

Health Ministry Announced on Saturday That the Number of Deaths From the Coronavirus Pandemic in Iran Increased to **144,724** With **One** More Iranian Killed by the Virus Over the Past 24 Hours

IRAN NEWS

Head of the Tehran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture Energy Committee Has Warned About the Serious Imbalance Between the Country's Natural Gas Production and Consumption in the Future

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Saudi Arabia Not Ready To Normalize Ties With Tehran

TEHRAN (PressTV)- Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian says Tehran is determined to restore relations with Saudi Arabia but it seems Riyadh lacks the required readiness in this regard.

"Saudi Arabia is still not ready to return to normal relations. We have the needed intention and will to normalize with Saudi Arabia. If such an intention is seen in the real sense on the Saudi side, the normalization of relations will be quick and achievable," Amirabdollahian told Lebanese media in Beirut on Friday.

He said Iran and Saudi Arabia have held five rounds of "important and positive" negotiations in the Iraqi capital of Baghdad and the two countries' foreign ministers believe talks should continue.

As the first step, he said, the two sides' consulates general in the Iranian city of Mashhad and the Saudi city of Jeddah should be reopened to provide necessary consular services to both sides' citizens who are willing to travel to Mecca and Medina in Saudi Arabia and Mashhad and other Iranian holy sites. **See Page 7**

Sweden Gov't Criticized On Hamid Nouri Case

TEHRAN (MNA) - Iranian Judiciary's Deputy Chief for International Affairs and Secretary General of the Islamic Republic of Iran's High Council for Human Rights criticized Sweden's government for violating human rights in Hamid Nouri's case.

Kazem Gharibabadi said that the government of Sweden presents itself as a human rights claimant, while it is itself a big human rights violator.

Referring to Hamid Nouri's case in Sweden, Gharibabadi added that from the beginning of Hamid Nouri's arrest to the trial and issuance of a verdict against him, the Swedish government and judiciary have repeatedly violated Nouri's rights in various forms.

Hamid Nouri did not have a fair trial and was prohibited from contacting his family for many months, he said, adding that Nouri was restricted from choosing a lawyer, and his prison conditions were very difficult.

Pointing to the lengthy time of issuing the indictment of Nouri, which lasted more than a year, Gharibabadi said that the Swedish judicial system did not have any documentation against Nouri. **See Page 7**

Iran Maintains Its Place Among World Top 22 Maritime Trade Powers



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), in its latest Review of Maritime Transport report dubbed "Navigating Stormy Waters", has said the capacity of Iran's maritime fleet has increased by one percent or 190,000 tons in 2022 and claimed that Iran has been able to maintain its place among the top 22 trade powers of the world.

In 2021, the capacity of the Iranian shipping fleet was estimated to be 19.251 million tons.

The report has put the total number of the country's fleet at 255 with a total capacity of 19,441,051 tons at the end of 2022.

In 2021, Iran's maritime trade fleet had received eight new vessels, and in 2022, one more ship was added to the country's fleet, thus bringing the number to 255.

Based on the report, in 2022, Iran has maintained its position as the owner of the world's 22nd-biggest maritime fleet in terms of capacity.

The UNCTAD data indicates that the Iranian shipping fleet accounts for 0.89 percent of the world's total shipping capacity.

UNCTAD has put the total number of the world's commercial ships, including tankers, container ships, and bulk carriers at the end of 2022 at 55,037. The total capacity of the mentioned ships is estimated at 2,180,058,307 tons in 2022, which has increased by two percent over the previous year.

The capacity of Iran's maritime fleet has been greater than three major industrialized countries, namely France, Italy, and Canada; and the U.S., as the world's largest economy, has only three times the maritime trade capacity of Iran. Countries like the Netherlands, Saudi Arabia, and Brazil also have smaller shipping fleets than Iran.

According to the UNCTAD report, Greece has the largest maritime fleet in the world in terms of cargo-carrying capacity. The capacity of the Greek fleet is 384 million tons. The total number of Greek ships is estimated at 4,870. China with capacity of transporting 277m tons ranks second after Greece and Japans ranks third while Singapore and Hong Kong come fourth and fifth in rankings.

Experts believe that having a large maritime fleet has played an important role in Iran's resilience against the U.S. sanctions, and by using this large fleet, the Islamic Republic has been able to neutralize the economic sanctions to a large extent.

According to the UNCTAD report, Iran's trade shipping fleet is even bigger than France, Italy and Canada which are the G7 members and even countries like the Netherlands, Saudi Arabia and Brazil have shipping fleet smaller than Iran.

Israeli Forces Kill Two Young Palestinians

BEIRUT (Dispatches) - Israeli military forces have shot and killed two young Palestinian men during a raid on a village near the city of Jenin in the northern West Bank, only a few hours after another young Palestinian died from injuries sustained when Israeli troops opened fire in another part of the occupied territory.

Izz Eddin Basem Hamamreh, 24, and Amjad Adnan Khalilieh, 23, were shot dead at the entrance to the town of Jaba' on Saturday morning, the Palestinian Ministry of Health said.

Palestinian security sources told the official news agency Wafa that Israeli soldiers opened fire at a car near the Jaba' intersection, and then pursued it until nearby Fandakumieh village.

The troops continued to fire shots at the car killing its two occupants, Hamamreh and Khalilieh.

Israeli troops had earlier set up a checkpoint at the Jaba' intersection, leading to clashes with local residents. The soldiers opened fire at the residents, injuring a Palestinian.

Moreover, a 19-year-old Palestinian, who was shot by Israeli soldiers and seriously injured two weeks ago in the village of Kafr Dan, located 8 kilometers (4.9 miles) northwest of Jenin, succumbed to his wounds early on Saturday.

Yazan Samer Jabari, a resident of al-Yamun town, was seriously injured during confrontations with Israeli soldiers, who had raided Kafr Dan to demolish the homes of two Palestinians, who were killed late last year following an attack on an Israeli army post.

The latest deaths bring the number of Palestinians killed by Israeli fire so far in 2023 to twelve, including three children. Israeli forces launch raids on various cities of the occupied West Bank almost on a daily basis under the pretext of detaining what it calls "wanted" Palestinians. The raids usually lead to violent confrontations with residents.

Over the past months, Israel has ramped up attacks on Palestinian towns and cities throughout the occupied territories. As a result of these attacks, dozens of Palestinians have lost their lives and many others have been arrested. The United Nations (UN) marked 2022 as the deadliest year for Palestinians in the West Bank in 16 years. **See Page 7**

ViewPoint

By: Hamid Reza Naghashian

U.S., Land Of Disgraces

American statesmen have the habit of mocking or blaming other countries and nations under different pretexts while their own country has turned into a laughing stock and everyday we see a new disgrace even in the high level layer of the U.S.

If we have a look back at the number of disgraces specially political ones, we need considerable time to count the disgraces but in recent decades, several disgraces under the title of "Gate" like "the Watergate" have happened in the U.S. and now another disgrace under the name of the "Garbagegate" has emerged and it is a new headache for U.S. President Joe Biden who is amid this disgrace.

Since some classified files have been found in the garbage of Biden's house, the disgrace is known by the media outlets as the Garagegate.

Since the failure of Donald Trump in the 2020 presidential election and victory of Biden in the election and invasion of Trump's fans at the Capitol Hill, the Democrats in the U.S. have been trying to resort to any move to put an end to Trump's political career and everyday pro-Democrat media publish some accusations against Trump and they have been busy with increasing pressure on Trump for taking some confidential papers and files illegally from the White House to his residence and now a twist is happening because such a disgrace has re-emerged in Washington and this time Biden is in trouble and it is the Republicans' turn to increase pressure on Biden at the time that the majority of the Congress is in hands of the Republicans and they now have this chance to take revenge on the Democrats and change the game.

Now Biden is in trouble and another disgrace is looming on this country which usually asks other nations to respect the laws and rules while their statesmen themselves ignore the recommendation.

Now Republicans in the U.S. House of Representatives launched an investigation on Friday into the Justice Department's handling of improperly stored classified documents possessed by President Biden, and questioned whether his son, Hunter, had access to any.

In a Jan. 13 letter to Attorney General Merrick Garland, top Republicans on the House Judiciary Committee said the Justice Department's appointment of Robert Hur as special counsel for the case this week raised "fundamental oversight questions." They demanded all relevant documents and communications between the department, the FBI, the White House and Biden's attorneys.

The letter came a day after Biden's legal team acknowledged it had found classified documents relating to his time as vice president in the Obama administration at his Delaware home, including some in his garage. Aides previously found another batch of classified documents at his residence, and at a Washington think tank he was associated with.

Earlier on Friday, House Oversight Committee Chairman James Comer wrote to the White House asking whether Hunter Biden had access to classified documents found at the president's private residence.

"It is unclear when the department first came to learn about the existence of these documents, and whether it actively concealed this information from the public on the eve of the 2022 elections," House Judiciary Chairman Jim Jordan and fellow panel Republican Mike Johnson told Garland in their letter.

"We expect your complete cooperation with our inquiry," they wrote, setting a Jan. 27 deadline for compliance.

White House and Justice Department officials were not immediately available for comment.

The two Republican probes present a distraction for the Democratic president, who has criticized his Republican predecessor Donald Trump's handling of classified material, and could cast a shadow over Biden as both he and Trump gear up for a possible 2024 election rematch.

It also provides fodder for House Republicans, who have pledged to focus their new majority on a number of investigations into the Biden administration. **See Page 7**

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Iran to Continue Supporting Afghan People

BEIRUT (IRNA) - Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian said here on Friday that Iran will continue its support for people of Afghanistan and condemn ISIS grouplet's terrorist act in front of that country's ministry of foreign affairs.

Amirabdollahian who was meeting with the Lebanese political and religious groups on Friday night, reiterated, "Deprivation of women from social activities in Afghanistan is contrary to the basics of beneficent Islam."

"We have not recognized the legitimacy of the current ruling group in Afghanistan, but in some particular cases in order to decrease the problems with which that country is entangled we have established relations with them," he added. The top Iranian diplomat stressed that the way to resolve the problem in Afghanistan is establishment of an all-encompassing government, comprised of the entire political groups there.

Islamic Republic The True Guardian of Women's Rights

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN – President Seyed Ebrahim Raisi stated that the model that the Islamic Republic of Iran has presented of a woman who plays a role and is effective in science, politics, culture, economy and sports by maintaining chastity and hijab has provoked the anger of Westerners, and clarified, "Today and in the war of wills, women Iranians have endangered the western lifestyle with their Islamic lifestyle".

