

**Health Ministry Announced on Tuesday That the Number of Deaths From the Coronavirus Pandemic in Iran Increased to 144,696 With Three More Iranians Killed by the Virus Over the Past 24 Hours**

# IRAN NEWS

**Sarakhs Customs Have Developed Significantly Following Iran's Membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Development of Ties With the Northeastern Neighbors, First VP Mohammad Mokhber says**

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## 94 Suspects of Martyr Soleimani's Case Are Americans

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Ninety-four of the suspects involved in the assassination of General Qasem Soleimani are from the United States, including three main defendants who are ex-U.S. President Donald Trump, former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, and head of the U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) Kenneth McKenzie, an Iranian official said.

Kazem Gharibabadi, the secretary of the High Council for Human Rights and deputy head of the Iranian judiciary, announced the latest follow-ups by the Iranian judicial system on the case of General Soleimani's assassination in a news conference in Tehran on Tuesday.

Gharibabadi also pointed to the cooperation between the judicial systems of Iraq and Iran, saying that a joint committee of the two countries held three rounds of talks in Baghdad and Tehran and that the fourth round will be held within a few days.

The indictment of the dossier is to be finalized in the near future, he assessed, noting that the indictment is now focusing on the American suspects, who are 94 people at present.

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## Iran Beats Record In Exporting Oil, Gas Condensate

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - The spokesman for the Iranian Government reported on Tuesday that the country has set a record in its export of oil and gas condensate in the recent month after the onset of the new round of sanctions against the country four years ago, adding that the country has witnessed a decrease in growth of liquidity to 34.3 percent.

Ali Bahadori Jahromi made the remarks at his weekly press briefing in Tehran.

A decrease in the growth of liquidity is an indication of the country's success in bringing inflation under control, Bahadori Jahromi noted.

The spokesman went on to say that the 60 percent growth in foreign income was achieved during the first ten months of the Iranian calendar year (starting on March 21, 2022).

The government spares no effort to foil the sanctions and take measures to remove them, he said adding that the government will not tie the country's economy to the issue of sanctions.

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## Iranians Across Country Pay Tribute to Martyr General Soleimani



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Iranians across the country have paid homage to their hero General Haj Qassem Soleimani, a world-renown anti-terror commander who was assassinated by the US in 2020.

People gathered in the southeastern city of Kerman, General Soleimani's hometown, to pay tribute to the iconic commander. Similar ceremonies were also held in the Iranian capital, Tehran, and other cities, including Esfahan, Yazd, Birjand, Rasht, Shahr-e Kord and Arak.

General Soleimani, commander of the Quds Force of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC), and his Iraqi trenchmate Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, the second-in-command of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Units (PMU), were martyred along with their companions in a US drone strike on January 3, 2020.

The strike near Baghdad International Airport was authorized by then-US president Donald Trump. Days after his martyrdom, the anti-terror icon's body was transferred to Iran and was laid to rest in his hometown of Kerman.

The two noted anti-terror commanders were tremendously respected and admired across the region for their instrumental role in fighting and decimating the Daesh Takfiri terrorist group in the region, particularly in Iraq and Syria.

In a Monday statement, Iran's Foreign Ministry said the assassination of the country's top anti-terror commander is a "glaring example of an organized terrorist act."

"Indubitable as it is, the criminal act of assassinating General Soleimani, designed and executed by the United States, constitutes yet another glaring example of an 'organized terrorist act'," the statement said.

Meanwhile the third anniversary of the U.S. assassination of Iran's top anti-terror Soleimani was marked in El Salvador. People gathered in Palestine Square in the Central American country's capital, San Salvador, on Tuesday to pay homage to General Soleimani, who was assassinated by the United States in 2020.

They carried the flags of Palestine and Iran and also the photos of the late Iranian commander. The participants also burnt the flags of the Israeli regime.

Mass rallies were also held across Iran on Tuesday to commemorate General Soleimani's martyrdom anniversary. People gathered in the southeastern city of Kerman, General Soleimani's hometown, to pay tribute to the iconic commander.

Earlier in the week, Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei lauded Soleimani's sacrifices, saying the anti-terror icon empowered, equipped and revived the resistance front against Israel and the US.

The U.S. assassination drew a wave of condemnation from across the world and triggered huge protests in the region, with Iraqi lawmakers approving a bill days after the U.S. attack calling for expulsion of all U.S.-led foreign military forces in Iraq.

On January 8, 2020, the IRGC targeted the US-run Ain al-Asad base in Iraq's western province of Anbar with a wave of missile attacks in retaliation for the assassination of General Soleimani.

According to the Pentagon, more than 100 American forces suffered "traumatic brain injuries" during the counterstrike. The IRGC said Washington used the term to mask the number of Americans killed during the retaliation.

Iran has described the missile attack on Ain al-Assad as a "first slap".

## Trump to Pay Heavy Price for Assassination Martyr Soleimani

BAGHDAD (Dispatches) - The leader of Iraq's Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq resistance group says former US president Donald Trump will pay dearly for the assassination of anti-terror champions General Qassem Soleimani and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis.

Qais al-Khazali made the remarks at a ceremony in commemoration of the two revered commanders and their companions in the capital Baghdad.

"We declare our full allegiance that we will definitely take revenge for the blood of our fallen commanders and martyrs. We will not shy away from telling and exposing the truth," Khazali said.

"It is high time we knew perfectly well about circumstances surrounding the assassination," the senior Iraqi politician pointed out.

The chairman of the Iraqi Popular Mobilization Units (PMU) also said the enemies made grave miscalculations as to General Soleimani's assassination, and the huge funeral processions held for the commander clearly showed his immense popularity.

"The participation of millions of people in General Soleimani's funeral revealed that he holds a high status in people's hearts. Although Donald Trump has orchestrated the crime of his targeted killing, it would not take long for the former US president to be thrown into the dustbin of history," Falih al-Fayyadh said. Iraq's anti-terror Harakat Hezbollah al-Nujaba movement also said the group will continue to retaliate over the assassination, irrespective of US occupation forces' futile attempts to conceal their losses in the aftermath of the targeted killings.

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## Iran Eyes Construction of Power Plant in Venezuela

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Deputy Minister of Energy for International Affairs Mohammad Ali Farahnakian says Iran wants to expand export of its technical and engineering services to the Latin American states and it is in talks to cooperate with Venezuela for construction of power plant.

Speaking in the closing ceremony of the 18th Exhibition on Water and Wastewater, Farahnakian said that 57.5% of Iran's export of technical and engineering services is in the field of water and electricity. He said once Iran used to provide its needs and required equipment in the field of water and energy from other countries but now it is among the top countries in this field.

He noted that the country is working hard for water supply to the villages and the annual aid of UNICEF is nothing comparing to what Iran spends for water supply in its villages.

Farahnakian went on to say that 57.5% of Iran's technical and engineering services export is in the field of water and electricity, adding that government's diplomacy is focused on the regional states but it will not stop from working other states.

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## Iran Oil Revenues to Top \$27b in 2023

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's oil revenues are estimated to reach over \$27 billion in 2023, according to a parliament report which expects a tight global supply of oil and continued sanctions on Iran will limit the country's ability to pump more crude compared to last year.

Excerpts of the report by Iranian parliament's research center published on Sunday showed that Iran's oil exports will cap at around 1 million barrels per day (bpd) in 2023 considering the growing uncertainties in the global energy market because of the war in Ukraine.

