

**Health Ministry Announced on Wednesday That the Number of Deaths From the Coronavirus Pandemic in Iran Increased to 144,720 With 3 More Iranians Killed By the Virus Over the Past 24 Hours**

# IRAN NEWS

**The Governor of the Central Bank Of Iran Mohammad Reza Farzin Held a Meeting With the Deputy Prime Minister of the UAE and Minister of Presidential Affairs Mansour bin Zayed Al Nahyan**

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## Iranian Economy to Expand 2.2% in 2023

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The World Bank, in its latest Global Economic Prospects (GEP) report released on Tuesday, sees the Iranian economy growing by 2.2 percent in 2023, despite a sharp, long-lasting slowdown in the global economy.

"Our latest forecasts indicate a sharp, long-lasting slowdown, with global growth declining to 1.7 percent in 2023 from 3.0 percent expected just six months ago," the report reads.

Following the global economy, the Islamic Republic of Iran's economic growth in 2023 has also been revised down by 0.5 percentage points, to 2.2 percent, on account of slower growth in key trading partners.

Domestic demand in Iran is also likely to be curbed by the effects of high inflation on real incomes, which is expected to average 44 percent in 2023/24, the report stated.

Based on the report, the deterioration in the global economy is broad-based in virtually all regions of the world, and per-capita income growth will be slower than it was during the decade before COVID-19. **See Page 7**

## German Exports to Iran Up Nearly 13% y/y in 2022

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Germany's exports to Iran rose significantly last year compared to 2021 despite restrictions imposed on Iran's trade ties with the rest of the world because of U.S. sanctions and in spite of Berlin's growing anti-Iran rhetoric.

A Tuesday report by Reuters news agency showed that German exports to Iran had reached around 1.5 billion euros (\$1.6 billion) from January to November 2022, up by 12.7% compared to the same previous period.

The report cited data from Germany's federal statistics office which showed that the country had exported a total of 1.4 billion euros worth of goods to Iran in 2021.

The figures come despite the fact that Iran's trade with European countries have dropped to historically low levels in recent years mainly because of American sanctions targeting Iran's banking ties with pro-US countries in Europe.

They also come despite efforts in recent months by certain elements in the German government to restrict the country's trade ties with Iran in a clear gesture of support for street unrest that began in Iran in late September. **See Page 7**

## Budget Bill Submitted to Majlis With an Eye on Tax Revenues



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - President Seyed Ebrahim Raisi submitted the Budget Bill for the next Iranian year of 1402 (to start on March 20, 2023) to the Parliament on Wednesday in the presence of Parliament Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf and legislators.

President Raisii, who attended the open session of the Majlis in order to present the budget bill, said, "In the fiscal year 1401, the government was able to achieve success with the cooperation of all the concerned and caring people and benefiting from their efforts, thoughts and efforts in the government, parliament and all departments that operate in the name of the holy system of the Islamic Republic."

The President added, "The first part of the country's 1402 budget bill, which is related to state-owned companies, was submitted to the Islamic Consultative Assembly one month earlier according to the law so that the parliament has more time to deal with the budget of this part."

The President stated, "All our efforts were to ensure that the budget bill 1402 was fully in line with the policies announced by the Leader and the policies of the 7th Development Plan," adding, "Of course, you are aware that the general policies of the 7th Development Plan reached us in mid-September, that is, in the middle of the drafting of the budget bill, but nevertheless, the 1402 budget was inspired by the policies announced by the Leader."

"After the finalization of the budget bill, the government devoted its efforts to developing the 7th Development Plan so that this plan can be submitted to the parliament as soon as possible," Raisi said.

The President stated that the government and the parliament will definitely take into consideration how far the past programs have been implemented and what were the reasons for the non-implementation of parts of these programs, and said, "Considering that the evaluations indicate that 30 to 35 per cent of the past programmes have been implemented, our focus will be that the 7th Development Plan will be formulated in such a way that it will be fully implemented."

Referring to the points considered by the Leader in the general policies of the 7th Development Plan, Ayatollah Raisi added, "One of these important points is to separate permanent orders from one-year orders so that businesses become more stable in the coming years and the parliament can review the budget bill easier."

According to the reports, the government revenues through tax will increase by over 55\$ next year comparing to this year's budget.

Raisi considered the reform of the budget structure as one of the emphasis of the Supreme Leader and a serious necessity of the country and stated, "In the budget bill of 1402, the strengthening of production and employment has been given special attention and 540 trillion tomans for the purpose of investing state companies in the country's economy and 327 trillion Tomans is also planned as the construction budget of the government."

He further mentioned the 7% reduction in the tax on production units as well as the reduction in the customs tariff of livestock inputs and basic goods from 4% to 1% as tax incentives foreseen in the budget bill 1402 in order to support production and employment.

The President considered housing as an important concern of the people and their representatives in the Majlis and said, "The government will make the necessary forecasts in next year's budget in order to provide financial resources to support the construction of housing, as well as provide the necessary credits from the transportation development fund"

Raisi said, "We thank God that our wise nation disappointed the enemy according to our wise leader and this time, as in the past, the enemies of this nation were defeated in these conspiracies, and of course, our responsibility towards the good, pious, and sincere people who love the Revolution has doubled"

On this basis, the President pointed out, "All the elements of the system must do their best to serve the people and take steps to solve the problems. We consider ourselves capable of solving problems and we deeply believe in the slogan of "we can" and move things forward with cooperation, empathy, coordination and convergence"

At the end, Raisi expressed hope that next year's budget will be the best budget compared to the previous budgets, and by announcing the imminent submission of the 7th Development Plan bill to the parliament, he thanked the people's representatives, as well as the parliament's presiding committee and the members of the specialized budget review commissions.

## ViewPoint

By: Hamid Reza Naghashian

## Who Should Be Blamed for Global Economic Chaos?

The world put behind 2012 with many unpleasant economic conditions that all emerged mostly after the Russia-Ukraine war broke out and many forecasts by the international economic bodies like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank went wrong with considerable margin of error and it is predicted the economic chaos like inflation and fuel crisis to continue in 2023.

After the IMF Chief Kristalina Georgieva last week warned over the economic condition in 2023 and said: "The global economy faces "a tough year, tougher than the year we leave behind." "We expect one-third of the world economy to be in recession," Georgieva told CBS's 'Face the Nation' in an interview aired Jan. 1. "Why? Because the three big economies — U.S., EU, China — are all slowing down simultaneously."

Now the World Bank has such a forecast for 2023 and has warned the world over a tough economic condition for 2023.

The World Bank in its latest report slashed its 2023 growth forecasts to levels teetering on the brink of recession for many countries as the impact of central bank rate hikes intensifies, Russia's war in Ukraine continues, and the world's major economic engines sputter.

The development lender said it now expected global GDP growth of 1.7% in 2023 -- the slowest pace outside the 2009 and 2020 recessions in nearly three decades. In its previous Global Economic Prospects report, in June 2022, the bank had forecast 2023 global growth at 3.0%.

The bank said major slowdowns in advanced economies, including sharp cuts to its forecast to 0.5% for both the United States and the euro zone, could foreshadow a new global recession less than three years after the last one.

"Given fragile economic conditions, any new adverse development -- such as higher-than-expected inflation, abrupt rises in interest rates to contain it, a resurgence of the COVID-19 pandemic or escalating geopolitical tensions -- could push the global economy into recession," the bank said in a statement accompanying the report.

The bleak outlook will be especially hard on emerging market and developing economies, the World Bank said, as they struggle with heavy debt burdens, weak currencies and income growth, and slowing business investment that is now forecast at a 3.5% annual growth rate over the next two years -- less than half the pace of the past two decades.

"Weakness in growth and business investment will compound the already devastating reversals in education, health, poverty and infrastructure and the increasing demands from climate change," World Bank President David Malpass said in a statement.

China's growth in 2022 slumped to 2.7%, its second slowest pace since the mid-1970s after 2020, as zero-COVID restrictions, property market turmoil and drought hit consumption, production and investment, the World Bank report said. It predicted a rebound to 4.3% for 2023, but that is 0.9 percentage-point below the June forecast due to the severity of COVID disruptions and weakening external demand.

The World Bank noted that some inflationary pressures started to abate as 2022 drew to a close, with lower energy and commodity prices, but warned that risks of new supply disruptions were high, and elevated core inflation may persist. This could cause central banks to respond by raising policy rates by more than currently expected, worsening the global slowdown, it added.

The bank called for increased support from the international community to help low-income countries deal with food and energy shocks, people displaced by conflicts, and a growing risk of debt crises. It said new concessional financing and grants are needed along with the leveraging of private capital and domestic resources to help boost investment in climate adaptation, human capital and health, the report said. **See Page 7**

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## Iraqi Ambassador Envoy Summoned Over Persian Gulf Misnomer

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's Foreign Ministry has summoned Iraqi Ambassador to Tehran Nasir Abdul Mohsen Abdullah to voice strong protest over a distortion of the name of the universally-recognized Persian Gulf at a biennial football competition currently underway in the Arab country's southern port city of Basra.

Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian said in a statement on Wednesday that the Iraqi diplomat was called in and reminded about the great sensitivity of the Iran nation to the use of the misnomer instead of the historically authentic name of the body of water lapping Iran's southern shores. **See Page 7**

## Iranian Citizen Nouri Objects to New Trial in Swedish Court

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Hamid Nouri, an Iranian citizen, has said that he will not stand trial in Sweden's court as long as the Swedish judicial authorities refuse to address his problems.

The new round of legal procedures to review his case was held in a court on January 11. Nouri said in the beginning of the session that he sees the trial unfair and he will not participate in the court until his problems are being addressed.

The judge of the court ordered cut off of his microphone, but Nouri continued to speak out loudly, saying that "I don't have access to ophthalmologist care"; so, I cannot study my case. I've been three years and two months in solitary confinement. The judge declared that the limitations have come to an end but I can't contact others yet.

## Navy Planning To Dispatch Vessels To Panama Canal

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

**TEHRAN - The Islamic Republic of Iran Navy has been present in almost all strategic straits throughout the globe except two, so it paves the ground for dispatching vessels to one of them this year and the other one in the future, an Iranian commander said.**

Speaking at the first national conference on maritime civilization in Konarak, Commander of IRI Navy Rear Admiral Shahram Irani called for a more powerful presence of the navy fleets in international waters, including the Panama Canal.

The Panama Canal is an artificial 82 km waterway in Panama that connects the Atlantic Ocean with the Pacific Ocean and divides North and South America.

The maritime capacities should be utilized to pave the way for materializing the Islamic-Iranian civilization, he said, noting that his forces are showcasing manifestations of Iran's might.

