

The Spokesman of the Iranian space Agency Announced That the Construction of the Martyr Soleimani Satellite Constellation Will Be Implemented With the Participation Of Knowledge-Based Firms

IRAN NEWS

Public Relations Office of the Islamic Republic of Iran President's Office Announced on Thursday Night that President Ebrahim Raisi Had Ordered His Instagram Page to Be Deactivated

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Tehran Holds French Gov't Responsible for Magazine's Profane Cartoons

IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Foreign Ministry says Tehran holds the French government responsible for an "anti-cultural and anti-human move" by a notorious French weekly to publish insulting caricatures of the country's top politico-religious authority, announcing a decision to revise cultural relations with Paris in response.

In a statement on Thursday, the ministry said it would review France's cultural activities in Iran, and that it was "ending the activities of the French Institute for Research in Iran as a first step."

It added that the French government bears "undeniable responsibility" to deal with violations of the sanctity of freedom, breach of human rights, insults against religious values and beliefs and threats to the national sovereignty of other countries by legal and natural persons subject to the rule of the European country's government. **See Page 7**

Iran, Russia Companies Sign MoU On Space Launch Services



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Russia's Space Corporation, on Thursday, said it signed memorandums with two Iranian companies on launch services, Anadolu News Agency reports.

"As a result of international events, conferences and exhibitions organized with the participation of Roscosmos and enterprises of the rocket and space industry ... Memorandums of cooperation in the field of launch services were signed with the Iranian companies SAHAB and SpaceOmid", a Roscosmos statement said.

Last month, Roscosmos had said that a delegation from the Corporation was taking part in the 11th Iranian International Air Show, during which the delegation planned to hold a series of meetings with Iranian officials, as well as representatives of other "friendly countries".

In August 2022, Roscosmos said that it launched Iran's Khayyam satellite, named after the 11th Century Persian poet and philosopher, Omar Khayyam, into orbit from the Baikonur spaceport in southern Kazakhstan.

Roscosmos Director-General, Yuri Borisov described the launch of the Iranian satellite as a milestone event in Russian-Iranian cooperation.

Meanwhile on Wednesday President Ebrahim Raisi hailed Iran's achievements in the space industry, saying the rapid progress in the field has proved the failure of Western sanctions and plots to isolate the Islamic Republic.

Raeisi made the remarks in an address to the second meeting of the country's Supreme Space Council in the capital Tehran.

Regarding the achievements made in the space industry, the president noted that Iran was one of the few countries that achieved the technology of launching spacecraft.

"Further progress by the country in the field of placing satellites into the Earth's orbit would neutralize the enemies' plots in the area of broadcasting anti-Iranian television and satellite channels," he stated.

Iran launched its first satellite Omid (Hope) in 2009 and its Rasad (Observation) satellite was sent into orbit in 2011.

In 2012, Iran successfully put its third domestically-made satellite, Navid (Good News), into orbit.

In April 2020, the country announced the successful launch of its first military satellite into orbit. And in March 2022, it blasted its second military satellite into space.

The president also pointed to the enemy's efforts to portray Iran's space achievements as limited to military purposes. Raisi said the space industry is among the country's assets and also among the propelling industries, whose advancement alongside other industries and sciences, would contribute to the enhancement of the country's overall strength.

Elsewhere in his remarks, he added, "Space sciences and industries are, today, one of the world's booming economic and commercial arenas," expressing the necessity of "commercialization of this science and industry."

Also during the meeting, Hassan Salarieh, Head of Iran's Space Organization, announced the approval of the country's strategic 10-Year Space Program by the Supreme Space Council.

In line with the program's scope, the Islamic Republic plans to become the regional epicenter of development of space technologies, and provider of space launch services. **See Page 7**

Economic Ministry Denies Report of Decision On Joining FATF

TEHRAN (Tasnim) - The Ministry of Economic Affairs and Finance of Iran dismissed reports that high-ranking Iranian authorities have been informed of its decision about the country's accession to the Paris-based Financial Action Task Force (FATF).

Following media speculation about Iran's membership in the FATF, the Economy Ministry announced in a statement on Thursday that its view about that mechanism has not been conveyed to the high-ranking authorities so far.

The ministry also noted that only when the views of the organizations in charge are expressed and the high-profile bodies come to a conclusion about the issue will the final decision about joining FATF be made.

The FATF has kept Iran on its blacklist for what it calls failing to comply with international anti-terrorism financing norms. In October 2019, Iran's parliament approved four bills put forward by the government to meet standards set by the FATF.

Only two of them have so far gone into effect and the fate of the two others, one on Iran's accession to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and the other one a bill amending Iran's Combating the Financing of Terrorism (CFT) law, is still in limbo. **See Page 7**

Iran Approves Residency Permits for 1m Afghan Refugees

TEHRAN (MNA) - Iran's Interior Ministry says it has approved residency permits for more than one million Afghan refugees living in the country.

Director General for Foreign Nationals and Immigrant Affairs of Iran's Interior Ministry Sadiq Rezadoost said all nationals who came to Iran after political developments in Afghanistan last year, or who were given papers in the past years, should not worry because their papers will be extended, Financial Tribune reported.

"The residence permits of more than one million Afghan citizens have been extended; Afghan citizens should not worry, because their papers will be extended after this date and the conditions for their return to Afghanistan have not yet been provided," said Rezadoost.

"A special residency card is also issued for those who are working in this country," he added.

Officials of Afghanistan's Ministry of Refugees and Repatriations (MoRR) say there are currently more than three million Afghan refugees in Iran and only one million of them have residency documents.

"In Iran, we have approximately three million refugees, of which two million still do not have residency documents," said Abdulmutallab Haqqani, the spokesman of MoRR.

"The ministry of refugees has tried to get Iran to give them a residence permit so that they obtain all the rights for immigrants, according to international laws," he said.

However, experts say Afghan refugees living in neighboring countries are facing many problems and challenges. **See Page 7**

Russia Raps West for Freezing JCPOA Talks On Baseless Claim

MOSCOW (Dispatches)-A senior Russian diplomat has blasted the West for using allegations of Iran's drone delivery to Russia as a "clumsy excuse" for freezing or even killing off the Vienna talks on the revival of the 2015 Iran nuclear deal.

"Alleged supplies of drones is a clumsy excuse for freezing (if not killing) the Vienna Talks on JCPOA," Mikhail Ulyanov, Russia's permanent representative to Vienna-based international organizations, tweeted on Friday.

The remarks came in response to a report by Al-Monitor which had quoted unnamed US and EU officials as blaming Iran for the failure of the talks on the revival of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

"Looks like the US + E3 have a temptation to move to 'Plan B'. Big mistake. It's difficult to expect that such a plan can be a credible option. More likely just a non-starter," added the Russian diplomat.

The remarks come as negotiations, which started in April last year in Vienna, remain stalled since August as Washington refuses to remove sanctions that were slapped on the Islamic Republic by the previous U.S. administration of Donald Trump.

This is while after taking office, the Biden administration had criticized his predecessor's decision to scrap the deal, known officially as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), and vowed to reverse the measure. **See Page 7**



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2021

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May

15%

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June

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July

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August

22%

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October

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Huge Cyber-Attack on CBI Neutralized

TEHRAN (MNA) – An Iranian cyber security official said that a widespread cyber-attack on the Iranian social networking platforms as well as the Central Bank of Iran (CBI) was unsterilized last night.

The managing director of the Infrastructure Communication Company informed the Central Bank of repelling a massive cyber-attack last night. According to Amir Mohammadzadeh Lajvardi, “last night Central Bank and Bale and Rubika platforms were targeted by Distributed denial of service (DDoS) attacks but the cyber-attack were repelled.”

He added that “These days, the largest volume of foreign cyber-attacks are directed at banks and financial institutions, Internet providers and communication infrastructures.”

Israel Will Face Soviet Union’s Fate

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN – U.S. research centers acknowledge that Israelis will face the Soviet Union’s fate, IRGC Quds Force commander said.

The chief commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, IRGC Quds Force, Brigadier-General Esmail Qa’ani said the Israeli referred to a letter from the Israeli regime’s authorities where they referred to their ruling collapse two times in history, during “Prophet Solomon” rule and in the kingdom of “Cyrus”, which took long 75 to 80 years.

General Qa’ani made the remarks at the commemoration ceremony for martyr Hossein Pourjafari, the companion of martyr Lt. Gen. Qasem Soleimani who was martyred in the U.S. terrorist attack, held in Kerman, southeastern Iran.

General Qa’ani said that the internal conflict has never been as high as the current time in regime, General Qa’ani noted.

He said that the Israelis spends trillions of dollars in the region and not only it did achieve nothing but also lost the areas it had occupied.

General Qa’ani stated that the U.S. research centers acknowledge that the country should manage to achieve anything and get dominant over the status quo in the region until 2025, otherwise it would anticipate the fate of the Soviet Union.

The Commander of the Quds Force of Iran’s Islamic Revolution Guard Corps said



that the arrogant powers of the world are moaning that the Islamic Revolution and the Resistance Front have turned into a disaster for them.

Brigadier General Qa’ani said the status quo in the region shows that the arrogant powers’ efforts had foundered.

General Qa’ani pointed to the recent unrest and the West attempt’s to provoke the Iranian people against the country through such issues as hijab and said that all of the Iranian people were united against such a plot, whether their hijab was complete or partial.

That the enemies’ resort to such methods to subvert the Islamic Republic was not out of their power but was out of their desperation, he noted.

General Qa’ani called on people to firmly stand united against the enemies that are being uprooted and collapsed.

Zionists to Face Heavy Consequences For Sacrilege of Al-Aqsa Mosque

TEHRAN (IRNA - Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian in a telephone conversation with Secretary General of the Islamic Cooperation Organization Hissein Brahim Taha on Thursday stressed that the Zionists Regime will face heavy consequences for attacking al-Aqsa Mosque.

During a telephone conversation on Thursday, Amirabdollahian and Hissein Brahim Taha discussed the latest developments in the region and the Muslim world, including the recent desecration of al-Aqsa Mosque by the Zionist regime, sacrilegious move by a notorious French magazine, and the situation of women in Afghanistan.

Thanking the Secretary General of the Islamic Cooperation Organization for condemning the recent Zionist desecration of the Al-Aqsa Mosque, Amirabdollahian noted that the consequences of this action will be heavy for the fake Israeli regime.

Referring to the Zionist provocative attempts against al-Aqsa Mosque, he proposed creating an effective legal and international mechanism to stop offensive acts against religious and holy sites.

