

Health Ministry Announced on Sunday That the Number of Deaths From the Coronavirus Pandemic in Iran Increased to 144,727 With Three More Iranians Killed by the Virus Over the Past 24 Hours

IRAN NEWS

Oil Minister Javad Owji Flew to Mashhad on Sunday to Conduct a Field Survey of the Country's Northeast Gas Distribution Network And Examine Methods to Prevent Pressure Drops in the Area

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Su-35 Fighters To Arrive in Iran In Coming Months

TEHRAN (MNA)- Sukhoi Su-35 fighters will arrive in Iran early next year (The Iranian year 1402 - starting from 21 March 2023), A member of the Iranian Parliament's National Security and Foreign Policy Commission said.

Shahriyar Heidari made the announcement in an interview with Tasnim News Agency.

The Iranian lawmaker added that other Russian weapons including defense systems, missile systems, and helicopters will arrive in the country in near future.

The Sukhoi Su-35 is the designation for two improved derivatives of the Su-27 air-defense fighter. They are single-seat, twin-engine, supermaneuverable aircraft.

Nothing Can Undermine Palestine Issue

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian has stressed that nothing can diminish the Palestinian issue, dismissing the normalization agreements signed between a number of Arab countries and the occupying Israeli regime as "worthless".

Amirabdollahian made the remarks during a meeting with a number of high-ranking officials and representatives from Palestinian resistance groups in Damascus on Saturday night.

"Palestine and al-Quds City are the principal issues of the Muslim world. Palestine will remain the foremost issue of Muslims until a Palestinian state is formed within its historical boundaries, with al-Quds as its capital," he stated.

"The United States and its allies have unveiled various plans one after another for many years, namely the Oslo Accords, the Greater Middle East, the [so-called] Deal of the Century, and the Abraham Accords. The Palestinian nation and resistance forces have, however, managed to thwart all those plots through exemplary unity, resilience and perseverance," the chief Iranian diplomat pointed out.

Amirabdollahian said that the 11-day Operation Sword of al-Quds between the Gaza-based Palestinian resistance groups and the Israeli military in May 2021 proved that Axis of Resistance and Palestine are alive.

"Even the World Cup [in Qatar] showed that Palestine is alive, and the normalization of Arab-Israeli relations is worthless," he continued.

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Iran Exports to EU Soar 20% In 11 Months on Year



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – The value of Iran's export to the European Union (EU)'s member states rose 20 percent in the first 11 months of 2022, as compared to the same period in 2021, according to the data released by the European Union's statistics office Eurostat.

The Eurostat's data show that Iran exported commodities worth €76 million to the union in the 11-month period of this year, while the figure was €812 million in the same time span of the previous year, IRNA reported. The EU's export to Iran has also risen 22 percent to €3.739 billion from €3.048 billion.

According to the Eurostat, the total value of trade between Iran and the European Union reached €4.715 billion in January-November 2022, while the figure was €3.86 billion in the same period of 2021.

Among European countries, Germany was Iran's top trading partner in the first 11 months of 2022, accounting for about 39 percent of Iran's trade with the European Union. Germany exported €1.465 billion worth of goods to Iran while importing €260 million worth of commodities from the Islamic Republic. The country's total trade with Iran was 1.725 billion euros.

As previously reported by Eurostat, the value of trade between Iran and the European Union reached €4.863 billion in 2021, registering a nine-percent growth compared to the previous year.

The trade between Iran and the European Union in 2020 stood at €4.458 billion.

Iran exported €22 million worth of commodities to the union during January-December 2021 to register a 29-percent rise year on year.

Based on the mentioned data, the exports from Europe to the Islamic Republic in the said year also increased by five percent, standing at €3.941 billion.

Iran imported €3.745 billion worth of commodities from the European Union states in 2020, while exporting €13 million to the region.

Iran mainly exports foodstuff and livestock, beverages and tobacco, raw materials, mineral fuels, and vegetable oils to European countries, while foodstuff, beverages and tobacco, mineral fuels, vegetable oils, and chemicals are also the main products imported from the union.

Iranian Oil Exports End 2022 at a High

LONDON (Dispatches) - Iranian oil exports hit new highs in the last two months of 2022 and are making a strong start to 2023 despite U.S. sanctions, according to companies that track the flows, on higher shipments to China and Venezuela.

Tehran's oil exports have been limited since former U.S. President Donald Trump in 2018 exited a 2015 nuclear accord and reimposed sanctions aimed at curbing oil exports and the associated revenue to Iran's government.

Exports have risen during the term of his successor President Joe Biden, who had sought to revive the nuclear deal, and hit the highest since 2019 on some estimates. This comes despite headwinds such as a stall in those talks and competition from discounted Russian crude.

Energy consultant SVB International said Iran's crude exports in December averaged 1.137 million barrels per day, up 42,000 bpd from November and the highest 2022 figure SVB has reported based on estimates given earlier.

"In comparison to the Trump administration, there hasn't been any serious crackdown or action against Iran's oil exports," said Sara Vakhshouri of SVB. "January exports were so far strong like previous months."

"Lower Chinese demand and Russia's supply to China have been a major challenge for them. Most of its oil still goes to the Far East, ultimately China. Iran also helps Venezuela to export its oil."

Adrienne Watson, a National Security Council spokesperson at the White House, said the administration's enforcement of the sanctions is robust, and "Iran's macroeconomic figures clearly bear this out."

"We have not and will not hesitate to take action against sanctions evaders, together with sanctions against Iran's missile and drone trade, and human rights violations against the Iranian people," Watson said. The Treasury Department imposed sanctions late last year on an oil smuggling ring linked to Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC).

Consultant Petro-Logistics, which tracks oil supply, said it was also seeing an upward trend in Iranian crude exports which, in its view, in December reached their highest level since March 2019.

Kpler, a data intelligence firm, put Iranian crude exports at 1.23 million bpd in November, the highest since August 2022 and almost on a par with April 2019's rate of 1.27 million bpd, although they slipped to just below 1 million bpd in December.

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ViewPoint U.S., a Falling Power

In recent decades and because of several international events and conflicts that the U.S. had been involved in most of them, most political analysts and experts have claimed that the U.S. is on the verge of decline and this big power is falling and losing its grandeur and even this belief has been confirmed by many Western experts.

For centuries the U.S. has been the world economy number one and it is now losing its position to China and the U.S. is even losing its political influence and power in the world and many nations have turned their back on this arrogant country.

Recent Ukraine-Russia war may trigger the collapse of the U.S. sooner than one could have thought of it while Washington is supporting the war to make most of it either economically or politically.

A famous French expert has recently claimed that the U.S. monetary control of the world will collapse if Russia resists Washington's sanctions and survives with Chinese support during the course of the war with Ukraine.

In an interview with Le Figaro on Friday, French historian and anthropologist Emmanuel Todd said, "If the Russian economy offers long-term resistance to sanctions and manages to bleed the European economy white and manages to survive with Chinese support, US monetary control of the world will collapse and with it, the US' ability to finance its mammoth trade deficit for next to nothing."

Todd stressed that the U.S. and its European allies are involved in the war and cannot get out of it before Moscow.

"This war has become existential for the United States. It cannot get out of the conflict before Russia. They cannot let go. This explains why we are now in an open-ended war, in a confrontation that is bound to result in the collapse of one side or the other," Todd added.

He also recalled a piece of analysis offered by Professor John Mearsheimer, a leading politician at the University of Chicago, who argued that whereas for Russia this conflict was "existential," for the U.S. it was just another game among other countries, and that victory or defeat in it would be of little importance to the U.S.

"But this analysis is insufficient. Biden now has to hurry. America is fragile and the Russian economy's resistance is pushing the US imperial system toward the abyss. Nobody had expected the Russian economy would be able to withstand the 'economic power' of NATO," Todd said, referring to Mearsheimer's analysis.

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UK Recalls Ambassador From Tehran After Spy Execution

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - In a fresh act of interference, the British Foreign Minister announced that London will temporarily recall its ambassador from Tehran to carry out some consultations over the execution of a UK-backed spy.

