province in neighboring DR Congo.

The DRC -- along with the United States and several European countries -- has repeatedly accused its smaller central African neighbor Rwanda of backing the M23, although Kigali denies the charge.

The Tutsi rebel group has in recent months advanced to within a few dozen kilometers of provincial capital Goma.

EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said Saturday that the European bloc had urged Rwanda to "stop supporting the M23 and use all means to press the M23 to comply with the decisions taken by the EAC (East African Community)" and at a November summit in Angola.

"It also firmly urges all states of the region to prevent the provision of any support to armed groups active in the DRC," said Borrell.

He called on Kinshasa to "take all measures necessary to protect the civilian population in its territory".

Under heavy international pressure to disarm, M23 joined a ceremony last week to deliver the strategic town of Kibumba to an East African military force as a "goodwill gesture" for peace.

The EAC also said the group had to withdraw to the border between the DRC, Uganda and Rwanda.

However, the Congolese army promptly dubbed the Kibumba handover a "sham."

Borrell's comments came after a UN experts' report on DR Congo indicated it had collected proof of "direct intervention" by Rwandan defence forces inside DRC territory between at least November 2021 and last October.

The experts' report says Rwandan troops launched operations to reinforce the M23 against the mainly Hutu Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) -- notably by supplying weapons, ammunition and uniforms.

Kigali sees the FDLR as a threat which justifies interventions inside the DRC.

Japan's Little Trains That Could Battle for Survival

CHOSHI (Dispatches) - In the driver's seat of a two-carriage train, Katsunori Takemoto puts on his white gloves and checks the antiquated gauges before setting out alongside cabbage fields in Japan's rural Chiba.

Like many small railway lines across Japan's countryside, the 60-year-old trains that ply this route are a loss-maker, but Takemoto has found a way to keep the business afloat.

With a combination of savvy marketing partnerships with pop stars and branded souvenirs, the president of the Choshi Electric Railway navigated the firm into the black in 2021, while helping promote the local region.

"I feel strongly that this is the mission of all local trains. We want to serve as advertising vehicles for communities," Takemoto told AFP.

"Towns without trains wither away. So rebuilding rural trains must be done as part of rebuilding communities."

But the 99-year-old business he took over in 2011 is the exception rather than the rule in Japan, home to hundreds of loss-making rural rail lines.

Depopulation, car ownership, freight trucking and the Covid-19 pandemic have decimated revenues.

"If we leave things as they are and don't do anything, it is clear to everyone that sustainable public transport systems will fall apart," Transport Minister Saito said earlier this year.

The rural lines are legacies of Japan's economic boom through the 1970s but failed to adapt to rural depopulation, as younger people left for cities and some villages emptied altogether.

Infrastructure like city halls and hospitals is increasingly built along main roads, with visitors expected to drive rather than take trains.

Of the country's 95 small railways — services outside urban areas or major regional links — 91 recorded deficits last year, according to the transport ministry.

That contrasts sharply with lucrative urban lines like Central Japan Railway, which operates the shinkansen super express between Tokyo and Osaka.

It earned a net profit of nearly ¥400 billion (RM13.4 billion) for the year to March 2020, before the pandemic took hold.

Major train operators can use profits from urban areas to subsidise rural services, but even industry titan East Japan Railway (JR East), which serves 13 million passengers daily in Tokyo and eastern Japan, is baulking at the cost.

It lost ¥68 billion (US\$490 million) in 2021 on the 66 most problematic segments of rural railways.

In the worst section, the company paid more than ¥20,000 for every ¥100 earned.

"We have done all we can to increase usage and cut costs," Takashi Takaoka, a JR East executive officer, told reporters this year.

"The fact is that there are areas where trains are not the best mode of transportation."

Not everyone agrees, and governors from around half of Japan's regions have filed a joint plea to the transport minister warning that slashing rural routes will endanger tourism and require spending on alternatives like buses.

But experts say change is inevitable and communities need to embrace innovations, potentially including self-driving transport.

For now though, lines like Takemoto's are turning to alternatives to stay afloat.



After Year of Climate Disasters, World Off-Track To Curb Warming

PARIS (Dispatches) - Catastrophic floods, crop-wilting droughts and record heatwaves this year have shown that climate change warnings are increasingly becoming reality and this is "just the beginning", experts say, as international efforts to cut planet-heating emissions founder.

The year did see some important progress, with major new legislation particularly in the United States and Europe as well as a deal at UN talks to help vulnerable countries cope with an increasing onslaught of devastating climate impacts.

But the goal of keeping warming within a safer limit of 1.5 degrees Celsius since the pre-industrial era appears in peril, with carbon dioxide emissions from fossil fuels — the main driver of global heating — on track to reach an all-time high in 2022.

United Nations chief Antonio Guterres warned world leaders at a climate summit in Egypt in November that humanity faces a stark choice between working together in the battle against global warming or "collective suicide".

They opted to put off the most important decisions for another time, observers say.

This year UN climate science experts issued their strongest warning yet of the dangers facing people and planet, with a landmark report on climate impacts in February dubbed an "atlas of human suffering".

Since then a series of extreme events has illustrated the accelerating dangers of climate change, at barely 1.2C of warming.

Record heatwaves damaged crops from China to Europe, while drought has brought millions to the point of starvation in the Horn of Africa.