The report also highlighted the continued impacts of US sanctions on Iran's crude oil sales, saying there is a possibility for increased sanctions pressure on Iran as chances of reviving a 2015 deal on the country's nuclear program, known as the JCPOA, have decreased in recent months.

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## Iran Expanding National Railway and Highway Networks

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Kheirollah Khademi, the Iranian Deputy Minister of Roads and Urban Development, and CEO of Construction and Development of Transportation Infrastructure Company (CDTIC) has said that up to 561 km of new railway lines are expected to be launched in Iran by the end of the current Iranian year - March 20, 2023. According to Khademi, 70% of the work has already been completed.

At present, a total of 3,300 km of new railway lines are being built in the country, adding to the existing 14,000 km of railway lines available in Iran.

In terms of highways, Khademi said that "In addition, 1,035 km long controlled-access highways are being built in Iran. Of this, 293 km are planned to be put into use by the end of the current Iranian year (March 20). There is an 85% physical progress in the construction work. In total, there are 2,800 km of controlled-access highways in the country." Examples of this are the four-lane highway that has opened connecting Caspian and Persian Gulf ports.

Khademi also pointed out that 6,100 km long highways are being built in the country, of which, 1,000 km are expected to open during the current Iranian year.

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## Iran Urges Its Logical Positions in Nuclear Talks

TEHRAN (IP) - Iran's chief nuclear negotiator said that the country emphasizes its logical positions in the course of negotiations to lift sanctions.

About the latest status of the negotiations on removing anti-Iran sanctions, Ali Bagheri Kani said that the negotiations are a process and this process is still ongoing and there has been no break in the negotiations.

Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister for Political Affairs stated: "The continuity of the negotiations has been maintained and the issues are being seriously pursued." Bagheri Kani added: "The Islamic Republic of Iran continues to emphasize its logical positions in the sanctions lifting negotiations and the logic of the Islamic Republic of Iran has been accepted."

## U.S. Informed of Measures On Pursuing Gen. Soleimani Assassination

**TEHRAN (IRNA) - Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian said that his ministry considers as its duty to legally pursue the US assassination of Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani.**

Amirabdollahian said that Iran has informed the U.S. of some of the legal measures it has taken through the Swiss Embassy in Tehran, which represents U.S. interests in Iran.

The top diplomat made the remarks during a ceremony at the Foreign Ministry to commemorate the third martyrdom anniversary of General Soleimani, which falls on January 3.

Amirabdollahian said, as part of efforts to pursue the assassination case of the top general, a special committee was set up at the Foreign Ministry, which cooperates with the Judiciary, as well as the legal section of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps.

He said that the committee has speeded up the measures to pursue the case over the past four months, "with some of those measures being declared to the U.S. through the Swiss Embassy".

Amirabdollahian stressed that the Foreign Ministry will do whatever it can to bring to justice the "American perpetrators and terrorists" responsible for the assassination of General Soleimani.



He also spoke of "close cooperation" between Iranian and Iraqi judiciaries in this regard, noting that three rounds of negotiations have so far been held, which will be followed by new talks set to take place in Tehran next week.

The diplomat said that the Iraqi government has prepared documents that General Soleimani was present in the Arab country as a guest at the time of the U.S. attack.

General Soleimani was the commander of the IRGC Quds Force, who along with top Iraqi Commander Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, was killed in a U.S. drone attack ordered by then US President Donald Trump, near Iraq's capital Baghdad.

## Speaker Vows for Materializing Gen. Soleimani's Ideals in Region

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Majlis Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf said that Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani's aspiration with regard to expelling the US from the region will be materialized soon.

Qalibaf made the remarks addressing Majlis open session on Tuesday.

He termed resolving pending issues, moving without hesitation to solve people's problems, and thwarting enemy conspiracies as General Soleimani's most outstanding characteristics.

He also urged following General Soleimani's managerial logic and the principles of his personal and social life.

## World's Strategic Ways within Reach of Iran's AI-Powered Aircraft

TEHRAN (Tasnim) - The commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) said Iran has acquired aerial vehicles that use artificial intelligence and can make an impact on strategic ways around the world.

Addressing a conference in commemoration of late Iranian commander Lt. General Qassem Soleimani, held at the Iranian Foreign Ministry on Monday, IRGC Commander Major General Hossein Salami highlighted Iran's progress in the drone industry.

He said Iran is in possession of aerial vehicles that can take advantage of artificial intelligence to have an impact on many strategic ways across the world at any location in oceans within a very large radius.

"We do not threaten anyone, but rather defend our own national interests," the commander added.

The general also noted that the safest shipping lanes in the world are the routes that Iranian-flagged ships cruise in.

The enemies are aware that they will have to pay the price, wherever in the world it may be, if they do the smallest damage to Iran, he stated.

In August 2022, the general said the IRGC Navy has been instructed to bolster its presence in remote waters.

Highlighting the IRGC Navy's superiority over the enemies, the commander had noted that a range of weapons, including advanced missiles, highly stable vessels and various sea-based equipment, coupled with true faith of the servicemen, have made the IRGC Navy an invincible force.

## Winners of 2nd Soleimani Award Memorial Honored

TEHRAN (IP) - The honoring ceremony of the winners of the second memorial of the "Soleimani Award" was held on Monday night at the Museum of the Islamic Revolution and Sacred Defense.

The honoring ceremony of the winners of the second "Soleimani Badge" memorial was held in the presence of Mohammad Eslami, the head of the Atomic Energy Organization, Ali Bakshizadeh, the deputy for Radio of the IRIB.

In this ceremony, Ali Bakshizadeh referred to the secret behind the fame of Lt. Gen. Qassem Soleimani's name, saying: "Haj Qassem's sincere action made him beloved by hearts. Even Christians and Yazidis respect this martyr and commemorate him."

As another speaker of this ceremony, Mohammad Eslami considered the characteristic of General Soleimani to believe in God and his people.

Referring to the role of General Qassem Soleimani in making the people aware of seditions, he said: "Since the beginning of the Islamic Revolution, the enemies tried to create chaos in the country through terror and tried to divide Iran. In addition, they started an economic war."

The head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran added: "The enemies wanted to implement the Great Middle East plan by dividing Iran and Iraq. Lt. Gen. Soleimani's greatest task was to inform the public against this sedition."

Hamidreza Eftekhari, the secretary of this memorial, praised the enthusiastic participation of teenagers in the second memorial of the "Soleimani Award," saying that out of the 1731 works sent to the festival, 1665 were works of public works and among these, 1,370 works were in the narrative section of teenagers.

## Sports Minister Gets Second Yellow Card From Majlis



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Majlis gave a warning on Tuesday to Sports Minister Hamid Sajjadi, accusing him of mismanaging the ministry, the Fars news agency reported.

Mr Sajjadi spoke to parliamentarians in an open session on Tuesday to brief officials on the ministry's financial problems and expenses, especially regarding the country's football teams.

It came after the Iranian men's national team failed to progress past the group stages of December's World Cup in Qatar.

Sajjadi clarified in parliament open session and briefed the members regarding the financial issues and expenses of the Ministry of Sports and some issues around the sport.

At the beginning of his speech, the minister also revealed a plot by England, the U.S., and the Zionist regime to design a global sedition in the field of sports during the World Cup in Qatar.