UK prime minister Rishi Sunak, who leveled baseless human rights claims against Tehran on Saturday, once again claimed, "Our response to Iran is not limited to today. We are reviewing further action."

Akbari, 61, was arrested in 2019 after he returned to Tehran from London, where he has relatives. Akbari had engaged with British spies and received cash and other benefits from MI6, including a British passport, €1.8mn, £265,000, and \$50,000.

The ex-official Akbari was executed on Saturday Iran's judiciary sentenced him to death on charges of spying for UK MI6.

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

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

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Iran, China Negotiating on New IKAC Terminal

TEHRAN (IP) - The CEO of Imam Khomeini Airport City announced the negotiation with the Chinese contractor for a 3-billion-euro contract to build a 410,000-meter terminal at the Imam Khomeini Airport (RA).

Recognized as main international airport of Iran, Imam Khomeini Airport International Airport, which is located in the southwest of Tehran, has very suitable facilities for welcoming and seeing off Iranian and foreign travelers. Talking about the construction of a 410,000-meter terminal in this airport, Saeed Chalandari, The CEO of Imam Khomeini Airport City (IKAC), said:

"Negotiations with a Chinese company have continued for the past two months and it has been decided that the Ministry of Roads will pay up to 3 billion euros, which will be done through cash payments or clearing with Chinese contractors."

Iran Accuses U.S. of Systematic Rights Violation

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Iran has slammed the death of Keenan Anderson, the cousin of a co-founder of the Black Lives Matter movement, after he was repeatedly tasered by police officers in Los Angeles, saying the United States must be held to account for systematic violation of human rights.

Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Nasser Kanaani said that the U.S. government must be held accountable for this "inhumane crime" and its irresponsibility vis-à-vis the repetition of gross and systematic violations of human rights in the country, particularly the rights of minorities and people of color.

Anderson, 31, cousin of Patrisse Cullors, died at a hospital in Santa Monica, California, after suffering a cardiac arrest following the incident on the afternoon of January 3 in Los Angeles' Venice neighborhood.

According to reports, the school teacher was repeatedly tasered by Los Angeles police officers and restrained following a traffic accident.

In a 13-minute body-cam footage released by LAPD on Wednesday, Anderson is seen begging for help as multiple officers hold him to the ground and one officer presses his elbow along with his body weight onto his neck.



"They're trying to George Floyd me. They're trying to George Floyd me," Anderson can be heard saying in the footage, in reference to the US police killing of Floyd in May 2020 in Minneapolis that sparked racial justice protests around the world.

Kanaani further lambasted the U.S.' hypocritical policies on meddling with other countries' affairs, saying, "The American regime, which hypocritically interferes in the internal affairs of other countries and sheds crocodile tears in order to achieve political goals, remains silent regarding the extreme violence and discriminatory and hate-mongering actions of the country's police against people of color."

The Iranian spokesperson added that the US police's brutal action in murdering Anderson, which was repetition of Floyd's heinous killing, once again shocked the world.

A 2021 study in the medical journal The Lancet recorded 30,800 deaths from police violence across the country between 1980 and 2018, far higher than estimates offered by the US National Vital Statistics System.

HOSCO to Become Biggest Steel Industry Hub of Country



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The CEO of Hormozgan Steel Company (HOSCO) says the company has big developmental projects that with their implementation the company will become the steel industry hub of the country and will shine like a gem.

On the occasion of the 11th foundation anniversary of HOSCO, a photo exhibition on memories of the company was held at the Hormoz Building where the exhibition hosted the CEO and many senior officials of the company.

Addressing the participants in the exhibition, the CEO of Hormozgan Steel Company Mr. Ataollah Maroufkhani said that they are of the elites of the national steel industry and they have proved themselves in the industry.

He added that they have witnessed in all levels of the organization that their colleagues have helped efficient energy consumption by innovation and presenting new ideas and projects and they have been influential in the industry.

He also thanked the public relations of the company for holding the exhibition on the occasion of the 11th anniversary of the foundation of the company and also thanked those who worked hard to reflect the performance and achievements of his dear colleagues in the company who set many considerable records in recent years.

Maroufkhani added that his colleagues in the exploitation unit with reliance on the remarks of the Supreme Leader have fulfilled the slogan of "We Can" through increasing the production and they operationalized the increase in production in HOSCO.

He then pointed to some projects of the company in the field of indigenizing in HOSCO, noting that today they see the efficient energy consumption in the company and some of records in production and reducing energy consumption are in hands of HOSCO.

He reiterated that all these achievements are because of whole-hearted endeavors of the staff in the company.

Maroufkhani went on to say that a glance at the performance of the company shows that HOSCO is among the most successful steel-making companies and it is one of the top ranking companies in Mobarakeh Steel Company Group.

He went on to say that the company has several developmental projects will come on stream in three years and by implementation of the projects, HOSCO will become biggest steel industry hub.

Head of IDRO Visits Production Lines of SAIPA



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Deputy Minister of Industry, Mine and Trade and Head of Industrial Development and Renovation Organization of Iran (IDRO) and his entourage visited the research and innovation center and production line of Shahin car of SAIPA auto industries and got acquainted with the new productions of the company.

According to IDRO News, the CEO of IDRO Mr. Ali Nabavi on the sidelines of his visit to the production lines of SAIPA said that fortunately the auto-makers with increasing the circulation of their products have materialized the pre-set targets.

He described the performance of SAIPA appropriate and said that boosting the quality of produced cars, collecting the defected cars from the parking lots, avoiding production of low quality cars, producing new and good quality products, and increasing the guarantee duration of products are of the good actions of SAIPA.

Nabavi then pointed to President's order for privatizing the sub-sets of SAIPA Group, adding that good steps have been taken in this regard and expressed hope this would materialize very soon.

During the visit, the CEO of SAIPA auto-making group briefed Mr. Nabavi and his entourage of the performance of the company in the past year and expressed the future programs of the company.

Police Chief Meets With President Raisi

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - The Chief of the Law Enforcement Command of the Islamic Republic of Iran met and talked with President Seyed Ebrahim Raisi at President's office.

Raisi met General Ahmad Reza Radan on Saturday morning while congratulating him on his appointment as the country's police chief, and said that this appointment shows his commitment, efficiency and valuable experience in managing and guiding police forces.

The President expressed hope that the Law Enforcement Command works on the path of strengthening social security, preventing the occurrence of crime, establishing public order and discipline, spreading justice and trust building throughout the country in the new era with divine attention, relying on jihadist spirit, making optimal use of the power and capacity of self-sacrificing police forces and closer interaction with the people and public opinion.

Raisi also wished continued success for General Ahmad Reza Radan in performing this important task and serving the system of the Islamic Republic of Iran and announced the government's readiness to support the country's law enforcement forces.

In this meeting, General Ahmad Reza Radan, the Chief of the Law Enforcement Command of the Islamic Republic of Iran, presented a report on the latest situation of the country's police force and explained the plans and goals of this group in the new era.

British Envoy Summoned Over Interference in National Security Affairs

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The Iranian Foreign Ministry has summoned the British ambassador in Tehran, Simon Shercliff, over the UK's interference in Iran's internal affairs, particularly in issues pertaining to national security.

"In reaction to Britain's unconventional interventions, including in the national security field of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Simon Shercliff, the country's ambassador to Tehran, was summoned to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs by the director general of Western Europe," the ministry said in a statement.

The Iranian official conveyed to the British government the Islamic Republic's protest over London's destructive measures which run counter to Iran's national security.

The statement came on the same day that Alireza Akbari, a former Iranian official, was executed after he was sentenced to death on charges of spying for the British intelligence agency.

The convict, who had been sentenced to death on charges of "corruption on earth" and "extensive activities against the country's internal and external security" through espionage for the British government's spy agency, was hanged on Saturday.