Floods super-charged by climate change engulfed Pakistan, affecting 33 million people and causing some US\$30 billion in damage and economic losses.

"The year 2022 will be one of the hottest years on earth, with all the phenomena that go with higher temperatures," said climate scientist Robert Vautard, head of France's Pierre-Simon Laplace Institute.

"Unfortunately, this is just the beginning."

This year is on track to be the fifth or sixth warmest ever recorded despite the impact, since 2020, of La Nina — a periodic and naturally occurring phenomenon in the Pacific that cools the atmosphere.

When this phenomenon reverses, potentially within months, the world will likely climb to a "new level" in warming, said Vautard.

Economy-battering climate extremes, which amplified the energy price surge for many countries as a result of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, provided the backdrop to last month's high-stakes UN climate talks in Egypt.

The negotiations did make history, with wealthy polluters agreeing to a fund to pay for climate damage increasingly unleashed on poorer countries.

Pakistani climate minister Sherry Rehman called the move a "down payment on the longer investment in our joint futures".

But vulnerable nations and campaigners said the conference failed to deliver on the emissions reductions needed to curb climate losses and damages in the future.

"COP27 tackled the consequences of climate change, but not the cause — fossil fuels," said Harjeet Singh of Climate Action Network.



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Turkey's Stock Exchange Ends 2022 at Historic High

ANKARA (Dispatches) – Turkey's benchmark stock index climbed 0.59% on Friday to end the year's last trading day at a new all-time high of 5,509.16 points. Starting the day at 5,510.78, Borsa Istanbul's BIST 100 index was up 32.24 points from Thursday's close of 5,476.92. It peaked during the day at 5,562.98 points, while its daily low was 5,489.20. While global stock exchanges struggled this year, the BIST 100 rocketed 196.57% on an annual basis in 2022, as investors hedged against surging consumer prices and a weakening lira. In contrast, Wall Street closed 2022 at its lowest point in 14 years and European stock exchanges made the biggest losses since 2018.



Global Economy Faces Tougher Year in 2023

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - For much of the global economy, 2023 is going to be a tough year as the main engines of global growth - the United States, Europe and China - all experience weakening activity, the head of the International Monetary Fund said.

The new year is going to be "tougher than the year we leave behind," IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva said on the CBS Sunday morning news program "Face the Nation."

"Why? Because the three main economies - the U.S., EU and China - are all slowing down simultaneously," she said.

In October, the IMF cut its outlook for global economic growth in 2023, reflecting the continuing drag from the war in Ukraine as well as inflation pressures and the high interest rates engineered by central banks like the U.S. Federal Reserve aimed at bringing those price pressures to heel.

Since then, China has scrapped its zero-COVID policy and embarked on a chaotic reopening of its economy, though consumers there remain wary as coronavirus cases surge. In his first public comments since the change in policy, President Xi Jinping on Saturday called in a New Year's address for more effort and unity as China enters a "new phase."

"For the first time in 40 years, China's growth in 2022 is likely to be at or below global growth," Georgieva said.

Moreover, a "bushfire" of expected COVID infections there in the months ahead are likely to further hit its economy this year and drag on both regional and global growth, said Georgieva, who traveled to China on IMF business late last month.

"I was in China last week, in a bubble in a city where there is zero COVID," she said. "But that is not going to last once people start traveling."

"For the next couple of months, it would be tough for China, and the impact on Chinese growth would be negative, the impact on the region will be negative, the impact on global growth will be negative," she said.

ECB Urged to Stop Quick Wage Growth From Fuelling Inflation

FRANKFURT (Dispatches) - Euro zone wages are growing quicker than earlier thought and the European Central Bank must prevent this from adding to already high inflation, ECB President Christine Lagarde told a Croatian newspaper.

The ECB has raised interest rates by a total of 2.5 percentage points since July in a bid to arrest a historic surge in inflation and has promised even more policy tightening over its next several meetings as longer term price growth expectations have started moving above its 2% target.

"We know wages are increasing, probably at a faster pace than expected," Croatian newspaper Jutarnji list quoted Lagarde as saying on Saturday. "We must not allow inflationary expectations to become de-anchored or wages to have an inflationary effect."

Lagarde provided no new policy hint in the interview but said



the bank must "take the necessary measures" to lower inflation to 2% from its current rate of near 10%.

Croatia will join the euro zone on Jan. 1 as the currency club's 20th member, entering an elite club at a time of unusual turmoil as the ECB tries to tame inflation after spending the past decade unleashing unprecedented stimulus to rekindle price growth when it was exceptionally low.

"We need to be careful that the domestic causes that we are seeing, which are mainly related to fiscal measures and wage dynamics, do not lead to inflation becoming entrenched," Lagarde said.

Lagarde added that the bloc's expected winter recession, induced by soaring energy costs, is likely to be short and shallow, provided there are no additional shocks.

China Home Prices Fall at Faster Pace in December

BEIJING (Dispatches) - China's home prices fell at a faster pace in December, according to a private survey, reflecting persistently weak demand amid rising COVID-19 cases despite a slew of support measures.

China's property market crisis worsened this summer, with official data showing home prices, sales and investment all falling in recent months, adding pressure on the faltering economy.