Amirabdollahian also thanked Hissein Brahim Taha for his stance in condemning the sacrilegious move by a notorious French magazine.

Referring to the responsibility of the French government in this regard, he underlined that beyond the repeated acts of this notorious French magazine against the religious sanctities, the role and guidance of the Zionists can be seen.

He reiterated the Islamic Republic of Iran’s stance on the need to end the war and conflict in Yemen, Afghanistan, and Ukraine.

Hissein Brahim Taha, for his part, condemned the recent Zionist desecration of the Al-Aqsa Mosque, expressing worry about the entrance of the Zionist regime’s minister of public security into the al-Aqsa Mosque.

Terming such provocative actions by the Zionists as disturbing peace and stability in the region, he emphasized that he is discussing various bodies to pressure the Zionist regime to stop such attempts.

Condemning the sacrilegious move by a notorious French magazine, he underscored that they are investigating the matter for reacting proportionately to it.

The two sides expressed deep concern over the Taliban’s decision to ban girls and women from studying in Afghanistan, calling the measures inconsistent with the progressive precepts of Islam.

94k Int’l Students Study at Iranian Universities

TEHRAN (IRNA) - More than 94,000 foreign students are studying at Iran’s universities, 24 percent (27,000 students) of whom are studying at public universities, a deputy minister said.

Hashem Dadashpour, the deputy minister of science and the head of the Student Affairs Organization, made the remarks on the second day of the conference of heads of universities and higher education centers in Tehran on Friday, noting that enrolling international students is one of the main priorities of Minister of Science, Research and Technology Mansour Gholami, and that President Ebrahim Raisi underlined the need for absorbing foreign students.

Some 107 universities possess the certificates to enroll international students, Dadashpour said, adding that the ministry is mostly focusing on enrolling students from Iraq and Afghanistan.

The Iranian universities have enrolled 56,000 students from Iraq and 33,000 students from Afghanistan, and the remaining 5,000 are from other countries.

Admission of students from Africa and Latin America has been very low, he warned, saying that only 284 students



from Africa and 17 others from Latin America have been registered at Iranian universities.

On the admission of foreign students last Iranian calendar year (March 21, 2021, to March 20, 2022), he noted that universities in Qom, Mashhad, Urmia, Esfahan, Mazandaran,

Kordestan, Tabriz, Ahvaz, Sabzevar and Yazd have been top higher education centers in absorbing foreign students.

Some 99 percent of international students pay tuition fees, while one percent rely on scholarships, the official mentioned.

The head of the Student Affairs Organization also underlined that some 27 institutes have been qualified to absorb foreign students so far and that 20 others are going to get permission to pave the way for enrolling international students at Iranian universities, so the number of these institutes is scheduled to reach 150 by the next year.

Iran plans to increase the capacity of absorbing international students to 250,000 within the next three years with the aim of being ranked among the top 10 countries in terms of providing foreign students with higher education, Dadashpour said.

Senior Cleric Urges Officials to Use Soleimani as Role Model

TEHRAN (MNA) - Tehran Friday Prayers leader urged the statesmen to look at Martyr Qassem Soleimani as a role model and hold on to their elections promises to solve problems in the country.

“Officials must be careful because people judge them according to the promises they made during elections,” this week’s Tehran Friday Prayers leader Hojatoleslam Abutorabifard said.

The senior cleric urged the government officials to hold on to their promises. “We should be careful about the promises we make during election days that are not achievable,” he said.

“The words and promises of the election time create demands for the people that are not achievable in the short term. They create demands for them that require time. We should be careful and we, the officials, will be judged by the people based on our words,” Hojatoleslam Abutorabifard further noted.

“One of the characteristics of Martyr General Qassem Soleimani was his truthful words as his words were based on knowledge and based on concrete evidence,” he said to mark the third martyrdom anniversary of former Iranian Quds Force commander.

Strong Iran to Be Realized by Strong Manufacturing, Industry

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN – President Seyed Ebrahim Raisi in his public address said on Thursday that the strong Iran is realized by strong production and industry, a strong Iran is based on strong women and men.

Raisi in his public address on Thursday told the people of Baharestan County: “Since the beginning of the 13th government, three thousand closed and semi-closed production units have returned to the production cycle and production has flourished.”

President Raisi then explained: “There is capacity and possibility in various fields and efficient human resources in the country, and it should be done in a way that flourishes and improves the science of sustainable activities.”

He further stated: “A strong Iran is realized by strong production and industry, a strong Iran is based on strong women and men, which is formed by making efforts in production, timely presence in the political arena, otherwise Iran would be dependent.”

The president pointed out: “Our whole effort is that people are not dependent on employment and production, we have land, capacity, water, soil and air, although there is little rainfall, but it is possible to plan to depend on basic commodities.”

Raisi continued that the government’s plan is to not allow and corruption to exist in the country, and all plans are to cut off the hands of corrupters from the country.”

The president reminded: “We hope that with the cooperation, assistance and presence of people in the all fields, the government will fulfill its tasks, we believe in the words of Martyr Lt. Gen. Soleimani that we can, this is our motto.”

Raisid uring his one-day trip to Baharestan County in southwestern Tehran while speaking at the administrative council meeting called the Ashura-based nature of the Iranians the big treasure which will safeguard the youth against any harm and cultural invasion.

Speaking at the administrative council meeting in Baharestan County, President Raisi said the Takaya, places where people mourn during Muharram on Imam Hussein’s (PBUH) martyrdom anniversary, and religious assets are considered treasures for Islamic Iran which can safeguard the youth.

Every year for more than a thousand years, in the first month of the Islamic lunar calendar called Muharram, Muslims and liberated humans from around the world, commemorate the jihad and martyrdom of Prophet Muhammad’s grandson Imam Hussein and his companions, in the deserts of Karbala, in the event known as Ashura.

He further explained that thanks to such treasure and in the shadow of the guidance of Imam Hossein (PBUH) the youth could be safe and could be immune from the cultural invasion.

President Raisi urged meeting the cultural and economic needs of the people.

No Limitation for Settling Problems Facing Iranians Living Abroad

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance Mohammad-Mehdi Esmaeili here on Thursday stressed the need for settling the issues facing Iranians living abroad.

Addressing the second expert working group of High Council of Iranian Affairs Abroad in Tehran, Esmaeili said there is no limitation for remove the e problems and difficulties facing Iranians living abroad.

He added that High Council of Iranian Affairs Abroad is trying to pave the way for return of Iranians living abroad.

Iranian Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance underscored that the Iranian cultural attaché play a pivotal role in contacting with Iranian nationals residing abroad.

Iran Envoy, Iraq President Urge Enhanced Ties in Various Fields

BAGHDAD (PressTV) - Iraqi President Abdul Latif Rashid and Iranian Ambassador to Baghdad Mohammad Sadeq Al-e Kazem have discussed ways to improve cooperation in various fields.

In a meeting in Baghdad, the two sides stressed the importance of bolstering constructive cooperation in all sectors to serve the two nations’ interests and make progress given the historical relations between the two neighboring countries.

The Iranian ambassador voiced Tehran’s keenness to continue cooperation with Baghdad in line with the macro interests of the two friendly countries.

Iran and Iraq have made great efforts in recent years to boost mutual relations and cooperation at international levels.

Late in November, new Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani made an official visit to Tehran at the head of a high-ranking politico-economic delegation.

Speaking in a joint press conference with Sudani, Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi said Iran and Iraq attach special significance to the promotion of peace and stability in the region, stressing that both states are firmly determined to fight the source of terrorism and regional insecurity.

“From the point of view of Iran and the Iraqi government, security, peace and stability in the region are very important and therefore, the fight against terrorist groups, organized crimes, drug trafficking and any [source of] insecurity that threatens the region is among [issues of] the agreements and common will of the two countries,” Raisi said.

Enemies Try to Create Gap Between System and People

TEHRAN (IRNA) – Majlis Speaker said enemies try to create a gap between the political system and the people, while Martyr Soleimani in his last will stressed need to preserve Supreme Leader’s status who favors Muslim’s grandeur.

Mohammad-Baqer Qalibaf who was speaking in a TV interview, said, “The enemies have invaded the sacred shrine of the Islamic Republic of Iran by imposing economic pressure against the people, and are now trying to create a gap between the Imam of this Ummah (Islamic nation) and the people, and thus they continue their invasion.”

He added that the enemies’ main purpose is regime change, and they are at the scene for that purpose.

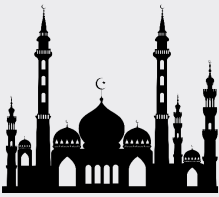
“But inside the country, paying attention to the people is among the top priorities of the Supreme Leader, and as you noticed in case of the Zاهدan incidence he acted personally, because the people’s rights is important for his eminence,” he added.

He emphasized that maximum attraction and minimum detraction is needed, adding, “Lack of insight and momentary decisions do exist in the governance, and the governance system is in need of renovation.”

Qalibaf said that asking to be excused is a good act, adding, “Why did they not ask to be excused? I, myself, asked to be excused. Whenever we felt we have done something wrong, we must not only ask to be excused, but also we must compensate.”

“Miss Amini’s death was an excuse, and if it had not happened these events and unrests would have occurred on a different excuse, while all the pressures of this adventure are on both the Supreme Leader and the people,” he reiterated.

The Speaker said that Martyr Soleimani has many supporters today, but his supporters today used to be his serious critics yesterday for his interactions with different groups and personalities, as some people argued that Soleimani was trampling over some values by doing so.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)

■ Evening (Maghreb)

■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)

■ Tomorrow's Sunrise

12:10

17:26

05:45

07:14

106. "He will leave them as plains smooth and level;
107. "Nothing crooked or curved wilt thou see in their place."

Surah 20. Ta-ha (106 - 107)

Negative Trade Balance Blamed for Halt in Rice Import From India

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Head of Rice Importers Association explained the reason for halt in imports of rice from India and said that the negative trade balance with India was the main reason for the halt.

Speaking to ILNA, Mr. Akhavan Akbari said that importers have been told to stop imports of rice from India because of the trade balance with India, adding that due to return of Iran's kiwi and apple from India, the trade balance between the two states turned negative and therefore rice importers were told to stop imports. He went on to say that it is not logical to stop import of a basic commodity for balancing the trade as elimination of kiwi from the household baskets does not pressurize the people's table but elimination of rice affects the people's table.

He reiterated that without any doubt the approval of the agriculture ministry will create chaos in the rice market and experience has shown us that always during months of Ramadhan and Muharram as well as Nowruz (New Year) holidays domestic rice consumption soars.