He said: There were plots for asylum and Iranian athletes that failed.

Further, the Minister of Sports clarified the expenses and financial statements of the big football clubs of the country and the placement of the financial statements on the codal website, related to the Tehran Stock Exchange (TSE).

"The MPs were not satisfied with Sports Minister Sajjadi's answer about the mismanagement situation in professional sports, especially football, and he received a yellow card from the parliament," said the agency.

This was the second yellow card of Majlis to Sajjadi and according to Majlis internal regulations, any minister who gets three yellow cards will face impeachment.

## Iraq Urges Deepening Ties With Iran

BAGHDAD (IP) - Iraq's finance minister called for deepening and expanding relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Iraqi Finance Minister Taif Sami Mohammed in a meeting with Mohammed Kazem Al-Sadegh, the Iranian ambassador to Baghdad, pointed to the depth of relations between Iraq and Iran, saying: "The Iraqi government wants to expand relations with Iran in all fields, especially financial and economic ones."

Appreciating the increasing efforts of the Islamic Republic of Iran in expanding mutual relations and coordination with Iraq, the Minister of Finance of Iraq considered these efforts to develop bilateral relations and open a new perspective of cooperation between the two countries.

Iran's ambassador to Iraq also praised the efforts and diligence of the finance minister of this country in order to strengthen the ties of friendship between the two sides.

The Iranian diplomat also emphasized the continued cooperation and partnership of the two countries in various fields in line with the interests of the two nations of Iran and Iraq.

Among the Arab countries of West Asia, Iraq has the most cultural and religious affinities with Iran.

Having the longest border among the neighbors (about 1258 km of land border and 351 km of water border), racial, historical, linguistic ties, religious commonalities and the existence of threats and common security and economic interests are considered important points in Iran-Iraq relations.

Later Iranian in a meeting with the Iraqi Minister of Transport Razzaq Mohibis Al-Saadawi discussed developing Iran-Iraq bilateral cooperation.

Al-e Sadegh met and held talks with Al-Saadawi to discuss and exchange views on cooperation in various fields of transportation between the two countries.

Pointing out the importance of the transportation issue in the development of economic relations between the two countries, the parties emphasized the need for solving the existing problems and increasing bilateral consultations in the areas related to transportation.

## Tehran University Ready to Admit Female Afghan Students

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Head of the University of Tehran announced readiness to admit female Afghan students, saying that the admission depends on their scientific conditions and academic records.

Addressing a gathering of Afghan girls, Mohammad Moghimi described University of Tehran's special attention to increase admission of students from Resistance countries, especially Afghanistan and Iraq, in line with Martyr Soleimani's aims.

He also referred to the reduction in the admission fee for Afghan students.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Moghimi criticized the Taliban for their recent decision on depriving Afghan girls of education.

Extreme views are not acceptable in this regard, he stated.

Earlier, Rasoul Mousavi, an aide to the Iranian foreign minister offered Iran's stance on a suspension of academic education for all female students in Afghanistan.

Meanwhile, Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesman Nasser Kanaani expressed regret over the decision by the Taliban in Afghanistan to suspend access to universities for female students.

## VP Meets With Saudi FM to Discuss Tehran-Riyadh Talks

TEHRAN (MNA) - In a meeting in Brasilia, the Iranian Vice President for Parliamentary Affairs discussed the continuation of the Tehran-Riyadh talks with the Saudi Foreign Minister.

Seyed Mohammad Hosseini met with Saudi Foreign Minister, Faisal bin Farhan on the sidelines of the swear-in ceremony of Brazil's President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva.

In this meeting, Hosseini stressed to the Saudi Foreign Minister of the necessity of the continuation of the Tehran-Riyadh talks initiated by Iraq.

The Saudi Foreign Minister, for his part, said that Riyadh is determined to discuss the existing concerns one by one in order to reach a conclusion. He said the type of relations between the two countries has an impact on the region.

The Iranian vice president held different talks on the sidelines of the visit to Brazil.

TEHRAN (IQNA) - Head of Iran's Hajj and Pilgrimage Organization

Seyed Sadeq Hosseini will travel to Saudi Arabia for talks on the participation of Iranian pilgrims in this year's Hajj.

Speaking to reporters, Hosseini said the first round of negotiations with Saudi Arabia was held via video conference some three weeks ago at the level of the deputies of the organizations and the Saudi Hajj and Umrah ministry.

He said the next round of talks will be in person, noting that he will visit the Arab country on January 7 at the invitation of the Saudi Hajj ministry.

Hosseini said the Islamic Republic expects a rise in the Hajj quota for Iranians.

Noting that according to an approval of the Organization of Islamic

## Iranian Official Due in Saudi Arabia for Talks on Hajj

As for resumption of Umrah trips for Iranians, Hosseini said Iran has

always been pursuing the case and has sent letters to the Saudi Hajj and Umrah ministry in this regard over the past two months but has not received an answer yet.

Figures show some 5.8 million Iranians are on a waiting list for travelling to Saudi Arabia to perform Umrah.

They have been waiting for years for their turn.

Iran stopped sending Umrah pilgrims to Saudi Arabia after two Iranian teenage boys were harassed in an airport in the Saudi city of Jeddah in March 2015.

Until then, Iran sent between 600,000 and 800,000 pilgrims to the kingdom for Umrah every year.

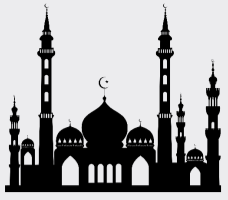
Cooperation, one percent of each Muslim country's population can take part in the annual Hajj pilgrimage, he said that it is thus predicted that the Hajj quota for Iranian pilgrims will be around 90,000 this year.

According to the official, some 1.1 million Iranians are on a waiting list to take part in Hajj.

He said the preparations for participation in this year's Hajj are underway and works related to renting hotels in Mecca and Medina began last week.

Some 39,600 Iranians took part in the 2022 Hajj, which was held in July after two years of suspension due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Hajj is a pilgrimage to Mecca that every able-bodied and financially able Muslim is obliged to undertake at least once during their lifetime.



## PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	12:09
■ Evening (Maghreb)	17:24
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	05:45
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	07:14

102. The Day when the Trumpet will be sounded: that Day,  
We shall gather the sinful, blear-eyed (with terror).  
103. In whispers will they consult each other: "Yet tarried not longer than ten (Days);  
Surah 20. Ta-ha ( 102 - 103 )

## Seoul Welcomes Cooperation With on Water Resources Management

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

**TEHRAN – Ambassador of South Korea to Tehran Yun Kanghyeon says Iran and South Korea have good capacities and vast fields for cooperation in the field of water resources management and using the modern knowhow in this field.**

During his visit to the 18th Exhibition on Water and Wastewater, Yun expressed hope the cooperation between Iran and South Korea in the water industry and related technology would be reinforced, adding that today no country is immune regarding water shortage or tension, and in some countries the problem emerges as water shortage and draught and in some other countries it happens in the form of floods and overflow of rivers.

He pointed to the problems related to the water shortage in South Korea, stressing that in this problem Iran in comparison to other countries has faced lower problems, noting that water resources management in South Korea is done with more care.

Yun went on to say that the issue of water resources is a vast issue and it includes from management of natural precipitation like water and snow to wastewater and surface waters, water desalination, wastewater treatment systems and electricity production.