Home prices in 100 cities fell for the sixth month in a row in December, declining 0.08% from a month earlier after falling 0.06% in November, according to the survey by China Index Academy (CIA), one of the country's largest independent real estate research firms.

Among the 100 cities, 68 cities posted a fall in monthly prices, compared with 57 in November, the survey showed.

China has in recent weeks ramped up support for the industry in a bid to relieve a long-running liquidity squeeze that has hit developers and delayed completion of many housing projects, further undermining buyers' confidence. The moves have included lifting a ban on fundraising via equity offerings for listed property firms.

The property sector has also got a slight boost after Beijing abruptly dropped its strict zero-COVID policy in early December, which could lure consumers back to showrooms. But the virus is now spreading largely unchecked and likely infecting millions of people a day, according to some international health experts.

"Real estate policies may continue to maintain an accommodative tone with room for policy easing on the supply and demand side in 2023," said the real estate research firm, adding "the housing market is expected to stabilize gradually next year."

S. Korean Exports Continue to Decline on Cooling Global Demand

SEOUL (Dispatches) - South Korea's exports continued to decline last month in a sign of cooling global demand as higher interest rates weigh on consumption.

Overseas shipments dropped 9.5 percent from a year earlier, compared with economists' forecasts for an 11.1 percent decline, and imports fell 2.4 percent, data released yesterday by the South Korean Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy showed.

The trade shortfall was US\$4.7 billion last month, resulting in the first annual deficit since the global financial crisis, as elevated oil prices battered many trade-dependent nations.

South Korean exports are a major barometer of global commerce and tech demand as the nation produces key items such as chips, displays and refined oil.



Trade resilience has been a key source of reassurance for the Bank of Korea that the economy could withstand higher borrowing costs even as it tightened policy over the past year.

However, the cycle of interest rate hikes is likely close to ending as the central bank becomes more concerned about growth with the world economy slowing.

South Korean exports last year increased 6.1 percent, while imports rose 18.9 percent. The contraction in monthly shipments began in October, with weaker chip demand leading the decline.

Semiconductor sales plunged 29.1 percent from a year earlier last month, the fifth straight monthly drop, the trade ministry said.

Chipmakers are adjusting to the slackening demand, and cut production in November by the most since 2009.

Elevated inflation, China's emergence from "zero COVID-19" and Russia's invasion of Ukraine are among other factors complicating the outlook for trade.

Labor strife is another factor that could hit the economy, as workers express discontent fueled by soaring prices. A nationwide truckers' strike weighed on South Korea's supply chains before ending last month.

Exports would likely fall 4.5 percent this year and imports could decline 6.4 percent, the South Korean Ministry of Economy and Finance said.

Rivalry between the US and China over semiconductor hegemony poses a longer-term threat to South Korea whose trade depends heavily on momentum in global memory chip sales.

China's struggle with nationwide COVID-19 outbreaks has also disrupted South Korea's overseas shipments. Exports to China fell 27 percent year-on-year last month, while shipments to the US increased 6.7 percent, the trade ministry said.

Pakistan's Forex Reserves Hit 8-Year Low at \$5.8b

ISLAMABAD (Dispatches) - Pakistan's foreign exchange reserves dropped to an 8-year low and plummeted to \$5.8 billion in December, according to the latest official figures.

State Bank of Pakistan's foreign exchange reserves further declined by \$294 million to \$5.8 billion due to external debt repayment, reaching the lowest level since April 2014. This means the country has only enough reserves to cover one month of imports, according to Arif Habib Limited, a brokerage and banking research firm. The central bank's data show forex reserves are at \$11.7 billion, with the commercial banks holding \$5.9 billion.

Pakistan has been facing a severe economic crisis amid dwindling forex reserves and currency depreciation, prompting concerns that the country may default on its sovereign debt repayment. Pakistani currency sharply devalued from PKR177 in March this year to more than PKR226 now in the interbank. There is a huge difference in rates of the interbank and open market where one dollar is selling at PKR260 to PKR270. The top three credit rating agencies, Standard & Poor's (S&P) Moody's, and Fitch, have also downgraded Pakistan.

Pakistan's finance minister Ishaq Dar has tried to dispel fears that the country was on the brink of default. But the market situation does not support his assertions and experts say that the current economic trajectory is highly alarming.

"This is a self-inflicted crisis culminating from unwarranted political crises, civil-military fracturing, delayed fuel price hikes, delayed fuel price reversals, tip-toeing with IMF and unwillingness to take structural reforms" economic analyst Asif Arsalan H. Soomro spelled out the reasons while talking to Gulf News. It is time to admit that "without bargaining with IMF, we are heading for a systematic crash of economic and civil order," he said,



adding the the "pain of economic contraction would be felt for the next two to three years until exports growth, interest rate comes back to 11 to 12 per cent and energy circular debt is decisively curtailed with a hike in utility prices."

Traders and analysts described 2022 as a tough year and warned the trend could persist in the coming year amidst deep political uncertainty. The year "2023 is a test for policymakers. From today till the formation of a new government, stakeholders need to take tough decisions. We need a smooth transfer of power and a consensus-led government with a new three to four years IMF program targeting growth in exports and taxation while reducing the national debt" Soomro suggested.