He noted that by the yearend two consumption peaks will be coincided with each other, stipulating that some 250,000 tons of rice should be imported by the yearend in order that the market does not feel any shortage and shortage of foreign rice will impact the domestic rice market and without any doubt the price of Iranian rice will increase.

Akhavan said that the price of foreign rice is almost one-thirds of domestic rice, adding that six domiciles of the society are main consumers of foreign rice and here the question is raised why foreign rice is eliminated from the people's table just on the eve of Nowruz (New Year) holidays and month of Ramadhan.

He stated that the country needs annual import of 1.5m tons of rice and so far 1.274m tons have been imported and 250,000 tons more should be imported by the yearend and if it does not happen, we will see soaring of Iranian and foreign rice price in the market.

Akhavan reiterated that the decision for halt in imports of rice will destroy the tranquility of the market and will lead to the tension in the market and the prices will soar in March, admitting that since last week, the price of Iranian rice has increased 5,000 toman per kilo.

He admitted that the fluctuation in the forex price affects the prices of goods and Iranian farmers prefer not to sell their rice because they know that there will be no imports and they can sell their products with higher prices.

On possibility of replacing Indian rice with rice from other countries like Thailand, he said that India accounts for 60% of Iran's foreign rice market and the country cannot find any replacement in short time because due to sanctions, traders do business based on the credit and they are unable to find a replacement for India in short time because it takes at least 6 months to replace another country, by the way Iranians have gotten used to Indian rice and they may not welcome rice from other countries.

ISOICO, NDC Sign Deal for Reconstructing Sahar 1 Drilling Platform

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – With signing agreement between Iran Shipbuilding and Offshore Industries Complex Company (ISOICO) and North Drilling Company (NDC), Sahar 1 drilling rig will be fully reconstructed.


According to IDRO News, this agreement for reconstruction following inspections and several constant and technical talks was prepared and signed in a ceremony in the presence of board of directors and managing directors of ISOICO and NDC.

Addressing the ceremony, the CEO and vice-chairman of board of directors of ISOICO thanked the trust of NDC to the contractors and domestic active experts of the national marine industry and said that ISOICO will do its best for implementing the project with best quality and in the timetable mentioned in the agreement.

Then Head of board of directors of NDC Mr. Morteza Pakravan, for his part, emphasized using created capabilities in the field of reconstructing offshore drilling platforms by the capable domestic companies like ISOICO and enjoying national and native capabilities and experience.

ISOICO has reconstruction and repair of many drilling rigs in its record and repair of each drilling rig not only creates 400 jobs on average but also prevents flight of millions of dollars from the country.

Iran Exporting Gasoline, Gas Oil to Africa, Eastern Europe



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – A member of Iranian Oil, Gas and Petrochemical Products Exporters' Union (OPEX) says Iran is currently exporting gasoline to West Africa and Eastern Europe and there is a huge potential in this field which should be noticed.

Speaking in a press conference, Hamzeh Varesi said that Iran was exporter of gasoline and gas oil for years in a way that it had the control of the Middle East market, adding that despite it, this year the country turned into an importing country because the country did not pay any attention to the private sector as the powerful arm of the establishment for energy production and at the same time the gas condensates is floating on the sea and its fate is undecided due to the sanctions.

He admitted that the harshest condition is imposed for delivery of feed, adding that the approach of distributing feed does not match with the slogan of support of production and removal of hurdles in way of feed provision for the private sector.

Varesi went on to say that currently export sector is working with only 5% of its capacity, adding that they are exemplary exporters and if not obstacle is created, the private sector can export over \$500m.

He noted that the biggest challenge of the producers is internal sanctions, adding that in the last days of President Rouhani's government it was announced that condensates with high quality will be provided for producing gas oil for power plants but with the change of the government, this issue was sidelined.

He went on to say that primary annual production and export of gasoline is 300,000 tons and the figure for the gas oil is 250,000 tons, adding that due to the restrictions, they changed their minds for expansion of the group, adding that they are trying to create rail transportation terminal and the MoU has been signed for it but the project is facing hurdle from the experts.

Varesi added that the private sector in the early days of its activity had oil derivative products and since 2022, it started production of engine oil and anti-freezing aimed at exporting to the Persian Gulf littoral states, West Africa and Eastern Europe. He stated that they entered the field of hydrocarbons four years ago.

Varesi who is the CEO of Caspian Chemical Pasargad Company said that unfortunately the government does not support them and the private sector and for this reason exporters are losing Kazakhstan and Armenia markets and they now have to search for new replacements for them. He added that his company exports its gasoline to Afghanistan and Iraq and it has entered international market via the UAE market.

Tehran, Doha Seek Monetary Pact

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran and Qatar plan to sign a monetary pact to facilitate bilateral banking ties as chief bankers of the two countries meet in the Qatari capital Doha to discuss increased cooperation between the two top regional lenders.

The Central Bank of Iran (CBI) said in a Thursday statement that its newly-appointed governor Mohammad Reza Farzin had travelled to Qatar in charge of a high-ranking delegation of baking and diplomatic officials to meet senior authorities in the Arab country.

The CBI said Farzin had met with Governor of Qatar Central Bank Sheikh Bandar bin Mohammed bin Saoud Al-Thani earlier in the day to discuss plans by Iran and Qatar to sign a key monetary agreement.

Farzin told Sheikh Bandar during their meeting that Iran and Qatar are on track to meet targets set in bilateral relations, adding, however, that signing of a bilateral monetary agreement and engaging in other multi-lateral pacts would help the two countries further boost their ties.

Sheikh Bandar also said in the meeting that Qatar views better banking relations with Iran as a top priority in its policies and decision-making, adding that cooperation between top banks of the two countries would definitely benefit both nations.

Iran and Qatar have sought to expand their political and economic relations since 2017 when Qatar came under an economic blockade by a regional block of countries led by Saudi Arabia.

Relations between the two countries deepened further in the run up and during the 2022 World Cup in Qatar as Iran provided support and assistance to Doha's efforts to organize the prestigious international tournament.

Production Up 80% in 9 Months

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran has reported a major increase in its motorbike production in the nine months to late December as local manufacturers seek to ramp up exports to neighboring countries where cheap Chinese products dominate the markets.

Secretary of Iran's Association of Motorbike Industry said on Thursday that total motorcycle production in the country had reached more than 300,000 units over March-December last year, up 80% from the same period in 2021.

Bahman Zia' Moghaddam said that annual output of motorcycles in Iran is expected to increase by more than a half year on year to reach over 400,000 units in the calendar year to late March.

Zia' Moghaddam said Iranian manufacturers of motorbikes are still struggling with relatively low levels of exports especially to neighboring countries where affordable Chinese brands have a strong presence in the markets.

He also blamed restrictions on banking transactions because of foreign sanctions on Iran as a major hurdle to expand exports of motorbikes from the country.

However, Zia' Moghaddam said that Iranian motorcycle manufacturers have sought to boost local sourcing of parts and components in recent years, adding that more than 60% of the parts needed to produce certain Iranian motorcycle models are manufactured inside the country.

He said that three Iranian motorcycle manufacturers had launched engine production platforms in recent months to further deepen their local production capacities.

Iran has 44 motorcycle manufacturing companies with 16,000 permanent jobs and another 80,000 working in the industry's wider supply chain.

75k Liters of Smuggled Fuel Seized

TEHRAN (MNA) – Police Chief of Sistan and Baluchestan province Brigadier General Mohammad Ghanbari said on Thursday that 75,000 liters of smuggled fuel have been confiscated in Nimruz County.

Brigadier General Ghanbari said that 75,000 liters of smuggled fuel has been confiscated from three heavy-duty trucks.

Some three defendants have been detained in this regard, he further noted.

Subsidized fuel in Iran is seen as an opportunity for smugglers to draw huge benefits. Iran, however, re-imposed using fuel cards and rationed gasoline back in November 2019 which was aimed in part to take the smuggling under control.

South Pars Phase-19 Flaring Lowered Dramatically

TEHRAN (Shana) -- The director of the 10th Refinery of the South Pars Gas Complex said by carrying out repairs of critical equipment at the refinery, a stunning reduction in the gases sent to the flare stacks has happened in the refinery.

According to South Pars Gas Complex, Mohammad Nemati, while announcing production of more than 13 million barrels of gas condensate from the beginning of the current Iranian calendar year on March 21 at the 19th phase of the massive South Pars gas field, stated: "With the efforts and significant and innovative measures of the specialists and employees of the economic front of the 10th South Pars Refinery, from the beginning of this [calendar] year to the end of November 21, more than 13 million barrels of gas condensates has been produced in the refinery."

Pointing out that the South Pars Gas Complex has been able to play a very effective and constructive role in the country's economy, he added: "Considering the cold season and peak gas consumption and the country's need for maximum and sustainable gas production with the cooperation and round-the-clock efforts of employees and specialists, the refinery has processed more than 12 million cubic meters of gas in the last 9 months."

The director of the 10th Refinery of the South Pars Gas Complex, referring to the knowledge and ability of Iranian manufacturers and knowledge-based companies, stated: "In the shadow of very good and constructive interaction and cooperation with knowledge-based companies and domestic parts and equipment manufacturers, achievements and increase in good production in the gas and by-products sector have been garnered."

Nemati pointed to the amount of production of other products of the 10th refinery in the last 9 months of this year, and announced: "In the 9 months of the year, 194,000 tons of ethane, 268,000 tons of propane, 215,000 tons of butane and 62,000 tons of sulfur have been produced in the 10th refinery of South Pars."

Lebanon Charges Seven Over Killing of UN Peacekeeper

BEIRUT (Dispatches) - Lebanon's military tribunal charged seven suspects in last month's attack that killed an Irish peacekeeper when a group of armed local residents ambushed his convoy and opened fire, officials said.

The shooting took place near the town of Al-Aqbiya in southern Lebanon, a center of support for the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah, which has denied any role in the killing.

The attack killed Pvt. Seán Rooney, 24, of Newtown Cunningham, Ireland, and seriously wounded Pvt. Shane Kearney, 22. The wounded peacekeeper was medically evacuated from Lebanon to Ireland. Two other Irish troops in the vehicle sustained light injuries.



Ukraine Pleads With Allies to Send Tanks as Fighting Grinds on in East



KYIV (Dispatches) - Ukrainian and Russian troops battled in eastern regions as Kyiv tried to push back occupying forces, while President Volodymyr Zelenskiy urged the West to provide his army with heavy tanks to boost their firepower.

The Ukrainian military said the Russians were focused on an offensive in the Bakhmut sector of the Donetsk region, but their attacks in the Avdiivka and Kupiansk sectors were unsuccessful.

