

**Police Chief of Sistan and Baluchestan Province Brigadier General Mohammad Ghanbari Said That 854 Kilograms of Illicit Drugs Have Been Busted in a Single Operation in Iranshahr**

**Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance Said That 31 Provincial Festivals Will Resume Their Activities in the Coming International Fajr Film Festival, Adding That the Ministry Has Resumed Music Works**

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## Iran Reserves Right To Respond to Israeli Military Adventurism

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's ambassador to the United Nations says the country considers it to be its "legitimate right" to respond to any potential act of military adventurism by the Israeli regime.

Amir Saeid Iravani made the remarks in a letter addressed to the UN secretary-general and president of the world body's Security Council.

The official cited several recent instances of the occupying regime's threatening to take military action against Iran, including against the Islamic Republic's nuclear facilities.

During the latest case, the regime's former minister for military affairs Benny Gantz alleged in late December that Tel Aviv "has significantly increased its preparedness in recent years and is preparing for the possibility of an attack on Iran."

Reacting to such remarks, Iravani noted, "While warning against the Israeli regime's military adventurism against Iran in order to pursue its malign policies in the region, the Islamic Republic of Iran reserves its legitimate right, in accordance with international law and the United Nations Charter, to respond to any threat posed by the Israeli regime and protect its people as well as national security interests at any time it deems appropriate." **See Page 7**

## Iran Exports Up 19% y/y To Over \$43b

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Latest figures by the Iranian customs office (IRICA) show that non-oil exports from the country rose significantly in the 10 months to December compared with the same period last year.

IRICA figures published showed that Iran had exported a total of \$43.088 billion worth of goods in the period between the start of the calendar year on March 21 last year and the onset of 2023.

The figure is an increase of 19% compared to the same previous period, said IRICA in a statement.

The statement added that the volume of Iranian exports reached a total of \$97.843 million metric tons between late March and the end of December last year, up just 2% from the same period in 2021.

China accounted for 27.5% or \$11.855 billion worth of purchases of all Iranian exports over the 10 months to December, followed by Iraq at \$8.631 billion and Turkey at \$6.419 billion, said IRICA, adding that the United Arab Emirates and India were the fourth and fifth largest importers from Iran over the same period with \$4.6 and \$1.474 billion in purchases, respectively. **See Page 7**

# Leader Slams West's Fake Support for Women's Rights



### IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei roundly dismissed the Western governments' bogus advocacy for women's rights, stressing that fake gestures come despite the fact that women and girls are subjected to different forms of abuse.

Ayatollah Khamenei made the remarks in the Iranian capital city of Tehran on Wednesday as he addressed a group of Iranian women in the run-up to the celebrations commemorating the birthday anniversary of Hazrat Fatemeh Zahra (SA), the beloved daughter of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).

"The absolute brazenness of the West comes into sight when it presents itself as the forerunner of advocacy for women's right, whilst it is responsible for flurries of blows dealt to the dignity and prestige of women. This could be explained as utter shamelessness.

He stated that one would feel deeply ashamed to know about last year's social movement, in which Western women publicized their experiences of sexual abuse or sexual harassment.

"This is what they suggest by women's rights and freedom. This is by no means freedom, but rather utter slavery," the Leader said.

This meeting has been a pure women's meeting and full of outstanding and excellent concepts until now, until this moment, the Leader said.

Ayatollah Khamenei hailed his meeting with Iranian women, describing it as a meeting full of outstanding and excellent concepts.

The Leader of the Islamic Revolution also appreciated the issues raised by the ladies in the meeting, saying that he really enjoyed the raised issues.

According to the Leader's remarks, the employment of efficient, experienced, knowledgeable, and wise women in the country's decision-making arenas is of high importance.

Hazrat Zahra (SA) is a role model for Muslim women, the Leader pointed out.

He went on to touch upon the status and situation of women in western countries, saying that western countries have to be condemned when it comes to the issue of women

Ayatollah Khamenei further criticized the hypocritical Western states who claim to be women's rights advocates saying that Iran and Islam are not in a defensive position rather they are in an offensive position when it comes to the issue of women's rights.

He described Western women as being "alienated" while noting that "the Western capitalist system is a patriarchal system."

Criticizing the Western capitalist system, the Leader said that in the capitalist system, people's capital has more value than humanity.

Therefore, in the capitalist system, men have priority over women because they can make more money than women, Ayatollah Khamenei also argued.

He also expressed hope that the Iranian women will be able to influence the public opinion of Westerners because their women are really suffering.

Every year, Iranians commemorate Mother's Day on the 20th day of the lunar Islamic month of Jamadi al-Thani, which marks the birthday anniversary of Hazrat Zahra (AS).

Hazrat Zahra (SA), also known as Fatemeh, is the daughter of Islam's Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) and the wife of Imam Ali (AS), the first Shia imam.

## U.S. Martyred Gen. Soleimani, Muhandis to Weaken Resistance

BEIRUT (Dispatches) - The secretary general of Lebanon's Hezbollah resistance movement says the United States assassinated top Iranian and Iraqi commanders, Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, with the goal of weakening the resistance front and eliminating threats to the occupying Israeli regime.

Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah made the remarks in a televised speech broadcast live from the Sayyed al-Shuhadaa Complex in Dahiyeh, south of the Lebanese capital of Beirut, on Tuesday while addressing a ceremony held in commemoration of the third martyrdom anniversary of the two top anti-terror commanders and their companions in a US drone strike near the Baghdad International Airport on January 3, 2020.

Nasrallah offered his condolences to the families of the two distinguished martyrs, saying General Soleimani "turned into an inspiring symbol after his martyrdom," and that "his funeral was the largest in history."

The Hezbollah chief lauded the "great sincerity and high degree of piety" of the General Soleimani and said, "Hajj Qassem was following the directives and guidance of Imam Khamenei." **See Page 7**

## ViewPoint U.S. Arms Industry Enjoys Ukraine War

When on February 24, 2022 Russian troops began their operation against Ukraine, nobody expected the U.S. arms industry to be the only winner of this conflict which still goes on and it does not seem to end very soon because of profits that arms sellers earn in this war.

Despite efforts of many independent countries to encourage Russia and Ukraine to put their guns down and come to the negotiation table, it was and still is the U.S. which encourages Ukraine to continue war against Russia because this world arrogance is the only one which makes money or political gain from this war.

While the war has caused chaos in the global economy and has pushed most countries into high inflation or recession mode, the West and predominantly the U.S. fan the flame of war because they sell their weapons to Ukraine.

Unfortunately Ukraine has fallen in the trap of the U.S. and has been involved in a war that it does not want to stop it because of the U.S. provocation, and Russia has no option but to give answer to Ukrainian troops.

According to a recent report, the U.S. has increased its arms sales to Ukraine and even to other European countries through creating Russiophobia and Europeans had nothing but to follow what their lord, the U.S., asks.

The United States has reportedly approved arms sales to NATO Allies increased dramatically in 2021, compared with 2022, as the war between Russia and Ukraine prompted the member states into purchasing more weapons.

By some estimates, military spending by the United States and its allies is growing at a level without precedent since the end of the Second World War.

According to an analysis by Foreign Policy Magazine, the number and cash value of arms sales approved by the United States to its NATO allies has nearly doubled in 2022 Compared to 2021.

Despite calls for dialog to solve the crisis and end the conflict, many western nations have fanned the flames of war by flooding Ukraine with arms.

According to an analysis of two years of data from the US Defense Department's Defense Security Cooperation Agency, in 2021, the U.S. government approved 14 possible major arms sales to NATO allies, worth around \$15.5 billion.

In 2022 that jumped to 24 possible major arms sales worth around \$28 billion, including \$1.24 billion worth of arms sales to prospective NATO member, Finland.

While not all arms sales will be finalized as outlined in the proposals, the sharp uptick in these plans reflects a massive shift in Europe's security landscape.

This has been the basis for the generation of vast profits for the arms manufacturers, with the US military industrial complex emerging as the key beneficiary of the war in Ukraine.

Despite conditions in which the Dow Jones Industrial Average has fallen by 10% for the year as a whole, the share prices of US defense contractors have surged.

Over the past 12 months the share price of Northrop Grumman has increased by 40% and Raytheon is up by nearly 17% while Lockheed Martin has surged by 37%.

Some of the approved U.S. arms sales in 2022 were years in the making, such as Germany's plan to purchase F 35 fighter jets in a deal of worth around \$8.4 billion, in contrast, many other major arm sales were rushed after the war broke out in Ukraine.

European countries on NATO's eastern flank dashed to replenish and fully stock their own military capabilities in an effort to replace the equipment they shipped to Ukraine and deter Moscow.

The United States has already approved plans to sell HIMARS launchers to Estonia and Lithuania. And a similar plan for Latvia is expected to be announced within a matter of months.

The major European powers are surging their military spending with 10 NATO members spending more than 2% of their GDP on weapons this year, up from four NATO member states in 2014. **See Page 7**

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## FM Slams French Magazine's Insulting Act

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian in a message condemned the French magazine's insulting act in publishing a caricature against religious and political authority.

The insulting and indecent act of a French publication in publishing a caricature against religious and political authority will not remain without a decisive and effective response, Amirabdollahian wrote on his Twitter account on Wednesday.

We will not allow the French government to cross a line, he added.

They have definitely chosen the wrong path. We have already put this publication on the sanctions list, he noted.

## Cost of Normalizing Ties With Israeli Regime to Highly Rise

TEHRAN (MNA) – Majlis Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf says that Iran will raise the costs of normalizing relations with the Zionist regime to the point where no one dares to do so.

Qalibaf made the remarks on Wednesday speaking at the 1st International Conference on Martyr Soleimani School of Thought.

Saying that Martyr Soleimani's school of thought was influenced by Imam Khomeini's (RA) school of thought, Qalibaf stated that General Soleimani was educated in a revolution that has a comprehensive life.

Qalibaf further cited that Martyr Soleimani was a role model in various social, political, military, moral, and behavioral issues. He also praised martyr Soleimani's efforts in eradicating insecurity, adding that throughout his life, martyr Lt. General Qassem Soleimani managed to deliver power and bring dignity to the Islamic ummah.