He added that many fields are under impact of water resources management, adding that accordingly, Iran and South Korea have capacities and vast fields for creating cooperation in the water resources management.



Yun then pointed to the resources management consumption in South Korea and added that the issue of water resources management is very important and it needs whopping investment in this field for creating required infrastructures and this multiplies the importance of interference in the water resources management by the governments.

He said that he visited the exhibition to get more information in the field of water resources management and the related technologies and emphasized that considering the current condition in the field of water in the world even one drop of water should not be wasted.

Yun emphasized using modern technologies for water resources management and notified that conventional technologies have lost their efficiency to much extent and for this reason South Korea enjoys capabilities of the knowledge-based companies for the water resources management and these centers are concentrated on new technologies and there are huge capacities for cooperation between Ira and South Korea in this field.

## Felicitation on Anniversary of Foundation of HOSCO

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – The CEO of Hormozgan Steel Company (HOSCO) on the occasion of January 2 and anniversary of foundation of the company in a message felicitated the day and conveyed its wishes to the personnel of the company.



Mr. Ataollah Maroufkhani in his message felicitated this occasion and said that January 2 shows us the outcome of collective efforts of experts and industrialists of our Islamic Iran who could play their role in national development with using all capacities and establishment of the company.

He added that it is honor that they celebrate the 11th anniversary of the company and it is also an honor that the company has played its role in economic development of Hormozgan Province in recent years, adding that the company will not spare any effort to materialize its goals.

He also said that the outcome of tireless efforts of the personnel in the company is successive record-breakings in production in the company.

He then congratulated the staff for their efforts and expressed hope they can set more records and materialize the outlook of the company which is completion of production and to remain among top brands.

## NPC Eyes Average Value of Iran Petchems at \$5k/t



TEHRAN (Shana) - The CEO of the National Petrochemical Company (NPC) stressed that all petrochemical industry activists should bring their abilities to the field to complete its value chain, and said: "We should bring the average value of petrochemical products to at least 4,500 to 5,000 dollars per ton."

Morteza Shahmirzaei stated at a conference to promote credit sales of products in polymer petrochemical companies that credit sales had already been assigned: "The performance of petrochemical companies to supply 25% of products in the form of a credit is regularly reported by the management of downstream industries of the National Petrochemical Company and will be included in the performance indicators of the production complexes."

Explaining the state of the country's petrochemical industry, he said: "We hope that with the help of all colleagues, activists and those interested in investing in the petrochemical industry, we will complete the basic steps for the rapid development of the downstream units in order to achieve its real and valuable position."

The NPC CEO emphasized that the Company supports all production units of the petrochemical industry, especially the units that complete the value chain, and added: "Our goal is to complete the value chain. All the activists of this industry must bring all their abilities to the field to complete the missing links of the petrochemical industry."

The Deputy Minister of Petroleum for Petrochemical Affairs continued: "Everyone should work hard in this field so that Iran, despite having rich oil and gas reserves, achieves its true and deserved position in the world's petrochemical industries."

## State Banks Raise Interest Rate by 7% to 25%

TEHRAN (PresSTV) - State banks have raised their interest rate by 7% to 25%, according to a report published in local media and more than a week after senior government authorities indicated they plan to hike the rates to stem inflation.

The report by Tasnim news agency said that state banks in the capital Tehran had already started offering the 25% interest on deposits while charging rates of 24% to 25% for lending.

There has been no official confirmation of the new rates from the Central Bank of Iran (CBI) or from the Iranian finance ministry (MEFA). Any increase in Iran's official interest rate, which is currently at 18 to 20 percent, should be approved by the country's High Council on Money and Credit which consist of senior CBI and MEFA officials.

The reported increase in interest rates in Iran come more than a week after the CBI authorized banks to issue deposit certificates with a rate of 23%. The decision was widely regarded in economic circles as a prelude to raising the official interest rate in the country.

CBI's new chief Mohammad Reza Farzin, who was appointed to the job earlier this week, has defended plans introduced by his predecessor Ali Salehabadi to raise interest rates.

Farzin told state TV on Friday that the CBI would count on higher rates as a means of controlling high levels of inflation in Iran. Official government figures released last month show that consumer prices in the country had risen by 45% in the year to late December.

## Non-Oil Exports From Chabahar Port Grow

TEHRAN (MNA) – The non-oil exports from Chabahar Port grow 3.5 times higher during first nine months in Iranian calendar compared to the same period last year, according to the Sistan and Baluchistan's Ports and Maritime Organization (PMO).

The director-general of Sistan and Baluchistan's Ports and Maritime Organization (PMO) Qassem Askari Nassab said that the non-oil exports from Chabahar Port grow 3.5 times higher during the first nine months of the year 1401 in the Iranian calendar (March 21-December 31 2022) compared to the same period last year.

Askarinasab added that loading and unloading operations have also had a 5.5 percent increase.

The enhanced coordination between the Islamic Republic

of Iran Shipping Line (IRISL) and the Ports and Maritime Organization (PMO) has led to the launch of regular lines from and to the Chabahar Port and an increase in container operations. Moreover, the costs of container operations have decreased along the routes of Southeast Asia, India, and the Persian Gulf countries, he added.

In this sense, the first 6,500 TEU container ship from Southeast Asia arrived at Shahid Beheshti Port in Chabahar on December 31, he said.

Provision of good services for all commodities, reducing the costs, and increasing freight and ship transports in Chabahar are among the top priorities of Chabahar Port for optimal use of current infrastructures and development of marine businesses, he added.

## Iran Targets \$3b in Annual Trade With Armenia

TEHRAN (IRNA) - A member of the Program, Budget, and Accounting Commission of the Iranian Parliament said that Iran has targeted \$3 billion in annual trade with Armenia, adding that Iran's foreign exchange revenues from trade with Armenia doubled against last year (according to the Iranian calendar).

Behrouz Mohebbi said on Tuesday that Iran's sale of oil and gas condensate is in very good condition and is almost doubled in comparison with the same period.

He added that it is expected that Iran's foreign exchange income could help improve the current conditions of the country and reduce the problems.

This member of the Program, Budget and Accounting Commission of the Iranian Parliament in his remarks added that the foreign trade exchange with Armenia was about \$270 million but in President Ebrahim Raisi's government, it has raised to \$700 million. Mohebbi said that Iran targets \$3 billion in annual trade with Armenia.

## 100 New Wagons to Join Combined Shipping Fleet of IRISL

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – The Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Line Group (IRISL) signed an agreement with a domestic company for manufacture of 100 freight wagons while IRISL as one of the main executive arms of North-South Corridor will be able with joining of these wagons to have transit time and the cost of transportation.

According to the reports, the agreement for manufacture of 100 26-meter flat freighter wagons was signed between Combined Shipping Company of IRISL Group and one domestic wagon-manufacturer of the

company by the managing directors of both sides.

In the ceremony for signing the agreement which was held in the presence of senior officials of both parties, the managing director of Combined Shipping Company of IRISL Group addressing the participants said that for the first time 26-meter flat wagons with capability of transporting two 40-foot containers enter the rail fleet of Combined Shipping Company, adding that IRISL Group as the main and executive arm of the North-South Corridor will be able to cut the transit time and have the price of transportation cost.

Captain Ebrahimzadeh said that the value of the signed

agreement with this domestic manufacturer for manufacture and purchase of 100 wagons is around 310b tomans. He added that IRISL Group so far has ordered manufacture of 200 freighter wagons to the domestic companies in line with its policy of supporting the domestic production and national economic boom.