The governor of neighbouring Luhansk region Ukrainian troops were recapturing areas there "step-by-step" but cautioned it was "not happening fast".

Luhansk and Donetsk make up the Donbas region, Ukraine's industrial heartland, parts of which were seized by Russian-backed proxies in 2014.

Russia declared Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions as part of its territory in September after referendums condemned by Ukraine and Western countries. Russia does not fully control any of the four regions. Bakhmut, which is now largely in ruins after months of battering by Russian artillery, is important because the Russian leadership wants a success to hold up to its public after a series of setbacks in the war.

It is located on a supply line between Donetsk and Luhansk. Gaining control of Bakhmut, with a pre-war population of 70,000-80,000 that has shrunk to close to 10,000, could give Russia a stepping stone to advance on two bigger cities - Kramatorsk and Sloviansk.

Fighting has been particularly tough there, with commanders on both sides describing it as a "meat grinder".

Ukraine's military said it estimated 800 Russian soldiers were killed in the past day, mostly in fighting in Donetsk. The figure - which would signify a huge loss of life for a single day - could not be independently confirmed.

The Luhansk governor, Serhiy Haidai, said he expected fighting to intensify across the eastern front as temperatures drop further and the ground freezes.

"Then the opportunity to use heavy equipment will open up," he said.

Turkey's President Tayyip Erdogan, meanwhile, spoke to Russian leader Vladimir Putin in a phone call and told him that peace efforts in the war should be supported by a unilateral ceasefire and a "vision for a fair solution", according to the Turkish presidency.

Putin told Erdogan that Kyiv would have to accept the loss of territories claimed by Russia, the Kremlin said.

"Vladimir Putin reaffirmed Russia's openness to a serious dialogue, provided that the Kiev authorities fulfil the well-known and repeatedly voiced requirements and take into account the new territorial realities," the Kremlin said.

Erdogan and Putin have spoken repeatedly since the Russian invasion, but the prospects of a serious dialogue to end the war appear remote at this stage.

In Moscow, Patriarch Kirill, the head of the Russian Orthodox Church, called for both sides to observe a truce for the Orthodox Christmas over Friday and Saturday. Kyiv dismissed the move as a propaganda from a figure it sees as supporting Putin's assault on Ukraine.

N. Korea Drone Entered S. Korea's Presidential No-Fly Zone

SEOUL (Dispatches) - A North Korean drone entered the northern end of a 3.7km (2.2 miles) radius no-fly zone around South Korea's presidential office in Seoul when it intruded into the country's airspace last month, South Korean military officials say.

"It [the drone] briefly flew into the northern edge of the zone, but it did not come close to key security facilities," a military official told South Korea's Yonhap News Agency. The drone was among five North Korean unmanned aerial vehicles that crossed the border and entered South Korean airspace on December 26, prompting South Korea's military to scramble fighter jets and attack helicopters. The military could not bring down the drones, which flew over South Korean territory for hours.



China Defends Its COVID Response After WHO

BEIJING (Dispatches) - China defended its handling of its raging COVID-19 outbreak after U.S. President Joe Biden voiced concern and the World Health Organization (WHO) said Beijing was under-reporting virus deaths.

The WHO's emergencies director, Mike Ryan, said Wednesday that Chinese officials were under-representing data on several fronts, some of the U.N. agency's most critical remarks to date.

China scrapped its stringent COVID controls last month after protests against them, abandoning a policy that had shielded its 1.4 billion population from the virus for three years.

China's foreign ministry spokesperson Mao Ning told a regular media briefing in Beijing that China had transparently and quickly shared COVID data with the WHO and said China's "epidemic situation is controllable".

"Facts have proved that China has always, in accordance with the principles of legality, timeliness, openness and transparency, maintained close communication and shared relevant information and data with the WHO in a timely manner," Mao said.

China reported one new COVID death in the mainland for Wednesday, compared with five a day earlier, bringing its official death toll to 5,259.

Ryan said China's numbers under-represented hospital admissions, intensive care unit patients and deaths, and said Beijing's definition of COVID-related deaths was too narrow.

Hours later, U.S. President Joe Biden raised concern about China's handling of a COVID outbreak that is filling hospitals and overwhelming some funeral homes.

"They're very sensitive ... when we suggest they haven't been that forthcoming," Biden told reporters.

The French health minister voiced similar fears, while German Health Minister Karl Lauterbach voiced concern about a new COVID subvariant linked to growing U.S. hospitalisations.

The United States is one of more than a dozen countries that have imposed restrictions on travellers from China. Germany announced tighter rules on Thursday.

China, which criticized such border controls, said its border with its special administrative region of Hong Kong would reopen on Sunday, for the first time in three years.



Peru Police Use Tear Gas to Clear Protests

LIMA (Dispatches) - Police used tear gas to disperse protesters trying to approach Peru's Congress headquarters, as thousands took to the streets two weeks after a wave of deadly protests over the ousting of former President Pedro Castillo.

By early evening, there were no reports of clashes with police, who closed off access to Congress, though transport authorities reported 35 blockade points across the country.

Almost two dozen died in protests across the country last month.

Protesters marched in Lima and Arequipa, many carrying the country's red-and-white flag, and demanded the resignation of current President Dina Boluarte, closure of Congress, changes to the constitution and Castillo's release.

Meanwhile, authorities said trains to the Inca citadel of Machu Picchu had been suspended, a day after some 2,062 tourists were evacuated.

Prime Minister Alberto Otrola had earlier called for demonstrations to be peaceful.

Authorities had "scrupulously complied" with Boluarte's instructions to use force prudently, Defense Minister Jorge Chavez told local news outlet RPP.

Castillo is serving 18-month pretrial detention while he is investigated for "rebellion," a charge the former president denies. He was ousted after he tried to illegally dissolve Congress and reorganize the judiciary.

Boluarte, a former vice president who assumed power shortly after Castillo's removal, has proposed bringing forward the next general elections.

Television footage earlier on Wednesday showed police and the army guarding headquarters of public institutions in some areas where protests were planned, including Ayacucho, a region with the highest number of victims in the December demonstrations.

On Tuesday, thousands of people had marched in Lima and elsewhere demanding "peace and tranquility."

Boluarte installed on Wednesday morning a "Monitoring and Crisis Control" center, together with the defense and interior ministers.

China, Philippines Commit to Peaceful South China Sea Solution

BEIJING (Dispatches) - China and the Philippines have agreed to set up a direct communications channel on the South China Sea and to handle disputes over the contested waterway "through peaceful means", according to a joint statement by the two countries.

The agreement came a day after Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr met Chinese President Xi Jinping in Beijing amid efforts to mend a relationship that has been strained by Manila's decision in 2016 to seek an arbitral ruling on China's expansive claims in the South China Sea.

The United Nations tribunal invalidated China's claims, but Beijing has rejected the ruling.

Since then, Manila has continued to raise concerns over reported Chinese construction activities on islands in the South China Sea - as well as the transformation of disputed reefs into artificial islands - and "swarming" by Beijing's vessels in the disputed waters, which are rich in oil, gas and fishery resources.

The joint statement on Thursday said Xi and Marcos had an "in-depth and candid exchange of views on the situation in the South China Sea" and "emphasized that maritime issues do not comprise the sum-total of relations between the two countries".

The two leaders also "agreed to appropriately manage differences through peaceful means".

Both countries reaffirmed the importance of maintaining peace and stability as well as freedom of

navigation and overflight in the South China Sea, and establish "a direct communication mechanism" between their foreign ministries, the statement added.

Marcos's three-day trip to Beijing, his first official visit to China as president, comes as the country re-emerges from a self-imposed border shutdown since the pandemic started in 2020 which has disrupted trade and hurt its economy.

The Philippine president is the first foreign leader hosted by China in 2023, and this "speaks volumes about the close ties" between the two countries, Xi told Marcos, according to China's official Xinhua news agency.

In a video address released by his office on Wednesday, Marcos said both sides discussed "what we can do to move forward, to avoid possible mistakes, misunderstandings that could trigger a bigger problem than what we already have".

Marcos also said he made the case for Filipino fishermen who have been denied access to their traditional areas of operation by China's navy and coastguard.

"The president [Xi] promised that we would find a compromise and find a solution that will be beneficial so that our fishermen might be able to fish again in their natural fishing grounds," he said.

The joint statement added that the coastguards of China and the Philippines would meet "as soon as possible" to discuss "pragmatic cooperation", and said that the two countries will hold an annual dialogue on security.



Paraguay Election Race Puts Taiwan Ties on a Knife-Edge

ASUNCION (Dispatches) - Paraguay would cut diplomatic ties with Taiwan and open relations with China if the opposition wins the election in April, its presidential candidate Efraim Alegre told Reuters, hoping to boost soy and beef exports that are its main economic engines.

The ruling party candidate, meanwhile, told Reuters he would maintain ties with Taiwan, a self-governed island that China considers one of its provinces and not a county, making the geopolitical question a center-piece of the election race.

Paraguay is one of only 14 nations globally that retains diplomatic ties with Taiwan and the only South American country to do so. China has convinced a number of the island's allies to shift allegiance in recent years, the last being Nicaragua.

Alegre, candidate of a broad coalition that will seek to defeat the conservative ruling Colorado Party, said Paraguay should establish relations with China to open access to its huge soy and beef markets, long a demand of farmers in the country.

"Paraguay must have relations with China," Alegre said in a recent interview after being named presidential candidate.

"Our interests in livestock and grain sectors are currently suffering a major loss," he added. "We hold this critical position towards relations with Taiwan because we don't think we get enough back from this relationship."

Santiago Pena, the Colorado Party candidate, said Paraguay's over six decades of ties with Taiwan would remain intact if he won the April 30 vote. "I do not see any change in that sense," Pena told Reuters. "I will defend the historical relationship with Taiwan."

Neither the political parties nor independent consultancies have released opinion polls on the elections, but some analysts predict a close result between Pena and Alegre. There are other small parties running in the single-round election.

Taiwan's foreign ministry told Reuters that it was paying close attention to Paraguay's upcoming election and was seeking to strengthen ties with candidates on all sides.

"Our embassy is actively strengthening contact and communication with candidates from different political parties to win support for the Taiwan-Paraguay friendship," the ministry said in a statement.



EU Refugee Strait Could Worsen in 2023 Without Policy Change

LONDON (Dispatches) - Some 4.8 million people were registered as temporary protection seekers by the UN refugee agency through early December, mainly in the eastern European Union: Poland, Germany, the Baltics, Romania and Slovakia. Depending on the course of the war, next year could see even bigger numbers.