The IRI Navy vessels have succeeded in being present in the Pacific Ocean for the first time in Iran's history, he said, explaining that Australia and France made some threats against Iranians to break the regulations they themselves have issued but the Iranians stood firm in the face of such threats.

Irani went on to say that the Iranians started shipping prior to other states in particular the Europeans, so Iran should revitalize the might in this respect.

As the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution stated, the IRI Navy is in fact a strategic force, he said, mentioning that the navy is present in different areas and plays an effective role at the international level.

The first national conference on maritime civilization is being held in Konarak, Sistan and Baluchestan Province, on Wednesday and Thursday.

The conference consists of specialized panels such as the naval force and the development of the Makran coast, the land-use planning of the coast, economy, trade, maritime sustainable development, entrepreneurship, and knowledge-based production, geopolitics, security, diplomacy, and maritime defensive geography.

Meanwhile earlier Irani said that for maintaining Iran's status in geometry of strength and for helping the 1,400-year-old strong tree with deep roots to stand mightily, the country has no way, but to defend its faith, and attack enemy from a defensive position.



Irani who was speaking on Tuesday night at the opening ceremony of the first Navy Round-the-Clock Qur'anic School, for memorizing and getting acquainted with the holy concepts of the Glorious Qur'an in 1st District of the Navy, reiterated, "What counts in the geometry of power is that those who stand tall in the power field, as somehow hit."

He added that today the enemy does not merely rely on its facilities, but also works on strengthening the faiths of its forces, and in other words, what the enemy has today is not only its facilities, since the facilities are used taking advantage of personnel, and that is why strengthening the beliefs is of great importance.

"It is not true that a U.S. soldier, pilot, or sailor has travelled some 10,000 miles to reach the Sea of Oman and the Persian Gulf and wants to get involved in a military operation with a blank mind," he added.

The Navy commander once again emphasized that beyond doubt, the enemy is working on the beliefs of its personnel and its staffers, although "those beliefs differ from ours", and that is why the establishment of this first Qur'anic school in the First Navy District is taking a step in the path that is rightly referred to in the Second Step Statement.

"On the one hand, Qur'anic studies is among the demands of the Supreme Commander of Armed Forces, that the Navy's Ideological and Political Organization has taken the right step in that path, and on the other hand shaping up the society is in mind, which will lead to the building of the Islamic civilization in the long run, and is referred to in seven or eight articles of the Second Step Statement," he added.

He said that "our fellow combatants are now performing their missions in remote parts of the Atlantic Ocean on a broad-scale, hoisting the flag of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and that is the result of the hardships tolerated by the Navy's Ideological, Political Organization."

## Membership of Iran In Another Int'l Treaty

TEHRAN (IP) - The government spokesman says Iran will become a member of the UN treaty for using electronic communication in the near future.

Speaking to the reporters on the sidelines of the cabinet session on Wednesday, Ali Bahadori-Jahromi said that with the proposal of the Foreign Ministry being submitted to the cabinet, the membership would be started to be pursued.

"The administration has agreed to the proposal of the Foreign Ministry regarding the ratification of Iran's use of the UN Electronic Communications Convention in the international agreements."

Using electronic communication will facilitate Iranian businessmen's international activities through the omission of paper documents, bring about transparency in trade processes, and stop corruption through forging documents.

He also reported that the Culture Minister and the Science Minister joined the country's special task force for the digital economy.

The task force formed last year, seeks the coordination and lead the development of the digital economy and achieve a 10% share of the country's digital economy out of the country's entire economy.

## Minister Rejects Rumors On Fajr Film Festival

TEHRAN (IP) - Minister of Culture stresses the upcoming International Fajr Film Festival will be held on time as usual.

Mohammed-Mahdi Esmaili told reporters on the sidelines of the weekly cabinet session that some foreign-based media tried to ruin the face of the upcoming Fajr Film Festival by circulating rumors about a boycott.

Esmaili said that the tickets for the festival's films are to be sold from the next week.

The minister about seizures of some actors' passports said that the ministry would do its best to solve the problem, noting that support for the Iranian artist is the duty of the ministry.

Yet, he stated that the personal problems of citizens including actors and cinema activists should proceed with its usual judicial procedure.

## Insulters to Islamic Sanctities Urged to Remember Fate of Salman Rushdie

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - IRGC Commander Major General Hossein Salami called on those who insult the Islamic sanctities to remember the fate of Salman Rushdie.

He made the remarks in reaction to recently published cartoons by French publication Charlie Hebdo which insulted the Iranian and Muslim values.

Despaired and disappointed of their recent plots, the enemies are seeking to disturb the peace of mind of the Muslims by insulting their sanctities, Salami said.

He advised the insulters not to "play with the Muslims", noting that Salman Rushdie was punished more than thirty years after he insulted the Holy Quran and the Prophet of Islam.

This is a lesson for those to know that no one can dare to insult the Islamic sanctities nowhere in the world, the commander said.

He also said that the enemies use sacrilege to ruin Muslims' calmness.

Salami was speaking in Zahedan, the capital city of the southeastern Sistan and Baluchistan Province, addressing groups of people there.

Referring to the enemy's plans against Muslim nations, Salami said that the foes try to sow discord and division in Iran by inciting riots, emphasizing that the Islamic Republic of Iran will decisively thwart their hostile plots.

He noted that the enemies use sacrilege to ruin Muslims' calmness.

Pointing to the destroying presence of enemies in the countries including Iraq, Syria, and Yemen, he underlined that they want to repeat the same destruction plan to the Islamic Republic of Iran but, the Iranian nation will surely defeat them as always.

## Iran, Turkey Speakers Discuss Water Shares in Aras, Ties

TEHRAN (MNA) - Iranian and Turkish parliament speakers explored ways to increase border trade and discussed the Iran water share in the northern Aras River among other issues in a meeting on the sidelines of APA meeting.

Iranian parliament speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf held a meeting with Turkey's Parliament Speaker Mustafa Sentop on the sidelines of the Asian Parliamentary Assembly (APA) meeting in Antalya, Turkey.

In the meeting, Qalibaf congratulated Turkey on the successful hosting of the 13th APA meeting and described the bilateral relations between the two nations as growing.

The Iranian speaker added that the two nations need to enhance their bilateral trade to a higher level to meet the expectations.

Referring to the important issue of Aras River and the need to respect Iran's water share of the river, he said, "There are concerns regarding the issue of water in the Aras River, some of which are related to the environment of the region, and a meeting was held between the ministers of energy and the agriculture of the two countries has been held and a second meeting should be held, and this is one of the issues that can be of great importance for both countries, people and of course the environment because it has caused many problems for the lower parts of the Aras River."



Regarding the issue of border trade on both sides, the Iranian speaker said "The issue of border markets and border exchanges is one of the demands of the people and one of the priorities of the parliamentary friendship groups."

Qalibaf called for taking further other steps to increase border trade between the two countries, saying the trade on the border can boost the region's economy and border security.

He went on to say that the bilateral and trilateral talks between Iran, Turkey and Azerbaijan can be important in resolving the existing problems at different levels for the benefit of the progress and development of the countries and the entire region.

Mustafa Sentop, for his part, welcomed and supported the proposals made in the meeting by the Iranian speaker.

"In relation to the Aras River issue, I will conduct the necessary discussions for the fair supply of water shares..." the Turkish speaker said.

As regards the issue of border markets problems, Sentop said, "The issue of these markets is also an important issue, and as you know, the parliamentary friendship groups of the two countries are also following up on this issue, and I will also follow up on it with the trade minister of my country."

## Measures Are Taken for Cold Weather and Gas Usage

TEHRAN (IP) - Iran's Oil Minister stated that the country is experiencing very cold weather in most of its provinces. According to the forecasts, Iranian cities are expecting colder weather and more rain and snowfall after days of heavy snowfall across Iran. Speaking on the sidelines of the cabinet meeting, Javad Owji told reporters that to prevent gas shortages, required measures are taken. "We are gas independent, but we are at the peak of gas consumption, Owji said adding that "Our first priorities are domestic consumption, so sustainable consumption is required."

Iranian oil Minister said: Each degree of temperature reduction by customers reduces 25 million cubic meters in country gas consumption. After days of cold weather across Iran, especially in the northwest where the temperature drops below freezing, heavy snows are falling.

Heavy snowfall in some regions has blocked several roads as well.

On a road in Isfahan province, the height of the snow on the ground has reached more than two meters and the related officials have announced that the road couldn't be reopened until spring.

Several airports including the airports of Mashhad and Ahvaz also halted the flights due to thick fog and heavy snow.

According to the reports, the Iranian capital of Tehran experienced its coldest day on Wednesday.

Sarab city in East Azerbaijan province was also announced on Wednesday as Iran's coldest city during the current year with a temperature of -27 °C. The schools of several provinces of Iran including Hamedan and Zanjan are holding their classes online due to the heavy snow and freezing weather.

According to the forecasts, Iranian cities are expecting colder weather and more rain and snowfall.

## Iran, Saudi Arabia Ink MoU on Hajj

TEHRAN (IRNA) - The head of the Islamic Republic of Hajj and Pilgrimage Organization Sadeq Hosseini, and the Minister of Hajj and Umrah of Saudi Arabia Tawfiq al-Rabiah in a meeting signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on Hajj.

Hosseini left for Saudi Arabia on January 7, at the invitation of the Ministry of Hajj and Umrah of Saudi Arabia, for talking about the Hajj negotiations.

Negotiations and signing of the Hajj MoU between the two sides took place in a very cordial and friendly atmosphere, and they discussed and exchanged views on issues related to this year's Hajj.

The details of the signed MoU on Hajj will be published after returning the Iranian side to the country.

## U.S. Maximum Pressure Only Brought them Maximum Failure

TEHRAN (MNA) - Saying that Washington always pursued the maximum pressure policy toward Tehran, the Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman stressed that this policy resulted in nothing but maximum failure.

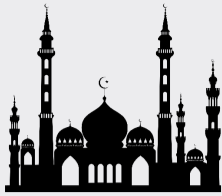
Saying that the U.S. enmity with the Islamic establishment and the Iranian nation is not a new event, Nasser Kanaani in a series of tweets on Monday wrote that the legal and international responsibility of different American administrations' hostile actions against Iran cannot be concealed.

The senior Iranian diplomat made the remarks referring to the statements of the Leader of the Islamic Revolution on Monday regarding a newly declassified document about the 39th US President Jimmy Carter.

He went on to say that the anti-Iranian maximum propaganda and political and economic pressure have always been on the agenda of all the US presidents, from Carter to Biden, under the false pretext of defending human rights and democracy.

"But they have not achieved anything more than "maximum failure", Kanaani stressed.