Following the plans of the second day of the Popular Administration's visit to Yazd Province, Raisi attended the special ceremony of the birthday of H.H. Fatima (PBUH) and Women's Day, congratulated all the women scholars and ladies of Iran and all human beings on this occasion and said, "During the ceremony, a request was made that the role of women should be seen more in decision-making assemblies and that women should be given more space to play social and management roles, which is a rightful request".

Emphasizing all the decision-making bodies in the country to pay more attention to the potential of the women of the country, the President added, "The women of our country have a very valuable role and contribution in various social, sports, economic and productive fields, and these roles are accompanied by education, science and knowledge".

Raisi stated, "I am not recommending but stressing to all the institutions and departments of the country that they must take advantage of the views of the women and girls of our country who are professors and students".

The President further referred to the issue of low per capita sports facilities for women in Yazd and clarified, "When I asked the governor general of Yazd about this, he emphasized that in the resolutions of the government's second visit to Yazd province, good funds are considered for the development of special sports facilities and centers for women".

Raisi also referring to the government's decision to insure at least 10,000 women working in the field of handicrafts in the first step, and added, "The government will also support the female heads of the family seriously on the agenda, and in this context, the Vice President for Women and Family Affairs will specifically follow the issues related to this group of women in the country".

In the continuation of his speech in this ceremony, the President stated the personality characteristics of H.H. Zahra (PBUH), and stated, "The existence of



H.H. Zahra (PBUH) and the dimensions of the great personality of this great lady has been a model for us".

The President further stated that the view of the Islamic Republic on women is derived from the life and conduct of H.H. Zahra (PBUH) and stated, "The view of the Islamic Republic on women is neither a demeaning view of a Western commodity nor a reactionary view, but in the view of the Islamic Republic, a woman is a full-fledged human being in various social fields who plays an effective role in raising the family and building the society".

Raisi said, "This Islamic Republic's view of women is a modern and progressive view that should be noticed by all the scientific and cultural circles of the world".

The President stated that the model that the Islamic Republic of Iran has presented of a woman who plays a role and is effective in science, politics, culture, economy and sports by maintaining chastity and hijab has provoked the anger of Westerners, and clarified, "Today and in the war of wills, women Iranians have endangered the western lifestyle with their Islamic lifestyle".

The President seriously emphasized the need to avoid a subjective view of women's issues and stated, "Today, many of our women and girls, even those whose hijab is weak, are loyal to the revolution and values, they respect the martyrs and their families, they love the system and the revolution with all their heart, and many of them shed tears when they see the Supreme Leader of the Revolution. In no way, no one has the right to deal with issues related to women with a subjective view".

Raisi further said, "Today, those who claim to give life to Iranian women should take a look at their behaviour in relation to women of their society and be ashamed of their claim. According to official statistics, a woman is killed by the American police every 10 days, and this country holds the record for imprisoning women in the world, and on the other hand, according to their own statistics, 81 women were killed by the British police within 28 weeks. Do you want to give life to our women or take life away from them with this shameful record?"

The President stated that Iranian women are role models for women in the world today, and added, "Those who claim to support women's rights should answer for their performance in dealing with women in Western countries instead of these baseless and ridiculous claims".

Emphasizing the need to preserve the dignity and respect of women at home and in society, the President said, "No woman should be oppressed either at home or in society".

Next Year Budget Bill Allocates \$302.6m To Industry Ministry

TEHRAN (MNA) - The budget bill for the next Iranian calendar year 1402, which starts on March 21, has allocated 121.052 trillion rials (about \$302.63 million) to Industry, Mining and Trade Ministry.

Of the mentioned figure, the share of the ministry is 95.225 trillion rials (about \$238.06 million), that of the Trade Promotion Organization (TPO) is 17.065 trillion rials (about \$42.66 million), 184 billion rials (about \$460,000) is the share of Iranian Mines and Mining Industries Development and Renovation Organization (IMIDRO), the share of Industrial Development and Renovation Organization of Iran (IDRO) is 400 billion rials (about \$1 million), and that of Iran Small Industries and Industrial Parks Organization (ISIPO) is 3.169 trillion rials (about \$7.92 million).

President Ebrahim Raisi submitted the administration's draft of the national budget bill for the next year to the Majlis on Wednesday.

2.1m Tons of Commodities Traded on IME Last Week

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Iran Mercantile Exchange (IME) last week witnessed trade of 2,165,000 tons of commodities with a total trading value of more than \$950m on its physical market.



According to a report by the IME's International Affairs and PR, the exchange saw on its metals and minerals trading floor trade of 1,679,139 tons of commodities valued at nearly \$705m.

On this floor the IME sold 1,006,174 tons of cement, 604,600 tons of steel, 83,000 tons of iron ore, 10,025 tons of aluminum, 8,035 tons of copper, 900 tons of zinc, 500 tons of lead, 200 tons of molybdenum concentrate, 24 kg of gold bars and 10,792 vehicles.

Furthermore, the IME witnessed on both domestic and export rings of its oil and petrochemical trading floor 407,876 tons of commodities worth more than \$223m.

Commodities traded on this floor included 134,857 tons of bitumen, 98,000 tons of vacuum bottom, 96,649 tons of polymeric products, 39,390 tons of chemicals, 31,000 tons of lube cut, 6,075 tons of base oil, 1,800 tons of petroleum products and 955 tons of sulfur.

The IME also traded within the same week 78,279 tons of commodities on its side market.

Iran Firm to Increase Ties With Italy



TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iran's ambassador in Rome Italy said that the Iranian government is ready to expand and increase ties with Italy in all fields.

Mohammad-Reza Sabouri made the remarks in his first press conference at the Embassy of Iran in Rome, Italy.

Sabouri regretted that recently some media trusted unreliable sources affiliated with the MEK terrorist organization, the records of whose crimes against the Iranian people are also available to the European, and covered the events of Iran.

He said that it is not fair that in covering the events in Iran, the behavior of a few hundred is overgeneralized to tens of millions inside Iran, but on the other hand, the gatherings of hundreds of thousands of people at the funeral of the martyrs of the recent events in Iran or the anniversary martyrdom of General Soleimani are not covered.

Iran's Ambassador to Italy in his remarks added that the Islamic Republic of Iran is ready to cooperate with Italy in knowledge, industry, and technology, and is ready to restore business ties to its glorious past and move towards economic joint ventures with a new perspective.

Former Iranian Official Alireza Akbari Executed

TEHRAN (MNA) – Alireza Akbari, a former Iranian official, was executed on Saturday on charges of spying for the British intelligence agency.

Iran's judiciary has issued a death sentence against Akbari who was arrested by the intelligence forces on charges of spying for foreign intelligence agencies.

The trial of Akbari was held with the presence of his lawyer and the death sentence was issued based on "substantiated evidence".

Iran's Supreme Court upheld the sentence after he requested an appeal.

Iran's Intelligence Ministry in a statement on Wednesday afternoon provided further details about Akbari and his arrest.

It named Akbari, a former deputy defense minister, as "one of the most infiltrating agents of the spying service of the evil UK in the country's sensitive and strategic centers," noting that he was identified and arrested after a "long and multi-layered process" involving "counter-intelligence" and "deception operation."



The "key spy," according to the ministry, had sent the acquired information from sensitive centers to the enemy's spy service on several occasions while being "completely aware" of his actions.

Iranian forces spotted Akbari when he met with a number of British

intelligence officers in the UK embassy in Tehran as he had gone to the diplomatic mission to collect a visa, reads the statement, adding that he became a "full-fledged employee" of the MI6 during his personal trips to Europe.

Iran's counter-intelligence forces intervened in the communication between him and the MI6, infusing "guided information" into it, added the statement, noting that he was arrested after a judicial order was issued.

"Although the evil English enemy has managed to take advantage of this individual's weaknesses and recruit him, they surely do not know which part of the obtained information is guided and [which part is] deceptive," the Intelligence Ministry added.

Iran, Russia, Turkey to Hold Meeting on Grains in Moscow

TEHRAN (MNA) – Russia, Iran and Turkey will hold a meeting to discuss the solutions for the fair distribution of grains around the world in order to prevent the food crisis.

A meeting will be held on February 10, 2023, in Moscow to discuss the solutions for the fair distribution of grains around the world and remove the existing obstacles to prevent the food crisis with the presence of officials from Russia, Turkey and Iran, as well as relevant organizations and large Russian exporters and Iranian and Turkish importers.

During the meeting, the problems and obstacles in grain supply, including banking and financial, logistics and customs affairs, will be discussed.

The meeting intends to create a direct dialogue between the exporters and importers of grains and agricultural products to facilitate the transit of Russian agricultural products to other countries through Turkey and Iran.

10th Iran-Pakistan Border Trade Meeting Held in Quetta

TEHRAN (MNA) – The tenth meeting of the Iran-Pakistan border trade committee has kicked off in Quetta.

The meeting aims to boost commercial exchanges, speed up transportation and facilitate customs affairs between the Islamic Republic and Pakistan.

Ways of furthering border cooperation and utilizing the barter mechanism are to be discussed in the meeting.

The committee is also to exchange views on combating smuggling and adopting a joint measure to enhance commercial cooperation.

The previous round of the meeting was held in Zahedan, Iran.

IRISL Taking New Step for Accelerating Processes of North-South Corridor

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – A member of board of directors of the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Line Group (IRISL) announced the establishment of the logistic and multifunctional services



management under the supervision of the CEO of the group and said that the management is aimed at organizing required processes of the IRISL for accelerating the implementation of the North-South Corridor and offering multi-functional services in the field of transit.

Speaking in the first national conference on marine civilization the course of progress, Mohammad Kashani said that one of the indicators of success in any country is the amount of transship and transit in that country that unfortunately Iran does not have successful record in those indicators while 95% of the goods arriving at or exiting Iranian ports are related to the needs of the country and only 5% is the share of transit.

He then pointed to the infrastructural problems in the national ports especially in Chabahar Port and added that Noshahr and Anzali ports are the oldest ports of the country which have been established before the Islamic Revolution and there is no nationwide railway.

Kashani went on to say that to accelerate efficient implementation of the projects in the North-South corridor, IRISL has recently established an independent organization for managing the transit and created corridors to work under supervision of the CEO of IRISL which will organize all activities related to the North-South and East-West corridors.

He then pointed to docking of the first 6500-TAU ocean liner in Chabahar Port and said that soon the second ocean liner which has started its journey from China will soon dock in Chabahar Port.