The country has been in negotiations with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to secure another tranche under a \$7 billion bailout package.

BOJ Considering Raising Inflation Forecasts to Near 2% Target



TOKYO (Dispatches) - The Bank of Japan (BOJ) is considering raising its inflation forecasts in January to show price growth close to its 2% target in fiscal 2023 and 2024, Nikkei reported.

The BOJ jolted markets this month by widening its 10-year yield cap range, a move officially aimed at straightening out bond market distortions but seen by some analysts as a prelude to the exit from its ultra-loose monetary easing.

Upgrades to the BOJ's inflation forecast would further fuel such speculation as Governor Haruhiko Kuroda has said the central bank could discuss the exit if achievement of its 2% inflation target in tandem with wage hikes comes into sight.

Citing people familiar with discussions at the central bank, Nikkei said the proposed changes would show the core consumer price index rising around 3% in fiscal 2022, between 1.6% and 2% in fiscal 2023, and nearly 2% in fiscal 2024.

The previous forecasts released in October were around 2.9%, 1.6% and 1.6%, respectively.

Japan's core consumer prices excluding fresh food items rose 3.7% in November, the highest since 1981, government data showed last week.

But Kuroda has dismissed the chance of a near-term interest rate hike, saying recent price rises were driven by one-off increases in raw material costs rather than strong demand.

The BOJ will release the latest quarterly growth and price outlook after its next policy meeting on Jan. 17-18.

Analysts, searching for any clues on a monetary policy shift, are also waiting to see if annual wage negotiations early next year will bring substantial pay hikes, or if the end of Kuroda's 10-year tenure in April leads to any revision to a 2013 policy accord between the BOJ and the government.

Armed Forces to Respond To Israeli Threats Decisively

TEHRAN (MNA) – The Iranian Army commander warned that the Iranian armed forces will decisively respond to any threat from the Zionist regime, saying that the recent army drill had a clear message for Iran’s ill-wishers. Addressing the reporters on the sidelines of the last day of Zolfaghār 1401 Joint Exercises, Major General Abdolrahīm Mousavi said that such drills usually convey a message of peace and friendship for the

regional nations and friendly countries. According to him, the exercises are held usually aimed at preserving the deterrence and security of the country. The drills have also a message for the enemies and ill-wishers, he said, adding that the armed forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran are serious in defending the values, ideals, borders, and territorial integrity of the country.



World Welcomes 2023 and Leaves a Stormy Year Behind

LONDON (Dispatches) - The world welcomed the new year with a packed party in Times Square and fireworks soaring above European capitals, while hoping for an end to the war in Ukraine and a return to post-COVID normality in Asia.

It was a year marked by the conflict in Ukraine, economic stresses and the effects of global warming. But it was also a year that saw a dramatic soccer World Cup, rapid technological change, and efforts to meet climate challenges.

After 2023 descended upon Asia, Africa and Europe, New York rang in the new year in typical style as thousands corralled themselves into pens under pouring rain in Times Square, waiting hours for the ball to drop. A 12-foot (3.7-meter) geodesic sphere made of Waterford crystal triangles slid down a pole atop a 25-story building to mark the calendar change.

Meanwhile, millions watched the accompanying musical acts and countdown on television from dry and warm living rooms around the world.

Tommy Onolfo, 40, a mechanic from nearby Nassau County, said he wore a diaper during his drenched, 14-hour wait in Times Square, as security measures require spectators to deprive themselves of all comforts to maintain a front-row view.

“I’m a lifeguard in the summer so I’m not afraid of water at all,” Onolfo said. “I have my bathroom thing down to a science. I haven’t had to use the diaper yet. It’s just in case.”

Earlier, across the Atlantic, the London Eye turned blue and yellow in solidarity with Ukraine as fireworks saw in midnight in the British capital.

The celebration, which London’s mayor had branded the biggest in Europe, also referenced Queen Elizabeth II, who died in September, the red and white of England’s soccer team, and the rainbow colours of the LGBTQ Pride event, which had its 50-year anniversary in 2022.

For Ukraine, there seemed to be no end in sight to the fighting that began when Russia invaded in February.

Numerous blasts were heard in Kyiv and in other places around Ukraine and air raid sirens wailed across the country in the early hours of New Year’s Day.

On Saturday, Russia fired a barrage of cruise missiles that Ukraine’s human rights ombudsman described as “Terror on New Year’s Eve.”

Evening curfews remained in place nationwide, making the celebration of the beginning of 2023 impossible in many public spaces. Several regional governors posted messages on social media warning residents not to break restrictions.

In Kyiv, though, people gathered near the city’s central Christmas tree as midnight approached.

“We are not giving up. They couldn’t ruin our celebrations,” said 36-year-old Yaryna, who was celebrating with her husband, tinsel and fairy lights wrapped around her.

In a video message to mark the New Year, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy, Time Magazine’s 2022 Person of the Year, said: “I want to wish all of us one thing - victory.”

Russian President Vladimir Putin devoted his New Year’s address to rallying the Russian people behind his troops.

Festivities in Moscow were muted, without the usual fireworks on Red Square.

“One should not pretend that nothing is happening - our people are dying (in Ukraine),” said 68-year-old Yelena Popova. “A holiday is being celebrated, but there must be limits.” Many Muscovites said they hoped for peace in 2023.