The Iranian Foreign Ministry official told Shercliff that Iran had obtained solid information about London's unconventional communication with Akbari, saying the



UK government should be held accountable over the issue that violated the Islamic Republic's national security.

He emphasized that the "unjustified and mischievous support" for the spying agent is not compatible with the claim of relations based on mutual respect.

He said Iran would not need permission from other countries, including Britain, to take a firm action to protect its national security, and warned that the continuation of such "illegal" moves would not be acceptable at all.

The British government must accept the consequences of the continuation of such unconventional and interventionist approach, the Iranian diplomat added.

He noted that Iran's Civil Law does not recognize dual nationality and therefore London's destructive interference and remarks under such a pretext have no legal basis.

The Iranian official condemned any unorthodox move which threatens national security and called on the British diplomat to inform his respective country of Iran's protest.

This comes as Britain's Foreign Secretary James Cleverly on Saturday threatened Iran that Akbari's execution will not stand unchallenged.

"This barbaric act deserves condemnation in the strongest possible terms. This will not stand unchallenged," Cleverly said.

Iran, Turkmenistan Discuss Expansion of Economic Ties

TEHRAN (MNA) - The Islamic Republic of Iran and Turkmenistan have called for strengthening bilateral relations in the economic fields.

Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister for Economic Diplomacy Mehdi Safari met and held talks with Turkmenistan's Foreign Minister Raşit Meadow.

During the meeting, both sides exchanged views on mutual ties in the political, diplomatic, commercial, economic, cultural, and humanitarian fields.

The two sides also stressed the importance of high-level meetings in boosting bilateral friendly relations.

The meeting addressed the significance of the Turkmenistan-Iran Commission for Economic Cooperation. The agenda also included issues of developing cooperation in the fuel and energy sector, as well as creating transportation and transit potential.

Iran, Syria Enjoy Best Ties

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian says Iran and Syria enjoy the "best" level of bilateral relations and are resolute on further promotion of ties, particularly in the economic and trade fields.

"Various agreements have been signed between the two countries which are being implemented. In this trip, we agreed with the Syrian foreign minister on the extension of a document for long-term strategic cooperation between the two countries which will be signed in the near future," Amir-Abdollahian said in a joint press conference with his Syrian counterpart Faisal Mekdad in Damascus.

Pointing to his meeting with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad earlier in the day, he noted that different mutual, strategic, regional and international issues were discussed, on which the two sides have common views.

He added that the two countries' top officials are determined to bolster relations, stressing the importance of making efforts to improve economic cooperation to the same level as the political ties.

"National sovereignty and territorial integrity of the countries must be respected, and we will continue our diplomatic efforts to ... resolve the problems and differences between Syria and Turkey," the top Iranian diplomat said.

Unrest Not for Women's Rights But for Enfeebling National Authority

TEHRAN (IRNA) - The recent unrest in Iran took place not to defend women's rights but to weaken the country's national authority, an official believes.

Mohammad Dehghan, Vice-President for Legal Affairs, said that the constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran literally protects the rights of women, while the West, which claims to be supporter of human rights and women's rights, has the worst record in violation of the women's rights.

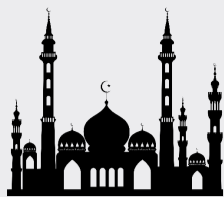
In the recent unrest in Iran, women from all walks of life and with different political backgrounds stood against perilous plots hatched by the enemies, the official said.

Contrary to the liberal and retrograde ways of thinking, which promote materialistic and violent approach towards women, Islam and the Shia sect respect the position of women, he noted.

The Islamic Republic pursues the tradition and performances of the main figures of the holy religion when it comes to observing the importance position of women, he said, adding that women are active in high-ranking management positions in Iran.

The statistics of women's participation in higher education, administrative positions as well as contribution to the generation of science and technology in the country prove the fact that the Islamic system in Iran attaches significance to the female citizens, Dehghan argued.

Referring to guidelines made by the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution, he noted that people's hijab should not be source of judgment on their stance towards the Revolution, and that the pro-US elements cannot weaken religious identity of the Iranians.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	12:14
■ Evening (Maghreb)	17:34
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	05:44
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	07:12

122. But his Lord chose him (for His Grace):
He turned to him, and gave him Guidance.
123. He said: "Get ye down, both of you, - all together, from the Garden, with enmity one to another:
but if, as is sure, there comes to you Guidance from Me, whosoever follows
My Guidance, will not lose his way, nor fall into misery. Surah 20. Ta-ha (122 - 123)

Iran, Pakistan Agree To Boost Trade

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The Iran-Pakistan Joint Border Trade Committee at a meeting agreed to remove hurdles, increase bilateral legal trade and implement the barter agreement for achieving the target of trade between the two countries.

The Iranian delegation at the committee's 10th meeting was led by Sistan-Baluchestan's Deputy Governor Dawood Shaharki while the Pakistani delegation was led by Customs Chief Collectors Abdul Qadir Memon.

Iranian Consul General Quetta Hasan Darwish, Quetta Chamber of Commerce and Industry President Haji Abdullah Achakzai, Senior Vice President Haji Agha Gul Khilji and other leading business leaders and senior officials of the relevant departments also attended the meeting.

Mr Shaharki said Iran was striving to achieve the set trade target with Pakistan and remove obstacles through cooperation.

"We are ready to open more border markets with Pakistan," he said, adding there was a need to implement the agreement reached between the two countries in the 2010 meeting of the committee.

Customs Chief Collector Abdul Qadir Memon said it was important to achieve the



goals set between the two countries and boost trade. He emphasized the need for cooperation for development and increasing trade.

Mr Achakzai said business people and industry leaders want direct flights between Quetta in Pakistan and Zahedan in Iran.

"We want free bilateral trade between both the countries based on equality," he added.

He said there should be more concerted efforts to increase the quantum of business and trade between the two neighbouring countries through legal routes. He suggested establishing a separate gate at the Pak-Iran border at Taftan for the business community so that they do not face any difficulty in the transportation of their goods.

Raisi's Visit to China Good Opportunity To Speed Up 25-Year Plan

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Head of Iran-China Friendship Association Alaeddin Boroujerdi has underlined that the future trip by President Ebrahim Raisi to China will help speed up the implementation of the Iran-China 25-year Cooperation Program.

The authorities of the Islamic Republic expect China, a friendly and capable country, to take important steps in order to enhance ties.

Boroujerdi said that the Iran-China Friendship Association is not satisfied with the current speed of pursuing the cooperation program, urging the two countries' officials to accelerate the process.

The official urged the Chinese officials to invest in the development projects in Iran to improve the tourism industry in the Islamic nation.

As to the lifting of coronavirus-related lockdowns in China, Boroujerdi expressed hope that the new situation would lead to more cooperation and travel between the two countries.

The Iran-China Friendship Association collaborated with the Chinese embassy in Tehran to prepare a software to give thorough information about the Iranian tourist attractions in the Chinese language, he added.

The implementation of the Iran-China 25-year Cooperation Program can pave the way for carrying out joint ventures in different arenas such as transit, manufacturing, energy, economic, trade, and political fields, he said.

Next Year Budget Bill Allocates \$775m to Transport, Urban Development Ministry

TEHRAN (MNA) - The budget bill for the next Iranian calendar year 1402, which starts on March 21, has allocated 310 trillion rials (about \$775 million) to Transport and Urban Development Ministry.

Of the mentioned figure, more than 150 trillion rials (about \$374 million) is allocated to the Construction and Development of Transportation Infrastructure Company (CDTIC) to complete railway and freeway projects.

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

The president mentioned stable economic growth, people's livelihood, observing justice, and efficiency of the government system as the main approaches of the budget bill and stated: "In this bill, the establishment of a progress and justice fund in all provinces is foreseen so that the development credits of the provinces are paid systematically."

Raisi also said, "We have included the important points considered by the Leader in the general policies of the Seventh National Development Plan (2022-2026) in the drafting of the 1402 budget bill."