Why don't Americans learn from all the scandals caused by their trust in traitorous Zionist and hypocritical advisors? Kanaani continued, adding that Iran, here, is independent and powerful.



## PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	12:12
■ Evening (Maghreb)	17:30
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	05:45
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	07:14

116. When We said to the angels, "Prostrate yourselves to Adam", they prostrated themselves, but not Iblis: he refused.  
117. Then We said: "O Adam! verily, this is an enemy to thee and thy wife: so let him not get you both out of the Garden, so that thou art landed in misery.

Surah 20. Ta-ha ( 116 - 117 )

## Outflow of Elites Reducing Competitiveness Of the Country

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

**TEHRAN - Chairman of Iran-Switzerland Joint Chamber of Commerce Sharif Nezam-Mafi believes the outflow of the elites from the country reduces the competitiveness of the country which is currently stagflation.**

Speaking to ILNA, Nezam-Mafi pointed to the loom of stagflation on Iran's economy, adding that stagflation reduces the purchasing power of the country, adding that Iran's inflation is a hitter one and it means it rises some percentage without having any tool for its control while economy and capital need serenity in the market for progress and if there is no stability, one cannot expect the stagflation to be controlled in any part of the world.

He then pointed to some risks that Iran's industry is struggling with them, adding that purchasing power of the people has reached a point that domestic production is not so important because with the decline in the purchasing power, the people lose possibility for buying goods and today's inflation in the country is not simple and it has turned into a complicated issue.

He described capital as a coward creature, adding that capital goes to a safe place and unfortunately Iran's economic security is not as much as of its equal countries. He added for example countries like Mexico, South Africa and Malaysia have much more stability in their economies and therefore capital tends to go to those countries and currently Iran's economy has been directed towards a destination that even we cannot compare it with Turkey and South Korea and they are in much better condition than us.

Pointing to the ways of providing basic goods in the sanctions era, he said that basic goods are two types: one is that the society can live their lives without them and the second one is that their shortage creates problems in the society, adding that he thinks in the near future the country will see problem in importing basic goods



especially grain because the country has not faced such a condition even during the Iraqi-imposed war when it was able to provide its needs but today the main issue is not only provision of basic goods but the society needs to grow and has production and exports and make progresses in terms of innovation in the industry.

Nezamm Mafi noted that it seems in the near future the country to face sanctions from EU and especially from Germany and France and the issue of sanctions will affect type of Iran's economic relation with Europe.

Emphasizing the decline in the number of patenting inventions, he said that this is a reality that elites are leaving the country and the number of graduates from the top universities of the country do not like to stay in the country and this will affect the economy in future and some may think this is not an important issue that elites are leaving the country but in the long term it will have its own impacts on the society and economy and will reduce the competitiveness of the country in the international scene.

He admitted that the Central Bank statistics show that the country is struggling with the stagflation and to get out of this condition is not so much difficult because the private and the state sectors know how to pass these crises.

Nezam Mafi went on to say that the volume of produced goods in Iran can be offered in the neighboring states but Iran cannot declare itself as an exporting country while Turkey can claim it. He stated that Turkey's government supports exporters and gives subsidies to exporter enterprises but this is not possible in Iran, adding that export is not main economic issue in the country although the country has seen progresses in recent years.

## Annual Saffron Production Rises 20%



TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Saffron production in Iran has increased by 20 percent in the current crop year as compared to the previous year, Head of Iran's Union of Sellers and Exporters of saffron Gholamreza Miri said.

Miri, however, noted that the exports of the mentioned product have been on a downward trend over the past year, IRIB reported.

Iran is one of the world's top saffron producers and over 90 percent of its production is exported to foreign destinations.

In September 2022, the Islamic Republic signed a \$300-million deal with Qatar to cooperate in distributing Iranian saffron in the global markets.

## Iran, Iraq Officials Stress Boosting Economic Ties

BAGHDAD (Dispatches) - The Iraqi ambassador to Tehran, in a meeting with the vice-chairman of the Economic Commission of Iran's Parliament said that the relations between the two countries are strong, long-standing as both side stressed further deepening.

At a meeting with Shahbaz Hasanpour Bigleri, the deputy chairman of the Economic Commission of Iranian Parliament, Nasir Abdul Mohsen Abdullah, the Iraqi ambassador to Tehran said that Iran-Iraq relations in various fields, including economic relations, are at a good and acceptable level which should be strengthened by the joint efforts of the two countries.

Nasir Abdul Mohsen Abdullah considered political visits as an important factor in the development and strengthening of Iran-Iraq relations and added: "there have been many meetings between the officials of the two countries in various fields, which we hope will reach the implementation stage soon and benefit from its results in the near future."

Also, in this meeting, the vice chairman of the Economic Commission of Iran's Parliament said: "the Islamic Republic of Iran and Iraq have had long-standing and strong relations with each other, and these relations will be deepened with more cooperation between the two countries in various fields, especially in the economic field."

Among the Arab countries of West Asia, Iraq has the most cultural and religious affinities with Iran. 219

## Renewing Road Maintenance Fleet Requires Over \$393m

TEHRAN (MNA) - Head of Iran Road Maintenance and Transportation Organization (RMTO) Dariyoush Amani has said his organization needs at least 150 trillion rials (about \$393.7 million) for the renovation of the country's road maintenance fleet, IRNA reported.

Amani put the average age of the country's road maintenance machinery at 25 years, saying that this fleet has not been renovated for many years and the machines have only been repaired.

"We are trying to supply the necessary resources from the allocated budget for RMTO as well as the financial assistance from other institutions," the official said.

## PUT Ranks First In Iran, ME, 7th in World

TEHRAN (Shana) -- According to the Scimago Ranking System, the Petroleum University of Technology (PUT) was ranked first in Iran, first in the Middle East, and seventh in the world in the field of geology.

According to PUT, based on the latest edition of the Scimago subject ranking system in 2022, PUT has won the first place in Iran, the first in the Middle East, and the seventh in the world in the field of geology.

Based on this ranking, PUT has gained 697th place in the world by improving 100 ranks in all the subjects collectively.

## Iran Exports to Turkey Up 24% y/y



TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iran's export to Turkey rose by 24% year on year in January-November 2022 to \$3.1 billion, according to figures by the Turkish Statistical Institute (TURKSTAT).

Latest TURKSTAT figures published in an IRNA report on Wednesday showed that total trade between Iran and Turkey had increased by 18% in the 11 months to November last year compared with the same period in 2021.

The value of bilateral trade between the two neighboring countries amounted to \$5.88 billion in January-November 2022, up from \$4.99 billion reported in the same previous period, showed TURKSTAT figures.

Turkey's export to Iran increased by 12% year on year over the 11 months to November last year to \$2.78 billion. The country had exported \$2.49 billion worth of commodities to Iran in the same period 2021, according to the same figures.

Turkey's imports from Iran reached \$3.1 billion in January-November 2022, up 24 percent from the same period 2021 when the country took delivery of \$2.5 billion worth of goods from Iran, said the Turkish statistics agency.

Meanwhile, IRNA's report cited figures by the statistical office of the European Union (EU), the Eurostat, showing that Iran had exported 8.422 billion cubic meters of natural gas to Turkey in January-November last year, down 1.8% in comparison to the same period in 2021 when Iran had exported \$8.581 billion cubic meters of gas to its northwestern neighbor.

## Modern Irrigation Systems Established in 35,000 Hectares of Farmlands

TEHRAN (MNA) - The project manager of Iranian Agriculture Ministry's modern irrigation systems development program said 35,000 hectares of the country's farmlands have been equipped with modern irrigation systems in the current Iranian calendar year (began on March 21, 2022).

Fariborz Abbasi stated that the total irrigated lands that have been equipped with modern irrigation systems since the beginning of the implementation of this project are 2.6 million hectares.

Stating that the development of irrigation systems with high efficiency is the main priority of the Agriculture Ministry's Water and Soil Department, he said: "In the next stage, irrigation machines that have higher efficiency and uniformity of water distribution are among our development priorities."

"According to the existing development capacities in the field of technical and engineering services, manufacturing of equipment and instruments, competent contractors and consultants, if the credits are provided on time, we can establish modern irrigation systems in up to 400,000 hectares of the lands in the country", the official added.

He considered technological development in the field of modern irrigation systems as one of the other priorities of his department and said: "We are trying to have the latest technologies in the field of modern irrigation systems in terms of equipment and supplies

with the help of domestic knowledge-based companies and manufacturers."

He mentioned increasing yield, rising irrigation efficiency and reducing irrigation water consumption among the benefits of developing new irrigation systems.

Abbasi, who is the head of the Agriculture Ministry's Water and Soil Department, has previously announced that his ministry is planning to establish modern irrigation systems for 50,000 hectares of farmlands in the current year.

He pointed to the supply and production of equipment for modern irrigation systems inside the country and said: "With the cooperation and help of domestic knowledge-based companies, we have reached self-sufficiency in the production of equipment and supplies for these systems."

The purpose of implementing the plan of modern irrigation systems is to increase the productivity and sustainability of water and soil resources in the country to ensure the sustainable production of agricultural products.

The Agriculture Ministry is also taking the necessary measures for supporting the domestic manufacturing of equipment used in these systems.

Back in September 2021, Abbasi had said that 95 percent of the equipment used in such systems is manufactured inside the country.

## Gov't to Face Rise in Budget Deficit Next Year

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - A famous economist and Al-Zahra University teacher believes the current government will face considerable rise in the budget deficit next year adding that the government has made most out of the current devaluation of national currency against dollar to decrease its current budget deficit.

Speaking to ILNA, Hossein Raghfar touched upon contradictions in the remarks of the government officials and Majlis law makers regarding the current budget deficit as well as the claim of the head of the Plan and Budget Organization's remarks that the government will have no budget deficit by the end of the current Iranian calendar year while less than two months ago they had admitted the government faced the budget deficit of over 200,000 billion tomans, and said that the government in this range of time has printed money and at the same time with devaluation of the national currency it has compensated some considerable part of its budget deficit from the public pocket and it has actually amended its budget deficit through the pockets of the people.

He noted that next year the condition will worsen and the government will move towards increasing the price of energy carriers, noting that when the head of Plan and Budget Organization two months ago announced the 200,000b budget deficit he talked about increasing the price of the energy carriers for amending the deficit but the current social condition did not let the government to amend its budget deficit through increasing the price of energy otherwise it would have done it.

Raghfar then talked about the next year's budget bill and said that he predicts the budget deficit will rise next year with the current budget bill.

He went on to say that the other issue is that the current unrests have cost the country and the government a lot and it seems the government does not intend to clear up and make transparent in this regard.

