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



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 Oasem 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. See Page 7

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. See Page 7



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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.

Oais 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. See Page 7

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. See Page 7

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. See Page 7

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. See Page 7

Iran Urges Its Logical Positions in Nuclear Talks About the latest status of the negotiations on removing anti-Iran sanctions, Ali Bagheri Ka 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 process"

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

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

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 Ouds 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

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

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.

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

TEHRAN (IRNA) – Majlis Speaker Mohammad Bager Oalibaf said that Lieutenant General Oasem 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 Al-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.

> As for resumption of Umrah trips for Iranians,

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

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.

Iranian Official Due in Saudi Arabia for Talks on Hajj

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.

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.

07:14

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

Tomorrow's Sunrise

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 knowledgebased 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.

PGPICC Powerful Engine of

Developing Petrochemical Industry

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The CEO of Persian Gulf Petrochemical

Company (PGPICC) says

the company has been powerful engine of

developing petrochemical

Commercial

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

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.

(June 2021-June 2022) and it has turned into a good model of benefiting different walks of people and share-holders. Addressing a conference on improving credit-base sales

of products in the polymeric petrochemical companies, Ali Askari pointed to distribution of 24,500b tomans of profits among its share-holders this year, adding that considering existence of abundant rial and dollar resources in the country, all should work to encourage people to invest in production rather than investing in speculation.

industry and it has been a successful group whose

collective profit was 95,000b tomans in the last fiscal year

He went on to say that one of the main programs of PGPICC is to invest in the downstream industries and complete the value chain, adding that to prevent crude sales and to create a few dozen-million-dollar wealth, they should use the domestic forex resources of banks and other defined financial resources.

Askari noted that to develop plans and new plants especially small plants in the downstream industries, capital provision fund has been formed beside using the National Development Fund resources.

He went on to say that due to the significance of polymeric and petrochemical industries, all financial resources of banks and other funds should be channeled for supporting these industries for meeting the domestic needs and exports. He also called for removing cumbersome regulations for easing investment.

Askari went on to say that petrochemical industry is a national advantage and an elite industry where the volume of investment is high. He reiterated that all should work to turn petrochemical industry into a driving engine of development and progress in the country and by devising standard mechanisms especially financial mechanisms, a few dozen billion dollars of sales will be possible in this industry.

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 Ebrahimizadeh 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.

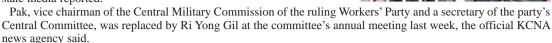
He reiterated that with joining of these 200 wagons to the rail fleet, Combined Shipping Company of IRISL will turn into one of the biggest owners of rail companies of the country.

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.



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 in 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

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.



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

The newspaper quoted Yoon as saying the joint planning and exercises would be aimed at a more effective implementation

Tunisian Transport Strike Adds More Woes for President Saied

ΓUNIS (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 ponuses," 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 nir, land and sea transport workers on January 25 and 26 to protest against what t 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.

of the U.S. "extended deterrence." and that Washington was also

"quite positive" about the idea.

"extended The term 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 fraved since Yoon took office in May, promising a tougher stance on the North.

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

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

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.

ongoing Israeli military campaign of intensified raids

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 organised over the past year.





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 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

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%.

flows and a robust export market.





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% yearover-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.

economies over the last decade.

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

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

Pakistan (43rd) holds the third position followed by Sri Lanka (75th), Nepal (101st), the

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

Moreover, it mentions the strong macroeconomic fundamentals, infrastructure improvements and enhanced digitalization that has enabled the country to

to stand at 6.9%, after which growth is expected to have accelerated to 7.2% in the fiscal 2021-22.

between the fiscals 2022-23 and 2026-27.

Bangladesh Projected to Be 20th Largest Economy by 2037 DHAKA (Dispatches) - Bangladesh's longterm 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

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

The country is forecasted to place 35th in 2023, reaching 26th spot in 2027, before

The Centre for Economics and Business Research (CEBR) last year projected that

eventually jumping to 20th in 2037, according to the latest report.

respectively, indicating an upward trend in economic performance and consistency in growth.

(currently \$429 billion).