He reiterated that the 400-dollar decrease in the cost of transporting goods via the North-South Corridor is clearly vivid, adding that this route should fully remain active with support of all related bodies.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	12:13
■ Evening (Maghreb)	17:33
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	05:45
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	07:13

120. But Satan whispered evil to him: he said,
 "O Adam! shall I lead thee to the Tree of Eternity and to a kingdom that never decays?"
 121. In the result, they both ate of the tree, and so their nakedness appeared to them:
 they began to sew together, for their covering, leaves from the Garden:
 thus did Adam disobey his Lord, and allow himself to be seduced. Surah 20, Ta-ha (120 - 121)

Only 150 Trucks Able to Shuttle Daily Between Iran and Azerbaijan

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – A member of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Mine and Agriculture (ICCIMA) says Azerbaijan Republic government accepts limited arrival of Iranian trucks and since Iran lacks X-Ray machines in the border this problem has been deteriorated and actually border customs of both countries cannot afford admission and inspection of more than 150 trucks per day.

Speaking to ILNA, Behrouz Poorsoleiman said that exports from Ardabil Province of Iran to Azerbaijan Republic has declined by 53% in the first three quarters of the current year, adding that this decline has happened while the trade between Iran and Azerbaijan had not disrupted even in the days of pandemic or Azerbaijan's dispute with Armenia over Karabakh.

He termed Ardabil the first hub of potato production in the country, adding that export of potato from Ardabil to Azerbaijan came to a halt for a while and it seems it was because of Azerbaijan's restriction on import of apple, adding that rubber products and construction stones are the other main exports of



Ardabil Province to Azerbaijan.

Poorsoleiman further pointed to the rise in the transit of goods between border of the two countries, adding that the volume of transit goods at borders of both countries has increased by 230% , adding that the Ukraine war has led to transit of goods arrived in Banda Abbas Port to Azerbaijan and today we face long lines at Bileh Savar border because of the rise in the number of the transit goods.

He added that the long lines are because of the lack of X-Ray machines in the border which has worsened the condition and currently due to these shortages only 150 trucks are admitted and inspected at the borders and expressed hope by finding new ways, the trade would improve.

He expressed hope the current devaluation of rial, the ground would be paved for the rise of exports especially to Azerbaijan.

Poorsoleiman also urged exporters to improve standards and especially the packing and branding their products if they want to conquer the Azerbaijan Republic Market.

CEO of Bank Sepah Visits Chadormalu Co.



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – The CEO of Bank Sepah, as the biggest share-holder of Chadormalu Mining and Industrial Company paid a visit to the company and inspected different units of the industrial complex.

According to the public relations of Chadormalu Company said that the CEO of Bank Sepah Dr. Ebrahimi and his entourage visited different parts of Chadormalu Company.

During the visit, the CEO of Chadormalu Company Eng. Taherzadeh briefed the guests of the activities and products of each unit of the company and expressed hope that considering the performance of the company in the first 10 months of the current year, it is predicted that despite restriction on gas and electricity supply which will continue by the yearend, the production of the company especially its ingots will have tangible increase comparing to last year through some measures taken by the company.

Khatam-al Anbia Headquarters Signs A Three-Way MoU

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC NEWS

TEHRAN - Khatam-al Anbia Construction Headquarters signed a three-way MoU with Golestan Province Governor-General Office and Iran's Fisheries Organization (IFO) on completing the Phase 1 of a

shrimp farming complex in Gomishan, creating infrastructures of Phase2 of sturgeon and shrimp farming and supporting the fish farming in the cage and pan.

According to the public relations of Khatam-al Anbia Construction Headquarters, in a ceremony which was held last Monday in the presence of the commander of the headquarters Brigadier General Seyed Hossein Hoosh-al Sadat, Governor of Golesta Province Dr. Ali Mohammad Zanganeh, Head of Iran Fisheries Organization Eng. Hosseini and some of officials of the headquarters and managers of the province, all parties emphasized synergy in the field of developing aquaculture industry in Golestan Province.

Addressing the ceremony, Dr. Zanganeh said that efforts of the headquarters in the province are appreciable and the role of the headquarters in the effective projects of the province is unique. He added that construction of Normab Dam which is to provide 535,000 people of

east of the province with water is underway with full speed.

He went on to say that aquaculture in Golestan Province is very important because fisheries production lead to the food security of the households.

He added that once Golestan Province was the cradle of caviar fish but due to the water regradation of the Caspian Sea and lack of required infrastructures, production of caviar declined but implementation of projects like these one will lead to the boom and job creation in the province.



CEO of Hormozgan Steel Company Raises:

Eleven Years of Pride Creating for Exaltation of Iran's Name

sponge iron per year, 90 thousand tons of lime per year, 7 thousand 500 standard cubic meters of oxygen per hour, 18 thousand standard cubic meters per hour of nitrogen and 120 normal cubic meters per hour of argon. The sheet metal produced in Hormozgan Steel Company is mainly carbon and for the production of hot and cold rolled steel sheet, which is used in hot rolling lines for applications such as profiling, water pipes, oil and pressure tanks, and heavy steel parts. Cold-rolled sheets made by Hormozgan Takthal Steel are also used to make car body sheets, home appliance bodies such as refrigerators, heaters, and also special applications such as tinned and galvanized sheets.

What year did this company join Foulad Mobarakeh? What are the benefits of this company's joining Foulad Mobarakeh?

Hormozgan Steel joined Mobarakeh Steel Company in August 2013. Further, with the operation of this steel factory, the path of the steel industry in the country was somehow changed by the use of advanced steelmaking technology. One of the obvious benefits of joining Hormozgan Steel to Mobarakeh Steel was that stable employment was created for the employees of this company and their families; In addition, with the support of Mobarakeh Steel Company in the following years, both through the supply of raw materials and the implementation of development plans, Hormozgan Steel became one of the leading producers of the country's steel industry.

What have been the most important achievements of Hormozgan Steel in various fields such as production, sales, income, profitability, etc., especially in the last one or two years?

In the last one or two years, Hormozgan Steel has made significant achievements in terms of production, sales and profitability. Last year, we were able to record five monthly production records, and these records were achieved despite the restrictions of electricity and gas energy. These record breaking events continued this year as well; So that this year, for the first time, the company's monthly production exceeded 150,000 tons, and Hormozgan Steel practically achieved the highest record of slab casting in the country. This year, we broke records in May and from September to December, i.e., during four consecutive months, we set records in the amount of production, and the highest record was achieved in December with 125,622 tons. In terms of sales, last year we managed to sell 822 thousand tons of products in the domestic market and 610 thousand tons in the export market. This year, despite the chaotic situation of the international markets and the sharp drop in prices in the domestic and export markets, we were able to sell 496,000 tons of products in the domestic market and 348,000 tons in the export markets. One of the strengths of Hormozgan Steel in the last few years has been the profitability of this company; So that in 1399 we were able to earn 51 thousand billion Rials and in 1400 more than 80 thousand billion Rials in net profit. The remarkable thing about

last year's profitability is that this year we had as much profit as the previous years, and this is due to the efforts of all colleagues in the production and sales department. Hormozgan Steel has always been proud in the past 11 years and has been able to win many statues and plaques in various festivals. Obtaining several awards for organizational excellence and Hatem festival's commendation, being placed in It has been among the top 100 companies in Iran in the last few years and the production of value-added products, etc., among these cases.

What actions have you taken in terms of development projects?

Another achievement of Hormozgan Steel in the last one or two years is the beginning of huge development projects in this company. As you know, development is the cornerstone of the economy; Therefore, for economic progress, wealth creation and employment creation, there is no path other than the development of activities. The country's steel industry is one of the drivers of the country's development. The more the steel industry as the mother industry develops, the adjacent and downstream industries will also prosper by ensuring the timely supply of their raw materials, and in this way, we will see more development in the country. Considering the widespread water shortage in the country, one of the areas that can be targeted for development will be the southern coasts, especially Hormozgan province. In 1400 and 10 years after its opening, Hormozgan Steel started the implementation of four large development projects with an approximate value of 10 thousand billion Tomans. Considering its many potentials and its special position, this company has started to pick up these plans. In addition, we have many other projects underway, some of which are implemented within the organization and others with the participation of other companies. Among the most important projects within the organization, we can mention the increase in the production capacity of electric arc furnaces through the installation of Lance Sidewall, the construction of an industrial wastewater treatment plant, the increase in the capacity of sponge iron silos, the construction of an industrial gas production unit, and the construction of the third module of the ironmaking unit, fortunately, some of them have made considerable progress. have and are on the verge of opening. Other projects are also progressing according to the plan. At the same time, the project of renovation, upgrade of the treatment plant and transfer of treated effluent of Bandar Abbas city to West Industries with Persian Gulf Infrastructure Development and Supply Company, construction of calcined lime production unit in Hormozgan Steel and Steel Company and construction of mega module of iron making with a capacity of one million and 720 thousand tons in Simin Hormuz Star Company is working as a partnership.

What achievements have you had in the field of social responsibility?

Hormozgan Steel Company is introduced as a socially responsible company in Hormozgan province. Since the change of management at the beginning of last year, attention to social responsibilities has doubled and this process has continued until today, because part of the responsibilities of large economic enterprises is defined towards the society and people, and therefore, we have taken several measures in this field. Hormozgan Steel considers the implementation of social responsibilities as the right of the people of the province and one of its inherent duties, therefore it has entered many fields, including sports, culture, humanitarian aid, medicine, environment, etc. For example, the presence of dozens of professional and labor teams of Hormozgan Steel in all age groups and the winning of numerous provincial, national and international championship titles by the teams of this company is a testimony to the company's social responsibilities, especially creating social vitality through sports and discovering the bright talents of the province. In this context and moving in the right direction. One of the most important social responsibilities of Hormozgan Steel came to the fore during the Corona era, and sending liquid oxygen to Bandar Abbas hospitals and sending liquid nitrogen to the University of Medical Sciences were among the most important actions of this period. In addition, preparing packages and health items during the Corona era, such as preparing masks, gloves, and ventilators, and preparing and donating 10 dialysis machines to Bandar Abbas Shahid Mohammadi Hospital for the treatment of patients were among the other measures taken by Hormozgan Steel during this period. Among other actions of Hormozgan Steel in the field of social responsibilities is supporting the needy and the oppressed, which has been done in the form of helping the needy in the cities of the province and also solving the problems of charity centers. Also, Hormozgan Steel has participated in the Orphan and Mohsenin Project and has covered 10,000 orphans and non-orphans under the Imam Khomeini Relief Committee (RA) of Hormozgan Province. Besides, he participated in Golorizan celebration (ceremonies for donating money for the release of prisoners) for the release of prisoners in the provinces.

What strategy have you considered for the future of Hormozgan Steel?