As reported, reforming the budget structure, creating transparency, attracting governmental and private sector investments for completing semi-finished projects, and implementing the government's integrated financial management system are highlighted in the budget bill for the next year.

The proposed budget amounted to about 52.616 quadrillion rials (about \$131.54 billion at the free market rate of 400,000 rials), with a 40 percent rise from the current year's budget.

The bill has estimated the government's budget at 21.64 quadrillion rials (about \$54.1 billion).

Public resources are estimated at 19.84 quadrillion rials (about \$49.6 billion).

The crude oil income is predicted to be 6.03 quadrillion rials (about \$15.075 billion), and oil sales are estimated at 1.4 million barrels per day at an average price of \$85.

Like the current year's budget, the next year's proposed budget requires the government to pay 40 percent of its oil, gas, and gas condensate revenues to National Development Fund (NDF).

Tax revenues are predicted to be 8.386 quadrillion rials (about \$20.965 billion).

The budget bill for the year 1402 is printed and distributed among the members of the parliament after its presentation and they will have 10 days to submit their proposals and reviews on the budget to relevant specialized committees.

Specialized committees will also have 15 days to submit their reviews to the parliament ad hoc budget review committee (known as Talfiq Committee).

Talfiq Committee is a body consisting of MPs from different committees which is established each year to study the national budget bill.

Petchem Investors Urged to Tap Domestic Capabilities

TEHRAN (Shana) -- The CEO of the National Petrochemical Company (NPC) addressed the executives and investors of petrochemical projects, and said: "Try to use the abilities, knowledge and capacities of domestic companies more than before."

According to NPC, Morteza Shahmirzaei emphasized the need to trust the capacities available inside the country to provide technical know-how, goods and equipment for the petrochemical industry, and stated: "Petrochemical Research and Technology Company (PRTC) is ready to provide technical know-how and catalysts needed in petrochemical projects and fortunately there are capable companies to provide for other needs."



He added: "Completing the value chain and reducing crude sales as a strategy is of special interest to the government, and we must take steps with the aim of creating more value added for the production of final and diverse petrochemical products."

The NPC CEO continued: "The will and ability of those involved in the Iranian petrochemical industry have facilitated completion of the development plans with perseverance and seriousness, and for this purpose, all the departments of NPC are ready for any cooperation and support for these projects to solve the potential problems and challenges in the way of full exploitation."

Herbal Export Can Be Increased

TEHRAN (MNA) - The chairman of the Union of Medicinal Plants Exporters of Iran said the country's export of medicinal plants can be increased through compliance more with the world standards.

Mohammad-Ali Rezaei Kamal-Abad stated that world standards are increasing due to the health-oriented consumption of herbal products, and failure to comply with these standards will lead to the return or destruction of these products.

"In the past years, poisons have entered the country, which are not only not used in other countries, but have also caused water and soil pollution in our country", he lamented.

Referring to the importance of agricultural product export standardization, he added: "Standardization is done in our country, but this standardization is not up-to-date. With the coordination of ministries, expenditure and updating of information can help to standardize agricultural products and develop the export of these products", he commented.

As previously announced by Rezaei Kamal-Abad, the value of medicinal plants exported from the country in the past Iranian calendar year 1400 (ended on March 20, 2022) was nearly 600 million dollars, but in the first nine months of this year, the value of the export of medicinal plants has decreased by 50 percent compared to the same period last year.

He said that having more than 11 climates out of 13 climates, Iran has 8,000 varieties of medicinal plants, which is at least twice as much as Europe.

According to global statistics, from 2020 to 2022, the turnover in the export of medicinal plants was more than 30 billion dollars, but of this amount, the export of medicinal plants from Iran was less than five percent, he further lamented.

He pointed out that in many countries of the world, the use of medicinal plants has become popular among the people, and said countries such as the U.S., China, and Germany are the main consumers of medicinal plants, so 65 percent of the drugs produced in Germany are of herbal origin.

Complaining about the drop in the export of the country's medicinal plants in the current year, Rezaei Kamal-Abad said, "Forex obligation, non-mechanization of agricultural systems, non-holding of the international exhibition, bulk export of medicinal plants, and cumbersome laws for producers are some of our most important weaknesses in the export of medicinal plants".

SPGC Indigenizes Knowledge for Manufacturing 1,386 Equipment Items

TEHRAN (MNA) - Experts and engineers at South Pars Gas Company (SPGC) have managed to indigenize the knowledge for the production of 1,386 items and parts used in the country's gas industry during the first nine months of the current Iranian year (March 21-December 21, 2022), Shana reported on Saturday.

The engineers and specialists of the company's central workshop are working every day for the domestic manufacturing of the parts and equipment needed in this complex in order to realize the programs defined in the current year which is named the year of knowledge-based production and job-creation and also to ensure sustained gas production during the cold season, SPGC Head Ahmad Bahoush said.

Hormozgan Province Exports Over 46K Tons of Aquatic Products

TEHRAN (MNA) - More than 46,000 tons of aquatic products have been exported from Hormozgan province in southern Iran.

The caretaker of the aquatic department of Hormozgan province said that the exported amount of aquatic products was worth over \$76 million in the first nine months of the Iranian year.

Sasan Sadeghi went on to say that Persian Gulf states, Russia, Vietnam, Malaysia, Thailand, and China are the main export destination in this regard.

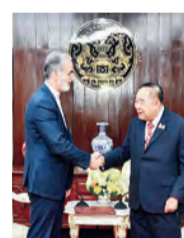
Hormozgan province ranked first in exporting aquatic products in terms of tonnage last year, he further noted.

Earlier, the Iranian Minister of Agriculture said that the export of aquatics products has seen a 68 percent surge in the first seven months.

Iranian Tourists Invited To Visit Thailand

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Thailand's Deputy Prime Minister Gen. Prawit Wongsuwan welcomed Iranian ambassador to Thailand Seyed Reza Nobakhti during the latter's courtesy call. The two discussed guidelines for promoting Thai-Iranian bilateral relations.



Deputy Prime Minister Gen. Prawit Wongsuwan has discussed Thai-Iranian cooperation with the Iranian ambassador. He is also inviting Iranian tourists to visit Thailand as the Covid situation has now lifted.

Deputy Prime Minister Gen. Prawit Wongsuwan welcomed Iranian ambassador to Thailand Seyed Reza Nobakhti during the latter's courtesy call. The two discussed guidelines for promoting Thai-Iranian bilateral relations. Gen. Prawit said the Thai government is committed to fostering the good relations that both countries have. He added the Thai government will take pleasure in promoting cooperation in the aspects of security, energy, economics, trade, agriculture, society, culture, and public health. The government will also work to advance the exchange of Thai rice with fertilizers from Iran, to serve as a starting point for the trade of other commodities.

The Thai government is also asking Iran to support Thailand's bid to host the Phuket Specialized Expo in 2028.

Iranian tourists are being invited to visit Thailand in greater numbers as the COVID-19 situation has improved. Gen. Prawit indicated Thailand now has the readiness to accommodate tourists from all over the world.

H.E. Mr. Seyed Reza Nobakhti thanked Gen. Prawit for giving him a warm welcome. He pledged to support Iranian cooperation with the Thai government and the Thai public in various forms.

Iranian tourists are being invited to visit Thailand in greater numbers as the COVID-19 situation has improved while Gen. Prawit indicated Thailand now has the readiness to accommodate tourists from all over the world.

Bolsonaro's Ex-Justice Minister Arrested

BRASILIA (Dispatches) - Brazil's former Justice Minister Anderson Torres, who was in charge of public security in Brasilia during the invasion of government buildings a week ago, was arrested in Brasilia on suspicion of "omission" and "connivance".

Torres was arrested after returning to Brazil on Saturday. He had been on vacation in Florida, the same U.S. state his ex-boss, former right-wing President Jair Bolsonaro, had traveled to after losing last year's election.

Demosthenes Torres, one of Torres' lawyers, confirmed the arrest to Reuters.

The ex-minister said on Thursday that evidence produced by police was taken out of context when his home was raided this week.