Martyr Soleimani always worked in the direction of "the unity of the Islamic world" and "generating power for the Islamic world" because he knew that the only effective logic is the logic of power, Qalibaf continued. "He believed that power comes from the people," he added.

He also considered the maritime deal between the Zionist regime and Lebanon as an indicator of the strength of the Revolution, the Islamic system, and the Resistance Front.

## President Expected to Visit Turkey in Near Future

TEHRAN (MNA) - President Ebrahim Raisi may visit Turkey in the coming weeks, said Ibrahim Kalin, Turkish Presidential spokesperson.

"A visit of this kind was planned. The visit was postponed due to certain reasons. Now the protocols are being negotiated, I think that the visit will take place in the next few weeks," Kalin said in an interview on NTV channel, APA reported.

He did not specify the time of the visit. Iranian officials have not commented on the news yet.

## IRGC Member Martyred in Tehran

TEHRAN (IFP) - A member of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps has reportedly been assassinated in the capital Tehran.

The IRGC member has been identified as Ghassem Fathollahi.

IRNA News Agency said the attackers emptied four bullets into Fathollahi's body outside his house in the capital Tehran on Tuesday.

According to this report, he succumbed to his wounds later in the day.

There are no further details about this terrorist attack.

## Tehran Condemns Desecration of al-Aqsa by Israeli Minister

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The Foreign Ministry spokesman has strongly condemned the desecration of al-Aqsa Mosque by far-right Israeli minister Itamar Ben-Gvir, saying any act of aggression against the holy site will face a firm response from the Muslim world.

Nasser Kanaani made the remarks in a statement on Tuesday, following Ben-Gvir's contentious visit to the al-Aqsa Mosque compound in the occupied Old City of al-Quds earlier in the day.

He said any desecration of the holy sites in the occupied Palestinian territories, including al-Aqsa, is a violation of international law and an insult to the values and sanctities of Muslims across the world.

The Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman further warned against the provocative actions of the Israeli regime's new far-right cabinet.

He praised the resistance of Palestinians, stressing that the Palestinian cause of liberation from the Israeli occupation is the first priority for the Muslim world.

Kanaani further called on the freedom-seeking people in the world, particularly the Muslim countries, to unite in order to defend al-Quds and confront the occupying regime's acts of aggression.

The Iranian official also urged international organizations to fulfill their legal duty and stop the Israeli regime's brutal acts of aggression against Palestinians and the Muslims' holy sites.

On Tuesday, Ben-Gvir entered the holy site of al-Aqsa Mosque through the Moroccan Gate, also known as the Mughrabi Gate, in a move that threatens a backlash from Palestinians who have labeled the act an "unprecedented provocation," Palestine's official Wafa news agency reported.

Ben-Gvir was sworn in as Israeli minister of "security" last week, as part of the occupying regime's new far-right cabinet, led by Benjamin Netanyahu.

## UAE Ambassador Meets Amirabdollahian

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian met and conferred with the UAE Ambassador to Iran, Saif Mohammed al-Zaabi, on Tuesday evening.

Ambassador Zaabi in the meeting delivered the written message of UAE foreign minister to Amirabdollahian.

The Iranian top diplomat and the UAE ambassador in the meeting also reviewed the latest status of bilateral ties and sought ways for their evermore expansion.



## MPs Depict Zolfaqar 1401 Drills as Display of Might

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Members of the Iranian Parliament have described the naval parade of Zolfiqar 1401 joint exercise as the display of the power of the Islamic Republic of Iran Army.

On Wednesday, the legislators expressed gratitude to the Army personnel for the glorious Zolfaqar 1401 joint exercise in the coastlines of the Gulf of Oman.

The lawmakers issued a statement, underscoring that the splendid drills on the Makran coast and throughout over three million square kilometers of open waters conveyed the highest coordination and capabilities of the Iranian Army in destroying any threat from any point.

They also emphasized that the drills in different geographical and climate situations indicate the full preparedness of the Army in facing all threats.

Today the Army supports the Islamic System, the Supreme Leader, and the Iranian nation, they

noted, adding that people in southern and southeastern provinces of Iran have warmly welcomed the Army personnel, foiling the recent plots hatched by the enemies, who conducted hybrid warfare against the great nation.

The representatives of the Iranian people in parliament also expressed gratitude to the armed forces of the Islamic Republic and commemorated the sacrifices made by martyrs of the Army and other protectors of the country.

Large-scale joint military drills codenamed Zolfaqar 1400 began early on Friday with the motto of "self-confidence, power, sustainable security" in an area stretching from the eastern sector of the strategic Strait of Hormuz to the northern tip of the Indian Ocean.

The Army held Zolfaqar 1400 drills in November 2021 in the same area, showcasing its defensive capabilities that are based on domestically-built equipment.

## Iranian Production of Nanotech Items, Equipment Up Six Times

TEHRAN (IFP) - New figures show the production of items and equipment developed based on nanotechnology in Iran witnessed a six-fold rise in a period of nine years.

According to a report by the Committee for the Development of Nanotechnology at the Iranian Vice Presidency for Science, Technology and Knowledge-based Economy, 1,376 nanotech products or pieces of equipment have been developed in the country during the time span.

The figures show 271 companies producing nanotech items and 64 firms making equipment using the same technology were registered in Iran until the end of 2022.

In the last Persian calendar year, (which ended in March 2021), the value of Iran's exports of nanotech products stood at \$62 million, according to the report.

## Iran Has Enough Corona Vaccine

TEHRAN (IP) - Minister of Health said that there were enough corona vaccines of different types stored in the country.

On the sidelines of the cabinet session on Wednesday, Bahram Einollahi told reporters: "Currently, we have about 50 million doses of corona vaccine stored in Iran."

In Iran, different types of corona vaccine are produced and there was no concern about the issue, Einollahi noted.

The health minister pointed to the new corona vibrant observed in Iran and stressed that the best way to prevent getting infected by the virus was to inject the vaccine, and the observation of health protocols including wearing masks and adhering to social distancing in roofed places.

He said that quarantining people and the reduction of trips were not on the agenda of the country but the smart quarantine system would be used to control the new wave.

## Transferring Water From Aras River To Lake Urmia to Be Started

TEHRAN (MNA) – The executive operation of the project of the Water Transmission from the Aras River to Lake Urmia in the West Azarbaijan province will be implemented by IRGC's Khatam-al Anbiya Construction Headquarters.

Mohammad Rostami, the CEO of the holding company affiliated with the Khatam-al Anbiya Construction Headquarters made the remarks on Tuesday.

The project includes 110 km of water transmission pipeline, 3 pumping stations, 1 treatment plant, 11 reservoirs, and also the development of the existing catchment, Rostami said.

According to him, the project is aimed at supplying the water needs of the Aras commercial-industrial free zone, the water needs of the metropolis of Tabriz and other cities and villages along the pipeline route, and providing the environmental rights of Lake Urmia.

This holding company enjoys the necessary capacity to implement other projects in the fields of water, electricity, agriculture, and the environment in the northwest of the country, he also added.

## Members of Terrorist Team Arrested

ZAHEDAN (IRNA) - Commander of Sistan and Baluchestan Disciplinary Forces issuing a communique announced arresting of members of a terrorist team which had last week launched armed attacks against police patrols.

"The operation in which the members of this terrorist team were arrested was launched after conducting intelligence work and identifying them in a complicated operation," read the communique, which reiterated that more detailed news on the operation will be released later on.

## Saudis Ready for Resumption of Reconciliation Talks With Iran

TEHRAN (Tasnim) – An Iranian vice president gave details of his talks with the foreign minister of Saudi Arabia in Brazil, saying the kingdom has expressed readiness for the resumption of negotiations on rapprochement with Iran.

Speaking to reporters on the sidelines of a cabinet session in Tehran on Wednesday, Iran's Vice President for Parliamentary Affairs Mohammad Hosseini said he has held extensive talks with the Saudi foreign minister as they attended the inauguration of incoming Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva.

Hosseini said the top Saudi diplomat patiently listened to his remarks and expressed his own views as well. He noted that the main topic of the talks was the fate of the negotiations between Iran and Saudi Arabia which have started with Iraqi mediation.

"They (Saudis) voiced their readiness for the resumption of talks (with Iran)," Hosseini stated. He noted that the foreign minister of Saudi Arabia welcomed the idea of holding a series of meetings to address the differences and concerns in order to reach a conclusion.

"The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (of Iran) is pursuing the case and has taken a series of measures. Iran and Saudi Arabia are two major and influential countries in the region that cooperate in various spheres, such as pilgrimage and tourism," he added.

## ISIS-Free World Gen. Soleimani's Legacy for Humanity

TEHRAN (IRNA) - General Qassem Soleimani's legacy for humanity was a world free of the ISIS (Daesh) terrorist group, says the Vice-Speaker of the Iranian Parliament (Majlis) Ali Nikzad.

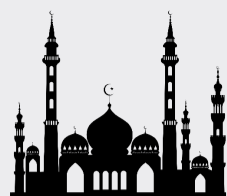
Nikzad told parliament's open session on Wednesday that General Soleimani had sacrificed his life for peace and humanity in the world.

He said that General Soleimani's successful mission to set up the Resistance Front in the region, which eventually led to the fall of Daesh, had deeply irritated the United States and the Zionist regime of Israel.

After successful operations in Iraq and Syria, Gen Soleimani announced the end of Daesh in a letter to the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei in November 2017 as he offered his congratulations to the Muslim world for the glorious victory against the terrorists.

General Soleimani, the former commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps Quds Force, was assassinated along a number his companions, including Iraqi popular militia commander Abu Mahdi al-Mohandes, in a U.S. drone attack just outside the main airport in the Iraqi capital of Baghdad on January 3, 2020.





## PRAYER TIME

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

104. We know best what they will say, when their leader most eminent in conduct will say:  
"Ye tarried not longer than a day!"

105. They ask thee concerning the Mountains: say,  
"My Lord will uproot them and scatter them as dust;"

Surah 20. Ta-ha ( 104 - 105 )

## Iran, Brazil Start Cooperation on Mining

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

**TEHRAN – Head of the Iran-Brazil Joint Chamber of Commerce says Iran and Brazil have started their cooperation in mining sector, adding that export of fruits to Brazil will also start soon.**

Speaking in a meeting, Fakhreddin Amerian said that the economic cooperation between Iran and Brazil is booming and the launch of the office of the chamber in Brazil and getting license for the trade center of Iranians in Brazil are of the first actions of the chamber which can accelerate the trade between the two countries.