Becoming one of Iran's steel production and export hubs, producing products with high added value and implementing development plans to complete the production chain, including the goals of Hormozgan Steel. In this regard, we have set the agenda to increase the steelmaking capacity from 1.5 million tons to 2.3 million tons, and in the future we plan to start a hot rolling unit as well. Becoming one of the main poles of steel production and export in the country by producing value-added products is one of our other big goals. Also, considering the export of Hormozgan steel products to export markets, we plan to become one of the most reliable brands in Iran's steel industry in international markets.

Benin's Ruling Coalition Won Election

CTONOU (Dispatches) - Benin's pro-government parties won a majority of seats in parliament, the country's constitutional court said, in a vote marking the return of the opposition after four years of absence.

Sunday's vote, which went ahead peacefully, was a test for the West African state where President Patrice Talon has promoted development but critics say democracy has steadily eroded under his watch.

It was the first time the opposition was participating in elections since cotton-magnate Talon came to power in 2016. Parties supporting Talon, the Republican Bloc and the Progressive Union for Renewal parties together won 81 out of 109 seats in parliament, said Razaki Amouda Issifou, president of the constitutional court.



Turkish Prosecutors to Probe Erdogan Effigy Incident in Sweden

ISTANBUL (Dispatches) - Turkey's foreign minister said Ankara expected firm action from Sweden after an incident in Stockholm in which an effigy of President Tayyip Erdogan was strung up, adding further diplomatic strain to Sweden's bid to join NATO.

Footage first shared on Twitter by the so-called Swedish Solidarity Committee for Rojava - a reference to Kurdish regions of Syria - showed an Erdogan effigy hung by its feet outside Stockholm city hall with a few people standing by. Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said on Friday that Sweden "cannot escape its responsibilities" by only condemning the incident.



Russia Claims Capture of Ukraine's Soledar; Kyiv Dies



KYIV (Dispatches) - Russia said that its forces had taken control of the town of Soledar in eastern Ukraine, in what would be a rare success for Moscow after months of battlefield reverses, but Kyiv said its troops were still fighting in the town.

Reuters could not immediately verify the situation in Soledar, a small salt mining town that has been the focus of relentless Russian assault for days.

Kyiv and the West have played down the town's significance, saying Moscow sacrificed wave upon wave of soldiers and mercenaries in a pointless fight for a bombed-out wasteland, unlikely to affect the wider war except insofar as the huge losses have sapped manpower on both sides.

But the capture of the town has taken on an outsized importance as it would, if confirmed, give Moscow a trophy for one of the bloodiest campaigns of the war following major battlefield setbacks throughout the second half of 2022. "The capture of Soledar was made possible by the constant bombardment of the enemy by assault and army aviation, missile forces and artillery of a grouping of Russian forces," Moscow's defense ministry said.

Seizing the town would make it possible to cut off Ukrainian supply routes to the larger nearby city of Bakhmut, and trap remaining Ukrainian forces there, it said. Moscow has been trying to seize Bakhmut for months. But Serhiy Cherevatyi, spokesperson for Ukraine's eastern military command, told Reuters by telephone Soledar had not been captured: "Our units are there, the town is not under Russian control."

CNN said on its website that a reporting team just outside the town could hear mortar and rocket fire on Friday afternoon and saw Ukrainian forces ferrying troops in what appeared to be an organized pullback. A Ukrainian officer in the area, speaking on condition of anonymity as he was not authorized to speak to the media, also told Reuters by telephone the Russians had not fully taken the town.

"Last night artillery fire was like from hell, both sides. From what I know, our boys have managed to exit some parts (of Soledar) in an orderly manner and now (assault) groups are counterattacking, but we still hold the town." Ukrainian officials said on Thursday more than 500 civilians, including 15 children, were trapped inside Soledar. In an overnight video address, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy thanked two units in Soledar he said were "holding their positions and inflicting significant losses on the enemy." He did not give more details.

After Ukrainian forces drove Russia into humiliating retreats for much of the second half of 2022, the front lines have barely budged for the past two months. Meanwhile, the battles around Bakhmut and Soledar became what both sides called a "meat grinder" - a brutal war of attrition claiming the lives of thousands of soldiers.

Kyiv's Western allies see it as a fight for marginal gains on a stretch of front where neither side can make a big breakthrough, a sideshow from battles further north and south, where Ukraine hopes to push through Russian lines.

"Even if both Bakhmut and Soledar fall to the Russians, it's not going to have a strategic impact on the war itself," U.S. National Security Council spokesman John Kirby told reporters at the White House, "and it certainly isn't going to stop the Ukrainians or slow them down."

Within Russia, victory in Soledar could boost ultra-nationalist mercenary leader Yevgeny Prigozhin, whose Wagner Group of fighters-for-hire, including convicts recruited from prison with promises of pardons, has focused on the fight in that area. He has griped as the regular military has taken credit for the Soledar battle without mentioning his fighters.

Assad Says Turkey Talks Must Be Based On Ending Occupation

BEIRUT (Dispatches) - Syrian President Bashar al-Assad has said talks with foe Turkey should be based on the aims of ending the occupation of Syrian land and halting support for what he called terrorism, an apparent reference to Ankara's forces in northern Syria and its support for rebels.

In his first publicly reported remarks on landmark talks overseen by his ally Russia, Assad also said the meetings "should be coordinated between Syria and Russia in advance in order to... produce tangible results sought by Syria".

Assad made the comments, reported by Syrian state media on Thursday, in a meeting with Russian presidential envoy for Syria Alexander Lavrentiev in Damascus.

Turkey has been a major backer of the political and armed opposition to Assad during the 12-year-long Syrian conflict, and has sent its own troops into swathes of the country's north.

Moscow is supporting a rapprochement between Damascus and Ankara, hosting talks between their defense ministers last month and aiming for meetings between the foreign ministers and eventually presidents.

Lavrentiev said Moscow viewed the defense ministers' meeting "positively" and hoped to develop talks "to the level of foreign ministers", Syrian state news agency SANA reported.

Assad said the results should be based on the principle of "ending" the occupation and support for terrorism, a term that Syrian authorities use to refer to all opposition armed groups.

A source with close knowledge of the negotiations said Syria wanted Turkey to pull its troops from swathes of the north and to halt support to three main opposition factions.

The source said Syria was keen to see progress on those demands through follow-up committees before agreeing to a foreign ministers' meeting.

Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said on Thursday he could meet his Syrian counterpart Faisal Mekdad early in February, rejecting reports that the two could meet next week.

Syria has made no official comment on the timing of such a meeting, which would mark the highest-level talks between Ankara and Damascus since the Syrian war began in 2011.



Thousands March in Peru Capital Demanding President Step Down

LIMA (Reuters) - Thousands took to the streets of Peru's capital Lima in a peaceful protest against the new government and president, after weeks of bloody clashes triggered by the ousting of former President Pedro Castillo left at least 42 dead.

"Why are you turning your back on the people, there are so many deaths, for God's sake, stop this massacre," said protester Olga Espejo, calling on President Dina Boluarte, previously Castillo's vice president, to resign.

"Ms. Boluarte, they are using you," she said. Protesters shouted "Dina asesina!" (Dina is a murderer) as they carried cardboard coffins, photos of the victims and anti-government slogans down the streets of Lima in the capital's first mass protest since New Year.

The march, organized by trade unions and leftist groups, took place without incident. The clashes that started in early December mark Peru's worst outbreak of violence in more than 20 years.

While the protest was underway, Labor Minister Eduardo Garcia announced his resignation on Twitter, saying the country needs an apology for the deaths and urged the government to recognize that "mistakes have been made that must be corrected."

Garcia said the situation could not wait until April 2024, when elections have been proposed, two years earlier than required.

The crisis has touched tourist hub Cusco, which again closed its airport, and the country's key mining sector, which saw a large copper mine struck by attackers and a tin mine shuttered in solidarity for the dead. Prime Minister Alberto Otrola said that Boluarte would not resign, citing constitutional requirements to consolidate the succession, "not because she does not want to." "Leaving the presidency would open a very dangerous floodgate for anarchy and misrule," he said.

Peru's top prosecutor's office on Tuesday launched an inquiry against Boluarte and some top ministers. The same day, Peru's Congress - which fiercely opposed leftist former leader Castillo - passed a vote of confidence in the new government.

Fears of Migrant Deaths Rise After Bodies Found in Eastern Poland

WARSAW (Dispatches) - Polish officials searched wetlands on the border with Belarus after three bodies were found in an area where thousands of migrants from the Middle East and Africa have been trying to enter the European Union.

The death of a Yemeni doctor near the border, where winter temperatures often fall below zero, was confirmed on Jan 7. The identity of the two others - found on Thursday and Friday - has not yet been confirmed, but they were probably migrants, according to Grupa Granica, a coalition of NGOs helping those struggling on the border.

Anna Michalska, a spokesperson of the Border Guard said soldiers on the border had told them others may have died.

"There may be more bodies so we are searching the area. The police, the border guard and the army are involved in the search," she said.

Migrants have flocked to the border since August 2021, when Belarus, a close Russian ally, opened travel agencies in the Middle East offering a new unofficial route into Europe - a move the EU said was designed to put pressure on it.

While the travel agencies have since been closed, migrants continue heading to Belarus in the hope of crossing into EU-member Poland, which is also housing more than 1.5 million refugees from Russia's almost year-old invasion of Ukraine.

Warsaw erected a 5.5-metre tall steel barrier equipped with electronic sensors at its border with Belarus to try to stem the flow, but it has not stopped people from coming.

The border guard has recorded 530 attempts to cross from Belarus already this year and Grupa Granica has received 121 calls for help and has given aid to 84 people.

For some, the journey has proved deadly. Since August 2021, 14 people lost their lives on the Polish side of the border, according to the Border Guard. Grupa Granica estimates the number of deaths to be 33.

"In total, we have received 200 missing persons alerts. Sometimes we find people in guarded detention centres run by the Border Guard, sometimes bodies are found," Aleksandra Loboda, spokeswoman for Grupa Granica, told Reuters.



India Urged to Close Airspace to Myanmar Warplanes After Attacks

NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - India should stop Myanmar's warplanes from entering Indian airspace during operations by the military regime to bomb targets in areas near India's border, an international human rights group has said.

Fortify Rights claimed that Myanmar's air force had "dropped bombs on both sides of the Myanmar-India border" in deadly attacks on Tuesday and Wednesday against an ethnic-Chin rebel group.

Five Chin National Front (CNF) soldiers were killed, including two women, in the air raids which reportedly started on Tuesday when bombs were dropped on the ethnic armed group's Camp Victoria in Myanmar's Chin state, which abuts India's Mizoram state, the rights group said.