UK Pledges to Provide Battle Tanks to Ukraine

LONDON (Dispatches) - The United Kingdom Prime Minister Rishi Sunak is pledging to provide tanks and artillery systems to Ukraine amid renewed missile attacks by Russia on Ukrainian cities.

Sunak offered to send Challenger 2 tanks and other artillery systems in a call with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on Saturday, the British leader's Downing Street office said in a statement.

The statement did not say how many or when the tanks would be delivered to Ukraine.

Sunak said the tanks were a sign of the UK's "ambition to intensify our support to Ukraine", according to a readout of a phone call with Zelenskyy.



Russian Missile Hits Apartment Block in Ukraine's Dnipro



KYIV (Dispatches) - Russia unleashed a major missile attack on Ukraine on Saturday, smashing a nine-storey apartment block in the city of Dnipro, killing at least five people and striking vital energy facilities, officials said.

Ukraine's energy minister said the coming days would be "difficult" as months of Russian bombardment of the power grid threaten the supply of electricity, running water and central heating at the height of winter.

In the east-central city of Dnipro, 20 people were rescued from an apartment block where an entire section of the building had been reduced to rubble, sending smoke billowing into the sky, the deputy head of Ukraine's presidential office said.

"Tragedy. I've gone to the site.... We will be going through the rubble all night," said Borys Filatov, mayor of the rocket-making city on the Dnipro River.

Five people were killed and at least 60 people, including 12 children, were also wounded in the attack, with more people were still trapped under the rubble, the regional governor said.

Another person was killed and one wounded in the steel-making city of Kryviy Rih where six houses were damaged in President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's hometown, mayor Oleksandr Vilkul said.

In his nightly speech, Zelenskyy appealed to the West to supply more weapons to prevent further deaths from what he described as "Russian terror".

"What's needed for this? The kind of weapons that our partners have in stockpiles and that our warriors have come to expect. The whole world knows what and how to stop those who are sowing death," he said.

Saturday's attack comes as Western powers consider sending battle tanks to Kyiv and ahead of a meeting of Ukraine's allies in Ramstein in Germany next Friday where governments will announce their latest pledges of military support.

On the front lines in the east, Ukraine said its forces were battling to hold onto control of the small town of Soledar where Russia has sacrificed large numbers of troops and resources to try to secure some kind of advance after months of setbacks.

In Dnipro, pictures showed firefighters putting out a blaze around the carcasses of some cars. A broad chunk of the apartment block was missing. The exterior of the rest of the building was badly damaged. Wounded people were carried away on stretchers.

Russia, which invaded Ukraine last February, has been pounding its energy infrastructure with missiles and drones since October, causing sweeping blackouts and disruptions to central heating and running water. Ukraine shot down 25 of 38 Russian missiles of different types, the Air Force said.

Missiles struck critical infrastructure facilities in the eastern region of Kharkiv and the western region of Lviv, officials said. Kharkiv region lost power completely and disruptions to electricity and water supplies in Lviv were also possible, officials said. Moldova's interior ministry said missile debris had been found in the north of the country near the Ukraine border following the air strikes.

The attack on Saturday came hours after a smaller-scale missile attack hit critical infrastructure in Kyiv and the eastern city of Kharkiv.

Thousands of Tunisians Rally Against President

TUNIS (Dispatches) - Protesters pushed through police barricades as they demonstrated against Tunisian President Kais Saied's seizure of near total power in central Tunis, the anniversary of a key date in the 2011 revolution that brought democracy.

The opposition remains divided in its quest to push Saied from office and Saturday's protests are split among several different groups that police said should demonstrate in separate, specified areas.

However, protesters said they planned to defy the police instructions and march towards the central Habib Bourguiba Avenue, the traditional site of rallies, and they pushed through barricades, a Reuters reporter there said.

"We were on Bourguiba in January 2011 when Saied was not present... today he is closing Bourguiba to us. We will reach it whatever the price," said Chaima Issa, an activist who took part in the 2011 revolution.

Hundreds of protesters were present in just one of the locations where Reuters was present. A large police presence was visible outside the Interior Ministry building on Habib Bouguiba Avenue, along with water cannon.

Saied shut down the elected parliament in 2021 and began to reshape the political system, but low turnout for December's election of a new, mostly powerless, legislature revealed little public appetite for his changes.

The main political forces, including most parties and the labor union, now oppose Saied's project, with many of them calling it an anti-democratic coup.

However, they have failed to repair deep ideological and personal fissures that divided them for years rather than forming a united front.

Many parties still reject a role for the biggest party, the Islamist Ennahda. The powerful UGTT labor union seeks a national dialogue but will not invite any party that accuses Saied of a coup.

The protests come 12 years to the day after the ousting of former autocrat, Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali, and January 14 is seen by most Tunisian parties and civil society groups as the anniversary of the revolution.



North Korea Slams UN Chief Over Nuclear Criticism

SEOUL (Dispatches) - North Korea slammed United Nations chief Antonio Guterres on Saturday over his recent description of Pyongyang's nuclear programs as a "clear and present danger".

Military tensions on the Korean peninsula rose sharply last year as the North conducted sanctions-busting weapons tests nearly every month, including firing its most advanced intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM).

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un also recently called for an "exponential" increase in Pyongyang's nuclear arsenal and new ICBMs to counter what it termed US and South Korean hostility.

Guterres told the UN Security Council on Thursday the onus was on Pyongyang to resume talks, which collapsed in 2019 when nuclear negotiations between Kim and then-US president Donald Trump broke down in Hanoi.

"The unlawful nuclear weapons programme being pursued by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea is a clear and present danger, driving risks and geopolitical tensions to new heights," Guterres told a Security Council meeting on the rule of law that was chaired by Japanese foreign minister Yoshimasa Hayashi.

Guterres released a statement late on Saturday in which it accused Guterres of having "typical double-standards" and committing the "dangerous act of destroying the trust of the world community in the UN".

The statement, attributed to Jo Chol Su, a senior official in Pyongyang's foreign ministry, also said Guterres was ignoring a "reckless arms buildup" by the United States that was "constantly bringing all sorts of nuclear strike means to the Korean peninsula and the region". Jo also accused Japan of having "no moral and legal qualification" to be part of the UN Security Council because of its wartime and colonial past.

Pyongyang's statement, carried by the official Korean Central News Agency, reiterated that the North will never give up its nuclear weapons.

Thousands of Teachers Take to Lisbon Streets to Demand Higher Wages

LISBON (Dispatches) - In a fresh blow to Portugal's government, tens of thousands of Portuguese teachers and school staff poured into the streets of the capital Lisbon to demand higher wages and better working conditions in one of the biggest protests of recent years.

During the peaceful demonstration, organized by the Union of All Education Professionals (STOP), protesters held banners and shouted slogans as they urged Education Minister Joao Costa to step down.

Teachers on the lowest pay scale make around 1,100 euros (\$1,191.08) per month and even teachers in the top band typically earn less than 2,000 euros monthly. Protesters say current wages are too low, particularly given the cost of living crisis.

"Teachers deserve a fair salary because we've worked all our lives... we've never been corrupt and we've never stolen like the bad example that is unfortunately coming from politicians," 62-year-old history teacher Maria Duarte said as waited for the march to kick off.

The Socialists, led by Prime Minister Antonio Costa, won an outright parliamentary majority in an election a year ago but the government has had a bumpy ride

since then, with 13 ministers and secretaries of state leaving their roles, some over allegations of past misconduct or questionable practices.

"It would be good for the leaders who are watching this demonstration to think very carefully about what they are going to do next because we want this to have consequences; we want serious measures to be taken," said maths teacher Aitor Matos.

The 47-year-old said teachers were "constantly losing income" and were often placed in schools far from home.

Protesters, some wearing black to mourn the state of the education sector, said the government has done little to improve their situation.

"We have to be respected," said special needs teacher Lucinda Lopes, 52. "They must give us what is rightfully ours and they can't take away the little we have."