## WHO Meeting to Decide on COVID Emergency Set for Jan. 27



GENEVA (Dispatches) - A World Health Organization committee will meet on Jan. 27 to consider whether the COVID-19 pandemic still represents a global emergency, a spokesperson said on Tuesday, three years after it was first declared.

WHO spokesperson Carla Drysdale confirmed the timing of the meeting at a Geneva press briefing. The Emergency Committee advises WHO Director General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus who makes the ultimate call on whether an outbreak represents a so-called Public Health Emergency of International Concern which is the U.N. agency's highest level of alert.

## China Suspends Issuing Visas In Japan and South Korea



BEIJING (Dispatches) - China suspended issuing short-term visas in South Korea and Japan, after announcing it would retaliate against countries that required negative COVID-19 tests from Chinese travellers.

China has ditched mandatory quarantines for arrivals and allowed travel to resume across its border with Hong Kong since Sunday, removing the last major restrictions under the "zero-COVID" regime which it abruptly began dismantling in early December after historic protests against the curbs. But the virus is spreading unchecked among its 1.4 billion people and worries over the scale and impact of its outbreak have prompted Japan, South Korea, the United States and other countries to require negative COVID tests from travellers from China.

## Russia Strives for First Big Ukraine Gains in Months



KYIV (Dispatches) - Britain said Russia had probably captured a mining town in eastern Ukraine where Kyiv accused Moscow of sacrificing wave upon wave of mercenaries and soldiers in a horrific and senseless battle over wasteland.

The British Defense Ministry said Russian troops and fighters of Wagner, a mercenary company run by an ally of President Vladimir Putin, were probably now in control of the salt mining town of Soledar after four days of advances.

If confirmed, it would be Russia's most substantial gain since last August, after a series of humiliating retreats throughout much of the second half of 2022. Russian forces have been fighting for months to capture the nearby larger city of Bakhmut, a few kilometres (miles) to the southwest.

But any victory would come at a massive cost, with troops from both sides having taken heavy losses in some of the most intense combat since Russia invaded Ukraine nearly 11 months ago. Kyiv has released pictures in recent days showing what it says are scores of Russian soldiers strewn dead in muddy fields.

Moscow says capturing Bakhmut would be a major step to taking full control of Ukraine's Donetsk region, one of four provinces it claimed to have annexed two months ago.

Russia's defense ministry did not mention either Soledar or Bakhmut in a media briefing on Monday.

"Russia's Soledar axis is highly likely an effort to envelop Bakhmut from the north and to disrupt Ukrainian lines of communication," the British defence ministry said in a short daily intelligence briefing.

In an overnight address, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy acknowledged that the situation in Soledar was "difficult", but said Ukrainian defenders had bought more time by holding on, and Kyiv would eventually drive Russians out of the entire eastern Donbas industrial region.

"And what did Russia want to gain there? Everything is completely destroyed, there is almost no life left. And thousands of their people were lost: the whole land near Soledar is covered with the corpses of the occupiers and scars from the strikes," he said. "This is what madness looks like."

Near Bakhmut, a team of Ukrainian soldiers was firing volleys of shells from a heavy anti-aircraft gun at what they said were Russian ground positions, across a barren snowy field. "We're frying orcs," said soldier with the nomme de guerre "Pilot", using a common Ukrainian slur for Russian troops.

His crew receives coordinates of Russian bases from spotters or drones. They periodically shell Russian bases, and unleash storms of heavy fire when the enemy troops advance: "If they creep in very actively, then we kill them in great numbers."

Serhiy Cherevaty, spokesman for Ukraine's eastern forces, said the Russians were deploying their best Wagner fighters at Soledar, which had been struck 86 times by artillery over the past 24 hours. He compared Russian tactics to World War One: throwing large numbers of men into ground battle and absorbing heavy losses.

"This is basically not a 21st-century war," he said. Reuters could not verify the situation inside Soledar itself. Journalist Yuriy Butusov, embedded with Ukrainian troops in Soledar, wrote for the online outlet New Voice that Russian forces had established fire control over the main Ukrainian supply route.

"This is not a complete encirclement, but normal supply along the route is impossible, (and) this is critical for defense," he said.

Zelenskiy has repeatedly urged Ukraine's Western supporters to supply more sophisticated weapons. Last week, one of Ukraine's biggest pleas was answered when the United States, Germany and France promised large numbers of Western armoured fighting vehicles for the first time. Kyiv is still seeking Western battle tanks.

## Brazilian Police Question Some 1,000 Detainees After Rampage



BRASILIA (Dispatches) - Brazilian police on Tuesday were questioning some 1,000 protesters held in an overcrowded gymnasium in the capital after anti-government mobs sacked public buildings over the weekend, as the country's new government worked to overcome the crisis.

Most of the supporters of far-right former President Jair Bolsonaro were detained as troops dismantled a camp in Brasilia from which demonstrators set off on Sunday to storm Brazil's Congress, Supreme Court and presidential palace.

Protesters at the camp outside army headquarters had called for a military coup to overturn the October election in which leftist President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva narrowly defeated Bolsonaro, who made baseless suggestions of a rigged election.

Supreme Court Justice Alexandre de Moraes, who is running investigations of the "anti-democratic" protests, vowed in a speech on Tuesday to combat the "terrorists" calling for a coup.

"Democracy will prevail and Brazilian institutions will not bend," said Moraes at the swearing-in of a new head of the federal police.

Yet the challenge of carrying out such an enormous criminal investigation into a loosely organized protest movement in the first weeks of a new government was already beginning to show.

Roughly 1,000 detainees from the protest camp were held for questioning at a police gymnasium where they slept on the ground, some wrapped in Brazilian flags, and complained to a Reuters journalist that they were being held indefinitely and poorly fed. They sang and took selfies with their phones, video posted on social media showed.

Opposition Senator Marcos do Val, who has denounced the Brasilia riots as a blunder for the political right, told journalists outside the gym that many of those detained "are paying for being in the wrong place at the wrong time."

Around 200 other demonstrators were under arrest and awaiting charges in a penal facility for their role in Sunday's rampage, which vandalized some of the capital's most iconic buildings in the worst attack on Brazilian democracy in decades.

## Classified Documents From Biden's Vice Presidency Found at Think Tank

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - Classified documents from Joe Biden's vice-presidential days were discovered in November by the U.S. president's personal attorneys at a Washington think tank, a White House lawyer said on Monday.

Nearly 10 documents were found at Biden's office at the Penn Biden Center for Diplomacy and Global Engagement, CBS News reported earlier, adding that U.S. Attorney General Merrick Garland had asked the U.S. attorney in Chicago to review the classified documents which were handed over to the National Archives.

The classified material was identified by personal attorneys for Biden on Nov. 2, days before the midterm elections, Richard Sauber, special counsel to the president, said in a statement on Monday.

The Penn Biden Center is named for Biden, who periodically used the office space from mid-2017 until the start of his 2020 presidential campaign. The White House Counsel's Office notified the National Archives on the day of the discovery of those documents, Sauber said, adding the National Archives took possession of the material on the following morning.

Sauber also said the documents were not the subject of any previous request or inquiry by the National Archives.

The documents were discovered when Biden's personal attorneys "were packing files housed in a locked closet to prepare to vacate office space at the Penn Biden Center in Washington, D.C.," Sauber said. He added the White House was cooperating with the Justice Department and the National Archives.

The Justice Department, the National Archives and the think tank did not respond to a request for comment. Biden was vice president under former President Barack Obama from 2009 to 2017.

Sauber's statement did not mention the number of classified documents, what they contained or their level of classification. CBS News reported that they did not contain nuclear secrets.

## Armenia Cancels Military Drills of Russian-Led Alliance

YEREVAN (Dispatches) - Armenia has refused to host military drills by the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), a Russian-led alliance of post-Soviet countries, in an announcement that reflects Yerevan's growing tensions with Moscow.

Russia had announced earlier this year that Armenia would host the annual exercises of the group which comprises six states - Russia, Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

"The Armenian defense minister has informed the CSTO Joint Staff that in the current situation, we consider it unreasonable to hold CSTO exercises on the territory of Armenia. At least, such exercises will not take place in Armenia this year," Interfax news agency reported Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan as saying.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov, when asked about the cancelled military drill, said Moscow would ask Yerevan to clarify its position.

"In any case, Armenia is our close ally, and we will continue our dialogue, including the most complex issues," he told reporters.

Pashinyan's move followed his refusal in 2022 to sign a concluding document from a meeting of the leaders of CSTO member nations in Yerevan, Armenia's capital.

The tensions are rooted in Armenia's conflicts with Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh.

The two ex-Soviet states maintain good relations with Russia despite its invasion of Ukraine; Armenia hosts a Russian military base and the Kremlin wants to maintain ties with oil-rich Azerbaijan.

Nagorno-Karabakh lies within Azerbaijan but has been under the control of ethnic Armenian forces backed by Yerevan since a separatist war there ended in 1994. That conflict left not only Nagorno-Karabakh itself but large chunks of surrounding lands in Armenian hands.

In 44 days of heavy fighting that began in September 2020, the Azerbaijani military routed Armenian forces, forcing Yerevan to accept a Russia-brokered peace deal that saw the return of a significant part of Nagorno-Karabakh to Azerbaijan.

The agreement also required Armenia to hand over swaths of land it held outside the separatist region.

Pashinyan has repeatedly criticized Russian peacekeepers for failure to secure free transit along a corridor linking Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh.

The Lachin province, which lies between Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia, was the last of three areas on the region's rim that Armenian forces surrendered in December 2020.

Russia deployed nearly 2,000 peacekeepers to ensure safe transit across the region and monitor the peace deal.



## NATO, EU Vow More Support for Ukraine To Defend Itself



BRUSSELS (Dispatches) - NATO and the EU vowed to bolster their backing for Ukraine to fight off Russia's invasion and ramp up cooperation between Europe and the U.S.-led alliance.

"We must continue to strengthen the partnership between NATO and the European Union. And we must further strengthen our support to Ukraine," NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg said after signing a joint declaration with the EU's top officials.

Countries in NATO and the EU -- which share 21 members -- have funnelled billions of dollars of arms to Kyiv that have helped it push back Moscow's forces. The United States, Germany and France have announced they will now also supply Ukraine with armoured fighting vehicles -- but Kyiv has pleaded for modern heavy tanks to be sent as well.

"I think that Ukraine should get all the necessary military equipment they need and they can handle to defend the homeland," European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said.

"This means of course, advanced air defense systems, but also other types of advanced military equipment, as long as it is necessary to defend Ukraine."