He went on to say that with manufacture of 100 wagons, around 300 to 400 direct jobs will be created. He said that Pars Wagon Company of Arak is to manufacture the wagons in 10 months, adding that the company has also promised to deliver the wagons sooner than the schedule.



Ebrahimzadeh also pointed to receiving 10 high side wagons from this domestic producer in December, adding that 15 more wagons are ready to be delivered by the company which will soon join the fleet.

He reiterated that with joining of these 200 wagons to the rail fleet, Combined Shipping Company of IRISL will turn into one of the biggest owners of rail companies of the country.

## 14 Dead in Armed Attack On Prison in Mexico

MEXICO CITY (Reuters) - Mexican authorities said at least 14 people died in an armed attack at a prison in the northern border city Juarez and two more died during a later armed aggression elsewhere in the city.

The Chihuahua state prosecutor said in a statement that among those who died in the prison attack were 10 security personnel and four inmates, while another 13 were hurt and at least 24 escaped.

It was not immediately clear who carried out the attack. The prosecutor said initial investigations found the attackers arrived at around 7 a.m. local time at the prison in armored vehicles and opened fire.



## North Korea's Kim Sacks No. 2 Military Official

SEOUL (Dispatches) - North Korea has sacked Pak Jong Chon, the second most powerful military official after leader Kim Jong Un, state media reported.

Pak, vice chairman of the Central Military Commission of the ruling Workers' Party and a secretary of the party's Central Committee, was replaced by Ri Yong Gil at the committee's annual meeting last week, the official KCNA news agency said.

No reason for the change was given. Pyongyang regularly revamps its leadership and the year-end party gathering has often been used to announce personnel reshuffles and major policy decisions.



## Anger in Russia as Scores of Troops Killed in Ukraine's Strike



KYIV (Dispatches) - Russia acknowledged that scores of its troops were killed in one of the Ukraine war's deadliest strikes, drawing demands from nationalist bloggers for commanders to be punished for housing soldiers alongside an ammunition dump.

Russia's defense ministry said 63 soldiers had died in the fiery blast which destroyed a temporary barracks at a former vocational college in Makiivka, twin city of the Russian-occupied regional capital of Donetsk.

It said the accommodation had been hit by four rockets fired from U.S.-made HIMARS launchers, claiming two rockets had been shot down. Kyiv said the Russian death toll was in the hundreds, though pro-Russian officials called this an exaggeration.

Russian military bloggers, many with hundreds of thousands of followers, said the huge destruction was a result of storing ammunition in the same building as a barracks, despite commanders knowing it was within range of Ukrainian rockets.

Separately, Ukraine said on Monday it had shot down all 39 drones Russia had launched in an unprecedented third straight night of air strikes against civilian targets in Kyiv and other cities.

Ukrainian officials said their success proved that Russia's tactic in recent months of raining down air strikes to knock out Ukraine's energy infrastructure was increasingly a failure as Kyiv beefs up its air defenses.

Unverified footage posted online of the aftermath of the Makiivka strike on the Russian barracks showed a huge building reduced to smoking rubble.

Igor Girkin, a former commander of pro-Russian troops in east Ukraine who has emerged as one of the highest profile Russian nationalist military bloggers, said the death toll was in the hundreds, later editing his post to include wounded in that figure.

Ammunition had been stored at the site and Russian military equipment there was uncamouflaged, he said.

Another nationalist blogger, Rybar, said around 70 soldiers were confirmed dead and more than 100 wounded.

"What happened in Makiivka is horrible," wrote Archangel Spetznaz Z, another Russian military blogger with more than 700,000 followers on Telegram.

"Who came up with the idea to place personnel in large numbers in one building, where even a fool understands that even if they hit with artillery, there will be many wounded or dead?" he wrote. Commanders "couldn't care less" about ammunition stored in disarray on the battlefield, he said.

"Each mistake has a name."

Russia's acknowledgement of scores of deaths in one incident was almost without precedent. Moscow rarely releases figures for its casualties, and when it does the figures are typically low - it acknowledged just one death from among a crew of hundreds when Ukraine sank its flagship cruiser Moskva in April.

Russia has seen in the new year with nightly attacks on Ukrainian cities, including Kyiv, hundreds of kilometres from the front lines. The nightly attacks mark a change in tactics, after months in which Moscow usually spaced such strikes around a week apart.

After firing dozens of missiles on Dec. 31, Russia launched dozens of Iranian-made Shahed drones on Jan. 1 and Jan. 2. But Kyiv said on Monday it had shot down all 39 drones in the latest wave, including 22 shot down over the capital.

## Israeli Forces Kill Two Palestinian Men in Occupied West Bank

RAMALLAH (Dispatches) - The Israeli army has killed two Palestinian men during a raid on a village near the city of Jenin in the northern occupied West Bank.

Mohammad Samer Hoshiyeh, 22, and Fouad Mohammad Abed, 25, were shot dead early on Monday in Kufr Dan, northwest of Jenin, the Palestinian Ministry of Health said.

At least three others were injured during the raid, including one in critical condition, the ministry added.

Confrontations and armed clashes broke out with Israeli forces late on Sunday night after they raided Kufr Dan to demolish the homes of two Palestinians killed in a shootout at an Israeli military checkpoint in Jenin that led to the killing of an Israeli soldier, Bar Falah, several months ago.

Ahmad Ayman Abed and Abdulrahman Hani Abed were shot dead at the Jalameh checkpoint, the main entry point between the northern occupied West Bank and Israel, on September 14.

Israeli forces said in a statement on that they had been conducting operations in Kufr Dan to demolish the homes of the two men, and said that they had been attacked with gunfire, rocks and firebombs.

Hamas, the Palestinian group that rules Gaza, claimed Fouad Mohammed Abed as its member.

Videos shared by local media showed one of the homes being blown up using explosives.

Similar images showed the demolition of a second home in the same way.

Such home demolitions are regarded as "collective punishment" by Palestinians and human rights organizations.

The large-scale Israeli military raid, which included special forces, began on Sunday night and continued until Monday morning.

The two men shot dead on Monday are the first Palestinians to be killed by Israeli forces in the occupied West Bank this year, as a result of an ongoing Israeli military campaign of intensified raids and killings for almost a year.

The United Nations (UN) marked 2022 as the deadliest year for Palestinians in the West Bank in 16 years.

Israeli forces killed at least 171 Palestinians in the West Bank and occupied East Jerusalem in 2022, including more than 30 children. At least 9,000 others have been injured.

Civilians confronting the Israeli army during raids and uninvolved bystanders have been killed, as well as Palestinian fighters in targeted assassinations and during armed clashes.

Following a string of individual attacks carried out by Palestinians in Israel that began in March, the Israeli army launched a campaign called "Break the Wave" that has included near-daily raids, mass arrests and killings in the West Bank, with a focus on Jenin and Nablus, where Palestinian armed resistance has grown more organized over the past year.



## Seoul, Washington Discussing Nuclear Exercises

SEOUL (Dispatches) - South Korea and the United States are discussing possible joint exercises using U.S. nuclear assets, South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol said, as North Korean leader Kim Jong Un labelled the South its "undoubted enemy" in flaring cross-border tensions.