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,

ratio, while operating a 5.1% fiscal deficit in 2022.

move towards post-pandemic recovery. The output growth in the fiscal 2020-21 was estimated

The CEBR expects an average growth rate of 6.4%

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

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

Gazprom said in a statement that exports outside the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) totaled

Europe was previously Gazprom's main export market but supplies have been drastically reduced because

Gazprom CEO Alexei Miller said the company had been steadily increasing supplies to China during the

"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

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

But Russia began efforts around a decade ago to develop new fields and build the Power of Siberia

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.

plunged by 45.5 percent in 2022, figures from gas giant Gazprom showed.

00.9 billion cubic meters compared to 185.1 billion in 2021.

of sanctions following Russia's offensive in Ukraine in 2022.

pipeline to deliver to the rapidly expanding Chinese market.

ear but did not give details on the quantities.

allow Russia to increase its exports to China.

nave served Europe — to China.

"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 bad 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.





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.

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

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.

goods rose at the quickest pace since mid-2022.

Iranian Short Film to Vie at 18th **IAWRT Film Festival in India**

TEHRAN (MNA) - Iranian short film "Freelodaer" by Elham Mohammadzadeh is scheduled to compete at the 18th edition of the IAWRT Asian Women's Film Festival 2023.

Directed and produced by Iranian filmmaker Elham Mohammadzadeh, "Freeloader" narrates the story of a fake divorce. The synopsis of the short film reads, "Leila and Reza get into trouble to get rid of financial problems and face a new challenge.' Hamoon Seyyedi, Roshanak Khosravi, Sahar Nassaji Kashi, and Vahid Qazi Zahedi are among the cast of the short film. The 18th IAWRT Asian Women's Film Festival will be held from 9th – 11th March 2023. IAWRT India organizes this unique Asian women's film festival each year to mark International Women's Day.



Gazprom Eyes Fast-Growing Chinese Market as Its Exports Plunge By 50%

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Gazprom's natural gas exports this year have fallen by close to 50 percent to 100.9 billion cubic meters outside the former Soviet Union, Bloomberg reported this week, citing a statement by the giant's chief executive Alexander Miller. This is the lowest since 2000, the report noted. The drop was the result of a combination of events, including Russia's reduction of pipeline flows to Europe following the barrage of sanctions the EU directed at Moscow after the latter invaded Ukraine. Another reason for the drop was the EU's consequent switch to LNG in a bid to reduce its energy dependence on Russia.

In his end-of-the-year address, meanwhile, Miller noted that global gas demand had dropped by 65 billion cubic meters this year, with 55 billion cubic meters coming from Europe. He added that in the future, however, global gas demand is set to grow and Gazprom is preparing for this growth.

China, he said, is set to account for 40 percent of global gas demand growth, which will itself amount to 20 percent from current levels. Positioning itself to benefit from this outlook, Gazprom plans to boost its gas exports to China to 48 billion cubic meters "very soon", Miller said.

As part of Russia's energy pivot to Asia, Russia's president, Vladimir Putin, inaugurated earlier this month the Kovykta gas field in eastern Siberia, a project long in the works, which will supply gas to China. The field has reserves estimated at 1.8 trillion cubic meters and is the largest in eastern Siberia discovered so far.

Asia has become a priority export destination for Russian energy after the breakup with Europe, with China the biggest client Russia has on the continent and India a close second. The energy pivot followed, with a little delay, a political pivot that started ten years ago.

Earlier this week, Russian Natural Resources and Environment Minister Alexander Kozlov said in a TV interview that the government planned to step up oil and gas exploration—especially gas exploration—in eastern Siberia with a view to ramping up exports to Asian partners.

There is also another reason why eastern Siberia oil and gas fields are becoming a priority: currently, most of Russia's oil and gas are coming from western Siberia, which is not immune from natural depletion. Western Siberian fields are mature ones



while deposits in eastern Siberia are yet to be tapped.

As part of this exploration and production move from the west to the east that symbolically reflects the political shift from the West to the East, Rosneft several years ago announced the biggest project in its history—Vostok.

Vostok Oil, in Russia's Far East, comprises several groups of oil fields holding an estimated 44 billion barrels of oil. Work on the project began in January 2021. The total cost of its development has been estimated at \$170 billion over the lifetime of the fields.