The European Union faces the biggest refugee crisis since World War II, EU Home Affairs Commissioner Ylva Johansson said in Brussels in mid-December, adding that together Europe would continue to support people.

However, some EU states have already complained of being overwhelmed. In Germany, too, the federal and local governments have cited difficulties with accommodation. Johansson faces the challenge of maintaining a sense of unity among the member states in 2023. That's because so far, the war refugees have not been distributed according to any formula, and are instead moving freely within the EU under a special protection status without asylum procedures.

Concerns about Ukrainian refugees have also obscured growing migration movements in the southeast. In the past year, the numbers of asylum-seekers from Syria, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Egypt, along with irregular border crossings, have risen sharply. The border management agency Frontex registered around 280,000 irregular entries by October — 77% more than in 2021 and the highest number since the peak of the so-called refugee crisis in 2015 and 2016, for which there are only estimations.

In its "risk analysis" for the coming years until 2032, Frontex said it expects migration pressure to continue increasing. "In the next decade, EU border management will experience a higher occurrence of migration/refugee crises (or disproportionate pressures) that will test the effectiveness of border controls. The complex interplay of geopolitics, security conflicts, and other megatrends will influence different regions of the world, including countries in close proximity to Europe," the report said.

Since migration movements would pose a massive threat to the security of Europe's external borders, the Warsaw-based organization, also known as the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, has recommended comprehensive precautions to strengthen border protection.

European Union interior ministers have taken these warnings seriously and promised at the last meeting of the year in Brussels to once again intensify their efforts in 2023. In the first half of the year, the Swedish presidency of the EU is expected to push for asylum reforms and border management, topics that the ministers have been unable to agree on for years.

But the fundamental conflict between the states that want to further restrict access for migrants and those that are still willing to accept them is unlikely to be resolved in 2023.

While the more migrant-friendly states are demanding solidarity and relief from the proponents of the concept of "Fortress Europe," this has hardly been forthcoming. As a result, countries of first entry such as Greece, Italy, Spain, Hungary and Croatia currently allow migrants and possible asylum-seekers to continue their journey northward. Austria and Germany then complain that tens of thousands of people are filing asylum applications there, when they should actually file in the country where they entered the EU.

The so-called Dublin rules, which designate responsibility for asylum seekers in the state of first entry, are not working. The European Commission has presented various proposals for reform, but of the ten draft laws, only three are under serious discussion. According to EU Home Commissioner Johansson, further laws will be passed in the coming year to finally establish a system of responsibility and solidarity in EU migration and asylum policy.



Everything You Know About Carbohydrates May Be Wrong

LONDON (Dispatches) - Carbohydrates have been vilified and misunderstood, much like fats used to be. The diet industry was built on a foundation of unnecessary food demonization that has made entire generations afraid of whole food groups. However, the evidence is clear that carbohydrates are an essential and delicious part of most healthy diets.

Carbohydrates are one of the three macronutrients that comprise the human diet. They are made of long chains of sugars and provide us with energy.

For the past three decades, the ideal amount of carbs has been hotly debated in fitness and nutrition. Extremists exist on both sides of the spectrum, with some whole foods vegans even eating an all-carbohydrate diet. On the other hand, purveyors of the carnivore diet swear carbohydrates are the enemy.

However, even the mainstream nutrition discussions in America tend to be entirely Eurocentric, only discussing diets that include foods centered in the Western world. This is problematic for several reasons. Most notably because during the discussion of carbohydrates, this line of thinking has vilified many foods central to the diets of the Global Majority.

For example, rice, tortillas, and potatoes are staples in most people's diets worldwide. Therefore, to claim that they must eliminate their ethnic foods to achieve fat loss and health is deeply flawed and completely unnecessary.

While it is easy to get caught up in the conversations around the superior diet — especially in light of the global obesity epidemic — it is essential to remember that humans across the globe have survived on numerous diets for millennia.

It is time for a cease-fire in the war on carbohydrates.

First, let's just say it and get it out there — low-carb diets have their benefits. Therefore, a discussion of carbs must begin by addressing the utility of the low-carb diet for some people. Low-carb diets gained popularity in the 1990s as an effective weight-loss tool, especially for people with type 2 diabetes, as they can help with glycemic control. However, it is essential to note that there is no singular definition. According to Statpearls, low-carb diets can consist of as little as 20g and up to 130g of carbohydrates per day. Furthermore, this evidence-based framework has been shown to help with weight loss and blood-sugar management.

What is crucial to understand, however, is that carbohydrates are not more fattening than fats or proteins. Carbohydrates have a more significant impact on our blood sugar because they are comprised of small sugars — but not all carbohydrates are created equal. Most nutritionists today recommend including complex carbohydrates because they digest slower due to their additional fiber and contain more nutrients.

Diets high in processed foods, fats, and sugars are indeed associated with diabetes, heart disease, and obesity. However, carbohydrates are not the sole cause; these diets severely lack nutrients, fiber, and lean protein sources — all essential to a healthy diet.

Dietary fiber is the part of plants that we cannot digest but is essential for our health and digestion. Fiber is primarily found in carbohydrates such as fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. Fiber provides numerous benefits, including:

Long a staple in the diets of runners, swimmers, cyclists, and hikers, carbs are an excellent energy source as they increase endurance and reduce fatigue. In addition, studies have shown that consuming carbohydrates before, during, and after endurance activities lasting over one-hour increases performance and improve recovery.



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BMW Sales Dip in 2022

BERLIN (Dispatches) - The BMW Group sold around 100,000 fewer cars in 2022 at 2.4 million vehicles, but more than doubled the proportion of fully-electric cars sold to reach almost 10% of total sales, a spokesperson said.

The German automaker plans to raise the share of battery electric vehicles in total sales to 15% in 2023, the person added. The core BMW brand sold 2.1 million vehicles last year, down from a record 2.2 million in 2021, as COVID-19 lockdowns in China stymied supply and European inflation weighed on demand. Still, BMW has so far offset the dip in sales volumes with higher prices, with third-quarter profits rising in 2022.



Egyptians Hit by Soaring Food Prices as Crisis Bites

CAIRO (Dispatches) - Public anger has been growing for months in Egypt over a severe dollar crunch and soaring food prices. But for many a money-saving tip from a state body has been the last straw.

As families have struggled to purchase household staples, an Egyptian government agency praised an alternative, cheap protein source -- "chicken feet, good for the body and the budget".

The advice drew widespread scorn on social media while lawmaker Karim al-Sadat slammed it as "divorced from the reality of the crisis".

The anger reflects the hardships of many in the Arab world's most populous nation, which recently had to ask for a \$3 billion loan program from the International Monetary Fund.

"The bread I used to buy for one Egyptian pound now costs three," said Rehab, 34, at a Cairo bakery, asking not to be named in full.

"My husband makes 6,000 pounds (\$242) a month, which used to last us all month but now runs out in 10 days."

In a country heavily reliant on food imports, prices have also shot up for staples such as cooking oil and legumes, putting the financial squeeze on many of Egypt's 104 million people.

Rationing signs in big supermarkets now warn customers they can each purchase only three bags of rice, two bottles of milk and one bottle of oil. Reda, a 55-year-old civil servant and hospital janitor who provides for her family of 13, said frozen meat had more than doubled in price and is "no longer an option".

"Even with two salaries, there's a lot I just can't buy anymore."

Egypt's economy was hit hard after Russia's invasion of Ukraine last February unsettled global investors and led them to pull billions out of the North African country.

The war sent wheat prices spiralling, heavily impacting Egypt, one of the world's largest grain importers, and piling pressure on its foreign currency reserves.

With costs driven up further by soaring global energy prices, official inflation topped 18 percent in November.

The central bank twice devalued the pound last year as the foreign currency crunch saw imported goods worth billions held up at its ports.

Amid the crisis, President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi's government has been looking for foreign currency where it can.

Starting this month, tourists will have to pay for train tickets in dollars, said Transport Minister Kamel al-Wazir. Many banks have limited foreign currency withdrawals and tripled credit card charges.

Even the pro-government TV talk show host Amr Adib voiced fury when he urged banks to allow Egyptians abroad to at least "withdraw enough money to take a taxi to the airport so they can come home".

Egypt has in the past decade tripled its foreign debt to \$157 billion. It has \$33.5 billion in foreign reserves, of which \$28 billion are deposits from its wealthy Gulf allies. The IMF loan program, worth \$3 billion over 46 months, is a drop in the bucket for Cairo whose debt service in 2022-2023 alone amounts to \$42 billion.

U.K. Consumer Credit Surges as Food Inflation Bites

LONDON (Dispatches) - U.K. consumers ramped up their credit card spending ahead of the holiday season, as inflation for groceries in particular continued to run well ahead of the rate of wage growth.

Figures from the Bank of England showed consumer credit rose £1.507 billion in November, its biggest increase in five months and well ahead of analysts' forecasts, as households prepared for the Christmas holiday season with inflation running at over 10%.

The British Retail Consortium said on Wednesday that overall shop price inflation had eased moderately to 7.3% in December from 7.4% in November. But food prices - which loom particularly large during the festive season - accelerated strongly to 13.3% from 12.4%, offsetting declines in non-food prices.

A parallel survey by market research firm Kantar Worldpanel, meanwhile, suggested that grocery prices rose 14.2% from a year earlier in December, while sales volumes fell 1%.

The BRC, a retail industry body, blamed the war in Ukraine for keeping the price of key inputs into food production - such as animal feed, fertilizer and energy - higher than they would otherwise be. Others, such as UBS Global Wealth Management chief economist Paul Donovan, noted that rising corporate profit margins have also played an important role.

"If companies can convince customers that price increases are due to forces beyond their control, they can persuade customers to accept expanding profit margins," Donovan said in a daily briefing, adding that "in recent months, agricultural output prices have been falling."

Analysts said the figures provide a weak backdrop to the U.K. retail sector ahead of updates from High Street stalwarts Next and Greggs later this week.



China's Finance Minister Promises Appropriate 2023 Fiscal Expansion

BEIJING (Dispatches) - China will step up fiscal expansion in an appropriate manner in 2023 by boosting fiscal spending and investment via local government special bonds to spur the economy, state media Xinhua reported, citing the finance minister Liu Kun.

Chinese policymakers have pledged to strengthen policy adjustments to cushion the impact on businesses and consumers of a surge in COVID-19 infections after Beijing's abrupt COVID-19 policy U-turn.

The world's second-largest economy also faces declining exports due to slow global growth and a protracted property slump at home, which also reduced local governments' revenue from land sales.