Yoon's comments, in a newspaper interview published on Monday, come after he called for "war preparation" with an "overwhelming" capability, following a year marked by the North's record number of missile tests, and the intrusion of North Korean drones into the South last week.

"The nuclear weapons belong to the United States, but planning, information sharing, exercises and training should be jointly conducted by South Korea and the United States," Yoon said in the interview with the Chosun Ilbo newspaper.

The newspaper quoted Yoon as saying the joint planning and exercises would be aimed at a more effective implementation of the U.S. "extended deterrence,"

and that Washington was also "quite positive" about the idea.

The term "extended deterrence" means the ability of the U.S. military, particularly its nuclear forces, to deter attacks on U.S. allies.

A Pentagon spokesperson said: "We have nothing to announce today," when asked about Yoon's comments, adding that the alliance remains "rock-solid."

Yoon's remarks were published a day after North Korean state media reported that its leader Kim called for developing new intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) and an "exponential increase" of the country's nuclear arsenal.

At a meeting of the ruling Workers' Party meeting last week, Kim said South Korea has now become the North's "undoubted enemy" and rolled out new military goals, hinting at another year of intensive weapons tests and tension.

Inter-Korean ties have long been testy but have been even more frayed since Yoon took office in May, promising a tougher stance on the North.



## Tunisian Transport Strike Adds More Woes for President Saied

TUNIS (Dispatches) - Metro and bus traffic in the Tunisian capital ground to a halt after employees of the state transport company held a strike over delays in the payment of wages and bonuses.

The strike highlights the financial problems faced by public companies on the verge of bankruptcy, while the government of President Kais Saied suffers its worst financial crisis.

"The union is protesting against the delay in the payment of wages and bonuses," said Hayat Chamtouri, a spokesperson for the company.

"The financial situation in the company is really difficult," she added.

The transport strike is a show of strength for the powerful UGTT union, which has pledged to hold a series of protests.

The union, which has one million members, has approved a two-day strike by air, land and sea transport workers on January 25 and 26 to protest against what it called "the government's marginalisation of public companies".

The strike sparked anger among thousands of people struggling to find transport in the capital.

"Today, we do not find milk, oil, sugar, or coffee. Also now we do not find buses that take us to work. Tunisia has become an unbearable hell," said Nejia, a woman waiting at a bus station.

In the poor Intilaka neighborhood, people blocked roads to protest against the strike. The North African country is grappling with eye-watering public debt, shortages of goods from sugar to petrol and high inflation.

Tunisia is seeking a \$1.9bn loan from the International Monetary Fund in exchange for unpopular reforms, including spending cuts, the restructuring of public companies and reductions in energy and food subsidies.

The economy minister, Samir Saeed, said last month that he expects Tunisia to face a difficult year with an inflation rate that will exceed 10 percent.

## EU Parliament Launches Urgent Procedure to Lift Two MEPs' Immunity



BRUSSELS (Dispatches) - The European Parliament announced its chief, Roberta Metsola, had launched "an urgent procedure" to lift the immunity of two MEPs amid a corruption scandal linked to Qatar.

The parliament did not give the lawmakers' names but said it was in response to an investigation by Belgian law enforcement into the graft allegations.

Sources briefed on the Belgian probe told AFP the two MEPs targeted by the procedure were an Italian, Andrea Cozzolino, and a Belgian, Marc Tarabella.

Both are members of the centre-left Social and Democrats grouping in the parliament.

The development follows a string of Belgian police raids in December on the addresses of MEPs, former MEPs and lobbyists that turned up a total 1.5 million euros (\$1.6 million) in cash.

There are suspicions that the money was tied to alleged graft in the European Parliament benefiting Qatar.

Qatar denies having a role in any wrongdoing.

The scandal has shaken the European Parliament, with one of Metsola's vice presidents, Greek MEP Eva Kaili, among four suspects arrested in the raids in Belgium.

Through her lawyer, Kaili has denied knowing of the existence of 150,000 euros found in her home and asserted she is innocent.

A Belgian judge determined that parliamentary immunity did not apply in Kaili's case because she was allegedly caught red-handed. She remains in custody.

Tarabella's home was searched by Belgian authorities on December 10, according to a law enforcement source.

Metsola, tweeting about her procedure to lift the two MEPs' immunity, said: "There will be no impunity. None."

The parliamentary speaker has sought to frame the scandal as an outside attack on European democracy.

She has also vowed reforms to clean up the parliament, including by strengthening whistle-blower protections, banning all "unofficial friendship groups" with foreign governments, and increasing vetting of MEPs finances.

# Why Everyday Stress Could Be the Key to a Healthy Old Age

LONDON (Dispatches) - Few words in the English language conjure up more negative emotions than stress. The mere mention of those six letters might elicit mental images of looming work deadlines, unpaid bills, the pressure of exams or tense family Christmases, to list just a few scenarios.

But what if I told you that stress can also be positive? That just as it can harm us, it also plays a key role in strengthening our immune system, forging connections in our brain that improve mental performance and building the resilience we need to navigate our way through the vagaries of life.

This first came to light through the work of an American psychiatrist called Firdaus Dhabhar, then a researcher at the Rockefeller University, New York, who was studying the connection between short-term stress and the immune system as part of the fight-or-flight response. In the mid-1990s, stress was viewed as almost unanimously bad for us, but to Dhabhar this was illogical. From a Darwinian perspective, the survival instincts of our animal ancestors would have been honed through repeated brushes with danger.

"It does not make sense that stress should always be a bad, harmful, negative entity," he says. "The fight-or-flight stress response is essential for survival. A gazelle needs this response to escape the jaws and claws of a lion, just as a lion needs it to catch its meal. Mother Nature gave us this response to help us survive and thrive, not to kill us."

Over the past 20 years, Dhabhar and others have shown that bouts of short-term stress can aid us in the modern world. A Ted Talk by Dhabhar, now a professor at the University of Miami, on the positive effects of stress has garnered 30,000 views on YouTube.

For example, the tension of an upcoming race helps prime the cardiovascular and musculoskeletal systems of athletes for optimum performance, while surveys have even found that the stress of needing to get work done alongside childcare means that parents are likely to be more productive home workers than singletons.

Both mild-to-moderate physical and mental stress stimulate the production of chemicals in the blood called interleukins, activating the immune system and making it more able to fight off infections, while stress can even affect the development of children before they are born. Babies born to mothers who experienced mild everyday stress during pregnancy had more advanced developmental skills by the age of two, compared with the children of mothers who had enjoyed a relatively relaxed, unstressful pregnancy.

There are also various ways to think about stress. As well as the pressure and tension inflicted by life events, different forms of exercise can be viewed as stress for the muscles, while various types of cognitive challenges can be considered as stress for the mind.



In January 2017, the French cyclist Robert Marchand made headlines by setting a new age group world record at a velodrome in Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines. What was particularly remarkable about Marchand's performance is that he had turned 105 a month earlier and his efforts made him the first centenarian ever to demonstrate improved cardiovascular health with age.

Exercise physiologists found that Marchand, who had begun serious competitive cycling in retirement at the age of 68, had an aerobic capacity for exercise – the gold standard means of measuring cardiovascular fitness – comparable to men aged 42 to 61, half a century younger than him.