Stoltenberg said Kyiv's Western backers will meet next week with Ukraine's defense minister "to discuss exactly what types of weapons are needed and how can allies provide those weapons".

"This is not only about adding more systems, more platforms, more weapons, but also ensuring that the platforms, the weapons we have already provided are working as they should," he said.

Moscow's attack on Ukraine has upended the European security order and spurred calls for the EU and NATO to work more closely together to protect the continent.

The two organizations agreed that NATO, backed by the military might of the United States, remains the bedrock for Europe's security despite attempts by the EU to boost its role in defense.

"Our declaration makes clear that NATO remains the foundation of collective defense and remains essential for Euro-Atlantic security," Stoltenberg said.

"It also recognizes the value of a more capable European defense that contributes positively to our security and is complementary to and interoperable with NATO."

## Rate of Scientific Breakthroughs Slowing Over Time



PARIS (Dispatches) - The rate of ground-breaking scientific discoveries and technological innovation is slowing down despite an ever-growing amount of knowledge, according to an analysis released last Wednesday of millions of research papers and patents.

While previous research has shown downturns in individual disciplines, the study is the first that “emphatically, convincingly documents this decline of disruptiveness across all major fields of science and technology,” lead author Michael Park told AFP.

Park, a doctoral student at the University of Minnesota’s Carlson School of Management, called disruptive discoveries those that “break away from existing ideas” and “push the whole scientific field into new territory.”

The researchers gave a “disruptiveness score” to 45 million scientific papers dating from 1945 to 2010, and to 3.9 million US-based patents from 1976 to 2010.

From the start of those time ranges, research papers and patents have been increasingly likely to consolidate or build upon previous knowledge, according to results published in the journal Nature.

The ranking was based on how the papers were cited in other studies five years after publication, assuming that the more disruptive the research was, the less its predecessors would be cited.

The biggest decrease in disruptive research came in physical sciences such as physics and chemistry. “The nature of research is shifting” as incremental innovations become more common, senior study author Russell Funk said.

One theory for the decline is that all the “low-hanging fruit” of science has already been plucked. If that were the case, disruptiveness in various scientific fields would have fallen at different speeds, Park said.

But instead “the declines are pretty consistent in their speeds and timing across all major fields,” Park said, indicating that the low-hanging fruit theory is not likely to be the culprit.

Instead, the researchers pointed to what has been dubbed “the burden of research,” which suggests there is now so much that scientists must learn to master a particular field they have little time left to push boundaries.

This causes scientists and inventors to “focus on a narrow slice of the existing knowledge, leading them to just come up with something more consolidating rather than disruptive,” Park said.

Another reason could be that “there’s increasing pressure in academia to publish, publish, publish, because that’s the metric that academics are assessed on,” he added.

The researchers called on universities and funding agencies to focus more on quality, rather than quantity, and consider full subsidies for year-long sabbaticals to allow academics to read and think more deeply.

“We’re not getting any less innovative as a species,” Park emphasised, pointing to recent breakthroughs such as the use of mRNA technology in Covid-19 vaccines, or the measurement of gravity waves in 2015.

Jerome Lamy, a historian and expert in the sociology of science at France’s CNRS research agency, who was not involved in the research, said it showed that “ultra-specialisation” and the pressure to publish had increased over the years.

He blamed a global trend of academics being “forced to slice up their papers” to increase their number of publications, saying it had led to “a dulling of research.”

## Marching Across India, Gandhi Scion Aims to Repair Congress Party’s Image



PANIPAT (Dispatches) - An old Bollywood film song playing on loop exhorted travelers to keep walking as opposition leader Rahul Gandhi and an entourage marched through northern India’s Panipat city on a frigid morning last week, trailed by hundreds of people.

Gandhi began walking the length of the country over 100 days ago from India’s southern tip, hoping to repair the battered image of his Congress party and take on Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s dominant Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

Stopping to greet onlookers and holding public meetings, Gandhi plans to round off his march in northernmost Kashmir by January end.

“Long live Rahul Gandhi,” Congress supporters shouted, as the scion of a dynasty that has given India three prime ministers marched through Panipat on his Bharat Jodo Yatra, or Unite India March. The 52-year-old, a fitness buff with a thick salt-and-pepper beard, walks about 25 km (15 miles) per day, stopping for the night in a trailer van that moves with him.

Gandhi’s gruelling march that will cover about 3,500 km (2,200 miles) is a throwback to the padayatras or foot journeys through the rural heartland by past leaders, including independence hero Mahatma Gandhi nearly a century ago. The two Gandhis are not related.

This modern version of the march gives hundreds of thousands of people face time with a leader who has seemed distant and aloof in the past. Congress is hoping that the crowds Gandhi is attracting will eventually translate into votes.

“Now that he has hit the streets, people can see who he is,” said Dharamvir Arya, a 55-year-old farmer who had come to see Gandhi in Panipat. “If he remains in a bungalow, hidden, how will people know what he is like?”

Polling agency CVoter, which has tracked Gandhi’s approval ratings in nine states - four of which will hold local elections this year - as part of nationwide monthly surveys of 30,000 respondents, found the Congress leader’s popularity has risen markedly in most states through which he has marched.

In the southern state of Karnataka, which holds elections this summer, the percentage of respondents satisfied with Gandhi has jumped from 39% in January 2022 to nearly 58% immediately after the march passed through.

The once-dominant Congress controls less than 10% of the elected seats in parliament’s lower house and has been decimated in two successive general elections by the BJP, most recently in 2019 under Gandhi’s leadership.

Modi remains India’s most popular politician by a substantial margin and is widely expected to win a third victory in 2024. Over 60% of respondents across the country prefer Modi as prime minister to 30.3% choosing Gandhi, according to CVoter.

Analysts say Gandhi’s public image is improving but it may not be enough for the flagging Congress to immediately convert that into electoral success.

“To invest in Rahul Gandhi’s personal popularity is actually a fairly astute move,” said Neelanjan Sircar, a senior fellow at the Centre for Policy Research think tank in New Delhi.

“Does it yield electoral dividends? That, I think, is unlikely,” Sircar said, pointing to the BJP’s superior organisational abilities and formidable election machinery.

Gandhi declined interview requests from Reuters.



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## Zambia Extends Electricity Rationing to Mining Firms

LUSAKA (Dispatches) - Zambia has started rationing electricity supply to mining firms following reduced power generation after a big drop in water levels in lake Kariba, the chairman of state-owned power utility Zesco said. Water levels in the lake were down at 1.66% of usable storage on Monday for the Kariba North Bank Power Station in Zambia and the Kariba South Bank Power Station on the Zimbabwean side of the lake, said the Zambezi River Authority, which manages the dam. The north bank power station has an installed capacity of 1,080 megawatts (MW), while the south bank power station in Zimbabwe has a capacity of 1,050 MW.



## Canada Finalizes Deal to Buy Dozens of F-35 Fighter Jets

OTTAWA (Dispatches) - Canada has finalized an agreement with the United States and weapons maker Lockheed Martin to purchase 88 F-35 fighter jets, the government announced, as it seeks to upgrade the country's ageing fleet.

During a news conference, Defense Minister Anita Anand said the \$14.2bn (\$19bn Canadian) deal marked the largest investment in the Royal Canadian Air Force in 30 years.

"As our world grows darker, with Russia's illegal and unjustifiable invasion of Ukraine and China's increasingly assertive behavior in the Indo-Pacific, this project has taken on heightened significance, especially given the importance of interoperability with our allies," Anand said.

The announcement comes as Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau is set to meet with US President Joe Biden and Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador at a "Three Amigos" summit in Mexico City this week.

Canada, which has a close defense relationship with the US, has been trying for more than a decade to replace its fleet of aging Boeing CF-18 fighters, some of which are more than 40 years old.

The first four F-35 aircraft are anticipated to be delivered in 2026 with full operational capacity for the fleet expected between 2032 and 2034.

The project's \$14.2bn (\$19bn Canadian) budget includes the cost of infrastructure setup, weapons and other related expenses in addition to the price of planes, which are estimated at about \$85m (\$114m Canadian) each. The full life cycle of the program is expected to cost \$52bn (\$70bn Canadian), however, which has drawn some criticism and questions in Canada.

"As winter sets in and Canadians struggle to make ends meet, it is irresponsible and unjust for the Trudeau government to spend public money on American warplanes," the No Fighter Jets Coalition activist group said in a statement in late December.

"Instead, the federal government should invest in affordable housing, health care, education, economic assistance, and climate action. Canada's planned F-35 procurement is unacceptable and immoral and must be canceled."

In 2015, Trudeau also campaigned on a promise to scrap a plan by then-Prime Minister Stephen Harper's Conservative Party government to buy the F-35s. Instead, he said his Liberal Party would launch a bidding process to replace Canada's fleet.

"We know that choosing to cancel the F-35 procurement by the Conservative government and choosing instead to replace with a competitive [bid] from the many alternatives out there, we will be saving tens of billions of dollars in the coming decades," Trudeau said at that time.

But on Monday, Anand said the F-35 agreement would help Canada meet its military commitments at home and better work with allies in the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

"Together, these projects will sharpen our military edge to keep Canadians safe and they will create economic opportunities for our country," the defense minister said.

Maintaining and operating the jets should involve approximately 3,300 jobs and add \$317m (\$425m Canadian) annually to Canada's gross domestic product (GDP) over 25 years, she added.

Nelson Wiseman, a political science professor at the University of Toronto, said it was inevitable that Canada would opt for the F-35, especially since many other western allies have bought the jet.

## Indonesia, Malaysia Agree to Fight "Discrimination" Against Palm Oil

BOGOR (Dispatches) - Indonesia and Malaysia, the world's biggest producers of palm oil, agreed to work together to fight "discrimination" against the commodity after a meeting between leaders from the countries.

The comments by Indonesian President Joko Widodo followed a meeting with Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, who was making his first overseas trip since being elected last November.

Widodo, popularly known as Jokowi, said the two countries would "fight discrimination against palm oil" and "strengthen cooperation through the Council of Palm Oil Producing Countries" to address concerns.

The European Union plans to phase out palm-oil based fuels by 2030 because of perceived links to deforestation.

During their bilateral meeting, Anwar and Jokowi signed eight memorandums of understandings covering shipping, export-import financing, green energy, the development of battery industry, which they said they hoped would deepen cross border trade and investment.

The leaders also discussed the development of Indonesia's planned new capital, Nusantara, with Anwar handing over 11 letters of interest from Malaysian companies related to possible investment in the new city, located in the Indonesian portion Borneo.

The new capital could boost regional development, Anwar said, with the Malaysian states of Sabah and Sarawak located in the Malaysian part of Borneo island.

"We hope the development of the capital will bring greater benefits to the wider region, including on Sabah and Sarawak," he said.