Two bombs dropped by the Myanmar air force also landed on the Indian side of the border, near the village of Farkawn in Mizoram's Champhai district, the rights group added, though no injuries were reported on the Indian side.

"New Delhi shouldn't tolerate the junta's incursions on its airspace, and Indian authorities should do everything in their power to ensure the security of civilians and border areas," Fortify Rights chief executive officer Matthew Smith said in a statement on Thursday.

"India must not allow the junta to continue destabilizing the region by using Indian airspace in its attacks and should support efforts to hold the junta accountable for its crimes," he said.

Myanmar's warplanes have also violated the airspace of Thailand and Bangladesh in recent months, according to the rights organization.

Salai Htet Ni, a spokesman for the CNF, which claims to represent the mainly Christian Chin minority located in western Myanmar, said on Wednesday that seven bombs were dropped.

"Some of our houses were destroyed from their air strike ... One bomb landed on the Indian side," he told AFP news agency.

Media based in Chin state carried footage of what was claimed to be a Myanmar fighter jet and the damage inflicted on Camp Victoria and the site where a bomb landed inside India.

According to the French news agency, Indian police reported that the bombs had landed in a riverbed that demarcates the international boundary between India and Myanmar. "Our initial investigation has revealed that there is no damage to any [Indian] life or property," Lalrinpuia Varte, police superintendent of Champhai district, told AFP.



Could Your Thyroid Be the Cause of Your Depression?

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - People with thyroid disorders might be more likely to struggle with symptoms of depression. Many people who have thyroid disorders often report other negative health problems. This can include mood and depression symptoms. Is there a connection between thyroid disorders and depression?

The thyroid is a gland that releases hormones that control several body functions. These hormones control the heart, breathing, body temperature, and many other bodily functions. Thyroid hormones include Thyroxine (T4), Triiodothyronine (T3), and Calcitonin.

If these hormone levels are abnormal, the body's systems won't work properly. This can cause symptoms in some systems alerting to a problem, but there may not be. Symptoms may be so gradual they are not noticed. The body's systems slow down, like in the case of hypothyroidism. Hypothyroidism is defined as a deficiency of thyroid hormone. In areas of adequate iodine uptake such as the United States, the most common cause of hypothyroidism is autoimmune thyroid disease or Hashimoto disease. Hashimoto's disease is more prevalent in women and increases with age.

Hyperthyroidism is the opposite situation. The thyroid releases too much hormone into the bloodstream, and the body starts to speed up. This can occur suddenly and the symptoms can begin without warning.

Signs and symptoms of hypothyroidism may include fatigue, lethargy or depression. Depression is a common mental health illness that causes daily or nearly everyday feelings of sadness, helplessness, worthlessness, loss of interest, decreased energy, or even suicidal thoughts.

Symptoms last longer than two weeks and everyone may not experience all symptoms. Some people may have only a few symptoms, while others may have several. Symptoms can also range from mild to severe.

Hypothyroidism is generally diagnosed by a blood test measuring TSH (thyroid stimulating hormone) level. Treatment is thyroid hormone replacement therapy and rarely surgery.

It is important to understand that although hypothyroidism may be associated with symptoms of depression, the vast majority of patients with depression do not have clinical evidence of thyroid dysfunction.

Is there a connection between the thyroid and depression?

Over the years, studies have found that symptoms of depression and thyroid disorders are similar. Symptoms of depression often appear in people whose thyroid hormone levels are not at healthy levels. This is particularly true in hypothyroidism.

People with hypothyroidism often have symptoms of depression, decreased attention, or slower reactions. People with hyperthyroidism often experience symptoms of anxiety, inability to concentrate, or exaggerated moods.

How does the thyroid affect depression?

The thyroid has a direct effect on mood which can include depression and anxiety. The severity of the depression can vary depending on the severity of the thyroid disorder. The connection between the two comes through the hypothalamic-pituitary-thyroid axis.

The hypothalamic-pituitary-thyroid (HPT) axis is a loop that cycles feedback between the hypothalamus and the pituitary gland overseeing thyroid hormone levels. When thyroid hormone levels are high, the HPT axis responds, telling the pituitary gland not to release thyroid stimulating hormone (TSH) so that T3 levels can decrease.

When thyroid levels are low, the opposite happens. The HPT axis responds by telling the pituitary gland to release more TSH. This prompts the thyroid to increase how much T3 is released. This helps



bring the thyroid hormone level to normal.

However, when thyroid levels are abnormal, it throws the loop out of balance. This alters hormone levels throughout the body, affecting mood and other bodily functions.

Treatment goals for hypothyroidism include reversing clinical progression and correcting any metabolic abnormalities such as TSH and thyroid hormone levels, specifically free thyroxine (T4).

Who might be affected?

Thyroid disorders can affect anyone at any age but are much more likely to affect women between ages 20 and 40. However, as people age, that risk increases. People over age 60 have an increased chance of developing a thyroid disorder. The American Thyroid Association recommends screening at the age of 35 years and then every 5 years thereafter. High-risk patients include pregnant women, patients with type 1 diabetes or other autoimmune diseases, or patients who have undergone neck irradiation such as for cancer treatment.

Depression can also occur at any age but is more likely to happen to adults near midlife or older. This is particularly true for adults diagnosed with health problems. Diseases and medications can also impact mood and mental health. These factors increase the risk of depression.

People with thyroid disorders are more likely to have depression than the general population. Studies show that patients with a known history of hypothyroidism have a greater chance of developing depression during their lifetime.

On the contrary

As research into HPT, thyroid levels, and depression increases, there are more questions about whether the thyroid directly causes depression or if it's more of a coincidence. Some studies suggest that these theories are being debunked. Symptoms of depression and thyroid disorders can be very similar. Some researchers believe they may simply be found together by chance.

The idea that thyroid disorders and depression are not always linked comes from proof that when treating the thyroid disorder, the depression does not always improve. In the same respect, not all patients with thyroid disorders suffer from mood changes. Also, the opposite is true. Patients who struggle with mood disorders and depression do not necessarily have abnormal thyroids.

While it remains true that there is a link between the two, it is not true in all cases. It is something to look at when assessing symptoms of depression and thyroid disorder. This is especially true when symptoms present in someone with both problems.

Is it the thyroid or depression?

Your healthcare provider can help determine if you have symptoms of one, the other, or both. If you have symptoms of a thyroid disorder, your provider will complete a physical exam to assess the thyroid to feel for enlargement or nodules. They will order bloodwork to check your T3, T4, and TSH levels. This will provide the best information for diagnosis.

If you are suffering from symptoms of depression, be sure to discuss this with your healthcare provider. It will be important to seek appropriate treatment, regardless of the cause. You will want to note whether or not symptoms improve if thyroid treatment is recommended.



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Swedish Inflation Hits Three-Decade High

STOCKHOLM (Dispatches) - Inflation in Sweden surged to its highest point in three decades in December, fuelled by soaring electricity prices that have hit the cost of living, official figures showed.

The consumer price index (CPI) accelerated to 12.3 per cent, up from 11.5 per cent in November, Statistics Sweden said, the highest figure since February 1991.

The main driver was the price of electricity, which rose 28.8 per cent in December compared to the month before and 45.3 per cent compared to a year earlier.

Sweden's inflation adjusted for fixed interest rates (CPIF) — the figure used by Sweden's central bank to guide monetary policy—jumped to 10.2 per cent on an annual basis, up from 9.5 per cent in November.



U.S. Inflation Cools to 6.5% in December

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - Rising consumer prices in the United States moderated again in December amid declining costs for gasoline and motor vehicles, offering hope that inflation was now on a sustained downward trend, though the labor market remains tight.

The government said that inflation declined to 6.5% in December compared with a year earlier, marking the smallest rise since October 2021. However, it was the sixth straight year-over-year slowdown, down from 7.1% in November.

Every month, the consumer price index (CPI) slipped 0.1% from November to December, the first such drop since May 2020, when the economy was reeling from the first wave of COVID-19 cases. Conversely, the CPI rose 0.1% in November.

Americans also got some relief at the supermarket, with the report from the Labor Department showing food prices posting their smallest monthly increase since March 2021. But rents remained very high, and utilities were more expensive.

The report could further allow the Federal Reserve (Fed) to scale back the pace of its interest rate increases next month. The U.S. central bank has been engaged in its fastest rate hiking cycle since the 1980s.

"The mountain peak of inflation is behind us, but the question is how steep the downhill is," said Sung Won Sohn, finance and economics professor at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles.

"To be sure, the efforts by the Federal Reserve have begun to bear fruit, even though it will be a while before the promised land of a 2% inflation rate is here."

Economists polled by Reuters had forecast the CPI to remain unchanged. However, it was the third month that the CPI came in below expectations.

Gasoline prices tumbled 9.4% after dropping 2.0% in November. But the cost of natural gas increased by 3%, while electricity rose by 1%. Food prices climbed 0.3%, the smallest gain since March 2021, after rising 0.5% in the prior month. The cost of food consumed at home increased by 0.2%.

The annual CPI peaked at 9.1% in June, which was the most significant increase since November 1981. Inflation remains well above the Fed's 2% target.

Price pressures are subsiding as higher borrowing costs, tremendous demand, and bottlenecks in the supply chains ease. Last year, the Fed raised its policy rate by 425 basis points from near zero to a 4.25%-4.50% range, the highest since late 2007. In December, it projected at least 75 basis points of hikes in borrowing costs by the end of 2023.

Excluding the volatile food and energy components, the CPI climbed 0.3% last month after rising 0.2% in November. In the 12 months through December, the so-called core CPI increased by 5.7% after advancing by 6% in November.

Prices for used cars and trucks fell 2.5%, recording their sixth straight monthly decline. Likewise, new motor vehicles slipped by 0.1%.

Goods prices dropped 1.1% after decreasing 0.3% in November as deflation in this category became entrenched. But services, the most significant component of the CPI basket, accelerated 0.6% after gaining 0.3% in November.

Sticky rents are driving them. Owners' equivalent rent, a measure of the amount homeowners would pay to rent or would earn from renting their property, jumped 0.8% after rising 0.7% in November. Independent estimates, however, suggest rental inflation is cooling.

UK Economy Beats Expectations With November Growth

LONDON (Dispatches) - The UK economy unexpectedly grew in November, helped by a boost from the World Cup, official figures show.

The UK's gross domestic product (GDP) - a key economic measure of services, construction and manufacturing output - rose by 0.1%.

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) said pubs and restaurants contributed to growth as people went out to watch the football. However, growth slowed sharply from October, partly due to strike action.