Western sanctions have interfered with Rosneft's plans for the Vostok project, with Rystad Energy forecasting earlier this year that Russian oil and gas investments are set to drop by \$15 billion this year and continue falling over the next few years as well. Meanwhile, Trafigura, which had bought a stake in Vostok, sold it after the sanction action began, to a Hong Kong trader, Nord Axis.

Despite this projected slump in investments and the pullout of Western companies from Russia's oil and gas industry, Gazprom's CEO sounded an upbeat note about the future. He noted in his speech that Gazprom has been booking a reserve replacement rate of over 1 in the past few years and that some of the deposits Gazprom operates could continue producing well beyond 2100.

94 Suspects of...

FROM PAGE 1

Since the suspects are not merely American nationals, the Iranian judiciary sent judicial representations to seven countries, including Germany and Britain, he argued.

Families of the martyrs from Iraq accused five people of playing role in the assassination of General Soleimani and his entourage, including Deputy Chairman of Popular Mobilization Committee of Iraq Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, the official said, adding that Iran's judicial system provided the Iraqi counterparts with documents on the involvement of 17 Iraqi nationals in the crime.

In the framework of the Convention 1973, Iran sent an official letter to the U.S. administration, urging the American authorities to extradite the defendants to Iran or sue them on U.S. soil, Gharibabadi said, adding that the deadline set in this diplomatic note has expired, which means Iran can take the next steps according to the convention.

Iran Beats Record...

FROM PAGE 1

As he stressed, the key to removing the problems is inside the country.

Ali Bahadori Jahromi pointed out the success of the government in the field of liquidity control in a press conference today (Tuesday), and stated: "At the beginning of the 13th government, the inflation caused by the creation of liquidity was nearly 42.8%, which is now reached 34.3% and this rate shows the government's success in controlling this part of inflation.'

He announced the continuous increase in the export of crude oil and gas condensate, and added: "Last month, we saw a record export since the beginning of the new round of sanctions, that is, since 2018."

The spokesperson of the government pointed to the actions taken in the field of environment, and stated: 'Good things have been done about oil-associated gases and we have had a 20% increase in the collection of associated gases, which has been achieved with efficiency in refineries and the energy sector."

He also called the martyrdom anniversary of Martyr Soleimani the day of resistance.

While congratulating the beginning of the New Year to the Iranian Christians and the Christians around the world, Bahadori Jahromi said: "We wish for a year without threats and wars and full of happiness all over the world."

He said: "Today is the third martyrdom anniversary of the beloved general of all Iranians and the defender of global security, Hajj Qassem Soleimani."

He further said: "It is the day of resistance and the day when all Iranians honor the greatness and bravery of a man whose heart was beating for all Iranians and who was a role model for kindness all across Iran."

"The memory of this martyr and the martyrs of the resistance and other martyrs of the region will always be kept alive and, God willing, we hope we will follow their exemplars in the field of governance," he added.

He further said that Iran is now among the 10 countries which are recognized as the manufacturers of telescopes in the world.

Iran Eyes Construction of...

FROM PAGE 1

He said that they want to focus on African states which is an intact market and also the Latin American states as Iran has received some demands from some Latin American states and Venezuela is one of them.

cooperation in the field of power plant construction and mainly repairing the power plants and maintenance of installations as well as launching installation in the field of water.

Farahnakian noted that Energy Ministry has the record-holder in holding joint economic commission meetings this year and it will attend the next joint economic commission which will be held in Nicaragua in two months.

Iran Expanding...

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Iran has been heavily sanctioned by the United States and European Union, however its strategic position as a vital Caspian-Arabian Sea link as part of the INSTC has repositioned the country as a strategic route between Europe and Asia.

That is likely to create friction between the United States and EU as the former wants the current Iranian Government out of the global picture, while the EU requires it to safeguard the INSTC as a primary supply chain transport corridor. Current unrest in Iran can partially be attributed to attempts to induce regime change. Should INSTC routes not come online as predicted, EU import-export costs will rise still further.