Scientists researching healthy ageing now regard him as an indicator of what can be possible if we continue to apply manageable stress to our muscles, blood vessels and heart as we age. But most humans are not like Marchand. Many of us become progressively inactive as the years tick by, which exacerbates any age-related changes already taking place. As a result, if our muscles are not being stressed, their fibres slowly atrophy and we grow progressively weaker. The interaction between the nervous system and the muscles also becomes less efficient without regular use, slowing our reaction times and making us more vulnerable to falls.

"A muscle which is not activated really rapidly deteriorates in so many ways," says Casper Søndenbroe, a scientist at Copenhagen University who studies the human neuromuscular system. "Muscles need to have this stimulus in order to maintain equilibrium. If you don't have a strategy going into the latter parts of your life, when you reach 70 or 80 you're likely to have some limitations with daily living because the functionality isn't there."

To illustrate this, Andy Philp, who heads the biology of ageing programme at the Centenary Institute in Sydney, explains that if an adult male spends five to seven days lying inactive in a hospital bed,

they will lose about half a kilogram of muscle mass. But the difference between a 30-year-old and an 80-year-old is that the younger person's body can recover and regenerate the lost muscle much more quickly.

Søndenbroe has found that some forms of exercise-related stress are better than others for preserving muscle mass in later life. While some age-related deterioration is inevitable, as Marchand showed, it can be kept in check. One of the best ways of doing so is through resistance-based workouts, which involve training the muscles with weights or bands. Cycling is also considered a form of resistance training. "We've proved many times that this increases muscle size and muscle strength, so it is really effective," says Søndenbroe.

Studies have also shown that people who remain active through sports or moderate exercise during middle age and later life are also less vulnerable to muscle decline.

Because of this, Søndenbroe is keen to urge people to do whatever kind of exercise they enjoy most. "The most important thing is that the best exercise is the one you actually get done," he says. "So if you don't like running high-intensity intervals, you shouldn't do that. Find something that you enjoy."

Exercise does not stress the muscles alone: it is also a workout for the central nervous system, and even the mind.

There is a two-way interaction between the muscles and nerves that extend out of the spinal cord. When they contract, muscles send signals back towards the motor neurons, long, spindly cells that control motion, keeping them active and functioning efficiently. The increased blood flow aids with the removal of tau proteins – associated with Alzheimer's disease – from the brain and cerebrospinal fluid, as well as stimulating neurons to produce a chemical called brain-derived neurotrophic factor, which protects neighbouring brain cells.

We know that our brain size decreases at a rate of about 5% a decade after the age of 40, with the rate of decline increasing once we pass 70. However, this shrinkage slows in older people who do regular aerobic exercise – forms of physical activity that get the blood pumping around the body, such as brisk walking, running, swimming and biking – to the extent that they have four fewer years of brain ageing.

Just as Marchand demonstrated that physical decline and frailty do not always have to come with age, studies of centenarians and supercentenarians – those who live past 110 – have illustrated that age-related cognitive decline is not always inevitable. Joyce Shaffer, a psychiatrist and behavioural scientist at the University of Washington, in Seattle, says a range of case studies between 100 and 118 demonstrated similar or even superior cognitive abilities compared with the average 50- to 60-year-old.



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## Indonesia's Dec. Inflation Inches Up to 5.51% y/y

JAKARTA (Reuters) - Indonesia's inflation rose slightly in December and remained above the central bank's target range for the seventh straight month, official data showed.

The headline annual inflation rate picked up to 5.51% in December, compared with 5.42% in November and 5.39% expected by analysts polled by Reuters. Bank Indonesia's inflation target range is 2% to 4%.

The annual core inflation rate, which excludes government-controlled prices and volatile food prices, inched higher to 3.36% from 3.30% a month earlier, while the Reuters poll had expected a rate of 3.39%.



## Turkey Logs Record Exports of Over \$254b in 2022

ANKARA (Dispatches) - Turkey managed to end 2022 with the highest export figures ever despite global challenges that clouded the trade outlook, the country's president announced.

Outbound shipments reached \$254.2 billion (TL 4.75 trillion) in 2022, marking a 12.9% year-over-year increase, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan told a meeting in Istanbul to announce the preliminary trade figures. "This is the highest ever level recorded in the history of the Republic. Our goal is to ensure that Turkey assumes its place among the top 10 countries with the highest exports in the world," said Erdoğan.

Exports in 2021 ended at a record \$225.4 billion, mainly driven by high foreign demand and orders that stemmed from supply bottlenecks and soaring freight costs during the coronavirus pandemic. Government and economists expected the figure to reach \$250 billion in 2022. "We increased our exports exactly sevenfold from \$36 billion when we set out 20 years ago," Erdoğan said.

On the other hand, Turkey's imports rose 34.3% year-over-year in 2022 to \$364.4 billion, revealed Trade Ministry data. The primary reason has been soaring energy costs. The country's trade deficit thus widened 138.4% from the previous year to \$110.19 billion in 2022. The export-import coverage ratio decreased to nearly 70% in 2022 from 83% in 2021.

In December, the trade shortfall widened 52% from a year earlier to \$10.381 billion, with exports up 3.1% to \$22.92 billion and imports rising 14.6% to \$33.30 billion, according to the data.

Exports have been one of the main drivers of Türkiye's economic growth and hit record-high volumes throughout 2022. Yet, a global slowdown has affected foreign demand, notably among Türkiye's largest trade partners, spearheaded by Europe.

Germany was the top export market in December as it received about \$1.81 billion worth of Turkish goods, a 1.6% year-over-year increase, the data showed. The United States followed with \$1.38 billion, an increase of 9% versus a year ago. Russia stood third with \$1.31 billion, with shipments rocketing by 122.3% from December 2021.

Most of the imports last month came in from Russia at nearly \$5.3 billion, a rise of 56.3% from a year ago. Imports from China rose 15.5% to \$3.64 billion, while those from Switzerland jumped by a whopping 1,245% on annual basis to \$2.52 billion, according to the data.

Erdoğan said shipments to the European Union increased by 12% in 2022, while some 10,000 companies completed their first exports in the same period.

Trade Minister Mehmet Muş hailed what he said was a historic success that came at a time of unprecedented global challenges, led by disruptions in supply chains, inflation, Russia's invasion of Ukraine and soaring energy and commodity prices.

## India's Factories Ended 2022 on a Strong Note

BENGALURU (Dispatches) - India's manufacturing industry ended 2022 on a solid footing as business conditions improved at the fastest rate in over two years while growth in new orders and output accelerated, a business survey showed.

The manufacturing purchasing managers' index, compiled by S&P Global, rose to 57.8 in December from November's 55.7, better than a Reuters poll median forecast for 54.3.

December's reading was the highest since October 2020 and above the 50-mark that separates growth from contraction for an 18th straight month. The survey was conducted December 6-19. Monday's data cemented the view Asia's third-largest economy is better placed than many other emerging economies to weather the impact of a potential global recession.

"Following a promising start to 2022, the Indian manufacturing industry maintained a strong performance as time progressed, wrapping the year with the best expansion in production seen since November 2021," noted Pollyanna De Lima, economics associate director at S&P Global Market.

"Demand strength took center stage among the reasons provided by firms for improvements in many measures. Additional materials were purchased and extra workers hired as companies sought to supplement production and maintain healthy levels of inventories. Input stocks rose at a near-record pace."

While both new orders and output continued to grow strongly exports rose at the slowest pace in five months as slowing global demand weighed on exports. Rising domestic demand, however, did little to improve conditions in the labor market as the rate of job creation eased to a three-month low.