Rail workers and Royal Mail staff staged walkouts over pay and working conditions in November. Darren Morgan, director of economic statistics at the ONS, told the BBC's Today programme: "We definitely saw the impact of industrial action in today's figures."

"We saw reasonably large falls in rail transport, postal work and warehousing and this sector had the biggest drag on the economy in November."

There was continued industrial action in December, which widened to include NHS workers as well as Border Force staff at six UK airports.

Despite the boost to economic growth in November, it is not clear if the UK will avoid a recession this year.

The 0.5% rise recorded in October was largely as a result of a bounceback from businesses shuttering to mark Queen Elizabeth II's funeral in September.

A recession is defined as two three-month periods, or quarters, of shrinking economic output in a row.

When a country is in recession, it is a sign that its economy is doing badly. During a downturn, companies typically make less money and the number of people unemployed rises. Graduates and school leavers also find it harder to get their first job.

Between July and September, UK economic output shrank by 0.3%.

Although there might have been a brief improvement in November, the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) warned that concerns over the economy haven't yet been laid to rest.

The UK is continuing to battle the pace of price rises, or inflation, which is at a 40-year high largely due to soaring energy bills. The Bank of England has announced a number of interest rate rises since December 2021 to cool consumer demand and combat soaring costs.



Turkish Airport Passengers in 2022 Soared Over 42% to 182.3m

ANKARA (Dispatches) - The number of passengers served by Turkey's airports in 2022 soared 42.1% from the previous year to 182.3 million, the transport and infrastructure minister said on Wednesday. Adil Karaismailoglu said that in 2022, total air traffic in Turkey jumped 28.4% to 1.88 million aircraft on a yearly basis, he noted.

Total aircraft traffic climbed 18.6% year-over-year in December 2022, reaching 144,578, including overflights; while the total number of air passengers last month, including transit passengers, was 12.88 million, he underlined.

Compared to 2021, passenger traffic increased by 14.9% on domestic routes and by 73% on international routes. The increase in total passenger traffic was 42.1% compared to the previous year. In the same period, freight (cargo, mail and baggage) traffic exceeded 4 million in total, including 774,112 tons on domestic flights and 3.2 million tons on international routes.

The number of aircraft that landed and took off from Istanbul's mega airport - Istanbul Airport - in December reached 37,436 in total, with 8,684 on domestic and 28,752 on international routes.

"We have served a total of 5.4 million passengers, some 1.1 million on domestic flights and 4.3 million international routes, in Istanbul," said Karaismailoglu.

Noting that Istanbul Airport had a total of 425,897 aircraft traffic last year, 109,634 on domestic routes and 316,263 on international routes, Karaismailoglu said, "At Istanbul Airport, 15.8 million and 48.5 million passengers were served on domestic and international routes respectively."

Indonesia Curbs Palm Oil Export

SINGAPORE (Dispatches) - A move by top palm oil exporter Indonesia to restrict shipments and boost domestic biodiesel consumption is set to squeeze global vegetable oil supplies already undercut by lower output in Southeast Asia and Latin America.

Edible oil buyers, including price-sensitive consumers in South Asia and Africa, will bear the brunt of the supply-side constraints that come just as demand is forecast to climb, with China easing COVID-19 controls and India boosting purchases.

Indonesia's export restrictions and higher use of crops for making biofuels are another challenge to food-importing countries hurting from last year's red-hot inflation, which pushed prices of key staples such as wheat, corn and soybeans to all-time or multi-year highs.

"The implementation of (the) B35 mandate in Indonesia in 2023 definitely changes (the) global palm oil SND (supply and demand) situation in 2023," said Oscar Tjakra, a senior analyst at food and agribusiness research at Rabobank.

"I'm now expecting global palm oil SND will be in a slight deficit."

Indonesia's B35 mandate, the highest in the world, stipulates diesel sold in the country from Feb. 1 has to contain 35% palm-based fatty acid methyl ester. In comparison, Malaysia has partially implemented a 20% biodiesel blending mandate and other countries have measures calling for single and double digit percentages of bio content for diesel or gasoline.

The Indonesia Biofuel Producers Association says the B35 mandate will take up 11.44 million tonnes in palm oil this year, up from 9.6 million in 2022 under the country's B30 measure.

Indonesia, producer of more than half of global palm oil supplies, also tightened trade rules this year, allowing exporters to ship just six times their domestic palm oil sales volume, less than a fourth-quarter 2022 ratio of eight times.

"Indonesian palm oil export definitely will drop, as output will decline, domestic consumption will increase," Fadhil Hasan, an Indonesian Palm Oil Association (GAPKI) official, told Reuters.

Indonesia produced 51.3 million tons of palm oil in 2022 and exported 33.7 million tons, GAPKI estimated. In 2023, palm oil output is expected at 50.82 million tons and exports at 26.42 million tonnes, it said.

Benchmark palm oil futures are expected in a range of 4,000-4,200 ringgit (\$920-\$970) per ton this year, according to the Malaysian Palm Oil Board Director General Ahmad Parveez Ghulam Kadir.

IMF Chief Expects To Keep 2023 Global Growth Forecast Steady At About 2.7%

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - The International Monetary Fund is not likely to downgrade its forecast for 2.7% growth in 2023, the head of the global lender said, noting that a feared oil price spike had failed to materialize and labor markets remained strong.

IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva said 2023 would be another "tough year" for the global economy, and inflation remained stubborn, but she did not expect another year of successive downgrades like those seen last year, barring unexpected developments.

The IMF in October forecast that global growth would slow to 2.7% in 2023 after falling from 6.0% in 2021 to 3.2% in 2022. It had previously forecast growth of 2.9% for 2023, but Georgieva said she did not expect further cuts to the outlook.

"Growth continues to slow down in 2023," she told reporters at the IMF's headquarters in Washington. "The more positive piece of the picture is in the resilience of labor markets. As long as people are employed, even if prices are high, people spend ... and that has helped the performance."

She added that the IMF did not expect major downgrades, although the final number had not been determined. "That's the good news."

Georgieva said the IMF expected the slowdown in global growth to "bottom out" and "turn around towards the end of '23 and into '24."

Georgieva said there was much hope that China - which previously contributed some 35% to 40% of global growth, but had "disappointing" results last year - would once again help fuel global growth, likely from mid-2023. But that depended on Beijing not changing course and sticking to its plans to reverse its zero-COVID policies, she said.

"What is most important is for China to stay the course and not to back off from that," Georgieva said, calling developments in China "very likely the single most important factor for global growth."

She said the United States - the biggest economy in the world - was likely to see a soft landing, and would suffer only a mild recession, if it did enter a technical recession.

But Georgieva said great uncertainty remained, citing the risk of a significant climate event, a major cyberattack or the danger of escalation in Russia's war in Ukraine, for instance through the use of nuclear weapons.

"We are now in a more shockprone world and we have to be open-minded that there could be a risk turn that we are not even thinking about," she said. "That's the whole point of the last years. The unthinkable has happened twice."

China's Consumer Price Inflation Rises, Factory Price Growth Slows



BEIJING (Dispatches) - China's consumer inflation rose modestly in December, official figures released Thursday showed, though it remained below 2% in a sign the economy is still struggling with the effects of years of zero-COVID-19 policy.

The consumer price index - the main gauge of inflation - hit 1.8% on-year, up from 1.6% in November, the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) said.

Inflation for the whole of 2022 rose by an average of 2%, making China an outlier compared with other major economies where prices have soared on the back of a spike in energy and food costs, and supply chain snarls.

Beijing had targeted an average inflation rate of 3% for 2022, and the lower figure will give authorities room to provide much-needed stimulus to the economy.

But the world's second-largest economy is still reeling from the effects of years of its zero COVID-19 policy, which hammered businesses and supply chains and dampened consumption, though many restrictions have now been lifted.

The producer price index, which measures the cost of goods leaving factories, contracted in December for the third consecutive month.

The 0.7% shrinkage is a further sign of weak demand and reduced margins for businesses.

"The economy is still running below potential," Zhiwei Zhang of Pinpoint Asset Management wrote in a note.

"High-frequency indicators such as traffic flows picked up recently, but demand is still not strong enough to lead to inflationary pressure. Inflation is not a constraint for monetary policy to loosen further this year."

China has been relatively unaffected by a global surge in food prices since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February.

But officials are keeping a close eye on pork, widely consumed in China, to avoid popular discontent.

Curbing Inflation Is CBI's Main Strategy

TEHRAN (MNA) - The new governor of the Central Bank of Iran (CBI) has said curbing inflation would be the main strategy of the bank during his tenure, IRIB reported.

Speaking in a meeting with the country's economic experts and scholars on Saturday, Mohammadreza Farzin said in order to curb inflation, managing the demand for liquidity and money creation would be put on the agenda and the

influencing factors on the pricing side will also be controlled as well. "We will implement an active monetary and banking policy in this regard," Farzin said.

The Statistical Center of Iran (SCI) has put the average inflation rate in the twelve-month period ended on December 21, which marks the end of the ninth Iranian calendar month Azar, at 45 percent, rising one percent from the figure for the twelve-month ended to the eighth month.



UN Confirms 2022 Among Eight Hottest Years on Record

GENEVA (Dispatches) - The past eight years were the hottest since records began, the United Nations confirmed, despite the cooling influence of a drawn-out La Nina weather pattern.

Last year, as the world faced a cascade of unprecedented natural disasters made more likely and deadly by climate change, the average global temperature was about 1.15 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels, the World Meteorological Organization said.

"The past eight years were the warmest on record globally, fuelled by ever-rising greenhouse gas concentrations and accumulated heat," the UN agency said in a statement.

The hottest year on record was 2016, followed by 2019 and 2020, it found.

Last year meanwhile marked the eighth consecutive year that annual global temperatures were at least one degree over the pre-industrial levels seen between 1850 and 1900.

The Paris Agreement, agreed by nearly all the world's nations in 2015, called for capping global warming at 1.5C, which scientists say would limit climate impacts to manageable levels.

But the WMO warned Thursday that "the likelihood of -- temporarily -- breaching the 1.5C limit... is increasing with time."

The WMO reached its conclusions by consolidating six leading international datasets, including the European Union's Copernicus climate monitor (C3S) and the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), which have announced similar findings this week.

The UN agency highlighted that the warmest eight years on record had all been since 2015, despite consecutive La Nina events since 2020.

The weather phenomenon has a cooling effect on global temperatures.

Last year was therefore "just" the fifth or sixth hottest year ever recorded, the WMO said.

The situation last year was more extreme in some places.