Indian Economy Poised for Further Growth in 2023

NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - The Indian economy recovered from the COVID-induced downturn during 2022 and is poised for further improvement in the



coming quarters though downside risks emanating from geopolitical tensions, strengthening dollar and elevated inflation will continue. The positive trajectory in the growth trend and improved fundamentals will help the nation in neutralising the impact of global headwinds which are expected to have a bearing on the country's exports in the months to come.

The challenges before the government and the Reserve Bank in the new year would be to arrest inflation, check declining value of rupee against US dollar and promote private investment and growth, with a view to ensure that the country remains one the fastest growing major economies of the world.

India recorded a growth of 9.7 per cent in the first half of 2022-23 (April-September), as against 5.6 per cent in Indonesia, 3.4 per cent in the UK, 3.3 per cent in Mexico, 3.2 per cent in the Euro area, 2.5 per cent in France, 2.2 per cent in China, 1.8 per cent in the USA and 1.7 per cent in Japan.

"From the viewpoint of India, in terms of headwinds originating abroad, the worst is probably behind us .. Overall, I still expect us to end the current fiscal year with a growth rate exceeding 7 per cent.

"Next year, the 7 per cent growth rate should sustain assuming the forthcoming Budget does not have any negative surprises," opined former vice-chairman of the Niti Aayog and noted economist Arvind Panagariya.

The biggest problem the economy faced was persistent high inflation which remained above the Reserve Bank's comfort level for the most of the year. Infact, the RBI had to file a report to the central government on why it failed to check inflation.

The depreciating rupee against the US dollar too remained a challenge for policy makers making imports costlier and in turn impacting the country's current account deficit. The rupee, according to analysts, will continue to remain under pressure in the coming months.

Exports too faced global headwinds and the things may not be rosy either in 2023, because of recession in key western markets and geo-political crisis due to the Russia-Ukraine war.

Later months of 2022 witnessed lots of job cuts in the technology segment amid global economic turmoil, though a mixed bag of opportunities is likely to greet job aspirants in the New Year as telecom and servicesoriented sectors are anticipated to accelerate hiring.

Andrew Wood, Director, Sovereign & International Public Finance Ratings, S&P Global Ratings said that India is benefiting from a period of rapid nominal GDP growth and buoyant revenues.

"These dynamics are helping to stabilize key debt metrics including the debt to GDP ratio, and the government's interest burden, albeit at still-elevated levels. While this tailwind will fade heading into FY24, we still expect India to achieve solid growth next year," Wood added.

Study Shows Carbon Footprint Labels Could Encourage People to Eat Less Red Meat

PARIS (Dispatches)- Will 2023 be the year many of us banish red meat from our diets? A recent U.S. study shows that information about a product's environmental impact can deter consumers from choosing carbon-rich foods.

According to a study published in the journal Jama Network Open, carbon footprint labels associated with products such as red meat have the potential to be an effective way to encourage people to reduce their purchases of planet-polluting foods.

The study involved a nationally representative sample of 5,049 US adults who were asked to select from fast food menus a food item they would like to order for dinner.

Participants were randomly assigned to several groups (including a control group). Some were given menus with green labels indicating low-climate-impact dishes (eg, chicken, fish, or vegetarian dishes), and others were given menus with red labels, which indicated high-climate-impact foods (in particular featuring red meat).

Menus with a green label featured the message: "This item is environmentally sustainable. It has low greenhouse gas emissions and a low contribution to climate change."

Menus with a red label read: "This item is not environmentally sustainable. It has high greenhouse gas emissions and a high contribution to climate change."

Negative message more powerful?

Compared to participants in the control group, 23.5 per cent more participants selected a sustainable food when meals displayed high climate impact labels and 9.9 per cent more participants selected a sustainable food when they appeared on menus with a green label.

The study authors, researchers at Johns Hopkins and Harvard Universities, noted that telling people that a type of food had a negative impact on the environment was more effective than informing them that a food was a more

For example, they found that red meat products with red labels were more likely to prompt participants to make sustainable choices, compared to foods with green labels.

Less red meat, less pollution

"In the United States, meat consumption, red meat consumption in particular, consistently exceeds recommended levels based on national dietary guidelines.