While input price inflation remained relatively muted in December, the prices manufacturers charged for their goods rose at the quickest pace since mid-2022.

That might keep overall inflation above the Reserve Bank of India's medium-term target of 4% over the coming months, curtailing the chances of policy easing by the central bank anytime soon.

Optimism about the next 12 months was little changed, remaining close to historical highs. The index only dipped from November when it was the highest in over seven-and-a-half years. "While some may question the resilience of the Indian manufacturing industry in 2023 amid a deteriorating outlook for the global economy, manufacturers were strongly confident in their ability to lift production from present levels," added De Lima.

## Bangladesh Projected to Be 20th Largest Economy by 2037

DHAKA (Dispatches) - Bangladesh's long-term outlook looks brighter as a leading London-based think tank projects the country to become the 20th largest economy out of 191 countries by 2037, owing to its macroeconomic stability, strong remittance flows and a robust export market.

The Centre for Economics and Business Research (CEBR) last year projected that Bangladesh would become the 24th largest economy by 2036.

The CEBR disclosed its latest findings in its annual World Economic League Table (WELT 2023) report on Monday, stating that Bangladesh has been among the world's fastest growing economies over the last decade.

The country is forecasted to place 35th in 2023, reaching 26th spot in 2027, before eventually jumping to 20th in 2037, according to the latest report.

This represents an economic boom during the ongoing, as well as, the next decade.

Previously, the nation held 57th, 58th, and 42th positions in 2007, 2012, and 2017 respectively, indicating an upward trend in economic performance and consistency in growth.

India has been holding the top position in the South Asian region since the first edition of the report came out in 2009, and is forecasted to become the third \$10 trillion economy in 2035 and the world's third largest by 2032.

Bangladesh is currently the second largest economy in the region, says the report, and will continue to keep its position till 2037 with a GDP size of \$1.628 billion at current prices (currently \$429 billion).

Pakistan (43rd) holds the third position followed by Sri Lanka (75th), Nepal (101st), the Maldives (152nd), and Bhutan (164th) in South Asia.

The US (1st), China (2nd), and Japan (3rd) are currently the top three economies in the world, and it is forecasted that China is now not set to overtake the US as the world's largest economy until 2036 at the earliest – six years later than expected due to the country's zero Covid policy and rising trade tensions with the West.

The think tank has classified Bangladesh as a lower middle-income country for 2022, lauding Bangladesh government's efforts to maintain a low debt-to-GDP ratio, while operating a 5.1% fiscal deficit in 2022.

Moreover, it mentions the strong macroeconomic fundamentals, infrastructure improvements and enhanced digitalization that has enabled the country to move towards post-pandemic recovery.

The output growth in the fiscal 2020-21 was estimated to stand at 6.9%, after which growth is expected to have accelerated to 7.2% in the fiscal 2021-22.

The CEBR expects an average growth rate of 6.4% between the fiscals 2022-23 and 2026-27.

## Sri Lanka Freezes Recruitment In Fresh Austerity Drive



COLOMBO (Dispatches) - Sri Lanka began a fresh austerity drive today, freezing government recruitment as new taxes and higher electricity prices kicked in with authorities trying to secure an IMF bailout.

The Indian Ocean island nation needs to achieve debt sustainability as a precondition to a US\$2.9 billion bailout from the Washington-based lender after it defaulted in April as its economy went into crisis.

The IMF has also asked Colombo to trim its 1.5 million strong public service, sharply raise taxes and sell off loss-making state enterprises.

A record 20,000 civil servants retired at the end of December — eight times as many as usual according to the public administration ministry — after President Ranil Wickremesinghe reduced their retirement age from 65 to 60.

They will not be replaced, the ministry said.

Doubled personal income and corporate taxes kicked in on New Year's Day to shore up state revenue, while electricity prices went up 65 percent after a 75 percent tariff increase in August.

Wickremesinghe, who came to power after Gotabaya Rajapaksa fled the country and resigned in July following months of protests, said the crisis was not yet over despite the restoration of fuel, food and fertiliser supplies.

"Our problems have not been resolved yet," he told his staff on the first working day of the year.

"We need to reduce our debt burden if we are to move forward."

Key creditors such as China and India are yet to announce agreement to a "haircut" on their loans to the South Asian nation.

As part of the new measures, the finance ministry has also banned non-essential capital expenditure.

## Russian Gas Exports Outside Ex-Soviet States Fell 45.5% in 2022

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russian gas exports to countries outside a group of former Soviet republics plunged by 45.5 percent in 2022, figures from gas giant Gazprom showed.

Gazprom said in a statement that exports outside the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) totaled 100.9 billion cubic meters compared to 185.1 billion in 2021.

Europe was previously Gazprom's main export market but supplies have been drastically reduced because of sanctions following Russia's offensive in Ukraine in 2022.

Gazprom CEO Alexei Miller said the company had been steadily increasing supplies to China during the year but did not give details on the quantities.

"From January 1 we are on a fundamentally new level of gas supplies to China," Miller said in the statement. President Vladimir Putin last month inaugurated the Kovykta natural gas field in eastern Siberia that will allow Russia to increase its exports to China.

Russia does not have pipelines to transport gas from its Western Siberian and Arctic gas fields — which have served Europe — to China.

But Russia began efforts around a decade ago to develop new fields and build the Power of Siberia pipeline to deliver to the rapidly expanding Chinese market.

The first Power of Siberia pipeline went into operation and began to ship gas from eastern Siberia to China at the end of 2019.

## Taliban Seeks Economic Self-Sufficiency and Foreign Investment for Afghanistan

KABUL (Dispatches) - The Taliban administration will encourage self-sufficiency and wants international trade and investment, the acting commerce minister said, as Afghanistan faces isolation and suspension of some humanitarian operations over restrictions on women.

"We will start a national self-sufficiency program, we will encourage all government administrations to use domestic products, we will also try to encourage people through mosques to support our domestic products" Haji

Nooruddin Azizi told Reuters. "We will support any item which can help us for self-sufficiency."

Another part of their strategy was to boost trade and foreign investment, he said.

"Those who were importing items to Afghanistan from abroad, they are asking us to provide opportunities for investing in Afghanistan and they want to invest here instead of importing from abroad," he said.

He said that countries including Iran, Russia and China were interested in trade and investment. He said some of the projects under discussion were Chinese industrial parks and thermal power plants, with involvement from Russia and Iran.

Already facing a lack of formal recognition and sanctions hampering the country's banking sector, investors are faced with growing security concerns after attacks on foreign targets in Kabul, claimed by the Islamic State.

An attack on a hotel catering to Chinese businessmen this month, which badly hurt several foreigners, could prompt some to re-think investing, a leading member of the Chinese business community has said.

Azizi said authorities were working to ensure security.

"We do our best for our businessmen to not come to harm. The attack hasn't had any bad impact, (but) if it happened constantly, yes it might have had impact," he said, referring to the investment environment.

Azizi laid out a plan to develop industry by creating special economic zones on land previously used for US military bases. He said his ministry was presenting the plan to the administration's cabinet and economic commission.

He added that foreign investors were showing interest in Afghanistan's mining sector, which has been valued at more than US\$1 trillion. He said that an iron mine in western Herat and a lead mine in central Ghor province had seen 40 companies take part in an auction and that the results would be announced soon.