Elsewhere in Europe, fireworks exploded over the Parthenon in Athens, the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin, and the Arc de Triomphe in Paris, where crowds gathered on the Champs-Élysées avenue to watch the French capital’s first New Year fireworks since 2019.

But, like many places, the Czech capital Prague was feeling the pinch economically and so did not hold a fireworks display.

“Holding celebrations did not seem appropriate,” said city hall spokesman Vit Hofman.

Earlier, Australia kicked off the celebrations with its first restriction-free New Year’s Eve after two years of COVID disruptions. Sydney welcomed the New Year with a typically dazzling fireworks display, which for the first time featured a rainbow waterfall off the Harbour Bridge.

In China, rigorous COVID restrictions were lifted only in December as the government abruptly reversed its “zero-COVID” policy, a switch that has led to soaring infections and meant some people were in no mood to celebrate.

While China’s official death toll is barely ticking higher, UK-based health data firm Airfinity estimated last week that around 9,000 people in the country are probably dying each day from COVID.

“This virus should just go and die, cannot believe this year I cannot even find a healthy friend that can go out with me,” wrote one social media user based in eastern Shandong province.

But in the city of Wuhan, where the pandemic began three years ago, thousands of people gathered to despite a heavy security presence.

Barricades were erected and hundreds of police officers stood guard. Loudspeakers blasted out a message on a loop advising people not to gather. But the large crowds of revellers took no notice.

In Shanghai, many thronged the historic riverside walkway, the Bund.

“We’ve all travelled in from Chengdu to celebrate in Shanghai,” said Da Dai, a 28-year-old digital media executive who was visiting with two friends.

“We’ve already had COVID, so now feel it’s safe to enjoy ourselves.”

Analysts Predict Economic Struggles for Zimbabwe in 2023

HARARE (Dispatches) - This month (December), inflation in Zimbabwe peaked at 280 percent, one of the highest rates globally. The Zimbabwean dollar also weakened, trading at 930 to the US dollar on the parallel market – a steep decline after two months of relative stability at 700 to \$1.

This led to plummeting living standards in the Southern African country where 7.9 million people, amounting to half of the population, fell into extreme poverty between 2011 to 2022.

Ahead of the crunch 2023 presidential elections, proposed currency reforms by the incumbent Emmerson Mnangagwa’s administration have already been put on hold.

Unsurprisingly economists, political scientists and multilateral institutions are sounding the alarm that the trend of declining economic fundamentals could continue till next year.

During a recent visit to the country, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) predicted a further fall in the gross domestic product (GDP) by 3.5 percent in the coming year due to among other things, “renewed domestic and external shocks (inflation surge, erratic rainfall, electricity shortages, and Russia’s war in Ukraine) ... adversely affecting economic and social conditions.”

“These multiple shocks will continue to weigh on Zimbabwe’s growth prospects,” the IMF said in December.

Analysts say years of economic mismanagement under Zimbabwe’s first leader, Robert Mugabe and later under his predecessor Emmerson Mnangagwa, have stymied the economy, further exacerbated by hyperinflation and the currency devaluing rapidly.

For Gift Mugano, a visiting professor of economics at the University of Zimbabwe Business School, the country’s 2023 economic outlook is gloomy.

“The year 2023 will be very dire, driven by spill-over effects of difficulties we encountered in 2022,” he told Al Jazeera.

Due to increased government spending as the central bank prints more money for contractual obligations to government suppliers and to finance agriculture, the local currency is expected to continuously weaken against leading currencies this festive season and into the next year.

In November, inflation stood at 255 percent, one of the highest in the world. But Mugano predicts that



inflation and exchange rate could more than double by the second quarter of 2023.

Furthermore, there are fears that while the central bank continues to dictate the exchange rate, there is no hope for convertibility determined by free market conditions.

In its statement after its visit to Harare this month, the IMF urged authorities to sustainably anchor macroeconomic stability through the liberalisation of the foreign exchange market, ensuring the central bank does not print money through quasi-fiscal operations, maintain tight monetary policy stance and wind down the use of gold coins.

But economists doubt authorities will heed the advice.

“Zimbabwe is entering a very volatile social and economic period which needs level political minded leaders to handle this with care but I don’t see [the authorities] having that capacity to think straight in terms of management of the affairs of Zimbabwe,” Mugano said.

The war in Ukraine and high inflation have also affected the agriculture sector. In Zimbabwe which relies on fertiliser imports from Ukraine, prices shot up from \$28 to approximately \$55 per 50-kilogramme (11-pound) bag, pushing bread, an everyday staple above the reach of many residents.

There is also the matter of power cuts nationwide occasioned by reduced electricity generation at its hydroelectric power plant, Kariba Power Station, owing to low dam water levels.

As a result, industries and households have been bearing the brunt of rolling power outages that last for as much as 20 hours on a daily basis.

Authorities hope refurbishment work at its Hwange Thermal Power Plant will add 300 megawatts to the national grid by the end of the first quarter of 2023.

Zimbabwe, which has traditionally relied on power imports from South Africa, Mozambique and Zambia, is now in a quandary because the region is also grappling with an enormous power deficit.

A lot also hinges on the looming general elections.