He added that soon cooperation between the two countries in different fields will increase and cooperation in the mining sector is one of them.

He also announced the possibility of launching a direct shipping line between the two countries for the development of mutual non-oil trade.

Amerian said: "It is expected that the Islamic Republic Shipping Lines (IRISL) will help develop this line with support and cooperation."

He also called on the responsible government entities to prepare a list of the commodities that can be bartered or exchanged between the two countries.

"The Iran-Brazil Joint Chamber [of Commerce] considers itself as an agent for the implementation of the Islamic Republic's economic diplomacy goals, and therefore, with the establishment of a representative office in Brazil and obtaining the license to set up an Iranian business center in the country, we are the first joint chamber that has a permanent base in the target country," the official said.

According to Amerian, Brazil is one of the biggest exporters of livestock inputs to Iran, and launching the mentioned shipping line could offer an opportunity to balance the trade between the two sides.

He put the value of trade between the two countries at six billion dollars in the previous year, saying that the imports from Brazil were double the value of Iran's exports to the country in the mentioned year.

Meanwhile in the meeting, chairman of Agriculture of Commission of Majlis Mr. Mohammad Javad Askari pointed to the existing capacities for broadening trade between Iran and Brazil based on the agro products, adding that the two countries have many capacities for cooperation like in agriculture, medical,



industry and tourism and expressed hope both countries can use these capacities in line with their interests.

He went on to say that Majlis will not spare any support for broadening trade between Iran and Brazil.

Then Deputy Agriculture Minister Mohammad Mehdi Boroumandi, for his part, pointed to the plans of the ministry for exporting agro products, adding that soon some of Iranian agro products and fruits will be added to the basket of exports to Brazil.

Then First Vice-Chairman of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Mine and Agriculture Mr. Hossein Salahvarzi thanked the performance of the Iran-Brazil Joint Chamber of Commerce and said that the private sector should itself be decision-maker in developing international trade and chambers of commerce can play an important role in this regard.

He went on to say that Iranian experts and industrialists in the fields of infrastructures and technical, engineering services, mining, medicines, medical equipment and agro machineries have many things to say and the joint chamber can provide required ground for using these capacities for helping promotion of trade.

Then Head of Iran Mine House Mr. Mohammad Reza Bahrami pointed to recent visit of a mining delegation to Brazil, adding that Brazil has one of the biggest mining reserves of the world and there is a good opportunity for bilateral cooperation and investment between Iran and Brazil.

He said that during the visit to Brazil the first mining delegation had opportunity to talk with the Brazilians and this is a good prelude for cooperation between Iran and Brazil in mining sector.

Bahrami also said that development and reinforcement of logistic and transportation is important in broadening mining trade and it helped the private sector to enter this field.

## Iran Eyes to Launch Joint Int'l Technology Center With Russia

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Iran plans to launch a joint international technology and entrepreneurship center in cooperation with Russia in the near future, said Behrouz Abtahi, vice-chancellor of Tehran's Shahid Beheshti University.

He made the remark at a meeting with representatives of a group of Russian startup companies in Tehran.

Abtahi noted that within the framework of the mentioned joint technology and entrepreneurship center, Iran's Shahid Beheshti University has specific programs oriented for startups.

A number of steps are being taken to increase the activity of start-up companies in Iran and to develop in this field.

Reportedly, necessary conditions have been created for the operation of more than 7,500 start-up companies in 49 science and technology parks in Iran.

During the first 8 months of the current Iranian year (March 21 through November 21, 2022), Iranian banks have provided loans worth about 900 trillion rials (about \$21.4 billion) to start-up companies in the country.

## Special View of LSEZ To Develop Investment



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – With presence of representative of towns of Lamerd and Mehr to Majlis and the CEO of Lamerd Special Economic Zone (LSEZ) Eng. Fattahi several meetings were held with several investment groups at the headquarters of LSEZ.

According to the public relations of the LSEZ, considering the view of the CEO of the zone to expansion and development of investments in this industrial and mining center, development and expansion of investments have been prioritized in the executive programs of the zone. With consultation with different investments and their enthusiasm towards the capacities of LSEZ, several meetings with different investment groups were held in the fields like steel, petrochemical and power plant.

It is worth noting that on the sidelines of the meetings, the investment contracts in the field of petrochemical were communicated to them.

## 36% Growth in Shiraz Petchem Sales

TEHRAN (Shana) -- The sale of petrochemicals in Shiraz Petrochemical Plant hit 198,000 tons in the month of Azar (9th month in the Iranian calendar, November 22-December 21) which shows a 36% growth month on month.

According to Shiraz Petrochemical Company, continuation of the production and activities of this petrochemical company caused investors and shareholders to regain trust of the company's value in the country's capital market.

The company's in the month of Aban (the 8th month in the Iranian calendar, October 23-November 21) was nearly 146,000 tons, while the amount reached about 198,000 tons in the following month.

73500 tons of domestic sales and 124300 tons of export sales were registered by Shiraz Petrochemical Company in Azar.

Furthermore, the Azar sales of petrochemicals by the company was Rls. 25,310 billion, which has increased by 29% compared to the month of Aban which was Rls. 19,600.

## Iran, UAE to Accelerate Port, Maritime, Transit Cooperation

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN –The head of Iran's Ports and Maritime Organization (PMO) and the United Arab Emirates (UAE)'s ambassador to Tehran stressed the acceleration of mutual port, maritime, and transit cooperation.

As the PMO portal reported, during the meeting Saif Mohamed Obaid Jaseem Al Zaabi underlined the capacities of UAE companies for port and maritime investment in neighboring countries, especially Iran, and announced a field visit by his country's experts to Iranian ports in the near future.

The Arab official also referred to the very good transportation and transit infrastructure in his country and welcomed Iran's approach to developing transit cooperation with CIS countries.

Al Zaabi emphasized the need for the expansion of economic relations between Tehran and Abu Dhabi, expressing the trust and interest of the UAE government in developing port and maritime cooperation with Iran.

PMO Head Ali-Akbar Safaei for his part stressed the strategy of the Iranian government to develop economic cooperation and good relations with neighboring countries, saying that the development of maritime relations between Iran and the United Arab Emirates is very important for the Islamic Republic.

Stating that Iran is ready for the development of maritime, transit, and port relations with Abu Dhabi, Safaei emphasized: "Transit and port connections between Tehran and Abu Dhabi with Central Asian countries and other nations can be formed quickly and prosper very fast."

The official also welcomed any investment by UAE port and maritime companies in Iran's southern ports, especially Shahid Rajaei Port and Chabahar Port.

"Chabahar Port has very good capacities and the private sector of the United Arab Emirates can forge long-term investment contracts in Chabahar port," he said.

## 6.6% Rise in Manufacturing Activity in H1

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Central Bank of Iran (CBI) figures show manufacturing activity in the country rose by 6.6% in the two quarters to late September last year compared to the same period in 2021.

CBI figures published in a report by the Iranian finance ministry showed that large-scale manufacturing index (LSMI) had reached 119.2 in the country in March-September.

The figures showed that the LSMI had increased in all but three of the 33 categories considered in the index.

The finance ministry report said that production of motor vehicles had increased by 20.8% in Iran in the six

months to late September last year, adding that other manufacturing sectors had reported growth figures of up to 56.8% compared to the same period in 2021.

The LSMI index covers activity in all manufacturing units staffed by more than 100 people.

Iran has counted on increased manufacturing activity to boost non-oil exports since its oil sales came under American sanctions in 2018. That comes as the policy has also helped Iran create more jobs for its youth while it has led to increased investment in relatively impoverished regions of the country that are rich in resources.

## Tehran, Moscow Sign Contract to Build Ship

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – In line with the developmental policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Line Group (IRISL) for renovating its fleet, the group signed an agreement with Russia for building a ship upon the request of Salianka Port of Russia.

A contract was signed in Russia's Astrakhan on Wednesday for the ship to be made in Russia based on an order placed by IRISL's regional office in Salianka, a port near Astrakhan where port operations are mostly controlled by the IRISL.

Iran's consul general in Russia's port of Astrakhan Mehdi Akouchakian said after signing of the contract that Russian and Iranian government agencies have made continuous efforts in recent months to upgrade trade and economic relations between the two countries.

Akouchakian appreciated efforts by the IRISL Group and regional authorities in Salianka to develop transportation networks in the Caspian Sea.

He said Salianka port authorities' decision to order a new ship is sign that Iran and Russia are boosting their ties, adding that the ship's addition to IRISL's fleet will help cut the final price of Iranian exports in the region.

IRISL's CEO Mohammad Reza Modarres Khiabani, who attended the ceremony to sign the ship manufacturing contract via video conference, said that such deals can enhance trade and transportation ties between Russia and Iran.

The Iranian official urged Iran's consulate in Astrakhan to help speed up infrastructure projects that could facilitate loading and unloading operations in Salianka

Meanwhile in the meeting, the CEO of Khazar Sea Shipping Lines Company Mr. Kambiz Jahanbani said that four new vessels are to join the fleet of the company and this requires better services to the passing vessels.





## Tanzanian President Lifts Ban On Opposition Political Rallies

DAR ES SALAAM (Dispatches) - Tanzania's President Samia Suluhu Hassan lifted a ban on opposition rallies imposed in 2016 by her strongman predecessor, in an overture to political rivals seeking the restoration of democratic traditions.

Hassan has been under pressure to break with the hard-line policies of John Magufuli, who died in 2021 after six years of heavy-handed rule in a country once seen as a democratic beacon in East Africa.

Magufuli had come to power in 2015 as a no-nonsense man of the people but presided over a sustained crackdown on dissent and political freedoms, earning the nickname "Bulldozer" for his authoritarian leadership style.



## Iraq Says Ex-Official Returned Fraction of Stolen Billions

BAGHDAD (Dispatches) - Iraq said it had recovered another \$2.6 million in public funds fraudulently withdrawn from a government account, but the money is still only a fraction of the \$2.5 billion that disappeared.