Copernicus said in its annual report Tuesday that the planet's polar regions experienced record temperatures last year, as did with large swathes of the Middle East, China, central Asia and northern Africa.

Europe endured its second-hottest year ever as France, Britain, Spain and Italy set new average temperature records and heatwaves across the continent were compounded by severe drought conditions, it said.

For the planet as a whole, the WMO said the impact of La Nina, which is expected to end within months, would be "short-lived".

The weather pattern, it said, "will not reverse the long-term warming trend caused by record levels of heat-trapping greenhouse gases in our atmosphere."



"In 2020, we faced several dramatic weather disasters which claimed far too many lives and livelihoods," WMO chief Petteri Taalas said, pointing to floods that submerged a third of Pakistan, record-breaking heatwaves in China, Europe and the Americas and a drawn-out drought in the Horn of Africa.

The WMO said the trend was clear.

"Since the 1980s, each decade has been warmer than the previous one," it said.

The average temperature for the period 2013-2022 was 1.14 degrees Celsius above the pre-industrial baseline.

It stood at 1.09 degrees Celsius between 2011 and 2020, according to estimates by the UN's climate science advisory panel, the IPCC.

This, WMO said, "indicates that long-term warming continues," with the world "already approaching the lower limit of temperature increase the Paris Agreement seeks to avert."

The spurt in extreme weather events underscores the need for "enhanced preparedness," Taalas said.

At the COP27 climate summit in November, UN chief Antonio Guterres unveiled a five-year, \$3-billion plan to build a global early warning system for deadly and costly extreme weather events amplified by climate change.

So far, only half of the 193 UN member states have such systems, Taalas said.

He warned that "big gaps" in basic weather observations, including in Africa, had "a major negative impact on the quality of weather forecasts."

Ocean Temperatures In 2022 Were Highest Ever Recorded



PARIS (Dispatches) - The world's oceans, which have absorbed most of the excess heat caused by humanity's carbon pollution, continued to see record-breaking temperatures last year, according to research published.

Climate change has increased surface temperatures across the planet, leading to atmospheric instability and amplifying extreme weather events such as storms.

Oceans absorb about 90 percent of the excess heat from greenhouse gas emissions, shielding land surfaces but generating huge, long-lasting marine heatwaves that are already having devastating effects on underwater life.

The study, by researchers in China, the US, Italy and New Zealand, said that 2022 was "the hottest year ever recorded in the world's oceans". Heat content in the oceans exceeded the previous year's levels by around 10 Zetta joules -- equivalent to 100 times the electricity generation worldwide in 2021, according to the authors.

"The oceans are absorbing most of the heating from human carbon emissions," said co-author Michael Mann, a professor at the University of Pennsylvania.

"Until we reach net zero emissions, that heating will continue, and we'll continue to break ocean heat content records, as we did this year," he said. "Better awareness and understanding of the oceans are a basis for the actions to combat climate change."

Records going back to the late 1950s show a relentless rise in ocean temperatures with almost continuous increases going back to around 1985.

Scientists have warned that climbing temperatures have wrought major changes to ocean stability faster than previously thought.

The research, published in the journal *Advances in Atmospheric Sciences*, was based on observations from 24 scientists across 16 institutes worldwide.

It also found other indications suggesting that ocean health is deteriorating.

Increasing water temperatures and ocean salinity -- also at an all-time high -- directly contribute to a process of "stratification", where water separates into layers that no longer mix. This has wide-ranging implications because it affects the exchange of heat, oxygen and carbon between the ocean and atmosphere, with effects including a loss of oxygen in the ocean.

Nuclear Reactor Experiment Rules Out One Dark Matter Hope

PARIS (Dispatches) - It was an anomaly detected in the storm of a nuclear reactor so puzzling that physicists hoped it would shine a light on dark matter, one of the universe's greatest mysteries.

However new research has definitively ruled out that this strange measurement signalled the existence of a "sterile neutrino", a hypothetical particle that has long eluded scientists.

Neutrinos are sometimes called "ghost particles" because they barely interact with other matter -- around 100 trillion are estimated to pass through our bodies every second.

Since neutrinos were first theorized in 1930, scientists have been trying to nail down the properties of these shape-shifters, which are one of the most common particles in the universe.

They appear "when the nature of the nucleus of an atom has been changed", physicist David Lhuillier of France's Atomic Energy Commission told AFP.

That could happen when they come together in the furious fusion in the heart of stars like our Sun, or are broken apart in nuclear reactors, he said.

There are three confirmed flavors of neutrino: electron, muon and tau.

However physicists suspect there could be a fourth neutrino, dubbed "sterile" because it does not interact with ordinary matter at all. In theory, it would only answer to gravity and not the fundamental force of weak interactions, which still hold sway over the other neutrinos.

The sterile neutrino has a place ready for it in theoretical physics, "but there has not yet been a clear demonstration that it exists," he added.

So Lhuillier and the rest of the STEREO collaboration, which brings together French and German scientists, set out to find it.

Previous nuclear reactor measurements had found fewer neutrinos than the amount expected by theoretical models, a phenomenon dubbed the "reactor antineutrino anomaly".

It was suggested that the missing neutrinos had changed into the sterile kind, offering a rare chance to prove their existence.

To find out, the STEREO collaboration installed a dedicated detector a few metres away from a nuclear reactor used for research at the Laue-Langevin institute in Grenoble, France.

After four years of observing more than 100,000 neutrinos and two years analysing the data, the verdict was published in the journal *Nature* on Wednesday.

The anomaly "cannot be explained by sterile neutrinos," Lhuillier said.

But that "does not mean there are none in the universe", he added.

The experiment found that previous predictions of the amount of neutrinos being produced were incorrect.

But it was not a total loss, offering a much clearer picture of neutrinos emitted by nuclear reactors.

This could help not just with future research, but also for monitoring nuclear reactors.

Meanwhile, the search for the sterile neutrino continues. Particle accelerators, which smash atoms, could offer up new leads.

FM Reaffirms Support for Lebanon, Its Independence

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian has reaffirmed the Islamic Republic's support for Lebanon's stability and independence, which he said will serve the entire region.

"From Beirut, we once again emphasize our support for internal stability and the completion of the political process in Lebanon through dialogue among the various groups in this country without any foreign interference," Amirabdollahian said in a meeting with Lebanese Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri.

Iran has always supported Lebanon's stability and security, he said, adding, "We believe Lebanon's stability will be beneficial to the entire region."

The top Iranian diplomat said his country would never interfere in Lebanon's domestic affairs but would spare no efforts to help the Arab country if necessary.

He underscored the importance of promoting trade and economic relations between Tehran and Beirut to serve the two nations' interests.

Amirabdollahian said Iran enjoys great technical capabilities to construct power plants for electricity generation, expressing Tehran's readiness to help Beirut in this regard.

Berri, for his part, hailed Iran's support for Lebanon at different junctures and said the two countries can improve relations in various areas.

Strengthening bilateral cooperation will serve the two countries' interests, he added.

He expressed concern over Israel's increasing threats against Palestinians and called on the international community to support Palestine.

The Iranian foreign minister also held a meeting with Hezbollah Secretary General Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah on Friday.

During the meeting, Amirabdollahian and Nasrallah discussed the latest developments in the region, particularly in Lebanon and Palestine.

They also exchanged views about the Israeli regime's threats and the resistance front's readiness in the face of new regional and international developments.

U.S., Land...

FROM PAGE 1

In addition to examining Biden's handling of classified documents, Republicans are preparing to probe Hunter Biden's past business dealings in Ukraine.



In Comer's letter to the White House, House Oversight Committee chairman said the home where the documents were found was listed as Hunter Biden's address on his driver's license as recently as 2018.

"The Committee is concerned President Biden stored classified documents at the same location his son resided while engaging in international business deals with adversaries of the United States," the letter read.

Republicans have sought to compare the investigation of Biden's handling of classified documents to the ongoing probe into how Trump handled classified documents after his presidency.

But their cases are not the same, legal experts say.

The White House said Biden's attorneys found a small number of classified documents and turned them over after discovery. Trump resisted doing so until an August FBI search turned up about 100 classified documents, raising questions about whether Trump or his staff obstructed the investigation.

So people in the world are gradually realizing that the U.S. as the so-called big power is not a dream land for those who seek respecting laws and human principles, as the Republican and Democrat statesmen are ready to resort to any violation of law for keeping their seats and American officials are better to solve their own problems rather than justifying any disgrace in their countries and they are also recommended to forget meddling in the other nations' affairs because they have lots of domestic problems that one is unable to enumerate them.

Saudi Arabia...

FROM PAGE 1

The top Iranian diplomat pointed to his short talks with his Saudi counterpart in Amman in December and said both sides emphasized that the restoration of Tehran-Riyadh relations would have positive impacts on the two countries and the entire region.

Saudi Arabia severed diplomatic relations with Iran in January 2016 after Iranian protesters, enraged by the execution of prominent Shia cleric Sheikh Nimr Baqir al-Nimr by the Saudi government, stormed its embassy in Tehran.

The kingdom then pursued a confrontational foreign policy toward the Islamic Republic, not least during the administration of former US President Donald Trump, with whom the Saudi rulers had close ties.

Saudi Arabia appears to have recently changed its antagonistic course, showing willingness through diplomatic channels and third parties to mend fences with Tehran and resume bilateral relations.

The two neighbors remain deeply divided over a set of regional issues, mainly the destructive and protracted Saudi war on Yemen.

Sweden Gov't Criticized...

FROM PAGE 1

After the verdict against Nouri and his appeal, the Swedish judicial system rejected some of the lawyers he had introduced and asked him to introduce other lawyers, he added.

Noting that Sweden claims human rights, but has rejected Nouri's lawyers under various pretexts, he noted that it is unfortunate that the timing of the Swedish judicial system to deal with this case is also unfair.

He reiterated that Nouri has committed no crime and he is an innocent person in Swedish prisons, adding that the Swedish government should release him as soon as possible and pay him damages.

A few months ago, Hamid Nouri in an audio file said that he had been tortured while in custody and was denied medical care despite suffering from eye problems.

Israeli Forces...

FROM PAGE 1

Israeli forces killed at least 171 Palestinians in the West Bank and occupied East al-Quds last year, including more than 30 children. At least 9,000 others were injured as well.

Reacting to fresh Israeli crimes, Palestinian Hamas resistance movement said in a statement on Friday that it holds Israel accountable for its continued crimes and violations against Palestinians, and reaffirms that the occupying regime's acts of aggression will not go unnoticed.