Mnangagwa, who has been president since November 2017, is expected to put a bid in for a second term but is facing stiff opposition.

Opposition leader Nelson Chamisa rallied the Citizens Coalition for Change (CCC) to win 19 out of the 28 seats in the parliamentary by-elections. Even though the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) still holds a parliamentary majority, analysts said CCC’s showing might be a foretaste of how it might perform in the 2023 presidential election.

In February, 37 opposition supporters were arrested at a rally and there have been other incidents of violence against dissidents in recent months.

Rashweat Mukundu, a Harare-based independent political analyst, is almost certain of heightened political instability in the months leading to the polls and after.

Given the high political stakes of the coming election, Mnangagwa seems set to pull all the stops to retain the presidency, he said.

“I think 2023 spells political doom for Zimbabwe as there is a high likelihood of politically motivated violence in by-elections but likely to intensify towards the local council, parliamentary and presidential polls,” he told Al Jazeera.

“I think ZANU-PF will attempt as much as possible to stop any campaigns by the opposition be it in urban and rural areas using the security structures and also party militias,” Mukundu added. “This is a zero-sum political game and election for Mnangagwa that he wants to win at any cost.”

The Crisis Coalition of Zimbabwe, a grouping of more than 80 non-governmental organisations in the country, has gone as far as to warn that the coming election could become the bloodiest in Zimbabwe’s history.

“In fact, as we edge towards 2023, we think it (political violence) is going to [get much worse],” Crisis Coalition of Zimbabwe’s Chairman Peter Mutasa said.

Disciples of... FROM PAGE 1

The US assassination drew a wave of condemnation from officials and movements throughout the world and triggered huge public protests across the region, with Iraqi lawmakers approving a bill two days after the attack demanding the withdrawal of all foreign military forces led by the United States from the country.

Stating that the revenge against [the masterminds and perpetrators of General Soleimani’s assassination] has begun, he warned them that they no longer have peace in their homes.

After his assassination, the Americans were under pressure because of the crime they committed, said Ghanni, adding that the disciples of Soleimani’s school will expel the Americans from the region.

Car Manufacturing Rises... FROM PAGE 1

Also, 23,000 heavy vehicles were manufactured in the nine-month period, registering about 166 percent growth year on year.

According to the ministry’s report, in the ninth month of this year, about 128,000 cars were manufactured in the country, which is the highest monthly car production in the last five years. This statistic also shows a five percent increase compared to the eighth month.

Iran to Invest... FROM PAGE 1

The National Iranian Copper Industry Company (NICICO) operates the country’s three major copper mines of Sarcheshmeh, Sungun and Miduk which have combined reserves of 3.4 billion tons.

The Sarcheshmeh copper mine in the southeast Kerman province is the world’s second largest. It holds over 826 million tons of proven and 1.2 billion tons of estimated reserves alongside substantial amounts of other minerals including molybdenum, gold, silver and rare metals.

The Sungun mine in East Azarbaijan province is Iran’s second largest copper operation with over 470 million tons of proven and 1 billion tons of potential reserves. The third major copper mine is Miduk in Kerman, that holds 170 million tons of proven copper reserves.

Iran is ranked among 15 major mineral-rich countries, holding some 68 types of minerals, even though the country’s mineral potential is not fully mapped.

The country has about 37 billion tons of proven mineral reserves and 57 billion tonnes of potential reserves, worth \$800 billion according to 2014 data on state-owned mines and metal holding company IMIDRO’s website.

Damascus Airport... FROM PAGE 1

Israel mostly keeps quiet about its attacks on the Syrian territories, which many view as a knee-jerk reaction to Syrian government’s increasing success in confronting terrorism.

The Tel Aviv regime has been a main supporter of terrorist groups that have battled the government of President Bashar al-Assad since foreign-backed militancy erupted in Syria in early 2011.

Syrian has repeatedly complained to the UN over Israeli assaults, urging the Security Council to take action against Tel Aviv’s crimes. The calls have, however, fallen on deaf ears.

Boeing Shares Jump Most In 40 Years as Airbus Retains the Crown

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Boeing Co. shares posted their largest quarterly gain in 40 years after executives laid out a plan to turn around the company after four years of turmoil that have cemented Airbus SE’s lead as the world’s biggest planemaker.

Boeing’s shares soared 57 per cent during the final three months of the year, adding \$42 billion to its market value, according to data compiled by Bloomberg. That gives Boeing a market capitalisation of \$113 billion, about \$19 billion more than Airbus.

But Airbus delivered 565 jetliners this year through the end of November compared to 411 from Boeing, which hasn’t delivered more than 51 jets in a month this year. That means Airbus is likely to retain its position as the biggest planemaker on this basis. They won’t reveal their final delivery - and sales - totals for 2022 until early January.

The title as company with the most sales could hinge on recent deals. As of the start of December, Airbus had 825 orders compared to 576 net sales for Boeing. And Boeing chipped away at the lead with a 200-jet sale to United Airlines Inc. and a 40-jet deal with a lessor.

Suarez Signs Two-Year Gremio Deal

MONTEVIDEO (Dispatches) - Uruguayan international striker Luis Suarez has signed a two-year contract with Brazilian club Gremio, the Porto Alegre side announced.

The 35-year-old had returned to his boyhood club Nacional last summer, scoring eight goals in 14 matches to help them win the Uruguayan league title.