The scandal, implicating businessmen and former high officials, has provoked widespread anger in Iraq. The country is oil-rich but ravaged by endemic corruption while plagued by unemployment and decaying infrastructure. Judge Haider Hanoun, who heads the government's anti-corruption agency, said "the sum returned today... amounts to four billion Iraqi dinars" (\$2.6 million).

He spoke at a press conference with piles of red and green bank notes stacked before him.



## Russians Angry at Commanders Over Ukrainian Strike That Killed Scores



MAKIIVKA (Dispatches) - Russian nationalists and some lawmakers have demanded punishment for commanders they accused of ignoring dangers as anger grew over the killing of dozens of Russian soldiers in one of the deadliest strikes of the Ukraine conflict.

In a rare disclosure, Russia's defense ministry said 63 soldiers were killed in the Ukrainian strike on New Year's Eve that destroyed a temporary barracks in a vocational college in Makiivka, twin city of the Russian-occupied regional capital of Donetsk in eastern Ukraine.

Russian critics said the soldiers were being housed alongside an ammunition dump at the site, which the Russian defense ministry said was hit by four rockets fired from U.S.-made HIMARS launchers.

TV footage showed a huge building reduced to rubble as cranes and bulldozers picked through concrete debris lying several feet deep.

Ukraine and some Russian nationalist bloggers put the Makiivka death toll in the hundreds, though pro-Russian officials say those estimates are exaggerated.

Rallies to commemorate the dead were held in several Russian cities, including Samara, where some came from, RIA Novosti news agency reported. Mourners laid flowers in the centre of Samara.

"I haven't slept for three days, Samara hasn't slept. We are constantly in touch with the wives of our guys. It's very hard and scary. But we can't be broken. Grief unites... We will not forgive, and, definitely, victory will be ours," RIA quoted Yekaterina Kolotovkina, a representative of a women's council at an army unit, as telling one of the rallies.

The strike on Makiivka came as Russia was launching what have become nightly waves of drone attacks on Kyiv and other Ukrainian cities. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said in his nightly video address that the attacks were aimed at "exhausting our people, our anti-aircraft defences, our energy".

Ukrainian air force spokesperson Yuriy Ihnat told Ukrainian TV that 84 drones had been shot down in two Russian attacks since the New Year.

Ukraine's armed forces are organising mobile groups to hunt them down, using jeeps and other vehicles equipped with anti-aircraft machine guns and searchlights, Ihnat said.

Zelenskyy, whose forces rely heavily on weapons and other equipment provided by Western nations, held separate phone calls on Tuesday with the Dutch and British prime ministers.

"We agreed to intensify our efforts to bring victory closer this year already," he said on the Telegram messaging app of his call with British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak.

Russia's Defense Ministry did not mention Makiivka in its daily bulletin on Tuesday but announced several offensives, including strikes launched by Russian Aerospace Forces that it said had killed more than 130 foreign mercenaries in Donetsk.

It said missile and air strikes launched at a "hardware concentration" near Druzhkivka railway station in Donetsk had killed "up to" 120 Ukrainian personnel, destroyed two HIMARS launchers and more than 800 rockets.

Russia, which invaded Ukraine on Feb. 24, has increasingly resorted to mass air strikes against Ukrainian cities after suffering defeats on the battlefield in the second half of 2022. It denies targeting civilians.

Ukrainian officials said Russia had struck Ukraine-controlled parts of the Donetsk region on Monday, hitting the village of Yakovlivka, the city of Kramatorsk and destroying an ice rink in Druzhkivka.

## China Blasts Unacceptable COVID Curbs on Travelers

BEIJING (Dispatches) - China has called the mounting international restrictions on travelers from its territory "unacceptable" after more than a dozen countries placed new coronavirus curbs on visitors from the world's most populous nation.

The United States, Canada, and Japan are among countries insisting all travelers from China provide negative COVID-19 tests before arrival, as concerns grow over a surge in cases.

An "overwhelming majority" of the EU's 27 member countries, including France, Spain and Italy, also want passengers coming from China to be systematically tested for Covid before departure, the European Commission said on Tuesday.

The trio have already imposed testing requirements on arrivals from China pending a bloc-wide approach.

But a crisis meeting was to be held Wednesday on the issue will decide what coordinated measures will be applied across the bloc.

The European Union fears a sudden influx of passengers from China could bring Covid variants that may be able to evade current vaccines.

There are also concerns that China's data on infections is incomplete, partial and insufficient.

EU health commissioner Stella Kyriakides said the officials also agreed to recommend stepped-up monitoring of wastewater from flights and at airports to detect traces of Covid, and for member states to boost surveillance.

China's steep rise in infections comes after Beijing abruptly lifted its zero-COVID policies in December, leading to hospitals and crematoriums quickly being overwhelmed.

Nevertheless, Beijing has pushed ahead with a long-awaited reopening, announcing an end to mandatory quarantine on arrival last week, in a move that prompted Chinese people to plan trips abroad. Medical developments, troubling variants, the human impact—it's all here.



## Colombia's ELN Rebels Not Agreed to Ceasefire

BOGOTA (Dispatches) - A ceasefire announced over the weekend by Colombian President Gustavo Petro is a proposal to be discussed at peace negotiations and is not in force, the National Liberation Army (ELN) rebel group said.

Petro, himself a former guerrilla, has pledged to end the Andean nation's six-decade internal conflict, which has left at least 450,000 dead. His government held a first round of peace talks with the ELN in December.

Over the weekend Petro said Colombia would hold a six-month ceasefire with the ELN and four other armed groups.

"The negotiations delegation of the ELN has not discussed with the government of Gustavo Petro any proposal for a bilateral ceasefire, so there exists no agreement on that issue," the ELN said in a statement posted on its website.

The December meeting in Caracas covered only the installation of the negotiation and its agenda, the ELN said, adding that the next cycle in Mexico is also set to cover the talks' agenda.

"Once we finish (that issue) it is predicted we will be available to discuss the bilateral ceasefire proposal, to examine the terms to make a deal possible," the rebels added.

Petro's office said it had no immediate comment, but that the president would meet with the government's high peace commissioner and officials in the Interior and Defense ministries.

The government said over the weekend that it would issue a decree for each armed group with specific conditions for the ceasefire and that the ceasefire would be verified by the United Nations, among others.

Previous attempts at negotiations with the ELN, which has some 2,400 combatants and was founded in 1964 by radical Catholic priests, have not succeeded partly because of dissent within its ranks.

## U.S., S.Korea Planning Response to Any N. Korea Nuclear Use

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - Washington and Seoul are planning an "effective coordinated" response if North Korea uses nuclear weapons, the White House warned.

South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol and U.S. President Joe Biden have "tasked their teams to plan for an effective coordinated response to a range of scenarios, including nuclear use by North Korea," a spokesman for the National Security Council at the White House said.

The NSC spoke out after confusion emerged in media reports about the allies' response to nuclear sabre rattling from Pyongyang.

On Monday, Biden had said "no" when asked if joint nuclear exercises were a possibility, seemingly contradicting earlier comments from Yoon.

The NSC spokesman clarified that joint exercises were not an option because South Korea does not have its own nuclear weapons.

However, "the United States is fully committed to our alliance... and providing extended deterrence through the full range of U.S. defense capabilities," the spokesman said.

In Seoul, Yoon's office said in a statement that the allies are "in talks over information-sharing, joint planning and the joint implementation plans that follow with regard to the operation of U.S. nuclear

assets to respond to North Korea's nuclear weapons."

Some interpreted earlier Yoon comments in a newspaper interview as indicating more elaborate joint nuclear exercises.

In an interview with the Chosun Ilbo newspaper published Monday, Yoon said the United States' existing "nuclear umbrella" and "extended deterrence" were no longer enough to reassure South Koreans.

"The nuclear weapons belong to the United States, but the planning, information sharing, exercises and training must be done jointly by South Korea and the United States," Yoon said, adding that the US was "quite positive" about the idea.

However, a senior U.S. administration official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said that there was no confusion over the extent of allied coordination.

Because North Korea's "actions and statements have caused increasing concern," the United States and South Korea "are working together to strengthen extended deterrence, including eventually through table-top exercises that will explore our joint response to a range of scenarios, including nuclear use," the official said.

"This is consistent with President Yoon's comment that the United States and the ROK (South Korea) will expand planning, information sharing, exercises, and training," the official said.



## Afghanistan Used To Launch Attacks On Pakistan

ISLAMABAD (Dispatches) - Pakistan's defense minister has alleged that Afghanistan's soil is being used by armed groups to launch attacks on his country, prompting a sharp response from Taliban government in Kabul which called the allegation "incorrect" and "regrettable".

"We have spoken to Afghanistan government and we will keep saying that... their soil is being used for cross-border terrorism," Khwaja Asif told a private news channel on Monday night.

Asif's remarks came shortly after Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, newly appointed military chief General Asim Munir and other top officials attended a meeting of the National Security Committee (NSC) in the capital Islamabad.

A statement issued by the government after the NSC meeting said "no country will be allowed to provide sanctuaries to terrorists" and their attacks "will be dealt with full force of the state".

The NSC statement did not name any country but it was an apparent reference to neighbouring Afghanistan, whose government denies the allegations as "provocative and baseless".

In response to the two statements, Zabihullah Mujahid, spokesman for the Taliban government in Afghanistan, on Tuesday said "the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan wants good relations with all its neighboring countries, including Pakistan," using the name Taliban has given to the country.

"The Islamic Emirate is trying its best that the territory of Afghanistan is not used against Pakistan or any other country. We are committed to this goal, but the Pakistani side is also responsible to try controlling the situation, refrain from giving baseless statements and provocative assertions, because such statement and mistrust is not in the interest of either side," it added.

The exchange of words between Pakistan and Afghanistan officials follows a series of recent attacks by Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), an armed group also known as Pakistani Taliban because of its ideological affinity with the Afghan Taliban.





## Key reason Why Long-COVID Patients Experience Long-Term Smell Loss



LONDON (Dispatches) - Scientists are working on determining the cause behind one of the most distinctive side effects of earlier strains of COVID-19—losing one’s sense of smell.

Although this symptom has become less common as newer variants spread, back in 2020 a sudden loss of smell was an immediate sign to go get tested for COVID-19.