## Consumer Inflation In Japan's Capital Exceeds BOJ Target

TOKYO (Dispatches) - Core consumer prices in Japan's capital, a leading indicator of nationwide trends, rose a faster-than-expected 4.0% in December from a year earlier, exceeding the central bank's 2% target for a seventh straight month in a sign of broadening inflationary pressure.

The increase, which was the fastest pace in four decades, will likely underpin market expectations the Bank of Japan (BOJ) may phase out its massive stimulus by tweaking its yield curve control policy.

"It's clear Japan's inflation is perking up as a trend. The economy's output gap will also likely to turn positive soon," said Mari Iwashita, chief market economist at Daiwa Securities.

"All in all, we're seeing more data that will give the BOJ reason to eventually normalise monetary policy," she said. The rise in the Tokyo core consumer price index (CPI), which excludes fresh food but includes fuel, exceeded a median market forecast of 3.8% and a 3.6% gain seen in November, government data showed on Tuesday. The last time Tokyo inflation was faster was April 1982, when the core CPI was 4.2% higher than a year before.

The Tokyo core-core CPI index, which excludes fuel as well as fresh food, was 2.7% higher in December than a year earlier, picking up from the 2.5% annual gain seen in November.

The rise in the Tokyo CPI heightens the chance that nationwide consumer inflation likely stayed above the BOJ's 2% target in December. The BOJ will likely upgrade its inflation forecasts at a rate review next week, sources have told Reuters, underscoring its conviction that robust domestic demand will keep inflation sustainably around its 2% target in coming years.

BOJ Governor Haruhiko Kuroda has dismissed the chance of a near-term interest rate hike on the view the bank must keep supporting the economy until the current cost-push inflation turns into a demand-driven one accompanied by higher wages.

But Japan's long-term interest rates have crept up since the BOJ stunned markets last month by widening the band around its 10-year bond yield target, a move that investors saw as a prelude to a future rate hike.

The central bank's heavy-handed market intervention has failed to correct distortions in the yield curve, analysts say, underscoring the challenge it faces in mitigating the rising cost of prolonged easing. There is also uncertainty on whether Japanese companies will increase wages enough to cushion the blow to households from rising living costs.

Household spending in November unexpectedly fell 1.2% from a year earlier, separate government data showed on Tuesday, marking the first drop in six months in a sign of the fragility of private consumption.



## Brazil's 2022 Inflation Slows Sharply, Misses Gov't Target

BRASILIA (Dispatches) - Brazil's inflation ended 2022 with a sharp slowdown from double-digit peaks seen throughout the year on the back of fiscal measures and an aggressive monetary policy tightening, but once again missed the government's official target.

The benchmark IPCA consumer price index rose 5.79% last year, statistics agency IBGE said on Tuesday, higher than the 5.60% median forecast in a Reuters poll of economists.

The result missed both the central bank's annual target of 3.5% and the top 5% of its tolerance band, marking the second straight year that it had done so.

Central bank chief Roberto Campos Neto is legally required to publish a letter justifying the inflation target miss. It will be released on Tuesday, according to the central bank.

The index was up 0.62% in December alone, IBGE said, above the 0.45% forecast in a Reuters poll.

Andres Abadia, chief Latin America economist at Pantheon Macroeconomics, noted that disinflation continues in Brazil, helped by tight financial conditions, stuttering economic growth, and broad tax waivers to bring prices down.

"Inflation should continue to decline over the next three to six months, though at a more modest pace than in the second half, assisted by the recent fall in oil prices," he wrote in a note to clients.

In 2022, the central bank continued its aggressive monetary tightening to battle inflation, lifting its key interest rate to 13.75% from a record low of 2% in March 2021. Since September, policymakers have left rates unchanged at their cycle-high, stressing they remain vigilant about inflationary pressures.

William Jackson, chief emerging markets economist at Capital Economics, said the higher-than-expected 2022 inflation coincided with growing fiscal concerns after leftist President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva secured the approval of the Congress to boost welfare spending.

That will give the central bank "more cause to delay the start of its easing cycle," Jackson said.

According to IBGE, inflation last year was mainly impacted by the increased costs of food and beverages (+11.64%) and health and personal care items (+11.43%).

Overall 12-month inflation was in double digits until July last year, affected by surging commodity prices triggered by the war in Ukraine.

But the government of former President Jair Bolsonaro took measures to ease prices before an October presidential election, including a costly tax waiver on fuels that was recently extended by Lula.

## Chevron's First Cargo of Venezuelan Oil After License Departs for U.S.

HOUSTON (Dispatches) - Chevron Corp's first cargo of Venezuelan crude under a U.S. license received in November has departed from a ship-to-ship transfer hub near Aruba to its Pascagoula, Mississippi refinery, according to shipping data seen by Reuters.

Chevron received authorization last year

from the U.S. Treasury Department to revive oil output and expand operations in Venezuela as part of Washington's efforts to encourage political dialogue towards a presidential election in the South American nation.

State-run oil company PDVSA allocated Chevron the first crude cargo this month, which was loaded at Venezuela's Jose terminal last week, according to shipping data and documents.

Chevron's tanker Caribbean Voyager this week transferred the 500,000-barrel cargo of Hamaca heavy crude it had loaded in Venezuela to Malta-flagged vessel Sealeo at a ship-to-ship hub near the Caribbean island of Aruba, Refinitiv Eikon tanker monitoring data showed.

The Sealeo is scheduled to arrive in Chevron's Pascagoula refinery on Jan. 15, according to the Eikon data.

A separate Venezuelan crude cargo chartered by Chevron on tanker Kerala was on Tuesday at Maracaibo Lake's navigation channel, where lack of dredging and a stranded vessel are creating limitations for ship transit.

Chevron confirmed shipping activities in Venezuela commenced this month and said the company is focused on "operating safely and reliably" after restarting operations at its affiliated joint ventures in December.

"We continue to conduct our business in compliance with all laws and regulations where we operate, as well as the sanctions framework provided by the U.S. Office of Foreign Assets Control," it added in a release to Reuters.

## India's Inflation Likely Remained Steady at 5.90% in December



BENGALURU (Dispatches) - India's retail inflation held steady in December, staying within the Reserve Bank of India's comfort zone for a second month as a moderation in food price rises was partly offset by elevated core inflation, a Reuters poll of economists found.

The Jan. 4-9 poll of 45 economists put consumer price inflation at 5.90% in December from a year earlier, little changed from an eleven-month low of 5.88% in November.

If confirmed, inflation would be within the RBI's 2-6% comfort range for a second month but it has been above the medium-term target of 4% for over three years.

Forecasts ranged from 5.40% to 6.40%.

But wholesale inflation likely slowed to 5.60% last month from a year ago, down from 5.85% in November.

"I think the sequential decline in food prices is likely to have a moderating impact on inflation, however, we are not looking at a very sharp fall from the previous meeting, because core inflation will continue to remain sticky. And that should provide a floor," said Sakshi Gupta, principal economist at HDFC Bank.

Core inflation, when volatile food and energy prices are stripped, is viewed by central banks around the world as a better measure of the persistence of price pressures and has remained high in India.

Most economists expect core inflation to remain sticky in the coming months.

Recently, RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das said the bank would continue its fight against inflation despite the worst being "behind us", suggesting the central bank was likely to remain hawkish in the near term.

"We have been highlighting that monetary policy setting in India is going to be a two-step process: first to bring inflation within the tolerance band and then to bring it closer to the 4% target," wrote Aastha Gudwani, India economist at BofA Securities.

### Taremi Named Liga Portugal's Best Player of November, December

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Portuguese Football Players' Union has named Iran's national football team and FC Porto striker Mehdi Taremi as best player of the country's top flight league, known as Liga Portugal, for the two months of November and December. Taremi won 16.78% of the votes cast in favor of the best Liga Portugal player in a poll conducted by the Union, according to the report by IRNA. Taremi featured in Iran's national football team in the 2022 World Cup that ended in Qatar last month. He scored two goals against England during the tournament.



### Ozone Layer Healing But Imperiled by Schemes to Curb Sun's Heat

PARIS (Dispatches) - The ozone layer that shields life on Earth from deadly solar radiation is on track to recover within decades, but controversial geoengineering schemes to blunt global warming could reverse that progress, a major scientific assessment warned. Since the mid-1970s, certain industrial aerosols have led to the depletion of ozone in the stratosphere, 11 to 40 kilometers (7 to 25 miles) above Earth's surface. In 1987, nearly 200 nations agreed on the Montreal Protocol to reverse damage to the ozone layer by banning chemicals that destroy this naturally occurring stratum of molecules in the atmosphere. That agreement is working as hoped, and is in line with previous projections, more than 200 scientists found. "Ozone is recovering, this is a good story," John Pyle, a professor at the University of Cambridge and co-chair of Scientific Assessment of Ozone Depletion, told AFP. The ozone layer should be restored -- both in area and depth -- by around 2066 over the Antarctic region, where ozone depletion has been most pronounced, according to the report, jointly released by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), the UN Environment Program, and government agencies in the U.S. and the European Union. Over the Arctic, full recovery will happen around 2045, and for the rest of the world in about 20 years. An intact ozone layer filters out most of the Sun's short-wave ultraviolet radiation, which damages DNA in living organisms and can cause cancer. At ground level, however, ozone is a major component of air pollution and exacerbates respiratory disease. Efforts to repair the ozone layer intersect with the fight against global warming. The phase-out of ozone-depleting substances -- some of them powerful greenhouse gases -- will have avoided up to one degree Celsius of warming by mid-century compared to a scenario in which their use expanded some three percent per year, according to the assessment. A class of industrial aerosols developed to replace those banned by the Montreal Protocol also turned out to be powerful greenhouse gases, and will be phased out over the next three decades under a recent amendment to the 1987 treaty. But while the world pulled together to tackle the damage to the ozone layer, it has failed to curb carbon emissions quickly enough to forestall dangerous warming. A world barely 1.2C above pre-industrial levels has already been buffeted by record heatwaves, droughts and temperatures, and is headed for a disastrous 2.7C above that benchmark. With emissions continuing to rise and time running out to avoid some of the worst impacts, controversial geoengineering schemes are moving to the centre of climate change policy debates. These include proposals to blunt global warming by depositing sulphur particles into the upper atmosphere. But the report cautioned this could sharply reverse the recovery of the ozone layer.