Teachers across the country have been on strike since early December, leaving many students unable to attend lessons. The education minister said on Friday he might force some teachers back to work by decreeing minimum services.



Biden's Counsel Finds Five More Classified Pages

WILMINGTON (Dispatches) - U.S. President Joe Biden's counsel said that five additional pages with classified markings were discovered at the president's Wilmington, Delaware, home on Thursday, and they were immediately handed over to Justice Department officials.

Biden's special counsel, Richard Sauber, said he traveled to Biden's Wilmington home on Thursday to facilitate the handover to the Justice Department of a document with classified markings that was found there earlier.

"While I was transferring it to the DOJ officials who accompanied me, five additional pages with classification markings were discovered among the material with it, for a total of six pages. The DOJ officials with me immediately took possession of them," Sauber said in a statement.

Biden's legal team acknowledged this week 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. U.S. Attorney General Merrick Garland named a special counsel on Thursday to probe the matter.

"How many more classified documents will they find at Joe Biden's house?" the Republican House Judiciary Committee said in a tweet early on Saturday.

Sauber said Biden's lawyer have acted "immediately and voluntarily" to handover all the documents found to the proper authorities.

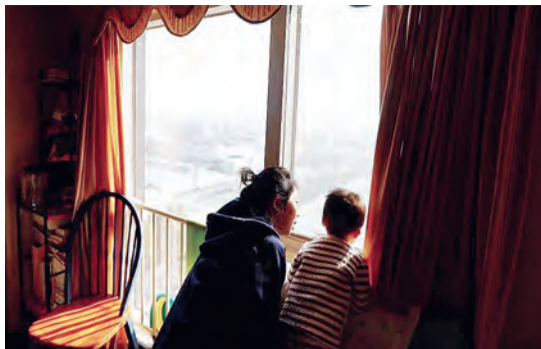
"We have now publicly released specific details about the documents identified, how they were identified, and where they were found. The appointment of the special counsel in this matter this week means we will now refer specific questions to the special counsel's office moving forward. As I said Thursday, the White House will cooperate with the newly appointed special counsel," he said. Biden is spending the weekend at his Wilmington home with his wife, Jill Biden, who underwent surgery on Wednesday to remove skin lesions from her face and chest.

Biden was asked by a reporter on Thursday about the wisdom of storing important material next to his Corvette. The self-declared 'car guy' president said both were in a locked garage.

"It's not like they're sitting out in the street," he said. "People know I take classified documents and classified material seriously."



China Set for Historic Demographic Turn



HONG KONG (Dispatches) - Living under China's stringent COVID-19 restrictions for the past three years had caused Zhang Qi enough stress and uncertainty to consider not having babies in the country.

When China abruptly dismantled its "zero COVID" regime last month to let the virus spread freely, the balance tilted to a definite "No", the Shanghai-based e-commerce executive said.

Stories about mothers and babies not being able to see doctors as medical facilities were overwhelmed by COVID infections were the final straw for Zhang.

"I heard that giving birth at a public hospital is just horrific. I really wouldn't consider having a baby," the 31-year-old said.

A glimpse of the scars caused by the pandemic to China's already bleak demographic outlook may come to light when it reports its official 2022 population data on Jan. 17.

Some demographers expect China's population in 2022 to post its first drop since the Great Famine in 1961, a profound shift with far-reaching implications for the global economy and world order.

New births for 2022 are set to fall to record lows, dropping below 10 million from last year's 10.6 million babies - which were already 11.5% lower than in 2020.

"With this historical turn, China has entered a long and irreversible process of population decline, the first time in China and the world's history," said Wang Feng, professor of Sociology at University of California.

"In less than 80 years China's population size could be reduced by 45%. It will be a China unrecognisable by the world then."

China's total population increased by 480,000 to 1.4126 billion in 2021. The United Nations predicts China's population will start to decline this year when India overtakes it as the world's most populous country.

U.N. experts see China's population shrinking by 109 million by 2050, more than triple the decline of their previous forecast in 2019.

While nine of the 10 most populous nations in the world are experiencing declines in fertility, China's 2022 fertility rate of 1.18 was the lowest and well below the 2.1 OECD standard for a stable population.

The country, which imposed a one-child policy from 1980-2015, officially acknowledged it was on the brink of a demographic downturn last year, when the National Health Commission said the population may start declining before 2025.

In October, President Xi Jinping said the government would enact further policies to boost the country's birth rate.

Since 2021 authorities have introduced measures including tax deductions, longer maternity leave, enhanced medical insurance, and housing subsidies to incentivize people to have more babies.

Their impact so far has been lacklustre.

Online searches for baby strollers on China's Baidu dropped 17% in 2022 and are down 41% since 2018, while searches for baby bottles are down more than a third since 2018. In contrast, searches for elderly care homes surged eight-fold last year.

The reverse is playing out in India, where Google Trends shows a 15% year-on-year increase in searches for baby bottles in 2022, while searches for cribs rose almost five-fold.

The financial burden of children's education, some of the most stressful college entrance exams in the world and a nursery enrollment of only around 5.5% for children under 3 years - far lower than the OECD average - are key factors affecting the fertility rate, the YuWa Population Research think tank said this month.

Why Japan Is Seeking Military Ties Beyond Its U.S. Ally



TOKYO (Dispatches) - Before meeting President Joe Biden in Washington D.C., Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida visited Italy, France, Britain and Canada, in part to forge security ties that could help it fend off China, North Korea and Russia.

In June, Japan's defense minister at the time, Nobuo Kishi, said his country was surrounded by nuclear-armed nations that refused to adhere to international norms of behaviour.

In the wake of Moscow's attack on Ukraine, Kishida has described security in East Asia as "fragile."

At the top of Japan's threat list is China, which it worries could attack Taiwan or nearby Japanese islands. Chinese military activity is intensifying around the East China Sea, including joint air and sea drills with Russia.

At the same time, North Korea has fired missiles into the Sea of Japan, and in October lobbed an intermediate-range missile over Japan for the first time since 2017.

For the past seven decades, Japan, which gave up the right to wage war after its defeat in World War Two, has relied on the United States for protection.

In return for its promise to defend the country, the U.S. gets bases that allow it to maintain a major military presence in East Asia.

Japan hosts 54,000 American troops, hundreds of military aircraft, and dozens of warships led by Washington's only forward-deployed aircraft carrier.

As China's military power grows alongside its economy, the regional power balance has shifted in Beijing's favor. China's defense spending overtook Tokyo's two decades ago and is now more than four times larger.

Encouraged by the United States, Japan in December unveiled its biggest military build up since World War Two, with a commitment to double defense spending to 2% of GDP within five years.

That will include money for missiles with ranges of more than 1,000 kilometres (621 miles) that could strike targets in China.

Beijing, however, is expected to continue expanding its military capabilities, and is likely to field ever more sophisticated weapons.

For that reason, and again with Washington's support, Japan is seeking new security partners to back it up both militarily and diplomatically.

That effort, for now, has focused on countries that are also strong U.S. allies, including Australia, Britain and France. Tokyo is also looking for closer security ties with India, which since 2004 has met regularly with Japan, the United States and Australia to discuss regional diplomacy as a member of the Quad group.

In London on Jan. 11, during his tour of fellow G7 countries, Kishida signed a reciprocal access defence agreement with British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak that will make it easier for the two countries to conduct military drills in each other's territory.

Japan is chair of the G7 this year and will be host to its leaders in Hiroshima in May.

As Britain tilts more towards Asia, it has sought closer defence ties. In 2021, it sent the new HMS Queen Elizabeth aircraft carrier on a visit to Japan, and announced that it would permanently deploy two warships in Asian waters.

In December, Japan announced it would build a new jet fighter with Britain and Italy, its first major international defence project with a country other than the United States since the end of World War Two.

Since the start of the Ukraine war, Japan's sometimes-troubled relationship with neighbouring South Korea has also improved, opening up the possibility of closer military cooperation between the two U.S. allies.