And although this loss of smell has been temporary for many, for others that sense never properly returned, leaving millions struggling with loss of smell for months or even years. In order to find out the mechanisms behind this, a new study looked at olfactory epithelial samples collected from 24 people, including nine people experiencing long-term loss of their sense of smell due to a case of COVID-19.

“One of the first symptoms that has typically been associated with COVID-19 infection is loss of smell,” Bradley Goldstein, associate professor in Duke’s Department of Head and Neck Surgery and Communication Sciences and the Department of Neurobiology and senior author of the new research, said in a press release.

“Fortunately, many people who have an altered sense of smell during the acute phase of viral infection will recover smell within the next one to two weeks, but some do not. We need to better understand why this subset of people will go on to have persistent smell loss for months to years after being infected with SARS-CoV2.”

According to a study published earlier this year, as many as five per cent of COVID-19 survivors have long-lasting struggles with loss of smell, coming out to estimated 15 million people. And it’s still happening, even if the rate has gone down—around 17 per cent of people lost their sense of smell due to the Omicron variant when it became dominant in 2021.

In this recent study, researchers found that among those suffering from chronic loss of smell following COVID-19 infection, there was inflammation in the tissue of the nose where the smell nerve cells are located, and that there were also fewer olfactory neurons within the nose overall compared to control groups, which researchers suspect could be due to damage from the inflammation.

In a paper published in the journal Science Translational Medicine in mid-December, researchers describe how they didn’t find any detectable SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, in the subjects, but ongoing inflammation was persisting nonetheless in those with chronic smell issues.

Researchers obtained additional samples from those who had been suffering from chronic loss of smell for at least four months since contracting COVID-19. None of the patients were acutely ill with COVID-19 at the time of sampling, nor had they previously had medical interventions such as intubation.

One big issue was that in the affected patients who previously had COVID-19, part of the immune system had been thrown off balance—T-cells in the olfactory samples were working overtime, driving the inflammation.

The job of T-cells is to attack specific foreign particles in order to help the body fight a virus, but in these patients, the virus was long gone.

“The findings are striking,” Goldstein said. “It’s almost resembling a sort of autoimmune-like process in the nose.”

It’s important research into an issue that has left some without the ability to smell anything, a condition called anosmia, and others with a distorted sense of smell that impacts their ability to eat food without nausea. Parosmia is the term for when a person’s sense of smell is thrown off to the point where many things smell rancid or have a chemical cast.

## Why Straight Teeth Are Important For Your Health



LONDON (Dispatches) - People are twice as likely to recall a face with straight rather than crooked teeth. Straight teeth improve your smile, which boosts your confidence and enhances your quality of life. Studies highlight that people associate straight teeth with happiness, health, and higher intellect. Let’s read about the benefits of having perfectly aligned teeth.

A set of straight teeth can help you maintain proper oral hygiene and, thus, overall health. Let’s see how. Everybody has a different set of teeth. However, if your teeth are seriously out-of-alignment, it might lower your self-esteem. Estimates show that 70% of Americans are unhappy with their teeth.

Interestingly, studies highlight that straight teeth help to build a positive body image, increase societal acceptance, and help young people to get hired for jobs.

Straight teeth allow a better bite and improved chewing efficiency. This simplifies swallowing and digesting solid foods by breaking them into smaller pieces. As a result, you can better digest food when you chew it properly.

Crooked teeth often overlap, making it harder to reach particular places with your toothbrush. In the long run, it damages general gum and tooth health. These often lead to chronic gum diseases like gingivitis (inflammation of the gums) and periodontitis (infections of the structures around the teeth).

Crooked teeth increase the risk of gum disease. In addition, studies highlight that periodontitis is linked to an increased risk of heart disease.

Dentists recommend being more meticulous about maintaining good oral health if you have prosthetic heart valves. Furthermore, poor oral health increases the risk of bacterial dissemination (a bacterial infection in the bloodstream), which can harm the heart valves. A study from the University of Helsinki discovered a link between infections of the root tip of a tooth and coronary artery disease.

You’re also more prone to biting your cheeks and tongue with crooked teeth, which can lead to painful sores. Misaligned teeth lead to an improper bite. This can cause pain and put too much pressure on some teeth, increasing the risk of breaking. When you break a tooth, you have to cope with the discomfort as well as the high cost of dental care.

Straightening your teeth might help attain proper jaw alignment. Straight teeth reduce the chances of clenching and stretching the jaw and teeth grinding. This is because muscles are more relaxed and can function normally.

Crooked teeth can lead to frequent headaches, chronic facial pain, jaw ache, earache and migraine attacks. A set of aligned teeth will make you feel calmer since you won’t have headaches or other problems from too much tension on your jaw joint.

We pronounce words with our tongue, teeth and lips. Straight teeth help with proper pronunciation.

Crooked teeth increase your chances of having speech issues such as lisps or other speech impairments. Furthermore, mal-aligned teeth might contribute to early tooth loss, which can exacerbate speech problems.

A set of straight teeth puts less pressure on the opposite teeth, gums, and supporting bone. This helps to protect teeth surfaces from flattening out rapidly. Subsequently, they undergo less wear and tear with age and last longer.

Research highlights that crowded, irregularly spaced, or misaligned teeth tend to wear unevenly over time, causing the teeth to weaken and fall out.

Issues with the growth and positioning of specific teeth or jawbones and the tongue, lips, cheeks, and muscular tissue can cause mal-aligned teeth and jaws. Because genes play a part, these issues can “run in families.”



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## Russian Rouble Slides in First Trade of the Year

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - The Russian rouble weakened against the dollar and euro in the first session of the year in Moscow amid light trading volumes during public holidays in Russia.

The rouble slid by 0.4% to the dollar to trade at 70.18 on the Moscow Exchange. Against the euro, the rouble declined 0.6% to 74.67.

The rouble endured a volatile year in 2022, slumping to a record low 120 per dollar in March soon after Russia shook

markets by sending tens of thousands of troops into Ukraine, but then recovered on the support of capital controls and a collapse in imports.

The imposition of a Western oil price cap and embargo hurt the rouble in December, but analysts expect the currency to remain relatively resilient in 2023 thanks to Russia's strong current account surplus.



## World Bank Seeks More Funds to Address Climate Change, Other Crises

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - The World Bank is seeking to vastly expand its lending capacity to address climate change and other global crises and will negotiate with shareholders ahead of April meetings on proposals that include a capital increase and new lending tools, according to an "evolution roadmap" seen by Reuters.

The roadmap document - sent to shareholder governments - marks the start of a negotiation process to alter the bank's mission and financial resources and shift it away from a country- and project-specific lending model used since its creation at the end of World War Two.

The World Bank management aims to have specific proposals to change its mission, operating model and financial capacity ready for approval by the joint World Bank and International Monetary Fund Development Committee in October, according to the document.

A World Bank spokesman said that the document aimed to provide details on the scope, approach, and timetable for the evolution, with regular updates for shareholders and decisions later in the year.

The development lender will explore options like a potential new capital increase, changes to its capital structure to unlock more lending and new financing tools such as guarantees for private sector loans and other ways to mobilize more private capital, according to the document.

But the World Bank Group (WBG) is not ready to bow to demands from some non-profit organizations to abandon its longstanding top-tier credit rating to boost lending, stating: "Management will explore all options that increase the capacity of the WBG whilst maintaining the AAA rating of the WBG entities."

U.S. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen has called for the World Bank and others to revamp their business models to boost lending and harness private capital to fund investments that more broadly benefit the world, such as helping middle-income countries transition away from coal power.

A U.S. Treasury spokesperson declined comment on the World Bank document.

The bank said proposals under consideration include higher statutory lending limits, lower equity-to-loan requirements and the use of callable capital - money pledged but not paid in by member governments - for lending.

Development experts say this shift would greatly increase the amount of lending compared to the current capital structure, which only utilizes paid-in capital.

"The challenges the world is facing call for a massive step up in the international community's support," the bank said in the document. "For the WBG to continue to play a central role in development and climate finance, it will need a concerted effort by both shareholders and management to step up WBG financing capacity."

The roadmap document cautions that a build-up of lending for climate change, health care, food security and other needs may require a capital increase to boost the capacity of the World Bank's middle-income lending arm, the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD).

## Japanese Companies See Bleak Outlook for 2023

TOKYO (Dispatches) - Major Japanese companies have grown more pessimistic about the economy, given higher costs and a weaker yen, according to a survey by Kyodo News.

The survey of 117 companies found just over half, or 56%, expect the economy to grow this year. That was down sharply from 84% a year earlier, said the survey released Monday.

The percentage of firms forecasting growth was at its second lowest in 10 years for the annual survey, and the companies also expressed worries about slowdowns in the United States and China in 2023.

The war in Ukraine has pushed prices of oil and other raw materials higher while the yen has weakened against the U.S. dollar, for the world's third-largest economy.

The bleak outlook also reflects worries over a possible global recession as central banks in the U.S. and other major economies raise interest rates to counter inflation.

The dollar rose to about 150 yen at its peak last year from 115 yen at the beginning of the year. On Tuesday, it was trading at about 130 yen. Only 3% of the companies surveyed said a weaker yen was a positive for them, with about a third saying it was a problem since it raised the costs of manufacturing inputs and energy, hurting their bottom lines.

Japan's economy shrank at a 0.8% annual rate in July-September as pandemic precautions eased in the late summer, allowing normal business activity and travel to resume. Exports expanded by 2.1% in annual terms. Growth in the last fiscal year, which ended in March, was at 2.5%.

Toyota Motor Corp. was among the companies expecting a relatively good year. Like other major export manufacturers, it benefits from a cheaper yen when it repatriates profits earned overseas.

Energy, telecoms and technology companies also foresaw improvement in the coming months, according to the survey, conducted from late November to mid-December.

Consumer spending has been recovering as Japan has ended restrictions on business activity to fight COVID-19 outbreaks, even as case numbers have soared in recent weeks. Most companies forecasting a positive outlook for 2023 cited that as the major reason for optimism.

About a third of the companies surveyed said they expected no major changes this year, while seven anticipated a moderate contraction.



## Turkey Touts Downward Trend as Inflation Falls Sharply

ANKARA (Dispatches) - Annual inflation in Turkey showed a sharp fall in December and came in below expectations, official data showed on Tuesday, mainly due to a favorable so-called base effect and after hitting a 24-year high in October.