Shifting current dietary patterns toward more sustainable diets with lower amounts of red meat consumed could reduce diet-related greenhouse gas emissions by up to 55 per cent," the researchers outlined.

Last April, the report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) recommended that world leaders (especially those of developed countries) foster a transition to sustainable, healthy, low-emission diets.

Iran Oil...

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The analysis, covered in a report by Fars news agency, added that under a "realistic scenario" Iran would be able to count on an oil price of below \$80 per barrel in 2023 as there is little prospect of a major increase in international oil prices. The parliamentary body estimated that total oil revenues for Iran in 2023 would reach some \$27.3 billion.

Iran has been able to supply increased volumes of oil to private buyers in China and other markets in recent months despite U.S. sanctions that ban any purchases of the country's oil shipments.

Experts believe the country could more than double its oil exports to over 2 million bpd if it reaches an agreement with world powers to revive the JCPOA.

Iran Oil...

FROM PAGE 1

"We will never stop short of avenging the assassination of Gen. Soleimani and Muhandis. American occupiers and their mercenaries have been trying to cover up the extent of their losses through various means of deception in order to maintain their status," the movement said in a statement.

"The world public opinion has, however, been informed of the enemy's defeats as truth will out. We will never rest idle and will brandish the flag of revenge until all US military forces are withdrawn from the West Asia region," it added.

Furthermore, the Iraqi anti-terror Kata'ib Hezbollah movement said all culprits behind the assassination will sooner or later have to pay a price for their horrendous criminal act.

"Friends and foes should know that the cost of

assassinating the anti-terror commanders and their comrades would be very high. Enemies will sooner or later have to bear the brunt, and the least cost for them would be to pack up and completely pull out of West Asia," Abu Hussain al-Hamidawi, the secretary general of the group, which is part of the PMU, said.

The Iraqi people hold ceremony in Salahedine Governorate to commemorate the former commander of the IRGC Quds Force General Qassem Soleimani and his comrades.

General Soleimani, commander of the Quds Force of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC), Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, the second-in-command of the PMU, and their companions were assassinated in a US drone strike authorized by Trump near Baghdad International Airport on January 3, 2020.



Croatia Defender Lovren Rejoins Lyon

YON (Dispatches) - Former Liverpool central defender Dejan Lovren has joined Lyon from Zenit Saint-Petersburg on a two-and-a-half year deal, the Ligue 1 club said.

The 33-year-old Lovren played for Lyon for three seasons before stints with Southampton and, most famously, for Liverpool in the Premier League.

Lovren helped the Reds win their first Premier League title in 2020 and also lifted the Champions League with them in 2019.

IRAN NEWS

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Navratilova Diagnosed With **Throat and Breast Cancer**

ORONTO (Dispatches) - Former world number one L tennis player Martina Navratilova said she has been diagnosed with throat and breast cancer.

The Czech–American is considered among one the greatest players of all time, winning a total of 59 Grand Slam titles across singles and doubles. "This double whammy is serious but still fixable," the 66-year-old said in a statement to WTA.

"I'm hoping for a favorable outcome. It's going to stink for a while, but I'll fight with all I have got."

SPORTS WEDNESDAY JANUARY 4, 2023

Auger-Aliassime, **Rune Stunned at Adelaide International**

DELAIDE (Dispatches) - Australian qualifier Alexei Popyrin stunned second seed A DELAIDE (Dispatches) - Ausuanian quantier Alexed A Spelix Auger-Aliassime in the first round of the season-opening Adelaide International as Novak Djokovic was given a hero's welcome in a rare doubles appearance.

On a day of upsets, world number 11 Holger Rune also crashed out, as did women's third seed Daria Kasatkina.

Canada's Auger-Aliassime was in top form towards the end of 2022, winning three tournaments in October and November before leading Canada to Davis Cup glory when they beat Australia in the final.

He rose to number six in the world and said before the tournament he wanted to ride the wave of momentum into the 2023 season.

But he came unstuck against Popyrin, who dropped out of the top 100 last year, slumping 6-4, 7-6 (7/5).

The 23-year-old Australian attacked at every opportunity, hitting 32 winners, including 12 aces

Popyrin broke Auger-Aliassime once in the first set and although he went down an early break in the second, he was able to claw back then clinch the tiebreak on his first match point.