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OPEC+ Faces Oil Market Volatility in Both Supply and Demand

CAIRO (Dispatches) - OPEC+ is facing "volatile prospects" in oil markets both in supply and demand, UAE energy minister Suhail al-Mazrouei told Asharq TV.

He said this was due to European sanctions on Russian crude taking effect in addition to China lifting its "zero-COVID" policy. OPEC+ production capacity was down 3.7 mln bpd due to fewer investments in the oil sector, Al-Mazrouei said.

He also said UAE is taking preemptive steps to compensate for the reduced oil production capacity in some countries by bringing forward its five million barrel per day oil production capacity expansion to 2027 from a previous target of 2030.



Russian Oil Shipped to Asia in Chinese Supertankers Amid Ship Shortage

NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - At least four Chinese-owned supertankers are shipping Russian Urals crude to China, according to trading sources and tracking data, as Moscow seeks vessels for exports after a G7 oil price cap restricted the use of Western cargo services and insurance.

China, the world's top oil importer, has continued buying Russian oil despite Western sanctions, after Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese leader Xi Jinping launched what they called a no-limit partnership before the war in Ukraine.

The sources said a fifth supertanker, or very large crude carrier (VLCC), was shipping crude to India, which like China has continued buying Russian oil sold at a discount as many Western buyers turn to other suppliers.

All five shipments were scheduled between Dec. 22 and Jan. 23, according to the sources and Eikon ship tracking data.

The G7 price cap introduced in December allows countries outside the European Union to import seaborne Russian oil but it prohibits shipping, insurance and re-insurance companies from handling Russian crude cargoes unless sold for below the \$60 cap.

"With Urals prices well below the price cap, the business of buying and trading Urals is essentially legitimate," said an executive with a Chinese firm involved in the shipments.

As the United States and its allies tried to choke off Moscow's energy revenues to limit its ability to fund the Ukraine war, Russia quickly diverted oil exports from Europe last year, mainly to Asia. The longer voyages, heavy discounts and record-high freight rates ate into profits but the use of supertankers on the Asian routes may now cut shipping costs.

The Russian energy and transport ministries declined to comment. China's Foreign Ministry did not respond to a request for comment, although Beijing has previously called the Western sanctions on Russia illegal.

Indian Oil Minister Hardeep Singh Puri said at a press briefing on Thursday that India would buy oil from wherever it could secure the cheapest price.

Industry sources say Indian refiners are securing a discount of \$15-\$20 per barrel on Russian oil on a delivered basis compared to Brent.

Russia is sending Urals from its Western ports for transshipment to supertankers Lauren II, Monica S, Catalina 7 and Natalina 7, all Panama-flagged ships bound for China, while the Sao Paulo is already approaching India, according to three trading sources and Eikon data.

Based on Eikon data and public maritime databases, Lauren II is managed by China's Greetee Co Ltd and owned by China's Maisie Ltd, Catalina 7 is owned by Hong Kong's Canes Venatici Ltd and Natalina 7 by Hong Kong's Astrid Menks Ltd with both managed by China's Runne Co Ltd, while Monica S is owned by China's Gabrielle Ltd and managed by Derector Co Ltd. The Sao Paulo is owned and managed by Cyprus-based Rotimo Holdings Ltd.

Reuters was unable to immediately contact the owners and managers because of a lack of public information about them.

The executive with the Chinese firm involved in the shipments estimated a total of 18 Chinese supertankers and another 16 Aframax-sized vessels could be used for shipping Russian crude in 2023, enough to transport 15 million tonnes a year or about 10% of total Urals exports.

A VLCC can carry up to 2 million barrels, a Suezmax vessel up to 1 million barrels and Aframax up to 0.6 million barrels.

While most Russian crude is now heading to China, India and Turkey in Russian or non-western ships, G7 sanctions have led to a shortage of smaller ice-class tankers - many belonging to Greek and Norwegian companies - needed by Russia to transport its crude from Baltic Sea ports in winter.

German Economy Still Defies Recession

BERLIN (Dispatches) - Same procedure as every year. The German statistical office just released a first estimate for GDP growth in 2022, without having any single hard data point for the month of December. According to this first estimate, the German economy grew by 1.9% year-on-year, from 2.6% in 2021. Definitely not bad for a year with lockdowns and a war. However, to put things in perspective: the German economy has only just returned to its size of late 2019. Three years of crisis have not passed by unnoticed.

The most important element of this annual growth rate is what it means for fourth quarter growth. According to the statistical office, the German economy stagnated in the fourth quarter, after growing by 0.4% quarter-on-quarter in the third quarter. In the past, these implied estimates for the final quarter were very accurate. However, at the current juncture, the economic performance in December could have been more volatile and disruptive than in the past; think of the weather impact, longer Christmas breaks and stronger-than-expected impact from the energy crisis on consumption and production. We think that this estimate for the fourth quarter will still be revised somewhat. In any case, today's data shows that for the entire year 2022, the catch-up effect after the end of lockdowns, both for consumption and production, outweighed the economic fallout from the war in Ukraine. In the final months of the year, fiscal support also cushioned the downswing.

Looking ahead, the post-lockdown catch-up is over and will not support economic activity in 2023. The adverse effects from the war and the energy crisis are likely to prevail and will be a drag on the economy. Weakening new industrial orders since February last year and weak consumer confidence are just two of many reasons for more trouble ahead for the German economy.

Still, the New Year started on a more optimistic footing for the German economy. The mild temperatures almost seem to have ended the energy supply crisis, at least for now. National gas reserves have increased again, and consumption is clearly below historical averages. While the warm weather should actually ring alarm bells in terms of climate change, it is a welcome surprise for the economy. That said, the weather is far from predictable and the economic safety net is built on fiscal stimulus.

More generally, let's not forget that the German economy is still facing a series of challenges which are likely to weigh on growth this year and beyond: energy supply in the winter of 2023/24, changing global trade with more geopolitical risks and changes to supply chains, high investment needs for digitalization and infrastructure and an increasing lack of skilled workers.



India to Seek Easing of EU Steel Quotas, Tariffs in Trade Talks

NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - India will seek an easing of European Union steel import quotas and tariffs in talks for a new trade deal as Indian steelmakers struggle to sell the alloy in one of world's big markets, a senior government official said.

Last year, India and the EU relaunched negotiations for a free trade agreement with the aim of completing talks by the end of 2023. The two sides previously launched talks in 2007, but they were frozen in 2013 due to a lack of progress. "India is likely to take up the issue of EU's steel import quota and their high tariffs during the free trade negotiations," said the official with direct knowledge of the matter. The official declined to be named as India's plan to take up the issue with the EU is confidential.

India's steel and trade ministries did not immediately reply to a Reuters email seeking comment.

The EU uses a system of quotas and tariffs to protect its steelmakers. Other than India, the main exporters of steel to the EU are China, Russia, South Korea, Turkey and Ukraine.

"Secondary steel manufacturers have raised the issue of EU's export quota and tariffs coming in the way of India's steel exports to the EU," the official said.

In its negotiations with the EU, India is also expected to express New Delhi's concerns over EU countries' proposed carbon dioxide emissions tariff on imports of polluting goods such as steel and cement.

"All these countries in order to protect their industries, force their standards," the official said.

Separately, India has launched four investigations against Chinese stainless steel imports to probe potential "dumping", the official said.

Indonesia to Stop Exporting Copper Ore Starting Mid-2023

JAKARTA (Dispatches) - Indonesia will stop exporting copper ore this year to increase domestic processing of the metal and boost exports of processed products, Indonesian President Joko Widodo said.

Indonesia prohibited exports of its nickel ore on January 1, 2020. The ban was considered illegal by the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the EU, since nickel is used in stainless steel production involving thousands of workers

throughout the world. In December, Widodo also announced that the country would stop exports of bauxite ore starting mid-2023 to boost domestic processing.

"We have not given up after losing in the WTO on the nickel issue. We will go even further than just banning bauxite exports. In the middle of the year, we will stop exports of copper ore," Widodo was quoted as saying by Detik news outlet.