Consumer price inflation eased to 64.27% in December from the 84.39% reported in November, the Turkish Statistical Institute (TurkStat) said. The latest reading marks the lowest since March when prices rose 61.14%.

The coronavirus pandemic and Russia's invasion of Ukraine have stoked inflation around the world, spearheaded by soaring food, energy and commodity prices.

December marked the second month in a row that Turkey's inflation has eased after hitting a 24-year high of 85.5% in October.

The decline is expected to become more pronounced in the first quarter of the year, spelling relief for this year's annual inflation calculation.

President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan hailed the data as a sign of a "rapid recovery."

"We will see that the downward trend in inflation will continue," Erdoğan told at an event in Ankara. "Our goal this year is to completely burst the bubble of inflation and remove the issue from our country's agenda as of next year."

Treasury and Finance Minister Nureddin Nebati said Turkey entered a significant downward trend in inflation as of November, stressing that the country ended 2022 at a level below the target set in the last year's Medium Term Program.

Consumer prices rose 1.18% month-over-month in December, the data showed, down from 2.88% in November and below the 2.7% forecast in a Reuters poll. The estimate for annual consumer price inflation was 66.8%.

The biggest monthly consumer price increases were seen in the health sector, up 5.91%, according to the data, while key food and nonalcoholic drink prices were up 1.86%. Transport prices dropped 4.14%.

The base effect that drove the decline in annual inflation from November was a 13.6% month-over-month surge in consumer price inflation in December 2021.

The sharpest increases in annual prices were in the housing sector, at nearly 80%, followed by food and nonalcoholic drinks prices at 78% and home furniture at 73.02%.

Meanwhile, the domestic producer price index was down 0.24% month-over-month in December for an annual rise of 97.72%, the data showed.

The Turkish lira was unchanged at 18.7255 against the U.S. dollar after the data was released.

## Syria Devalues Local Currency For 2nd Time in 4 Months



DAMASCUS (Dispatches) - Syria devalued its national currency, the second time in less than four months. In a statement, the Central Bank lowered the official exchange rate to 4,522 Syrian pounds against the U.S. dollar.

Previously, the official rate had been set at 3,015 pounds. The dollar is traded on the black market for around 6,500 pounds.

The devaluation was the second in less than four months after the Central Bank weakened the national currency from 2,814 pounds to 3,015 pounds against the dollar in September.

Foreign currency wealth has been declining in the Syrian market for over 10 years when traders and citizens preferred the dollar to the local currency to protect their savings from falling exchange rates.

The latest decision came as the Syrian currency has continued to crash in the war-torn country, plunging more Syrians into poverty.

Syria has been wracked by civil war since early 2011 when Bashar Assad's regime cracked down on pro-democracy demonstrators.

Hundreds of thousands of people have been killed and over 10 million displaced, according to estimates from the U.N.

Meanwhile, the currency has been hit hard by war, corruption, Western sanctions and financial and economic collapse in neighboring Lebanon.

Several regions in the north have previously switched to using the Turkish lira last year amid the uncontrolled devaluation of the Syrian pound and huge hikes in the prices of goods and commodities.

Turkish lira notes were already in circulation in some areas of northern Syria, which had been liberated from terrorist organizations by the Turkish military and Syrian opposition groups.

## Iraq Oil Revenues Top \$115b in 2022

BAGHDAD (Dispatches) - Iraq's oil revenues in 2022 exceeded \$115 billion, according to preliminary figures announced by the oil ministry on Tuesday -- a four-year high following a collapse in prices during the coronavirus pandemic.

Oil production accounts for some 90 percent of Baghdad's income, and the country is the second largest producer within the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC).

"The total revenue from the export of crude oil for the year 2022 amounts to more than \$115 billion," Minister for Oil Hayan Abdel-Ghani said in a statement.

The country exported more than 1.2 billion barrels in 2022, averaging 3.3 million barrels per day, according to the statement.

These revenues follow a spike in prices following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, and OPEC producers' subsequent reluctance to increase production.

In October the oil cartel decided to cut production quotas to maintain price levels, with a reduction of "two million barrels per day".

With a near total reliance on oil revenue to fund state spending, Iraq was hit by a collapse in prices at the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic.

From \$78.5 billion in 2019, oil revenues fell to \$42 billion in 2020, according to official statistics. By 2021 they had risen back up to \$75.6 billion.

## German Inflation Slows in December

BERLIN (Reuters) - German inflation eased for a second month in a row in December due to falling energy prices and the government's one-off payment of household energy bills, coming in below expectations even as analysts warn that a continued slowdown is not a given.

German consumer prices, harmonised to compare with other European Union countries, rose by 9.6% on the year in December, preliminary data from the Federal Statistics Office showed on Tuesday. Analysts

polled by Reuters predicted prices would rise by 10.7% year-on-year in December.

October saw the highest reading since comparable data going back to 1996, with harmonized price index up 11.6% on the year. November saw a slight easing, with an increase of 11.3%.

A one-off payment for household energy bills in December, part of government efforts to shield consumers, had a downward effect on prices, according to the statistics office.

Compared with November, December prices fell by 1.2%. Analysts had expected a drop of 0.5% on the previous month.

The annual increase has been driven primarily by a surge in food and energy costs due to the war in Ukraine.

Energy prices eased somewhat in December but were still up 24.4% compared with the same period last year, while food prices had increased by 20.7%, according to the office.

The Bundesbank had expected lower inflation rates in December because of relief measures, President Joachim Nagel said last month, adding that the inflation levels would remain around 7% in 2023 before retreating significantly in 2024.

According to the bank's new forecasts, German inflation is now seen at 7.2% in 2023 and slowing to 4.1% next year.

Germany's full-year harmonized inflation rate jumped to 8.7% in 2022 from 3.2% a year earlier, said the statistics office.

Hauck Aufhaeuser Lampe private bank chief economist Alexander Krueger said it was too early to sound the all-clear but that the inflation peak appeared to be already behind.

"Core inflation remains the number one inflation scourge for the time being," he added, referring to a measure that excludes volatile food and energy costs.

Commerzbank chief economist Joerg Kraemer also warned that core inflation had risen further and said the European Central Bank's "hesitant approach" means high inflation will stick around, despite energy relief measures.



## Iran, Brazil Call for Strengthening Mutual Ties

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Vice President for parliamentary affairs, Mohammad Hosseini, and Brazil's Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Kenneth Nobrega called for boosting mutual ties between Tehran and Brasilia. Hosseini, who has taken part in the inauguration ceremony of Brazilian President-elect Lula da Silva, has said in the meeting that his visit to Brazil was a good opportunity to find ways to strengthen and seriously develop

the relations between Tehran and Brasilia and plan to make the existing capacities more active. He added that the Islamic Republic of Iran has extensive ties with the countries of South America and with the election of Brazil's President-elect Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, Brazil can become the center of Iran's relations with South America in order to secure the common interests of the two nations and the nations of the region.



## Russia Risks Causing New-Year IT Worker Flight With Remote Working Law

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russia's buffeted IT sector risks losing more workers in the new year because of planned legislation on remote working, as authorities try to lure back some of the tens of thousands who have gone abroad without prompting them to cut ties completely.

Having relatively portable jobs, IT workers featured prominently among the many Russians who fled after Moscow sent its army into Ukraine on February 24 and the hundreds of thousands who followed when a military call-up began in September.

The government estimates that 100,000 IT specialists currently work for Russian companies overseas.

Now, legislation is being mooted for early this year that could ban remote working for some professions.

Hawkish lawmakers, fearful that more Russian IT professionals could end up working in Nato countries and inadvertently sharing sensitive security information, have proposed banning some IT specialists from leaving Russia.

But the Digital Ministry said in December that a total ban could make Russian IT firms less effective, and so less competitive: "In the end, whoever can attract the most talented staff, including those from abroad, will win."

While many disillusioned young Russians have gone to countries such as Latvia, Georgia or Armenia where the Russian language is widely spoken, several have made a bigger leap — to Argentina.

IT specialist Roman Tulnov, 36, said he did not plan on returning to Russia under any circumstances.

"I had wanted to leave for some time. On February 24, everything became clear. I understood that there was no more life in Russia," he said, crediting mobilisation in particular for the opportunity to work six times zones away and still keep his job.

"Before mobilisation, no one thought about giving the go-ahead for people to move to who-knows-where."

Vyacheslav Volodin, the powerful chairman of Russia's lower house of parliament or State Duma, has said he wants to see higher taxation for workers who have moved abroad.

Product designer Yulia, 26, estimated that a quarter of her team would rather quit



than return to Russia under duress.

"Such a non-alternative choice is a bit like negotiating with terrorists: 'Come back or we'll make your job impossible, and for your company and employees'," she said.

Some expatriate Russians might also be put off paying tax altogether. Personal income tax of 13 per cent is deducted automatically from employees who are resident, but those who work for Russian-based companies from abroad are left to their own devices.

Professional online poker player Sasha, 37, also living in Argentina, said he had now stopped paying Russian taxes.

"When you pay taxes you support the state and its military expansion," he said. "I'm not paying and don't plan to."

## Can Global Oil Production Climb If the U.S. Shale Boom Is Over?



LONDON (OilPrice) - Prior to the pandemic-induced downturn in world oil production, U.S. oil production growth was responsible for 98 percent of the increase in world production in 2018 (as reported in 2019). Almost all of that growth resulted from rapid increases in shale oil production which accounted for 64 percent of U.S. production (as of 2021).

Fast forward to today when Oilprice.com has declared that "The U.S. Shale Boom Is Officially Over." The reasons cited mostly have to do with management "discipline" regarding capital expenditure in favor of shareholder payouts and complaints about "anti-oil rhetoric" and "regulatory uncertainty."

But there might just be another reason for the slowdown in shale oil production in the United States: There isn't as much accessible and economical shale oil underground as advertised. Earth scientist David Hughes laid out his case for this view in his "Shale Reality Check 2021." (For a summary of Hughes' report, see my piece from December 2021 entitled, "U.S. shale oil and gas forecast: Too good to be true?")

There may be other sources of oil worldwide that will somehow make up for the significantly lower growth in U.S. shale oil production. But no other source seems set to provide the kind of growth U.S. shale oil provided, that is, 73.2 percent of the global increase in oil production from 2008 through 2018.