Suarez played at the World Cup in Qatar without scoring as his country were eliminated in the group stages.

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Andreescu Makes Gritty Comeback to Beat Muguruza

ADELAIDE (Dispatches) - Bianca Andreescu staged a dramatic comeback to topple Garbine Muguruza in a battle of former Grand Slam champions on day one of the Adelaide International.

The Canadian, who won the 2019 US Open, was crushed in the first set and slipped 2-5 behind in the second before surging home 0-6, 7-6 (7/3), 6-1 to get her 2023 season off to a winning start.

It maintained her perfect record against two-time Grand Slam winner and former world number one Muguruza, improving to 3-0.

Doncic Posts 51 In Win Over Spurs

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Luka Doncic poured in 51 points, including two free throws with 4.5 seconds remaining, and the visiting Dallas Mavericks outlasted the San Antonio Spurs 126-125 to win their season-best sixth straight game.

The Mavericks led by 10 points after three quarters but San Antonio fought back, getting to within 112-111 after a pair of free throws by Jakob Poeltl with 5:29 to play. After Dallas rebuilt its lead to six points, the Spurs rallied again, getting a floater by Poeltl to cut their deficit to 121-119 with 2:09 left.

Another pair from the charity stripe by Poeltl closed the gap to one point with 1:34 remaining. Frank Ntilikina's jumper extended the Mavericks' lead to three points before Jeremy Sochan responded with two free throws with 20.2 seconds to play. Sochan then missed on a driving shot with 5.7 seconds left before Doncic's game-sealing free throws.

San Antonio's Tre Jones had a chance to tie the game but made just one of two free throws with 2.7 seconds to play. Christian Wood added 25 points for Dallas, with Tim Hardaway Jr. hitting for 14. Keldon Johnson led the Spurs with 30 points, while Sochan added 20. Poeltl racked up 19 points and 15 rebounds.

Heat 126, Jazz 123

Tyler Herro hit a buzzer-beating 3-pointer off of one foot to lift Miami over Utah in a thriller in Salt Lake City.

Herro drove the length of the court and heaved up the off-balance game-winner after Utah's Lauri Markkanen tied the game with three free throws with 6.1 seconds remaining. Bam Adebayo led all scorers with 32 points, adding eight rebounds, and Herro finished with 29 points, nine rebounds and six assists to help the Heat finish the calendar year in style.

Markkanen and Jordan Clarkson each hit three free throws in the final 14 seconds to tie the game late. But Miami closed it out despite not having a timeout to set up a final play. Markkanen led the Jazz with 29 points and 14 rebounds, and Clarkson netted 22 points in Utah's fourth consecutive loss.

Sabalenka Says Wimbledon Ban on Players Changed Nothing

LONDON (Dispatches) - Wimbledon's decision to ban Belarusian players from last year's tournament "changed nothing", world number five Aryna Sabalenka said as she hoped to return to the grasscourt Grand Slam in 2023 having missed its fans and atmosphere.

Wimbledon organizers banned players from Russia and Belarus last year due to Moscow's invasion of Ukraine. Belarus is a key staging area for the invasion, which Russia calls a "special military operation".

Players from the two countries were blocked from competing in British grasscourt events in the build-up to the major and Sabalenka—who is playing in Adelaide this week before the Australian Open—said politics and sport should not mix.

"This is really terrible because no one supports war - no one," the 24-year-old Belarusian told Melbourne's Age newspaper. "The problem is we have to speak loud about that... but why should we scream about that in every corner? It's not going to help at all.

"I'm just really disappointed sport is somehow in politics. We're just athletes playing their sport. That's it. We're not about politics. If all of us could do something, we would, but we have zero control.

"They banned us from Wimbledon and what did it change? Nothing - they're still doing this and this is the sad (part) of this situation."

Sabalenka said she was "super disappointed" with Wimbledon's decision and that she trained in Miami when the Grand Slam took place in June and July.

"I had a great time in Miami, but I really missed the people because the atmosphere at Wimbledon is super amazing. You can feel these people really love tennis there and I really miss them," Sabalenka said.

"I really hope I'll play there (in 2023), just because of the people, to feel this atmosphere. But if they're going to ban us again; I don't care about Wimbledon's decision. The only thing I'll miss is the people."



Pacers 131, Clippers 130

Myles Turner scored 34 points, Tyrese Haliburton added 24 points and distributed 10 assists and Indiana weathered a season-best 45-point performance from Paul George to down visiting Los Angeles.

Kawhi Leonard complemented George's season high in scoring, adding 24 points with seven assists. Indiana took a critical 126-125 lead inside the final minute when Haliburton converted a successful and-one. The Pacers led the remaining 57.4 seconds to preserve the win, their third straight and fifth in the last six games, thanks to 6-for-7 combined free-throwing shooting from Turner and Haliburton.

Cavaliers 103, Bulls 102

Caris LeVert scored 23 points and made a big defensive play to prevent DeMar DeRozan from hitting the game-winning shot as visiting Cleveland survived a rocky finish and held on for a victory over Chicago.