"I had a really, really tough season last year," Popyrin said.

"So to come out in my first main draw match of the year and beat a player of his

quality, it just shows that the work I did in the off-season is paying off."

Giron who beat French veteran Richard Gasquet 7-6 (7/5), 6-7 (6/8), 7-5 on Sunday. Japan's Yoshihito Nishikori downed fifth



Year in 2022 after claiming three titles -- in three sets.

Rune, 19, won the first set comfortably but his serve went off the boil and Nishikori came back to win the next two and take the match 2-6, 6-4, 6-4.

In other singles action, Serbia's Miomir Kecmanovic beat Australian Christopher O'Connell 6-4, 6-4 and Frenchman Quentin Halys eased past wildcard Jordan Thompson 6-3, 6-4.

Earlier, fans gave Djokovic a raucous welcome during his first match in Australia in

Playing with Canada's Vasek Pospisil, they lost to doubles specialists Tomislav Brkic and Gonzalo Escobar 4-6, 6-3, 10/5 but enjoyed overwhelming crowd support.

The Serbian superstar, who is also playing singles in Adelaide, was deported from the country before the 2022 Australian Open for not being vaccinated against Covid-19 and was subsequently barred from re-entering for three years.

But the ban was lifted in November and he will be attempting to win his 10th Australian Open title later this month.

There was also a major upset in the women's draw when 18-year-old Czech qualifier Linda Noskova beat Kasatkina 6-3, 6-7 (2/7), 6-3.

Fourth-seeded Veronika Kudermetova of Russia crushed American Amanda Anisimova 6-3, 6-0, while Romanian Irina-Camelia Begu beat another American, Shelby Rogers, 3-6, 7-6 (7/5), 6-1.

Hotspur manager Antonio Conte claims last year's top-four finish in the Premier League was 'a miracle' and said pre-season expectations of a title tilt were ludicrous.

Speaking after a Sunday's dismal 2-0 defeat by Aston Villa that left Tottenham in fifth place, 13 points behind leaders Arsenal, the Italian offered a dose of harsh reality.

"Last season we made a miracle," Conte, who took charge in November 2021 and rejuvenated the team, told reporters.

"Because we played only one competition, and we played with 12 or 13 players and they didn't have injuries in the last 15 games, we played with our best players every game because, I repeat, we played only the league.

"Don't forget with three games to go Arsenal were four points ahead of us and that we finished 20 points less from Manchester City and we did a miracle, but I knew the situation.'

Tottenham were booed off on Sunday as they barely managed a shot at Villa's goal. In mitigation they were without the creative spark of Dejan Kulusevski who was injured and Brazilian forward Richarlison who was also unavailable.

Jokic Triple Double Leads Denver Over Boston

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - Nikola Jokic delivered a triple double with 30 points, 12 rebounds and 12 assists to spark host Denver over Boston 123-111 in a showdown of NBA conference leaders.

Two-time reigning NBA Most Valuable Player Jokic made 10-of-13 shots from the floor, including both 3-point attempts, and went 8-for-8 from the free throw line to produce his ninth triple double of the season.

The Nuggets improved to 24-12, stretching their Western Conference lead to one game with a 10th win in 12 contests and snapping Boston's four-game win streak.

"We're playing a good brand of basketball," said Denver's Andrew Gordon, who contributed 18 points, six rebounds and seven assists.

"It's about handling business. We ended up handling business. It's not about the other team. It's about the standard that we hold ourselves to. Tonight we held that standard."

Denver, 14-3 at home, defeated the Celtics for the first time since November 2019.

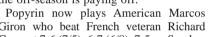
Bruce Brown added 21 points for Denver while Michael Porter Jr. added 19. Jaylen Brown led Boston with 30 points and eight rebounds while Jayson Tatum contributed 25 points, seven rebounds and six points for the Eastern Conference-leading Celtics, who still have the best record in the NBA at 26-11.

Gordon defended the Boston stars much of the night.

"Those are special players," Gordon said. "You try to make it difficult for them. You really aren't going to be able to stop them. You try to make it uncomfortable for them, make their shots difficult, and that's what we did."