The world has actually been getting along with less oil for some time now. World oil production proper (crude oil including lease condensate) peaked on a monthly basis in November 2018 at 84.58 million barrels per day (mbpd). In August 2022 production was 81.44 mbpd. That's after a pandemic-induced shock that saw production fall to 70.28 mbpd in June 2020.

Neither the U.S. shale oil companies nor OPEC seem ready to increase production significantly (assuming that they can). Russia, among the world's top three producers, is under heavy sanction and may not be able to produce more oil for export anytime soon. (Again, it is not certain that Russia can significantly increase production. Except for the pandemic-induced drop Russia has long been on a production plateau of between 10 and 11 mbpd.)

No doubt some new oil savior will be announced soon whether credible or not. In the meantime, the world economy will be faced with limited oil supplies that do not simply grow to meet our fantasies of what we want. The result will be high prices, that is, higher than has been historically the case. A recession won't change this dynamic and, in fact, may reinforce it as oil companies are likely to reduce drilling activity when demand for oil slumps. That will make it doubly difficult for those companies to supply growing demand coming out of the next recession.

## Tesla in Pole Position in Norway's Race to EV Goal

OSLO (Dispatches) - Four out of five new cars sold in Norway in 2022 were battery powered, led by Tesla, but some in the industry say new taxes could thwart the country's goal of becoming the first to end the sale of petrol and diesel automobiles by 2025.

Elon Musk's electric-only Tesla Inc. sold more cars in Norway than any other brand for a second consecutive year, clinching a 12.2% share of the overall market ahead of Volkswagen with 11.6%, registration data showed.

While China is by far the biggest car market overall, Norway with its 5.5 million inhabitants, has achieved the world's highest proportion of electric vehicles with the help of generous subsidies, making it a proving ground for auto makers launching models.

The share of battery electric vehicles sold rose to 79.3% of all new cars in 2022 from 65% in 2021, up from 2.9% a decade ago, the Norwegian Road Federation said.

The Tesla Model Y was the single most popular model of the year, ahead of Volkswagen's electric ID.4 in second place, and Skoda Enyaq in third.

Seeking to end the sale of petrol and diesel cars, oil-producing Norway has until now exempt battery electric vehicles from taxes imposed on rivals using internal combustion engines.

But while tax exemptions help cut emissions, they cost the state 39.4 billion crowns (\$4.0 billion) in lost revenue in 2022, the finance ministry said, and the centre-left coalition government is seeking to curb benefits for high-end vehicles.



Those who bought an electric Porsche Turbo S last year would have paid at least 1.7 million Norwegian crowns, but if it had been taxed like its petrol-fuelled equivalent, the price tag would have been above 2.1 million.

A new auto tax based on weight could also negatively impact the sale of BEVs as electric engine systems are heavier than their fossil-fueled

equivalents, said the Norwegian Automobile Federation (NAF), an interest group representing car owners.

"We are concerned that the sales will drop because the government has proposed a new tax based on weight," NAF spokesperson Thor Egil Braadland said.

The government has also failed to sufficiently address one of the main practical problems for electric car owners, which involves charging stations and how to pay for their use, he said.

"You need 10-15 apps to be a well-prepared EV owner in Norway, and we know that many are delaying their purchase of an EV because of that," Braadland said.

NAF is pushing for an 'e-roaming' solution that would enable users to pay at all charging stations without needing multiple apps.

The government defended its policy for electric vehicles.

"The electric car has become the new normal car for Norwegians, and that means we have to look into how we are using society's funds," Labour's Johan Vasara, a state secretary at the Norwegian transport ministry, said.

"We are very confident that the electric car is here to stay," Vasara said, adding the government needs to focus its measures on other transport segments, including heavy goods vehicles.

## U.S. Martyred Gen. Soleimani...

FROM PAGE 1

"Hajj Qassem was able, through his brainpower, planning, constant presence, and sincerity, to link the forces of the resistance axis, strengthen them and provide them with material and intellectual support through meetings and direct presence on the front lines."

Nasrallah said General Soleimani and his companions confronted the US plot in the region, known as the "New Middle East" project, and the aim of their assassination was to break the resistance and weaken the parties to the axis of resistance in order to dominate the region and seize its oil and gas wealth.

"The first thing that Martyr Soleimani and other leaders and martyrs faced was the first version of the new Middle East project in Lebanon and Palestine," Nasrallah said, adding that the September 11 incident "gave impetus to the American project to enter Afghanistan and Iraq and approach Iran and Syria."

The Hezbollah chief said, "The Iraqi resistance defeated the Americans and forced them to withdraw from Iraq and change the face of the region."

"Those who launched the resistance campaign in Iraq are factions and sects, and Haj Qassem provided them with training and planning alongside Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis," he added.

Nasrallah said the purpose of the assassinations was to "break the resistance, terrorize the Iraqis, and weaken the parties to the axis of resistance in Syria, Iran, Lebanon and Palestine," adding, "The assassinations were also meant to remove the most important strategic threat to the occupation entity."

The Hezbollah leader emphasized, "The American project failed to achieve its goals and to subjugate Iran, Iraq, Palestine, Syria, Lebanon and Yemen, but rather launched new elements of power in our region."

The U.S. administration, under then-president Donald Trump, assassinated General Soleimani and Abu Mahdi Al Muhandis in a drone strike near Baghdad International Airport on January 3, 2020.

## U.S. Arms Industry...

FROM PAGE 1

Any opportunity to supply weapons is profitable to the US Military Industrial Complex. This incentive is enough for perpetuating the Ukraine conflict.



Lockheed Martin, the United States largest military contractor, had booked more than \$950 million worth of its own missile military orders from the Pentagon, in part, to refill stockpiles being used in Ukraine.

The Army has awarded Raytheon technologies more than \$2 billion in contracts to deliver missile systems to expand or replenish weapons used to help Ukraine.

Ukraine's unending demands for weapons supply have reportedly jeopardized NATO's defense capacity and left Europe struggling to produce enough ammunition for the country and for itself as the war continues with no end in sight.

Since the beginning of the conflict in February 2022 media attention has regularly focused on the military assistance provided by states to bolster Ukraine's war effort, with NATO members delivering almost \$40 billion in military aid.

To date the United States and its allies have provided Ukraine with over 100 million rounds of a small arms ammunition, over a million rounds of artillery shells, and over 100,000 tank rounds.

This is in addition to providing Ukraine with some of the most advanced weapons in the U.S. arsenal, including the Armored Gun, the Patriot anti-aircraft systems, the HARM anti-radar missile, and Harpoon anti-ship missile.

In order to supply more weapons to Ukraine or convince other European states to follow it, the U.S. repeatedly claims that Russia uses Iranian drones and missiles. Although this claim has not been verified by the independent sources, the West uses it as a pretext for supply of arms to Ukraine for continuing war against Russia and in between the U.S. enjoys Ukraine resistance because Ukrainians are acting in favor of the U.S., and American arms industry makes most of this baseless patriotism and continuation of Ukrainians and even Russians.

So with the current developments in the war scene in Ukraine and reports coming from the battle zones, one cannot expect an immediate halt in the war and the U.S. by fooling the world can continue selling arms to Ukraine and other European countries, and Washington does not mind how the world is suffering from this war even most American people are suffering but what matters for Washington and its arms dealers is to make money by selling arms and to weaken some of its rivals, namely, Russia and some European states.

## Iran Reserves Right...

FROM PAGE 1

The envoy further referred to yet another recent instance of menacing language by Tel Aviv, during which former Israeli prime minister Yair Lapid claimed that no Israeli cabinet "will allow a nuclear Iran. If it is necessary to act, we will act."

Iravani considered the regime's threats to take military action against Iran's nuclear facilities to be "a flagrant violation of international law and the United Nations Charter."

The Israeli regime has invariably opposed Iran's peaceful nuclear activities.

Over the years, the regime has assassinated at least seven Iranian nuclear scientists and conducted several sabotage operations against the Islamic Republic's nuclear facilities.

Pointing to the Israeli regime's recurrent accusations against Iran's nuclear work, the envoy, meanwhile, reminded that the Islamic Republic's peaceful nuclear energy program has been subject to "the most stringent and intrusive nuclear verification, monitoring, and transparency measures ever implemented in a country in the IAEA (the International Atomic Energy Agency)'s history."

Iravani concluded his statement by asserting, "Indeed, such warmongering statements demonstrate that the Israeli regime is responsible for all criminal and terrorist acts committed against Iran and must bear the consequences."

## Iran Exports...

FROM PAGE 1

Total Iranian trade rose by 17% year on year to \$87.425 billion in March-December, showed the customs data.

Major suppliers of goods to Iran over the 10 months to the end of 2022 were the UAE, the main re-exporting country in the Persian Gulf, with \$13.649 billion worth of exports, followed by China at \$11.521 and Turkey at \$4.635 billion, said IRICA, adding that imports from India and Germany had topped \$2.249 billion and \$1.399 billion over the same period, respectively.



## Haller Back in Training After Cancer Battle

**B**ERLIN (Dispatches) - Borussia Dortmund striker Sebastian Haller has returned to training after undergoing surgeries and chemotherapy to treat a testicular tumor that was discovered in July.

"Happy New Year to all! And it's off to a great start for me because it means getting back on the field," the 28-year-old Ivory Coast international wrote on Twitter, posting images of himself working out at the gym. "2022 wasn't the easiest year but it prepared me for all the new challenges that 2023 will bring."

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## Leeds Sign Max Wober From RB Salzburg

**L**ONDON (Dispatches) - Leeds announced they have signed Austrian international defender Max Wober from RB Salzburg for an undisclosed fee, subject to a work permit.

The 24-year-old, who can operate at centre-back and left-back, is the Premier League club's first signing in the January transfer window after agreeing a four-and-a-half-year deal.

Wober, who has been capped 13 times, played under Jesse Marsch when the Leeds manager was in charge at Salzburg. Marsch spent two years at the Austrian club until 2021.

# Djokovic Feels "the Love" In Australia

**A**DELAIDE (Dispatches) - Novak Djokovic said the reception he had received in Australia was more than he could wish for and the good vibes would reflect in his tennis as he targets a 22nd Grand Slam title this month.