LeVert scored Cleveland's last basket when his floater in the lane made it 103-96 with 2:03 remaining. DeRozan made a strong move to the hoop to make it 103-102 with 29.8 seconds left. The Cavaliers were called for a shot clock violation with 5.8 seconds remaining. DeRozan made a move to the baseline, but had to try a 15-footer over LeVert at the horn. The shot fell short.

Kevin Love added 20 points and nine rebounds for the Cavaliers, who survived a rough night from star Donovan Mitchell. DeRozan scored 11 of his 21 points in the fourth quarter for the Bulls. Ayo Dosunmu added 19 points and Zach LaVine 15.

Vinicius Jr Says La Liga Doing Nothing About Racism

MADRID (Dispatches) - Real Madrid's Brazilian forward Vinicius Jr accused La Liga of continuing to do nothing about racist fans at matches, after videos on social media showed fans shouting abuse and throwing objects at him at a match a day earlier.

La Liga issued a statement condemning all forms of hate speech and saying it was following up on instances of racism at the match.

Vinicius appeared to be subjected to abuse at the Jose Zorrilla stadium in Valladolid as he walked past fans after being substituted in Real Madrid's 2-0 win over Real Valladolid on Friday.

"Racists continue to go to stadiums and watch the biggest club in the world up close and La Liga continues to do nothing," Vinicius wrote on Twitter.

"I will continue with my head held high and celebrating my victories and those of Madrid."

In September Atletico Madrid fans were filmed directing racist chants at the 22-year-old outside their Wanda Metropolitano Stadium ahead of a match against Real.

In its statement on Saturday, the league said it was looking into Friday's match.

"La Liga has detected racist insults from the stands of the Zorrilla stadium, published on social networks," the Spanish top-flight league said.

Ruud Cruises at United Cup

BRISBANE (Dispatches) - World number three Casper Ruud cruised past Thiago Monteiro in straight sets to give Norway some hope in their mixed teams United Cup tie against Brazil in Brisbane.

After Brazil won both opening singles rubbers Saturday, Ruud's 6-3, 6-2 victory brought Norway back into the tie ahead of the second singles clash between his countrywoman Ulrikke Eikeri and Laura Pigossi.

Ruud was far too consistent for the 71st ranked Monteiro, who made 27 unforced errors, wrapping up a dominant win in only 70 minutes.

Saudis Flock to Buy Ronaldo Shirts After Al Nassr Deal

RIYADH (Dispatches) - Only hours after Cristiano Ronaldo penned a two-year contract with Saudi Arabia's Al Nassr, crowds flocked to a football kit store in Riyadh to buy the five-time Ballon d'Or winner's new club jersey.

Abdulmohsen al-Ayyban, 41, and his nine-year old son, Nayef, were among those queueing at Al Nassr club's official kit store on Saturday where clerks were busy pressing Ronaldo's name onto t-shirts.

"We are witnessing a historic moment," al-Ayyban told AFP of the deal which he believes "will elevate the Saudi football league".

Ronaldo on Friday signed for Al Nassr until June 2025 in a deal believed to be worth more than €200 million.

A wide smile stretched across Nayef's face as he proudly held his new jersey aloft. For the young Saudi, a dream has come true.

"I have always wanted Al Nassr to acquire the best player in the world," he said. "I will make sure to watch all his games at the stadium."

Ronaldo, 37, is expected to appear before fans next Thursday, an official from the Al Nassr club told AFP.

For Saudi Arabia, Ronaldo is the latest high-priced sporting jewel acquired to add lustre to their international image.

At home, the deal further fuelled national fervour that spiked after the kingdom defeated eventual winners Argentina in the early stages of the 2022 World Cup, a victory hailed as one of greatest shocks in the tournament's history.

An unprecedented rush at the Al Nassr kit store started as soon as reports of the deal were leaked to the local press on Friday night — hours before the official announcement.



Medvedev Aims To Learn From Tough Moments

ADELAIDE (Dispatches) - Daniil Medvedev said he needed a long time to recover from his loss to Rafa Nadal in last year's Australian Open final, but the Russian vowed to use his experiences to reach a higher level in 2023 as he gears up for the season's first Grand Slam.

Medvedev was up two sets when Nadal pulled off a comeback for the ages by sealing a 2-6 6-7(5) 6-4 6-4 7-5 victory in a thrilling final at Rod Laver Arena to deny his opponent his second major crown.

"I felt absolutely terrible... the thing about life and tennis is that you have to get over it, try to learn from it because you can't change the past," Medvedev told reporters on Sunday, before the Adelaide International 1 tournament.

"I had some tough moments in my career... tough losses — I know a lot of losses in a row and I always managed to find a way back, so I'm sure I'm going to find the way back to an even higher level than I was playing maybe last year.

"But yeah, the match was not easy to get over for some time, but right now I'm looking forward to the Australian Open again, and I want to do better than last year. That's the goal."

After losing to Nadal at Melbourne Park, Medvedev exited the French Open in the fourth round, while a ban on Russian players at Wimbledon due to Moscow's invasion of Ukraine forced him to miss the grasscourt major.

His title defense at the US Open ended following a fourth-round defeat by Australian Nick Kyrgios and the 26-year-old went on to lose his number one ranking.

Teenager Carlos Alcaraz ended 2022 as the top-ranked player and Medvedev said the men's field looked as strong as ever with the emergence of new faces in the top 10.