A broken rim halted the game for 34 minutes with 6:43 remaining in the fourth quarter with the Nuggets leading 110-97.

Japan's Rui Hachimura came off the bench to score a game-high 26 points in leading the Washington Wizards to a 118-95 victory at Milwaukee.



seed Rune -- the ATP Newcomer of the

Venus Williams Makes Winning Return at Auckland Classic

UCKLAND (Dispatches) - Seven-time Agrand slam winner Venus Williams overcame a player less than half her age in a vintage performance in the first round of the Auckland Classic.

Playing her first match in four months, the 42-year-old unearthed some trademark power to notch a first win in more than a year, adding another footnote to a professional

ORCIDA

career that has stretched into a 27th season.

An hour-long rain interruption worked in Williams' favor, as she resumed in style to beat fellow American Katie Volynets 7-6 (7/4), 6-2.

Volynets, who turned 21 on New Year's Eve, was leading the first set tiebreaker when

play was suspended but she faded in a match that stretched late into the evening.

The former world No.1 is using this week to prepare for her 25th tilt at the Australian Open, having accepted a wildcard entry to the tournaments in Auckland and Melbourne.

She admitted the stoppage worked in her favor although it didn't feel that way at the time. "It's hard when you're all fired up and just suddenly you have to stop," said Williams, whose previous match was a first-round loss at the U.S. Open.

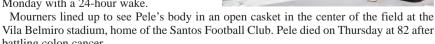
"I was so mad on the rain break. My coach could barely talk to me so I'm going to try to improve my attitude.'

Williams has slipped outside the top 1,000 in the rankings but she showcased glimpses of her former class — and some creditable fitness — during the second set against 114th-ranked qualifier Volynets.

The tournament is being staged for the first time in three years, with the 2020 edition having been won by retired great Serena Williams -- Venus' younger sister.

Brazil Bids Farewell to King of Soccer Pele

 $S_{\rm coastal\ city\ of\ Santos,\ which\ sporting}^{\rm ANTOS\ (Dispatches)}$ - The Brazilian giant Pele turned into a byword for soccer brilliance during a glittering club career, started bidding goodbye to its hero on Monday with a 24-hour wake.



"Pele leaves millions of Santos fans across our country. He was the creator of Brazilian soccer," said Antonio da Paz, a fan outside the stadium for the memorial that began at 10 a.m. (1300 GMT).

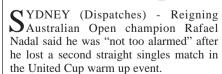
FIFA President Gianni Infantino was among the first to arrive for the service and said he would ask every country to name a stadium after Pele, the only man to win the World Cup three times as a player.

"Pele is eternal," Infantino told reporters. "FIFA will certainly honor the 'king' as he deserves. We have asked all football associations in the world to pay a minute of silence before every game and will also ask them, 211 countries, to name a stadium after Pele. Future generations must know and remember who Pele was."

Edson Arantes do Nascimento - Pele's given name - was born in 1940 in the small country town of Tres Coracoes, but moved to Santos in 1956 and lived there for most of his life.

In the early hours Monday, his body arrived under fireworks in the city of about 430,000 people from Sao Paulo's Albert Einstein Hospital.

No Panic for Nadal **After Second Loss** At United Cup



"Honestly, I'm not too alarmed or too negative about what happened. There was a real chance to lose these kinds of matches," said Nadal after falling to Alex de Minaur in Sydney.

"There is room to improve. I really believe I can do it."



Australian turned the match around for a 3-6, 6-1, 7-5 upset in Sydney. Nadal also lost to Cameron Norrie in his country's first tie at the mixed-teams event as

Spain were beaten by Great Britain at the weekend.

With his singles run over at the inaugural edition of the competition, being played in three cities, 22-time Grand Slam winner Nadal is keen to get to Melbourne and train for his Open title defence starting in a fortnight. "I have two weeks before the start," Nadal said. "I can't say the situation is ideal, but I can't say that it's very negative.

"For moments I was playing well, two matches are going to help. I arrived needing a little

The veteran said he was outplayed by world number 24 De Minaur.

"He played better in the important moments. I had my chances but I made important mistakes at those moments that I can't do if I want to win."