The Serbian star, who will bid for a 10th crown at the Australian Open, is back in the country a year after being kicked out for refusing to be vaccinated against Covid-19.

He was barred from returning for three years, but the government has since lifted the ban and Djokovic made a winning return at the Adelaide International, beating Frenchman Constant Lestienne 6-3, 6-2.

The 35-year-old was given a warm welcome when he played a losing doubles clash yesterday and received similar treatment on a packed centre court.

"It's great to be back. To see the packed house for my first match was definitely a very pleasant surprise. Lots of support, lots of love," he said at a press conference.

"That obviously motivated me and allowed me to express myself in the best possible way on the court with my game."

"A lot of Serbia flags, I know the Serbian community here in Adelaide is big but I didn't think so many would come and I thank them very much."

Last year's Australian Open was overshadowed by Djokovic being put on a plane on the eve of the contest after a high-stakes legal battle over his visa status.

It left a bitter taste, but he held "no grudges" and had moved on.

"It was different coming to Australia this year than any other year basically because of the events of 12 months ago," he said.

"But at the same time, 12 months is also a long time ago, already it is behind me, I've moved on and looking forward.

"There's no reason to focus on ... what you focus on is what you become, if you focus on the negatives that is what you'll become, so I don't want to do that.

"I don't hold a grudge, I'm here to play tennis, to enjoy sports and spread good energy."



Daniil Medvedev, who lost to Djokovic in the 2021 Australian Open final, also tasted victory, saving an incredible nine set points on his way to a 7-6 (8/6), 2-1 win over Italian Lorenzo Sonego who retired hurt.

Jannik Sinner, Denis Shapovalov and Victoria Azarenka were among other winners.

Top seed Djokovic served to love to open his account and it went with serve until he pounced in game six, working two break points with Lestienne netting a forehand to go 4-2 behind.

He calmly closed out the set in 38 minutes and took full control in the second, quickly breaking twice to move 3-0 clear before cruising home. Djokovic will play another Frenchman Quentin Halys next for a place in the quarter-finals of a tournament he won in 2007.

Before his haul of 21 major trophies, the then 19-year-old Serb beat Chris Guccione in the final ahead of his breakthrough triumph over Jo-Wilfried Tsonga at the Australian Open a year later.

Former world number one Medvedev, seeded two, also progressed but was given a tough workout by Sonego, a champion in Metz last year.

They played a cracking 80-minute first set in their maiden meeting.

Sonego fended off three break points, but the tables were turned in game nine with the Russian forced to save six set points after a series of uncharacteristic unforced errors.

He saved another three set points in the next game before prevailing in the tiebreak.

They exchanged breaks in the second set before Sonego retired after treatment on his right arm. He will next meet Serbian Miomir Kecmanovic.

Sixth seeded Italian Sinner beat Britain's Kyle Edmund in straight sets while Canadian seventh seed Shapovalov ground out a three set win over Australian qualifier Rinky Hijikata.

In an upset on the women's side, Estonian former world number two Anett Kontaveit was stunned by Chinese qualifier Zheng Qinwen 6-1, 4-6, 7-6 (9/7).

But former two-time Australian Open champion Azarenka survived a tough battle with Ukraine's Anhelina Kalinina 7-6 (11/9), 7-6 (7/5).



**Conte Insists He Is Happy At Tottenham**

**L**ONDON (Dispatches) - Antonio Conte insists he is happy at Tottenham Hotspur and committed to the club's project despite comments at the weekend apparently criticizing the quality of his squad.

Tottenham were booed off after a 2-0 home defeat by Aston Villa on New Year's Day, a result that left them in fifth place after only two wins from their last six Premier League games.

After that loss, Conte said pre-season talk of a title challenge were 'crazy' and insisted that fans needed to be realistic about the prospects of winning silverware.

Tottenham urgently need an uplift in form, starting on Wednesday at Crystal Palace, if they are not to lose touch with the teams also competing for a top-four finish.

"I am happy but I always say to you I am happy. I want to stay here. I am enjoying my time in Tottenham, I am enjoying my work in Tottenham," Conte told reporters.

"But it doesn't mean I cannot tell you what we are doing. We are trying to create a base foundation. It is difficult for me every day to repeat the same thing and for you not to understand. I am happy to stay here because I am at a modern club, I have a good relationship with the players and I have a good relationship with the club.

"Sometimes I go home and think I have to study much more English because I am not good to transfer my thoughts to you."

## Gauff, Raducanu Overcome Rain Disruptions in Auckland

**A**UCKLAND (Dispatches) - Top seed Coco Gauff cruised into the second round of the Auckland Classic while two former Grand Slam winners featured in rain-disrupted encounters.

The 18-year-old American, ranked seventh in the world, downed 35-year-old German veteran Tatjana Maria 6-4, 6-1 in a match that only lasted 82 minutes even with multiple stoppages as brief showers swept over the city.

Gauff, who has been as high as world number four, has only two minor titles to her credit and will be looking to win major trophies in 2023 but her game was marred by inconsistency on Tuesday.

After a powerful start that saw her race to a 4-0 lead in the first set, Gauff was broken twice by Maria who fought back to level at 4-4.

But Gauff composed herself to win eight of the next nine games and wrap up the match.

Emma Raducanu, the 2021 US Open winner, rallied from a set down to outlast rising Czech star Linda Fruhvirtova 4-6, 6-4, 6-2 with two rain breaks stretching the match to nearly four hours.

In her first competitive outing since being sidelined last October by a wrist injury, the 20-year-old Briton showed signs of rust as she lost the first set to Fruhvirtova, three years her junior, and was down 0-2 in the second before her fortunes changed.

"I was like, you need to stop this and just pick it up, like be more aggressive and swing more freely," said Raducanu as she explained moving up several gears to win four straight games to take control of the second set and then break twice more at the start of the decider.

"It's always difficult playing your first match of the year, so it was always going to be a little bit of a challenge, especially with the conditions," she said.

"I was loving the support. I felt like everyone was behind me and I absolutely loved it. Some moments it was tricky in the score and I would hear a young kid say 'Come on Emma' and I was like, 'come on, let's go'."

The match between number two seed Sloane Stephens, the 2017 US Open champion, and Spain's Rebeka Masarova was halted to be completed Wednesday with Masarova up 2-1, 30-0 in the first set.

## Al Nassr Coach Hails Extraordinary Ronaldo Signing



**R**YADH (Dispatches) - Al Nassr coach Rudi Garcia said the signing of Cristiano Ronaldo was a big step forward for Saudi Arabian football after the Portuguese forward arrived in Riyadh ahead of his official unveiling on Tuesday.

Ronaldo, who was a free agent following his acrimonious split with Manchester United in November, joined Al Nassr last week on a 2-1/2 year deal estimated by media to be worth more than 200 million euros (\$213.30 million).

"The signing of a player the size of Cristiano Ronaldo is extraordinary and contributes to the development of Saudi football," said Garcia, who previously managed Lille, AS Roma, Olympique Marseille and Olympique Lyonnais.

"We are happy with his arrival. The first goal is to work so he can adapt to our team, to enjoy playing for Al Nassr, and to entertain the fans."

Ronaldo was later unveiled at Al Nassr's home ground Mrsool Park, where 25,000 fans turned up.

The club, who lead the Saudi Professional League (SPL), have seen the number of followers on their Instagram account increase by millions since they announced Ronaldo's transfer.

The 37-year-old forward has scored 819 career goals and his arrival represents a coup for the Gulf country, which is looking to bring more big names to the SPL.

"We will support the rest of our clubs for qualitative deals with international stars soon," Abdulaziz bin Turki Al-Faisal, the country's Minister of Sports, has said.

"Cristiano, welcome to your new home, welcome to SPL."

## Huge Crowds Bid Soccer Star Pele Farewell in Santos

**S**ANTOS (Dispatches) - Emotional crowds watched as Brazil soccer legend Pele's coffin was driven through the streets of Santos on Tuesday on a firetruck, after 230,000 mourners, including the country's new president, filed past his open casket to pay homage.

Young and old embraced as the funeral procession wound its way through the coastal city's streets for hours, with some fans in tears and others cheering and chanting for a national hero who rose from barefoot poverty to become one of the greatest and best-known athletes in modern history.

Pele died last week at the age of 82 after battling colon cancer for a year.

His funeral procession left from the city's Vila Belmiro stadium, home of Santos Football Club, the team Pele played for from 1956 to 1974, scoring more than 1,000 goals. It departed after a 24-hour wake which saw fans queue for hours to pay their respects, even overnight, according to the club. One of the most moving moments came when the procession halted outside the home of his 100-year-old mother. Crowds there applauded and chanted "Pele is our king," before holding a minute's silence.

Pele's sister Maria Lucia Nascimento, 78, watched in tears from a balcony and thanked the crowds in a brief TV interview. Newly sworn-in President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva arrived by helicopter at the stadium, where he stood for about 30 minutes next to Pele's casket, draped with a Brazilian flag, in the center of the soccer field.



## Berrettini Inspires Italy to Big Victory In United Cup

**B**RISBANE (Dispatches) - Matteo Berrettini powered past Casper Ruud to help Italy clinch their United Cup tie against Norway and reach the next round of the inaugural mixed team tournament where they will take on Poland for a spot in the semi-finals.

In a rematch of their US Open quarter-final and Gstaad final, where world number three Ruud prevailed last year, it was Berrettini who took control of the match on the back of his powerful serve to seal a 6-4 6-4 Group E win.

"Casper, he's a super solid player, he improved so much in the past year. I knew I had to serve my best," Berrettini, who fired 10 aces and won 88% of points on his first-serve, said. "We know each other well, so we're always studying what we're doing and I knew that I had to serve like that. One thing is knowing and one thing is doing it, but I'm really glad it worked out pretty well."

Berrettini's victory over the French Open and US Open runner-up gave Italy an unassailable 3-0 lead and they went on to sweep the tie as Lucia Bronzetti and the pair of Camila Rosatello and Lorenzo Musetti won their matches.

The winners of each of the two groups from the three venues — Sydney, Perth and Brisbane — compete in the "city finals" on Wednesday to determine who makes the last four.

The fourth semi-finalist will be a runner-up with the best record from their three matches in the US\$15 million event.