Liu said in an interview with Xinhua that the government needed to expand fiscal expenditure, use local government special bonds to drive investment and increase transfer payments from the central government to poor and less developed areas.

The government needs to "ensure fiscal sustainability and keep local government debt risks controllable," the finance minister said.

Policymakers in 2022 drew on an established practice of issuing debt to fund big public works projects to try to revive the slowing economy.

Since 2018, China has arranged 14.6 trillion yuan (\$2.11 trillion) in new local government special bonds to support the economy, Liu said. That included 4 trillion yuan in such bonds to support the construction of nearly 30,000 projects in January-November of 2022.

60% of Top Japanese Executives Expect Economy to Improve

TOKYO (Dispatches) - Sixty percent of corporate leaders surveyed by The Yomiuri Shimbun think the country's economy will pick up over the next half-year or so.

Among the 30 leaders of top firms polled by the Yomiuri, 18 said the economy would improve over the next about six months. This represented a decline of 10 executives from a year earlier, when more than 90% of respondents said it would make a recovery, pushed down by high raw materials prices

and concerns about a slowdown in the global economy.

The survey was conducted via interviews or in writing between mid-November and mid-December last year.

Regarding the business forecast for the next six months or so, 18 executives said the economy would recover moderately, while eight said it would come to a standstill. Three said it would decline moderately.

No one said the economy would take off quickly.

With more than one answer allowed, 17 executives said the recovery would be caused by an upturn in private consumption, while 10 cited expected progress in balancing economic activities with the prevention of infections through such means as the use of COVID-19 vaccination certificates.

Six respondents who said the economy would hold steady or moderately worsen cited higher oil and raw material prices as the reason for their outlook. Another six cited the sluggish U.S. economy.

Regarding the current state of the economy, 21 respondents said it is experiencing a moderate recovery, while seven said it has stagnated. One said it is declining moderately.

With more than one answer allowed, 21 executives said the recovery was spurred by an upturn in private consumption, while 12 named the recovery in investment in plant and equipment.

Sixteen executives, or more than 50% of respondents, said the economy would grow in real terms by at least 1.0% but less than 1.5%, indicating the prevailing view that slow growth will continue.

In 2022, the yen weakened against the dollar against the backdrop of the widening interest rate gap between Japan and the United States. At one point, it hit the ¥151 level against the dollar for the first time in about 32 years.

Twelve executives said the dollar-yen exchange rate would peak at around ¥145 in 2023, the most popular choice among the respondents.

Germany's Hot Labor Market Set to Trigger More Eurozone Rate Rises

LONDON (FT) - The number of German jobs reached a post-reunification high in 2022, with the strength of the labor market in the eurozone's largest economy expected to increase the likelihood of interest rate rises despite the risk of recession.

About 45.6mn people were employed in Germany in 2022, up 589,000 from the previous year and more than at any time since German reunification in 1990, according to Destatis, the country's official statistics agency.

The jobs market across the eurozone has remained tight despite weaker growth during the autumn and the prospect of a winter recession, with unemployment hitting a fresh low of 6.5 per cent in October — the most recent month for which data is available.

Separate data from the S&P Global index of German purchasing managers — or PMI — also published on Monday, showed that German manufacturers continued to hire workers at a steady pace in December despite the majority reporting contracting output. Hiring was also up in December across eurozone businesses.

The strength of the labor market has heightened fears of high wage growth among the region's rate-setters, tasked with keeping inflation under control.

Bert Colijn, senior economist at ING, expected the eurozone labour market to "remain tight despite recession", adding that businesses were likely to keep people on the payroll to make sure that they have good workers available when the downturn ends. "Modest upward pressure on wages is set to stay," said Colijn.

Markets are pricing in a 50 basis points increase in interest rates when the European Central Bank meets on February 2. That would be on top of the 2.5 percentage points' -worth of rises since June last year, as rate-setters battle with inflation that hit 10.6 per cent in October — an all-time high. The benchmark deposit rate reached 2 per cent in December.

The increase of both foreign and domestic workers contributed to the German record high, which was 292,000 above the previous peak in 2019. The unemployment rate dropped to 2.8 per cent — another post-reunification low.

A European Commission poll published in December showed that during the final quarter of 2022, more than two in five German businesses reported shortages of workers, just shy of the highest-ever share, a figure that was registered in the third quarter of last year.

Labor shortages are widespread across the eurozone. About 30 per cent of eurozone businesses experienced them during the final quarter of 2022, another near-record high.

The labor market is closely monitored by the ECB, with wage growth seen as likely to prolong the region's bout of high inflation. Price growth fell slightly in the year to November, but remains about five times the ECB's 2 per cent goal.

Pakistan to Close Malls, Markets Early Due to Economic Crisis



ISLAMABAD (Dispatches) - Pakistan's government has ordered measures to conserve energy, including closing all malls and markets by 8:30pm (15:30 GMT), as the country grapples with a crippling power and economic crisis.

The cabinet-approved measures are expected to save the country about 62 billion Pakistani rupees (\$273m), Defense Minister Khawaja Asif told journalists.

Pakistan finds itself strapped for cash as money expected to come in under an International Monetary Fund (IMF) program has been delayed. Its foreign exchange reserves now barely cover a month of imports, most of which are for energy purchases.

The defense minister said additional measures that will take immediate effect include shutting restaurants and wedding halls by 10pm (17:00 GMT). He said some market representatives had pushed for longer hours, but the government decided that an earlier closure was needed.

Asif also said Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif had ordered all government departments to reduce electricity consumption by 30 percent.

The measures are being implemented as Pakistan struggles to quell fears of a default after the \$1.1bn in IMF funding was delayed. Islamabad has differences with the IMF over a review the agency is conducting of policy and reforms it is requiring in Pakistan. The review should have been completed in November.

Other critical international financing is linked to the IMF program, which means the South Asian nation of 220 million people will be hard-pressed to meet its external financing needs. Those total more than \$30bn up to June and include debt repayments and energy imports.

Pakistan's total liquid foreign exchange reserves stood late last month at \$11.7bn, \$5.8bn of which are with the central bank. That is half the value of the foreign exchange reserves it held at the start of 2022.

Iran Appreciates Syria's Positive Interaction With OPCW

NEW YORK (Dispatches)- Iran's permanent UN envoy here on Thursday appreciated Syria's positive interactions with Organization for Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). Ambassador Amir-Saeed Iravani while appreciating Syria's positive interactions with the OPCW, emphasized that heeding the Syrian government's legitimate worries in that respect, too, is necessary.

Speaking at the UN Security Council (UNSC) Thursday session on Thursday, local time, about the Syrian chemical weapons file, Iravani said, "Since the previous UNSC session in this respect no new event, or development has occurred. The OPCW representative office at the UN, too, has not presented any new point in this respect."



Renewable Energy Jobs On the Rise

LONDON (Dispatches) - In 2021, global renewable energy jobs reached 12.7 million in a trend that's set to continue. Despite fears of a severe decrease in fossil fuel jobs worldwide, as we transition to renewable energy, the good news is that opportunities in green energy increasing rapidly. The number of jobs in renewable energy grew by around 700,000 globally between 2020 and 2021, according to the Renewable Energy and Jobs Annual Review 2022 by IRENA and the ILO. Solar power currently provides the highest number of renewable energy jobs, at 4.3 million, around a third of the total jobs. The majority of green energy jobs come from China, around 42 percent, while the EU and Brazil both hold 10 percent of the world's renewable energy jobs, and the USA and India each hold 7 percent. IRENA's Director-General, Francesco La Camera, stated "In the face of numerous challenges, renewable energy jobs remain resilient, and have been proven to be a reliable job creation engine. My advice to governments around the world is to pursue industrial policies that encourage the expansion of decent renewables jobs at home. Spurring a domestic value chain will not only create business opportunities and new jobs for people and local communities. It also bolsters supply chain reliability and contributes to more energy security overall."

The biggest proportion of renewable energy jobs, following solar, is hydropower with 2.4 million jobs, biofuels with 2.4 million, and wind power with 1.3 million. The number of jobs in renewables is expected to soar to 38.2 million by 2030, based on the current rate of growth and project pipeline. The number of jobs has already risen substantially from 7.3 million in 2012.

A significant proportion of renewable energy jobs were in construction, installation, and operations and maintenance (O&M). With more and more large-scale solar and wind farms emerging, as well as other green energy operations, the need for the building and maintenance of key infrastructure is clear. There were 257 GW of renewable electricity installed in 2021, meaning growth in cumulative capacity of 9 percent. And solar and wind power made up 88 percent of this expansion.

The ILO's Director-General, Guy Ryder, highlighted a change in the types of opportunities becoming available in the energy sector, in the transition away from fossil fuel operations to green energy projects. He explained, "beyond the numbers, there is a growing focus on the quality of jobs and the conditions of work in renewable energies, to ensure decent and productive employment." Further, "The increasing share of female employment suggests that dedicated policies and training can significantly enhance the participation of women in renewable energy occupations, inclusion and ultimately, achieve a just transition for all," he stated.

The growth in renewable energy jobs is helping to make up for the huge loss of oil and gas jobs worldwide. The number of job losses in the energy industry



rose significantly during the Covid pandemic, as operations were forced to shut down due to lockdowns and other restrictions on work and movement. Further, several energy companies were forced into bankruptcy, meaning permanent job cuts. However, many oil and gas workers have extensive skills and experience in energy operations, which they are lending to renewable energy projects. Many countries are now offering re-training options for energy workers. For example, as part of the U.K.'s transition plan, it is developing a "people and skills" plan for workers looking to transition to the renewable energy sector. Some companies, such as BP and Equinor, are footing the costs of retraining staff who want to make the switch.

The U.K. is seeing its renewable energy jobs grow four times faster than the rest of its employment market. Recent reports suggest that 2.2 percent of all new U.K. jobs are classified as "green". And according to PWC, the number of green jobs advertised increased threefold in 2021, at 336,000 roles. Although, these positions continue to be found primarily in the London job market, centred mainly around professional and scientific opportunities.

And in the U.S., the United States Energy & Employment Report 2022 revealed that the number of green jobs increased in every energy sector. Around 3 million of the 7.8 million energy jobs in the U.S. fell under areas aligned with the country's climate goals. Renewable energy jobs in 2021 made up about 40% of total energy jobs. There were 23,577 new jobs in the hybrid electric vehicle sector, as well as 17,740 jobs added in the energy efficiency sector, which covers green technologies for heating, ventilation and air conditioning.