So-called stratospheric aerosol injection (SAI) is increasingly seen as a potential stop-gap measure for capping temperatures long enough to tackle the problem at the source. Nature demonstrates that it works: the violent 1991 eruption of Mount Pinatubo in the Philippines -- which spewed millions of tons of dust and debris -- lowered global temperatures for about a year. Scientists calculate that injecting 8 to 16 million tons of sulphur dioxide into the stratosphere each year, roughly equivalent to Pinatubo's output, would cool Earth's temperature by about 1C. Simulations over Antarctica in October -- when the ozone hole is biggest -- show that so-called stratospheric aerosol injection over 20 years would lower global temperatures by 0.5C. But there's a trade-off: the ozone layer would be reduced to its 1990 levels, only a third of what it was before the impact of human activity. The world would see "a continuing severe depletion of ozone while such solar radiation management continues," Pyle said. The UN's climate science advisory panel, the IPCC, has warned of other unintended consequences, ranging from the disruption of African and Asian monsoons, upon which hundreds of millions depend for food, to a drying of the Amazon, which is already transitioning toward a savannah state. The new report, the 10th to date, also highlights an unexpected decline of ozone in the lower stratosphere over the planet's populated tropical and mid-latitude regions. Up to now, chlorofluorocarbons, or CFCs, and other molecules have mainly eroded ozone in the upper stratosphere, and over the poles. Scientists are investigating two possible culprits: industrial chemicals not covered by the Montreal Protocol called "very short-lived substances" (VSLs), and climate change.

### Who Should Be Blamed for...

FROM PAGE 1

The report comes as the World Bank's board this week is expected to consider a new "evolution road map" for the institution to vastly expand its lending capacity to address climate change and other global crises. The plan will guide negotiations with shareholders, led by the United States, for the biggest revamp in the bank's business model since its creation at the end of World War Two. Although both the IMF and World Bank have criticized big economies but the question is who should be blamed for such a chaotic economic condition in the world. The answer can be found in the West's behavior which ignited the Russia-Ukraine war which caused chaos in any economic component in the world. The war worsened the fuel and food conditions for the world and it led to recession and inflation in most countries even in the Western ones and unfortunately those who have been behind such economic chaos just think of getting their own countries and nations out of this crisis and they give no damn to the other nations. The West instead of trying to encourage Ukraine and Russia to stop war and make peace fans the flame of war and as long as the war goes on, one cannot expect any major economic serenity to return to the world and in between those countries which are weaker will suffer more and those who should be blamed for the current economic crisis make money by selling weapons to the warring side. The United Nations should take serious and fair action to restore peace otherwise the condition will get worse and this crisis may also continue in 2024 and many people in the world would suffer from fuel and food shortages because of high prices. And if the international economic bodies seek a solution to improve the global economic condition, they are better step up pressure on the countries which back war in any part of the world because war has no actual winner and anybody is loser of war.



### Romania Quietly Catches Up With Richer Neighbors

BUCHAREST (Reuters) - Romania's economy is set to outpace its stagnating neighbors this year, helped by European Union funding, currency stability and foreign investment driven in part by reshoring from Russia and Ukraine. The International Monetary Fund expects a 3.1% expansion, while even the European Commission's 1.8% growth forecast would place it well ahead of Poland - seen growing 0.7% - and Hungary, grappling with a slowdown and sky-high inflation. That follows a decade in which Romania - long one of Europe's poorest countries, and burdened with a reputation for corruption - has quietly closed in on its peers to become Eastern Europe's second-largest economy after Poland. According to most recent figures from Eurostat, GDP per capita expressed in terms of purchasing power was 74% of the EU average in 2021, a 21 percentage point gain since 2010. An average Romanian would spend about 20 months' net income to buy a new Dacia Jogger car, the same as a counterpart in traditionally richer Hungary. The transformation has been achieved despite Romania's history of political instability, most recently a government collapse in 2021. Romania's prospects are underpinned by its EU membership and good relations with Brussels. While Budapest and Warsaw are haggling with the bloc over rule-of-law strings attached to billions worth of pandemic recovery funds, Romania has already drawn down over 6 billion euros in grants and cheap loans.

### Chinese Rush to Renew Passports as COVID Border Curbs Lifted

BEIJING (Dispatches) - People joined long queues outside immigration offices in Beijing, eager to renew their passports after China dropped COVID border controls that had largely prevented its 1.4 billion residents from travelling for three years. Sunday's reopening is one of the last steps in China's dismantling of its "zero-COVID" regime, which began last month after historic protests against curbs that kept the virus at bay but caused widespread frustration among its people. Waiting to renew his passport in a line of more than 100 people in China's capital, 67-year-old retiree Yang Jianguo told Reuters he was planning to travel to the United States to see his daughter for the first time in three years. "She got married last year but had to postpone the wedding ceremony because we couldn't go over to attend it. We're very glad we can now go," Yang said, standing alongside his wife. China's currency and stock markets strengthened on Monday, as investors bet the reopening could help reinvigorate a \$17 trillion economy suffering its lowest growth in nearly half a century. Beijing's move to drop quarantine requirements for visitors is expected to boost outbound travel, as residents will not face those restrictions when they return. But flights are scarce and several nations are demanding negative tests from visitors from China, seeking to contain an outbreak that is overwhelming many of China's hospitals and crematoriums. China, too, requires pre-departure negative COVID tests from travellers. China's top health officials and state media have repeatedly said COVID infections are peaking across the country and they are playing down the threat now posed by the disease. "Life is moving forward again!" the official newspaper of the Communist Party, the People's Daily, wrote in an editorial praising the government's virus policies late on Sunday which it said had moved from "preventing infection" to "preventing severe disease". "Today, the virus is weak, we are stronger."



Officially, China has reported just 5,272 COVID-related deaths as of Jan. 8, one of the lowest rates of death from the infection in the world. But the World Health Organization has said China is under-reporting the scale of the outbreak and international virus experts estimate more than one million people in the country could die from the disease this year. Shrugging off those gloomy forecasts, Asian shares climbed to a five-month high on Monday while China's yuan firmed to its strongest level against the dollar since mid-August. China's blue-chip index gained 0.7%, while the Shanghai Composite Index (.SSEC) rose 0.5% and Hong Kong's Hang Seng Index climbed 1.6%. "The ending of the zero-COVID policy is ... going to have a major positive impact on domestic spending," Ralph Hamers, group chief executive officer at UBS, told the Swiss bank's annual Greater China conference on Monday. "We believe there is a lot of opportunity for those committed to investing in China." "It's a huge relief just to be able to go back to normal ... just come back to China, get off the plane, get myself a taxi and just go home," Michael Harrold, 61, a copy editor in Beijing told Reuters at Beijing Capital International Airport on Sunday after he arrived on a flight from Warsaw. Harrold said he had been anticipating having to quarantine and do several rounds of testing on his return when he left for Europe for a Christmas break in early December. State broadcaster CCTV reported on Sunday that direct flights from South Korea to China were close to sold out. The report quickly shot to the most-read item on Chinese social media site Weibo. In the near term, a spike in demand from travellers will be hampered by the limited number of flights to and from China, which are currently at a small fraction of pre-COVID levels.

### Iranian Economy...

FROM PAGE 1

According to the forecast of the World Bank, developed countries will approach economic stagnation in 2023 and will grow by only 0.5 percent this year. The economic growth of the Eurozone which has decreased from 5.3 percent in 2021 to 3.3 percent in 2022, is also expected to fall to zero this year as the region enters recession in 2023. World Bank, in its latest economic report on the MENA region, published in October 2022, forecasted the Iranian economy to grow by 2.9 percent in 2022 and 2.7 percent in 2023. "Iran's GDP is forecast to grow 2.9 percent in 2022. In 2023, the average growth for developing oil exporters is expected to fall back to 2.7 percent," the bank said in the report. The bank expected the Islamic Republic's Account Balance to improve in 2022 reaching 3.8 percent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The figure stood at 3.5 percent last year.

### German Exports to Iran...

FROM PAGE 1

The German government announced on December 23 that it was suspending state measures designed to foster business with Iran. However, an analysis published by Iran's official IRNA news agency last month said that German exporters and companies would bear the brunt of anti-Iran policies adopted by the incumbent leftist government in Berlin. "Rather than harming Iran, Berlin's recent decisions to impose restrictions on trade ties with Iran will end in more losses for this country's economy," said the report.

### Iraqi Ambassador Envoy...

FROM PAGE 1

"Even though we enjoy strategic, fraternal and deep relations with Iraq, we have vehemently expressed our objection to the matter, summoned Iraqi ambassador to the Foreign Ministry, and the sensitivity of the great Iranian nation to the use of the precise word was communicated to the Iraqi side," Amirabdollahian said. The top Iranian diplomat said Tehran's protest has been explicitly conveyed to Iraqi officials, and Prime Minister Mohammed Shia' al-Sudani corrected the misnomer in a post recently published online. Spokesman for Iran's Foreign Ministry Nasser Kanaani said on Monday that Tehran has expressed its objection to Baghdad over using the fake misnomer of "Arabian Gulf" to refer to the Persian Gulf. The Iraqi southern city of Basra is hosting the return matches of a local competition, and Iraq set up billboards to welcome the foreign teams to the "25th Arabian Gulf Cup." Several international scientific conferences have been held in recent years to discuss the historical roots of the Persian Gulf. Researchers from the most reputable academic centers worldwide are almost unanimous in their opinions that the body of water has been referred to as the Persian Gulf throughout history. Some regional countries and Western publications, however, continue to distort historical facts by omitting "Persian" from the full name or using a misnomer.

### Iran, Turkmenistan Confer on Strengthening Bilateral Ties

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan Raşit Meredow met with Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Iran for Economic Diplomacy Mehdi Safari in Ashgabat. According to the Foreign Ministry of Turkmenistan, the two diplomats discussed issues of bilateral cooperation in the political, diplomatic, trade, economic, cultural, and humanitarian spheres at the meeting. Accordingly, the sides noted the importance of meetings at the highest and high levels in expanding bilateral friendly relations. The importance of the activities of the intergovernmental Turkmen-Iranian commission for economic cooperation was emphasized. The agenda also included issues of developing cooperation in the fuel and energy sector and building up transport and transit potential.

## Al-Attiyah on Course for Back-to-Back Dakar Wins

**R**IYADH (Dispatches) - Qatari driver Nasser Al-Attiyah's strategy of playing it safe saw him move a step closer to retaining his Dakar Rally title and his fifth in all following the ninth stage. The 52-year-old Toyota driver finished 11min 8sec adrift of the stage winner, nine-time world rally champion Sebastien Loeb. However, the pressure further eased on Al-Attiyah as his closest pursuer overnight, the South driver African Henk Lategan, suffered a mechanical problem and lost 40 minutes.