Joelinton Could Be Dropped by Newcastle

LONDON (Dispatches) - Newcastle boss Eddie Howe could drop Brazilian midfielder Joelinton for Sunday's Premier League clash against Fulham after his arrest for drink-driving. The 26-year-old, who has become a key member of Howe's in-form side, was stopped by police in the early hours of Thursday and later charged with driving while above the prescribed limit for alcohol. He will appear before magistrates in the city later this month, but is available for Sunday's match.

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Spieth Shares USPGA Tour Sony Open Lead

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - Three-time major Lwinner Jordan Spieth fired seven birdies in his six-under par 64 to share the US PGA Tour Sony Open lead with Chris Kirk and Taylor Montgomery when darkness halted play. Spieth and Kirk — who also had seven birdies — set an early first-round target at Waialae Country Club in Honolulu, Hawaii, where Taylor seized his share of the lead with a birdie at the 18th shortly before play was halted.

Celtics Battle Past Nets in Battle of East's Top Teams

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - The Boston Celtics clawed out a 109-98 victory over Brooklyn, pulling away late to boost their NBA-best record and widen the distance over the Nets atop the Eastern Conference.

Celtics star Jayson Tatum endured a tough seven-for-22 shooting night on the way to 20 points and 11 rebounds.

Marcus Smart and Malcolm Brogdon added 16 points apiece for the Celtics, who learned shortly before the contest that Jaylen Brown -- coming off a 41-point performance in Boston's win over New Orleans -- would be sidelined with a right adductor muscle strain.

The Nets, meanwhile, were playing their first game since superstar Kevin Durant limped out of a win over Miami with a sprained right knee ligament, which is expected to sideline him for several weeks.

Brooklyn, led by 24 points from Kyrie Irving, coped admirably through the first three quarters, leading the back-and-forth battle by as many as nine points in the first half and by as many as five in the third quarter before Boston pulled away.

The Celtics connected on 10 of 25 shots from the field in the fourth quarter and clamped down defensively, holding the Nets to 16 points in the period on six-of-19 shooting.

"We get out and run, it's hard for people to stop it," Smart said. "We were able to get back in transition on the defensive end and set our defense."

The Celtics won their fifth straight game to improve to 31-12 and stretched their lead over the Nets atop the East to three games.

James Maintains Lead in NBA All-Star Voting

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Los Angeles Lakers superstar LeBron James remained the top vote-getter in the second round of fan balloting for the NBA All-Star Game released by the league.

James is on pace to join Kareem Abdul-Jabbar as the only 19-time All-Stars in history when the midseason exhibition is held on February 19 in Salt Lake City, Utah.

In the latest returns James had 4,825,229 votes and as the leading vote-getter in the West was trending toward serving as captain for the sixth straight year.

He could again find himself going up against a team captained by Kevin Durant, the Brooklyn Nets star who leads voting in the East with 4,509,238 votes even though he is expected to miss about a month after spraining a right knee ligament this week.

The top three front court players and top two guards in each conference will be chosen as starters with the players with the most votes in each conference serving as captains and choosing their teams.

Denver's Nikola Jokic remained second among Western Conference front court players and James's Lakers teammate Anthony Davis remained in third.

Durant led East frontcourt players, just ahead of Milwaukee's Giannis Antetokounmpo with 4,467,306 votes.

Boston's Jayson Tatum moved ahead of Philadelphia's Joel Embiid for third spot.

Golden State's Stephen Curry leads all guards in the balloting with 3,901,808 votes with Luka Doncic of Dallas second in the West.

Muguruza Has Bittersweet Feelings at Australian Open

MELBOURNE (Dispatches) - Two-time Grand Slam champion Garbine Muguruza said she has started from scratch and goes into next week's Australian Open with "bittersweet feelings" following a year to forget.

The 29-year-old Spaniard won the French Open in 2016, Wimbledon in 2017 and reached the final in Melbourne in 2020, before losing to the American Sofia Kenin.



"Keep going," Smart said of what the Celtics would have to do in the meantime. "Next man up."

The Nets remained half a game ahead of the Milwaukee Bucks, who fell to the Heat 102-108 in Miami.

The Philadelphia 76ers fell 133-114 to the Oklahoma City Thunder to lose ground to Cleveland in the battle for fourth place in the east.

The Cavaliers were in action later Thursday against the Trail Blazers in Portland.

In Miami, Gabe Vincent scored a career-high 28 points, Bam Adebayo added 24 points and 12 rebounds and Jimmy Butler chipped in 17 points and 11 rebounds for the Heat in a clash of injury-depleted teams.

Miami's Gabe Vincent drives against Jevon Carter in the Heat's 108-102 NBA victory over the Milwaukee Bucks

The Bucks, whose multiple absentees included two-time NBA Most Valuable Player Giannis Antetokounmpo, led by 15 in the second quarter, but the Heat had tied it up by halftime.

Miami opened the fourth quarter on a 7-0 run and didn't trail in the final period.

One night after they set an NBA record by making all 40 of their free-throw attempts, the Heat made 15 of their 16 attempts from the foul line -- running their streak of free throws made to 55 before Butler missed one with less than 30 seconds remaining.

In Philadelphia, Oklahoma City's Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 37 points as the Thunder avenged a 19-point New Year's Eve loss to the 76ers.

Joel Embiid scored 30 points and pulled down 10 rebounds and James Harden added 24 points with 15 assists for Philadelphia, but the Thunder connected on 51.2 percent of their shots from the field, including 14 three-pointers, to spring the surprise.



Bidding for Ronaldo-Messi Prestige Seat Passes \$2.6m

RIYADH (Dispatches) - A Saudi Arabian businessman is leading bidding to watch the latest chapter in Cristiano Ronaldo and Lionel Messi's celebrated rivalry in global football with a 10 million riyals offer for a ticket to a showpiece game.

The Saudi government's entertainment arm said on Twitter that Mushref Al-Ghamdi, general manager of real estate group AqarOne, was the leader so far in an auction ending on Jan. 17.

The "Beyond Imagination" ticket is for a match featuring a combined team from Saudi clubs Al Nassr — who recently signed Ronaldo — and Al Hilal versus Messi's Paris St Germain.

The Jan. 19 game in Riyadh will be the pair's first on-pitch meeting since Juventus beat Barcelona 3-0 in December 2020.

The buyer of the ticket has the right to attend the winner's ceremony after the match, enter dressing rooms, and meet the two men who for years have vied to be the world's greatest.

Though revenue from the auction is to go to charity, the event may fuel accusations of "sportswashing": distracting attention from rights abuses by splashing money on sport.

As well as attracting Ronaldo, Saudi Arabia have signed up Messi as a tourism ambassador. Paris St Germain is owned by the Qatari government, which has just staged the World Cup.

Mane May Return for PSG Clash



BERLIN (Dispatches) - Bayern Munich manager Julian Nagelsmann said injured star forward Sadio Mane will "come back a bit earlier" and may figure in the Champions League last 16 clash against Paris Saint Germain.

Speaking from Bayern's winter training camp in Qatar, Nagelsmann told reporters Mane was making better than expected

progress in his return from the right fibula injury which ruled him out of the World Cup.

"He (Mane) is an important player. When everything goes well, it could be that he's there against Paris," Nagelsmann said.

"But we will see."

"In my mind, I'm not counting on him for the first game against Paris."

Mane has scored six goals and made three assists in the league since making the move from Liverpool to Bayern in the summer.

Six-time Champions League winners Bayern travel to Paris for the first leg clash on February 14, with the return fixture in Munich taking place on March 8.

Rahul Helps India Beat Sri Lanka to Clinch ODI Series

KOLKATA (Dispatches) - KL Rahul's unbeaten 64 helped India down Sri Lanka by four wickets to clinch a series victory in the second one-day international in Kolkata.

Wrist spinner Kuldeep Yadav and fast bowler Mohammed Siraj earlier took three wickets each as India bowled out Sri Lanka for 215 in 39.4 overs at Eden Gardens.

India were in trouble at 86-4, with skipper Rohit Sharma and star batter Virat Kohli back in the pavilion, but Rahul anchored the chase as the hosts got home in 43.2 overs.

The hosts took an unassailable 2-0 series lead, with the third match to be played on Sunday in Thiruvananthapuram. Debutant Nuwanidu Fernando stood out for Sri Lanka with his 50 but they lost wickets regularly after electing to bat first.

Siraj struck first as he bowled Avishka Fernando for 20 with an in-swinging delivery that took the inside edge of the bat to crash against middle stump.

Nuwanidu put on 73 runs for the second wicket with Kusal Mendis before Kuldeep, replacing Yuzvendra Chahal as the only change in the team, broke through.

Kuldeep trapped Mendis lbw for 34 with the final delivery of his opening over and two balls later left-arm spinner Axar Patel bowled Dhananjaya de Silva for a duck.

Nuwanidu raised his 50 but was soon run out after his 63-ball knock.

Kuldeep struck twice in two overs, including captain and previous match centurion Dasun Shanaka, bowled for two.

Sri Lanka slipped to 152-7 when tearaway quick Umran Malik cut short Wanindu Hasaranga's breezy knock on 21.

Number eight Duniya Wellalage made 32 and resisted along with the other lower-order batters to take the total past 200 before Siraj struck twice in three balls to wrap up the innings.



Norrie, Gasquet Into Auckland Classic Final

AUCKLAND (Dispatches) - Cameron Norrie will face Richard Gasquet in the ATP Auckland Classic final after the Frenchman was gifted a walkover victory in the semis.

In the warm-up tournament ahead of the Australian Open, second-seed Norrie won through to the final with a convincing 6-3, 6-4 victory over American Jenson Brooksby in his first straight sets win of the week.

The 36-year-old Gasquet — once ranked as high as seventh in the world but is now 67th — did not get to take the court with fellow Frenchman Constant Lestienne, who pulled out with a shoulder injury suffered during his quarter-final win over Serb Laslo Djere the previous day.

Norrie, ranked 12th in the world and a beaten semi-finalist at Wimbledon last year, applied early pressure on the 48th-ranked Brooksby who was forced to save four break points on his second serve.

On his third serve, the American could no longer hold off the torrent of fierce returns from Norrie who was untroubled holding his serve throughout the set.

As had been the case in his two previous matches, Norrie was again in trouble at the start of the second set when Brooksby opened a 2-0 lead but this time he was able to break back twice to wrap up the match.

"It was nice to get it done in straight sets. In the other two matches I won the first and lost the second so it was nice to get it done straight," Norrie said.

"But it was an absolute battle, you know, a lot of long rallies.

"He puts the ball in such awkward parts of the court and I had to come up with a lot of really good shots on the run, and a lot of big passes and was able to hold on to my serve there at the end."