Despite pessimism over the loss of fossil fuel jobs worldwide, the sharp rise in renewable energy jobs offers hope to workers in the sector looking to retrain, as well as for young graduates seeking innovative opportunities in the energy sector. As the market continues to grow, the number of global green energy jobs is set to rise substantially over the next few years and continue to increase for decades to come.

Russia Boosts Export Capacity Of Its Natural Gas Pipeline to China



MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russia has increased the export capacity of its pipeline to China to over 60 million cubic meters daily, China Media Group has reported, with total flows this year seen at over 22 billion cubic meters.

That would compare with 15 billion cubic meters delivered via the Power of Siberia last year, and a total of 30 billion since the launch of the pipeline three years ago.

"Gazprom keeps increasing gas exports to China via the Power of Siberia gas pipeline. In 2022, gas supplies regularly exceeded daily contracted amounts based on China's request. As a result, we exceeded our yearly obligations," Gazprom's chief executive Alexei Miller said in a company statement at the end of 2022.

China has become a more or less first-priority destination for the Russian state gas major after the breakup with Europe but in fairness, it had been a priority for years before that as Russia turned east for new markets amid worsening relations with the West.

The Power of Siberia was one of the biggest projects recently completed by Gazprom and the first conduit for Russian gas to China. Now, there's talk about Power of Siberia 2, which Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak said last year will serve as a sort of replacement for the defunct Nord Stream 2 in Gazprom's export growth strategy.

Indeed, when the Power of Siberia 2 is built, the total capacity of the new pipeline will top 50 billion cubic meters - almost as much as the 55 billion cubic meters in capacity that Nord Stream 2 has. Construction work on the new pipeline is scheduled to begin in 2024.

Meanwhile, last year Gazprom's gas exports were set to fall by about 50 billion cubic meters, again per Novak. Speaking to the media in September, the Deputy Prime Minister also said plans are to boost gas exports to China to more than 61 billion cubic meters by 2025.

Environmental Cases to Watch in 2023

LONDON (Dispatches) - Youth plaintiffs who claim pro-fossil fuel government policies violate the law will head to trial for the first time, marking one of several important climate and environmental cases in the coming year alongside a potential blockbuster year at the U.S. Supreme Court.

Here are four climate and environment lawsuits that are likely to make headlines in 2023.

A 15-year fight between Northern Idaho landowners Chantell and Michael Sackett and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency made its way to the Supreme Court for a second time in October, and the court's decision could clarify what properties are subject to regulation under the landmark 1972 Clean Water Act (CWA).

The Sacketts, represented by the conservative Pacific Legal Foundation, argue the law applies narrowly to lands with a continuous surface connection to a major stream, lake or river. The EPA argues the law is broader and covers lands with a "significant nexus" to a waterway. The agency issued a final rule codifying that interpretation in December.

A narrower test could result in as much as 51% of wetlands and 18% of streams across the country being excluded from protections, according to a 2017 U.S. Army Corps of Engineers estimate.

If the court rules for the Sacketts it "would be the most consequential decision under the Clean Water Act



in its history," said Victor Flatt, an environmental law professor at the University of Houston.

Young people across the U.S. and the world have in recent years launched several lawsuits claiming governments are violating their constitutional and human rights through fossil fuel friendly policies that exacerbate the climate crisis. Held is the first of several in the U.S. to go to trial, which is currently scheduled for June.

A group of 16 young people in that case claim Montana is violating its own constitution, which specifically guarantees a right to a "clean and healthful environment," by promoting fossil fuel industries such as coal.

The suit was filed in 2020 and takes aim at two state laws that encourage fossil fuel energy development in the state and bar environmental reviews from considering how a project such as a power plant will contribute to climate change.

Our Children's Trust, the firm representing the Montana plaintiffs also represents youth plaintiffs in court in Hawaii, Virginia and Utah, as well as the flagship U.S. youth climate case Juliana v. United States.

After years of jostling over whether climate suits against Big Oil belong in state or federal court, 2023 could see some movement in cases filed by states and municipalities against oil companies BP, Shell, Exxon and others alleging the companies knowingly contributed to the climate crisis and must help pay for the damages.

Iran Approves...

FROM PAGE 1

Recently, a quadrilateral meeting of the representatives of Iran, Pakistan, Afghanistan and the International Organization for Migration was held in Iran to solve the problems of refugees.

In a meeting with Acting Higher Education Minister of Afghanistan Mawlawi Abdul Baqi Haqqani and after a scientific discussion last year, the Iranian ambassador in Kabul, Bahador Aminian, vowed to provide scholarships to Afghan students.

Haqqani asked the ambassador to assist Afghanistan in the sector of education, Bakhtar News Agency reported.

The Iranian envoy invited a technical delegation from Afghanistan's Ministry of Higher Education to visit Iran and take a close look at Iran's education system and use its experience.

He assured the Afghan Ministry of Higher Education of providing educational scholarships to Afghan students and teachers.

Economic Ministry Denies...

FROM PAGE 1

FATF's proponents have said the measure would smooth the path for Iran's increased financial transactions with the rest of the world and help remove the country from investment blacklists.

Opponents, however, say membership in the FATF will only make the country vulnerable to outside meddling.

They say Iran's implementation of FATF standards so far has not only failed to attract investment, but it has also exposed various institutions to extraterritorial regulations and penalties.

The FATF cannot impose sanctions, but individual states that are its members have used the group's reports to take punitive measures against their adversaries. As a result, Iran has been targeted by US and European sanctions.

Iran, Russia...

FROM PAGE 1

The Iranian program also aims to devise and implement space missions in line with its goal of helping civilian, business, and executive organizations benefit from the world's state-of-the-art technologies.

Meanwhile on Thursday Advisor to Supreme Leader for International Affairs Ali Akbar Velayati in a meeting with former deputy Speaker of Russia's State Duma Sergey Baburin termed the relations between Iran and Russia as very important.

"Relations between Iran and Russia are currently at the best level and developing," said Velayati, adding that the relations between the two countries are very important.

Referring to the Ukrainian war, he called the US and NATO as the main causes of the spread of the conflict. "Today's world is no longer unipolar, and it is very important for independent countries to be careful of their [U.S. and NATO] influence in the region.

Velayati also pointed to the South Caucasus region, saying, "As the Leader of the Islamic Revolution emphasized, the Islamic Republic of Iran does not accept any changes in the current borders and the security of the region must be preserved."

Baburin, for his part, called the purpose of his visit to Iran to participate in the international meeting of the anniversary martyrdom of Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani.

He said that Soleimani was indeed a very important and influential figure. "He is known as a hero in Russia and Iran, and it is clear to the whole world that the United States committed this terrorist act, and the Americans, including Trump, have admitted this many times."

Baburin emphasized the ineffectiveness of the US sanctions, saying that Russia can use Iran's experience in the issue of neutralizing sanctions, and the cooperation between Iran, Russia, and Syria is a valuable basis for the multipolar world.

"The relations between Iran and Russia are friendly and close," he said.

Tehran Holds French...

FROM PAGE 1

The ministry condemned "in the strongest terms" the infamous French magazine's move "to trample on recognized moral norms, savagely violate religious sanctities, disrespect the sanctum of the politico-religious authority, and insult the Iranians' state symbols and national values."

The French publication's move was another sign of the Zionism's role in a media campaign to promote Islamophobia, incite hatred and sow discord among peoples and countries, it said.

It added that the French publication has for many years misused the noble concept of "freedom of speech" as a cover for its anti-cultural acts and desecration of humans as well as sublime moral and religious values.

The statement noted that in the past years, the French magazine has repeatedly provoked Muslim anger by publishing insulting cartoons of Prophet Mohammad.

Iran slams the inaction of the relevant authorities in France in dealing with the French publications' measures against Islam and the spread of racist hatred and reiterates the direct responsibility of the government in Paris to hold accountable the perpetrators of such moves, it said.

The ministry added that Iran also called for a serious fight against Islamophobia as a "manifestation of institutionalized racism in this country."

It vowed to seriously pursue the Iranian nation's demand for the French government to hold accountable the perpetrators and prevent their repetition, saying Tehran would take appropriate measures in this regard.

The statement comes as the French satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo is set to publish several insulting cartoons of the Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei in a special issue later this week. The controversial right-wing magazine had in early December announced a competition for producing the cartoons.

Iran's Foreign Ministry on Wednesday summoned the French Ambassador in Tehran Nicolas Roche to protest the insulting act by the French magazine in publishing caricatures of the country's top religious authority.

Iran's Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian also on Wednesday strongly condemned the "insulting" act by the controversial French magazine, warning of a "decisive" response. "The insulting and indecent move by a French publication in publishing cartoons against the religious and political authority will not go without an effective and decisive response," the minister wrote in a Twitter post.

Russia Raps West for...

FROM PAGE 1

On the contrary, the Biden administration officials have upped the so-called maximum pressure campaign against Iran and on several occasions announced that the talks to revive the 2015 nuclear deal are no longer their main focus.

Observers believe Washington is trying to use these baseless accusations against Iran to gain leverage in talks and negotiate from a position of strength.

Raducanu Suffers Injury Scare Ahead of Australian Open

AUCKLAND (Dispatches) - Britain's Emma Raducanu retired at 6-0 5-7 in her second-round match against Slovakian Viktoria Kuzmova at the WTA 250 Auckland Classic after rolling her ankle, casting doubt on her participation at this month's Australian Open.

Former US Open champion Raducanu swept the first set in 22 minutes but faltered in the second and had her left ankle examined during a medical time-out before leaving court in tears after being unable to complete the first point of the decider.

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Lazio Fans Hurl Racist Abuse At Tearful Umtiti in Italy

ROME (Dispatches) - France international Samuel Umtiti reportedly left the pitch in tears after he and Lecce teammate Lameck Banda suffered racist abuse from visiting Lazio fans in Italy's Serie A.

The referee stopped the game in the second half because of racist taunts "coming from the visitor sector occupied by Lazio supporters", Italian news agency Ansa said. Cameroon-born defender Umtiti, who won the 2018 World Cup with France and is on loan at Lecce from Barcelona, was the primary target of the abuse.

8 IRAN NEWS

SPORTS

SATURDAY JANUARY 7, 2023

Pistons Shock Warriors With Buzzer-Beating Trey

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Saddiq Bey beat the final buzzer with a 28-foot 3-pointer as the Detroit Pistons withstood the shock of a game-tying trey by Klay Thompson a second earlier to stun the Golden State Warriors 122-119 in San Francisco.

Bey's heroics came after the Warriors, attempting to rally to a sixth straight home win, appeared to force overtime when Thompson bombed in a 3-pointer off an inbounds play with one second showing on the clock.