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## Southampton Sign Young Argentine Midfielder

**B**UENOS AIRES (Dispatches) - Premier League club Southampton have signed Argentine midfielder Carlos Alcaraz from Racing Club for 13.65 million euros (\$14.68m), the Argentines announced on social media. The 20-year-old midfielder is the second most expensive sale in Racing's history, after the 25 million euros Inter Milan paid for Lautaro Martinez in 2018. He has signed a four-and-a-half year contract. The fee includes a 15 percent sell-on clause. He played 83 times for Racing, scoring 13 goals and providing six assists.

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SPORTS

THURSDAY JANUARY 12, 2023

# Holiday Leads Bucks Rally Past Knicks

**N**EW YORK (Dispatches) - Jrue Holiday snapped out of a game-long slump by scoring 10 points in the final 2:30 for the visiting Milwaukee Bucks, who overcame a 17-point, third-quarter deficit to edge the New York Knicks 111-107. Giannis Antetokounmpo posted a double-double (22 points, 10 rebounds), while Brook Lopez had 17 points, including the corner 3-pointer with 1:46 left that put the Bucks ahead for good at 100-97. Jalen Brunson scored a career-high 44 points for the Knicks, whose four-game winning streak was snapped. Julius Randle had 25 points and 16 rebounds, and Immanuel Quickley finished with 23 points. Brunson sank a pullup to bring New York within two before the Bucks eluded the Knicks' attempts to foul on a possession that ended with a Lopez dunk. Brunson was fouled by Antetokounmpo and converted both free throws with 9.4 seconds left. Holiday then hit two free throws and Brunson drove the length of the court for a layup before Grayson Allen iced the game with a pair of free throws with 0.6 seconds remaining.

### Grizzlies 121, Spurs 113

Behind a team-high 24 points from Tyus Jones and a double-double by Steven Adams, Memphis extended its winning streak to seven games with a win over visiting San Antonio. Jones started in place of Ja Morant (right thigh soreness) for the second straight game and went 11 of 19 from the field. Adams, who missed one game with an illness, returned to collect 13 points, 15 rebounds and four assists. Tre Jones, the brother of Tyus, had a team-high 18 points and seven assists for San Antonio. Josh Richardson added 16 points and five assists off the bench.

### Nuggets 122, Lakers 109

Jamal Murray scored a season-high 34 points, Nikola Jokic had a season-high 16 assists to go with 14 points and 11 rebounds for his 11th triple-double of the season and host Denver beat LeBron James-less Los Angeles. Kentavious Caldwell-Pope had 16 points, Bruce Brown scored 15 points, Bones Hyland and Michael Porter Jr. added 12 apiece and Aaron Gordon finished with nine points, 10 rebounds and four blocks for Denver, which has won 11 straight home games. Russell Westbrook scored 25 points, Thomas Bryant had 17 points and 10 rebounds,



Kendrick Nunn finished with 15 points and Max Christie and Dennis Schroder scored 14 points each for the Lakers, who saw their five-game winning streak end.

### Pelicans 132, Wizards 112

CJ McCollum scored 34 points, Jonas Valanciunas had a double-double and visiting New Orleans defeated Washington. Valanciunas finished with 27 points and 12 rebounds, and Naji Marshall scored 18 points for the Pelicans, who had a season-high point total despite playing without two of their top scorers -- Zion Williamson and Brandon Ingram -- who are injured. It was New Orleans' first victory in Washington in 12 years. Kristaps Porzingis had 23 points and 10 rebounds, Kyle Kuzma scored 19 points and Corey Kispert had 17 as all five starters scored in double figures for the Wizards. Marshall converted a three-point play and Devonte' Graham made two 3-pointers as the Pelicans scored the first 15 points of the fourth quarter to take a 27-point lead before cruising to victory.

### Celtics 107, Bulls 99

Jayson Tatum had 32 points, eight rebounds and seven assists to help Boston edge past visiting Chicago. Grant Williams tied his career high with 20 points on 8-of-15 shooting, while Jaylen Brown scored 19 and Malcolm Brogdon added 11 in the Celtics' third consecutive win. Boston was unable to pull away until the final minute as Zach LaVine scored 15 of his team-leading 27 points for the Bulls in the fourth quarter. He also had seven rebounds and six assists.

### Kings 136, Magic 111

Harrison Barnes had a season-high 30 points, Domantas Sabonis missed a triple-double by two assists in just 32 minutes and Sacramento emphatically ended a two-game losing streak with a shellacking of visiting Orlando. Eight Kings scored in double figures as the hosts used a 41-point first quarter as a springboard to complete a two-game season-series sweep of the Magic.



## Lloris Retires From Int'l Football

**P**ARIS (Dispatches) - France captain Hugo Lloris has announced his retirement from international football at the age of 36, three weeks after his country lost the World Cup final on penalties to Argentina in Doha. "I have decided to stop my international career, with the feeling that I have given everything," Tottenham Hotspur goalkeeper Lloris said in an interview with French sports daily L'Equipe published. "I think it is important to announce this now, two and a half months before the start of Euro qualifying." Lloris, who made his international debut as a 21-year-old in a friendly against Uruguay in November 2008, bows out after becoming France's most-capped player during the World Cup. He overtook previous record-holder Lilian Thuram's mark of 142 appearances and finished with his 145th cap in the final, which France lost 4-2 on penalties after an epic 3-3 draw at the end of extra time. "I have really been thinking about it since the end of the World Cup, but there has been something deep inside of me for maybe six months now and which grew during the competition, leading me to make this decision," Lloris said. Former Nice and Lyon goalkeeper Lloris captained France to victory at the 2018 World Cup in Russia. He played at seven major tournaments in total, including Euro 2016, when France lost in the final to Portugal as hosts.

## Humbert Ends Three-Year Auckland Reign

**A**UCKLAND (Dispatches) - Ugo Humbert's three-year reign as Auckland Open champion came to an end as Christopher Eubanks defeated the Frenchman 7-6(4) 7-6(3) with sixth-seeded American John Isner also exiting the tournament in the first round. Humbert won the event, his first success on the ATP tour, when it was last played in 2020 but lost out to the American qualifier in a pair of tiebreaks. "I was playing some pretty good balls throughout the course of the match and I think being comfortable and playing a lot of tiebreakers in a lot of my games showed a pretty good effect today, so I'm pretty happy," said Eubanks. The Auckland Open has returned after a two-year break due to the Covid-19 pandemic but Tuesday's matches were moved indoors and played without fans due to the impending arrival of Cyclone Hale. The day opened with Isner, a semi-finalist at Wimbledon in 2018, crashing out when he lost in three sets to Gregoire Barrere. Barrere won the tie 6-7(3), 7-6(5), 6-3 to overcome the big-serving American, who was defeated despite firing down 56 aces. Eubanks will next face Belgium's David Goffin while Barrere meets fellow Frenchman Constant Lestienne in the second round. Meanwhile, Australia's Alex de Minaur continued his impressive early season form by defeating former world number three Dominic Thiem 6-4 6-4 in the Kooyong Classic exhibition event. The win comes a week after de Minaur defeated defending Australian Open champion Rafa Nadal at the United Cup in Sydney. Thiem, the 2020 US Open champion, will play at the Australian Open, where he was a finalist in 2020, after gaining a wildcard entry as he continues his comeback from a wrist injury.



# Kyrgios-Djokovic Clash Sells Out Stadium in Minutes

**S**YDNEY (Dispatches) - Nick Kyrgios took a cheeky dig at his critics after tickets for Friday's practice match with Serb Novak Djokovic sold out in 58 minutes, proving the Australian's huge box office draw. Kyrgios had pulled out of the United Cup with an injury just minutes before his pre-tournament press conference, drawing the ire of Australian co-captain Lleyton Hewitt, his team mates and the media. The 27-year-old has not played since October and an ankle injury forced him to skip

warm-up tournaments in Adelaide as well, before Djokovic offered to play him in a practice match that will be played at Melbourne's Rod Laver Arena. "Wow Nick Kyrgios is bad for the sport! Wow what a disgrace, a national embarrassment! How dare he sell out another stadium, the arrogance," Kyrgios said in a sarcastic tweet on Tuesday. Former American player Noah Rubin questioned the timing of the exhibition match just before a Grand Slam to which Kyrgios responded: "Well to be fair it will bring more crowd than any of your matches." Tickets for the match, a repeat of last year's Wimbledon final, were priced at A\$20 (\$14) each with the proceeds going to the Australian Tennis Foundation.

## Kohli Leads India To Big ODI Win Over Sri Lanka

**G**UWAHATI (Dispatches) - Virat Kohli smashed a brilliant attacking century to set up a convincing 67-run win for India in the opening one-day international against Sri Lanka. Kohli hammered 113 off 87 balls to drive India to 373-7 after they were invited to bat first at the start of the three-match series in Guwahati. Skipper Rohit Sharma (83) and fellow opener Shubman Gill (70) put on 143 runs to lay the foundations of the mammoth total. The bowlers, led by Mohammed Siraj, then restricted Sri Lanka to 306-8 to give India a 1-0 lead in the series. Skipper Dasun Shanaka top-scored with an unbeaten 108 after opening batsman Pathum Nissanka hit 72 but the knocks could only reduce the margin of loss for the tourists. Kohli, who survived two dropped catches on 52 and 81, stood out with his 45th ODI hundred and 73rd across all formats as he let out a roar and took off his helmet to bask in the stadium's applause. He finally fell to third-time-lucky quick Kasun Rajitha, who was also bowling when wicketkeeper Kusal Mendis and Shanaka dropped the star batsman. Gill hit three successive boundaries off debutant left-arm quick Dilshan Madushanka in the fourth over and Rohit smashed two sixes and a four off Rajitha to begin the charge on a batting-friendly pitch.



## Wales Boss Wants Bale to Stay Involved In Int'l Set-Up

**L**ONDON (Dispatches) - Wales manager Rob Page wants Gareth Bale to stay involved in the international set-up after the star forward announced he was hanging up his boots. Bale, a five-time Champions League winner at Real Madrid, ended a glittering career on Monday after winning 111 caps and scoring 41 goals for his country -- both national records for the men's team. The 33-year-old's decision to quit came after Wales' disappointing performance at the World Cup in Qatar, when Page's team failed to get out of their group and Bale struggled due to a lack of match fitness. Page revealed Bale contacted him on Sunday to inform him of his decision to retire, and said he was in full agreement with his captain. "I told him I think it's the right time to bow out," he told the BBC. "You've just scored in a World Cup and got everything on your CV, what you've done for this country is unbelievable." Wales start their Euro 2024 qualifying campaign in March and Page confirmed that Bale, who was playing for Los Angeles FC in the MLS, would have been selected for that double-header against Croatia and Latvia, perhaps with a role as an impact player off the bench.