Bojan Bogdanovic hit five of Detroit's 3-pointers and finished with a team-high 29 points, while Jalen Duren posted an 18-point, 11-rebound double-double. The Pistons have alternated losses and wins in the first four outings of their five-game trip.

Thompson had 30 points and Jordan Poole 24 for Golden State, which lost despite shooting 51.7 percent and making 15 3-pointers.

Cavaliers 90, Suns 88

Evan Mobley returned from a two-game absence and hit the game-winning shot with four seconds left to lead Cleveland past visiting Phoenix.

Mikal Bridges missed a fallaway jumper with Donovan Mitchell defending at the buzzer to allow the Cavaliers to hold on for their third straight win. Caris LeVert scored 21 points and Mitchell had 20 for Cleveland. The Suns, who were led by 25 points from Chris Paul, lost their fourth straight and seventh in eight games. Deandre Ayton added 15 points and 18 rebounds as Phoenix finished its six-game road trip with a 1-5 mark.

Hawks 120, Kings 117

John Collins recorded 22 points and 12 rebounds and De'Andre Hunter added 22 points and eight rebounds to help Atlanta beat host Sacramento.

Trae Young had 21 points and six assists and Dejounte Murray added 21 points, six rebounds and three steals as the Hawks ended a four-game skid. Bogdan Bogdanovic added 17 points and eight rebounds off the bench for Atlanta.

De'Aaron Fox scored 25 points and former Hawks player Kevin Huerter added 24 points for the Kings. Harrison Barnes scored 22 points and Domantas Sabonis had 20 points, 14 rebounds and eight assists. The double-double was the 15th in a row for Sabonis, tying the franchise mark set by DeMarcus Cousins during the 2013-14 season.

Garcia Says She Struggled With bulimia

PARIS (Dispatches) - WTA Finals winner Caroline Garcia said she struggled with bulimia as she looked to "fill a void" when things were not going her way on court.

The Frenchwoman, who won top tier titles in Wuhan and Beijing in 2017, said the last couple of years had been marked by "tears and sleepless nights" and eventually an eating disorder.

"Everyone is different. Some will stop eating and for me it was the opposite: I used to take refuge in food," Garcia told French sports daily L'Equipe on Thursday.

"You feel so empty, so sad, that you need to fill yourself. It came from the distress of not managing to do what I wanted to do on court, of not winning anymore, of suffering physically.

"Eating would appease me for a few minutes. We all know it does not last but it was an escape route. When you're alone, it's harder to control. In tennis, you spend a lot of time alone in your room. It's how it often happened."

Garcia, who also reached the US Open semi-finals last year, said sharing her struggles helped.

"You start understanding and realising that if it happens, it's not the end of the world," the world number four said, adding she was now managing her disorder.

"Since I've been taking time for myself, it happens less.

Barca Scrape Past Intercity in Spanish Cup

ALICANTE (Dispatches) - Ansu Fati snatched an extra-time winner for Barcelona in a thrilling 4-3 victory over third-tier Intercity in the Spanish Cup round of 32.

The minnows from Alicante nearly embarrassed Barcelona with former La Masia youth player Oriol Soldevila scoring a superb hat-trick to force extra-time, before Fati's deflected strike settled the tie.

Ronald Araujo headed home after just four minutes from youngster Pablo Torre's corner, making it look like Barca would breeze into the last 16.



113, Trail Blazers 106

Anthony Edwards scored 13 of his 32 points in the final 5:38 as Minnesota beat Portland in Minneapolis.

Rudy Gobert had 17 points and 12 rebounds for Minnesota. Luka Garza added 14 points and Taurean Prince scored 11 after missing the past 20 games due to a right shoulder injury.

Damian Lillard led Portland with 27 points, while Jerami Grant added 26, Anfernee Simons had 16, Shaedon Sharpe chipped in 13 and Jusuf Nurkic had 10 points and eight rebounds before fouling out.

Pelicans 119, Rockets 108

CJ McCollum scored 28 points and short-handed New Orleans defeated visiting Houston, the Pelicans' 15th win in their past 17 home games.

Jonas Valanciunas added 16 points and 17 rebounds, and Naji Marshall scored 16 for the Pelicans, who played without leading scorer Zion Williamson (hamstring). Second-leading scorer Brandon Ingram (toe) missed his 19th consecutive game.

Jalen Green and Kenyon Martin Jr. scored 16 points each, and Jabari Smith Jr. had 14 points and 13 rebounds for the Rockets, who lost their fifth consecutive game.

Lakers 112, Heat 109

Dennis Schroder scored a season-high 32 points and Russell Westbrook added 21 points, nine assists and eight rebounds as short-handed Los Angeles earned a victory over visiting Miami.

Thomas Bryant had 21 points and nine rebounds for the Lakers, who were without LeBron James (illness) and Lonnie Walker IV (left knee soreness). Los Angeles won for the fourth time in its past five games and pulled off the victory without James, who had put up a total of 90 points in the previous two victories.

Bam Adebayo scored 30 points and pulled down 13 rebounds and Jimmy Butler added 27 points for the Heat, who entered with four victories in their previous five games.



LEEDS (Dispatches) - Harry Kane closed in on Jimmy Greaves' all-time Tottenham Hotspur goalscoring record as he helped Spurs thrash Crystal Palace 4-0 in the Premier League, while Nottingham Forest beat Southampton to move out of the relegation zone.

West Ham United and Leeds United remain embroiled in a relegation battle after the pair drew 2-2 at Elland Road, while Unai Emery's Aston Villa were held to a 1-1 draw at home by Wolverhampton Wanderers.

England captain Kane marked his 300th Premier League appearance with a brace of goals in the emphatic 4-0 victory in Spurs' London derby clash at Selhurst Park.

Defender Matt Doherty and Son Heung-min netted further goals for the visitors as Palace capitulated in the second half having been the better side in the opening period when the teams went to the break at 0-0.

Kane's goals, a close-range header from an Ivan Perisic cross and a first-time strike, took him onto 264 for Spurs in all competitions, just two behind Greaves' tally for the North London club.

The victory, Spurs' first since the World Cup break, moved fifth-placed Tottenham to within two points of Manchester United in fourth.

"It was a really important win. We have not come back (from Qatar) and got the best results. It was nice to put that performance in," Kane told Sky Sports.

"It was about moving the ball quick, getting runs in behind and then quality in the final third. It was great to keep a clean sheet."



Ronaldo's Saudi Debut on Hold Over Player Quota

RIYADH (Dispatches) - Portuguese superstar Cristiano Ronaldo faces a wait to make his Al Nassr debut because the Saudi club have exceeded their quota for foreign players, club sources told AFP.

When he was unveiled with great fanfare on Tuesday, the 37-year-old said he was keen to play as soon as possible, starting with Thursday's home game against Al Ta'ee.

But Ronaldo, whose deal is worth an estimated €200 million (RM931 million) to June 2025, is Al Nassr's ninth foreign player — one more than the eight allowed by Saudi football authorities.

"Al Nassr has not registered him yet because there is no vacancy for a foreign player," one club official, who did not want to be named because he was not authorised to speak to media, told AFP.

"A foreign player must leave to register Ronaldo, either by selling or by terminating the contract by mutual consent."

Al Nassr's foreign contingent includes Colombian goalkeeper David Ospina, Brazilian midfielder Luiz Gustavo and forwards Anderson Talisca of Brazil and Vincent Aboubakar of Cameroon.

Saudi reports said Uzbek midfielder Jaloliddin Masharipov was most likely to make way for the five-time Ballon d'Or winner and Champions League record scorer.

A second club source confirmed that Ronaldo was not registered as of Thursday afternoon local time.

"There are ongoing negotiations to sell one of the players, but they have not reached their final stages yet," he said.

Both officials refused to confirm whether Ronaldo still needed to serve a two-match English Football Association ban from November for hitting a mobile phone out of a teenage fan's hand after Manchester United, his club at the time, lost to Everton.

The Saudi Football Association referred questions about the match ban to Al Nassr.

Al Nassr's 25,000-capacity stadium, Mrsool Park, is sold out for Thursday's game, as it was on Tuesday when Ronaldo was welcomed with fireworks and deafening cheers.

The Portuguese forward said then that he was looking for a new challenge by coming to Saudi Arabia, adding that he had received offers from around the world.

"I'm a unique player. It's good to come here, I broke all the records there (in Europe) and I want to break a few records here," Ronaldo said.

Djokovic Recovers From Shaky Start to Reach Adelaide Quarters

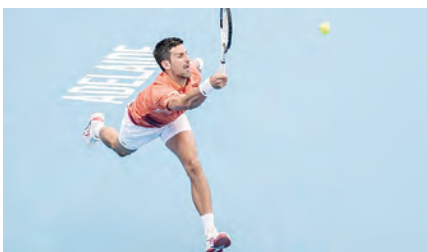
ADELAIDE (Dispatches) - Novak Djokovic overcame a shaky start to beat Frenchman Quentin Halys and reach the Adelaide quarter-finals, stepping up his preparations for the Australian Open.

The top seed from Serbia won 7-6 (7/3), 7-6 (7/5) and will face Canada's Denis Shapovalov in the last eight of the Adelaide International.

Djokovic returned to the scene of his 2007 title run on Tuesday with a comfortable straight-sets win over France's Constant Lestienne.

He backed that up against Lestienne's doubles partner Halys but was slow to get going, slumping 2-5 in the first set before clinching victory.

"It was a great performance from my opponent today," said the 35-year-old Djokovic, who is warming up for a tilt at a 10th Australian Open title after missing last year's Grand Slam when he was deported over his vaccination status.



Infantino in Pele Wake Selfie Row

PARIS (Dispatches) - FIFA chief Gianni Infantino insisted he would never be disrespectful to Pele as he came under fire over a photo call at the Brazilian legend's wake.

Infantino took a selfie with some of Pele's old teammates on Monday right beside the open coffin of the three-time World Cup winner.

The Swiss said he took the photo as Pele's friends seemed unable to operate their mobile phones.

"I took the phone of one of them and took the photo of all of us for him," Infantino insisted.

"If being helpful to a teammate of Pele creates criticism I'm happy to take it and will continue to be helpful wherever I can to those having contributed to write legendary pages of football.

"I have so much respect and admiration for Pele and for that ceremony yesterday that I would never do anything that would be disrespectful in any way whatsoever," Infantino said.

Brazil gave Pele a powerful send-off starting with a day-long wake at the Santos stadium. Santos said more than 230,000 people had attended his 24-hour wake in the Vila Belmiro stadium.