According to Detik, the president plans to ban exports of raw ore in an effort to get more added value for processed minerals and increase profits from their exports.

The Indonesian leader criticized the EU for complaining to the WTO about the ban on nickel ore exports, saying it was trying to hamper the country's economic development through neocolonial practices.

"The EU includes countries that colonized Indonesia in the past. And now the position of the EU is almost identical to the one that existed during the Dutch colonial period in Indonesia... Restricting opportunities for the economic growth is the tricky practice that does not belong in this century," the president added.

At the same time, Indonesian Investment Minister Bahlil Lahadalia noted that the country also intended to put restrictions on building nickel plants so as to focus more on green industry.

"Restricting building of plants is a form of the government's care for developing products focused on green energy and green industry," the minister was quoted by Detik as saying.

In October, Lahadalia said that the country was looking into the possibility of establishing a cartel, similar to the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), for nickel and other key metals. The goal of such a cartel would be to protect the country's metal industry and economy, according to the minister.

Yellen Warns of U.S. Default Risk By Early June

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - U.S. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said the United States will likely hit the \$31.4 trillion statutory debt limit on Jan. 19, forcing the Treasury to launch extraordinary cash management measures that can likely prevent default until early June.

"Once the limit is reached, Treasury will need to start taking certain extraordinary measures to prevent the United States from defaulting on its obligations," Yellen said in a letter to new Republican House of Representatives Speaker Kevin McCarthy and other congressional leaders.

She urged the lawmakers to act quickly to raise the debt ceiling to "protect the full faith and credit" of the United States.

"While Treasury is not currently able to provide an estimate of how long extraordinary measures will enable us to continue to pay the government's obligations, it is unlikely that cash and extraordinary measures will be exhausted before early June," the letter said.

Republicans now in control of the House have threatened to use the debt ceiling as leverage to demand spending cuts from Democrats and the Biden administration. This has raised concerns in Washington and on Wall Street about a bruising fight over the debt ceiling this year that could be at least as disruptive as the protracted battle of 2011, which prompted a brief downgrade of the U.S. credit rating and years of forced domestic and military spending cuts.

The White House said on Friday after Yellen's letter that it will not negotiate over raising the debt ceiling.

"This should be done without conditions," White House spokesperson Karine Jean-Pierre told reporters. "There's going to be no negotiation over it."



House Republicans are planning to move a "debt prioritization" measure by the end of March that would call on the U.S. Treasury to continue making certain payments once it reaches the debt ceiling, but details have not been finalized, a person familiar with the plan told Reuters. The proposal was first reported by the Washington Post.

The Republican plan will call on the Treasury Department to keep making interest payments on the debt, the Post reported, citing sources. It may also stipulate the Treasury should continue making payments on Social Security, Medicare and veterans benefits, and fund the military, the newspaper said.

The plan was part of a private deal reached this month to resolve the standoff between right-wing hardliners in the House and McCarthy over his election as House speaker, the Post said.

Declining Exports Hurting Pakistan Economy



KARACHI (Dispatches) - A detailed report of Pakistan Businesses Forum (PBF) stated that despite Pakistan's myriad political issues, the declining trend in exports has had a long-term negative impact on the country's economy.

Due to decreasing exports and the government's failure to end the economic crisis, approximately seven million people in Pakistan's textile and textile-related industries have lost their jobs.

Dr Urwa Elahi, Additional Secretary General for Research at the PBF, said that Pakistan is already behind in achieving financial equilibrium because the volume of its imports is much higher than the level of its exports, which is hurting the country's overall economic condition.

The crisis in the balance of payments is getting worse by the day because exports haven't improved and financial planners are trying to control imports with half-hearted measures.

There are many reasons why exports haven't increased, but it appears that most of them are not addressed in the right way, leaving the export industry stuck in the mud.

Dr Urwa Elahi stated that a structural flaw in the country's economic practices necessitates a complete overhaul, which must be completed quickly, and that it will be difficult to increase export volumes.

Exports fell for the second month in a row, falling 18.3% from \$2.9 billion a year earlier, proving that Pakistan's economy is consistently shrinking.

In contrast, imports increased 11.3% to \$5.25 billion in November, resulting in a \$2.88 billion monthly trade deficit. Although the coalition government is credited with reducing the annual trade deficit, many economists are of the opinion that the fictitious strategies implemented by the current finance minister may cause long-term harm to the national economy.

Police Seize War Ammo Cargo in Northwest Iran

TEHRAN (IP) - The head of the Judicial Department of Western Azerbaijan Province, northwestern Iran, reported the seizure of a cargo consisting of weapons and live bullets. Naser Atabati said on Sunday that the cargo seized 335 rifles and 5,000 live bullets. He said that despite the seizure of 1,261 weapons of different types in the borders of Iran during the 75-day time span of the recent unrest

in the country, 60 kg of C4 and TNT explosives also were discovered. Weapons have been entering the country from the eastern and western borders of Iran in recent days to be distributed among the rioters who instigated the recent unrest in Iran. From late September, some parts of Iran, including the capital Tehran, witnessed unrest from the beginning of which the footprint of the foreign-backed media was clear.



Why Malaysia Is Considering a Ban on Palm Oil Exports to EU

KUALA LUMPUR (Dispatches) - Malaysia, the world's second-largest palm oil producer, said it might stop palm exports to the European Union after the bloc imposed additional import restrictions on the edible oil due to concerns over deforestation.

Malaysia and Indonesia have for years been at loggerheads with the European Union over curbs on imports of palm oil, which the two countries say are trade barriers and protectionist measures for the bloc's domestic oilseed industries.

The EU deforestation regulation is in addition to an EU renewable-energy directive, announced in 2018, that requires the phasing out of palm-based transportation fuels by 2030.

The bloc has also set a separate safety limit on food contaminant 3-MCPD esters for palm oil compared to soft oils derived from crops such as soybean, canola and sunflower.

Indonesia and Malaysia, which account for 85% of the world's palm oil exports, have filed separate World Trade Organisation suits against the EU over the renewable-energy directive.

The palm oil producers say they have taken steps to meet EU requirements, including stepping up their national sustainable palm oil certification standards and improving environmental protection and food safety standards, but that the bloc keeps imposing new restrictions.

EU officials say their regulations do not target any one country and are aimed at ensuring that commodity production does not further drive deforestation and forest degradation.

Bursa Malaysia's benchmark crude palm oil futures have yet to react to Malaysia's proposal, although some traders said they see it as a bearish signal.

Some in the palm industry view the proposed ban as a knee-jerk reaction that will hurt the sector, and others laud Malaysia for putting its foot down.

Malaysia said it will discuss with Indonesia the possible ban and other strategies to tackle the EU measures, as both have agreed to increase cooperation to fight "discrimination" against the commodity.

It is not clear whether Malaysia is considering a direct ban on exports to the European Union or enacting tariffs.



The EU accounts for 9.4% of Malaysia's export volume in 2022. Malaysian Palm Oil Board data indicates that exports to the 27-member bloc have been declining since 2015.

In 2022, Malaysia's exports to the EU fell 10% from the previous year to 1.47 million tonnes. That is a 40% plunge from 2.43 million tons in 2015.

The Malaysian Biodiesel Association last year urged industry officials to come to terms with a steady decline in shipments of palm-based biofuels to the EU.

The palm oil industry makes up about 5% of Malaysia's economy. Malaysia has in recent years actively explored new markets to offset losses from Europe, including food-importing countries in the Middle East, Central Asia and North Africa.

Several publicly-listed Malaysian palm oil companies, however, have established refineries in Europe and an export ban would disrupt their operations.

U.S., a Falling Power

FROM PAGE 1

He is convinced that the United States is in a long-term drawdown and, given its declining influence in the world, wants to push for more influence in its "main bulwarks" acquired after World War II, namely Europe and Japan.



The recession of the world economy has little to do with the issue of military conflicts in Ukraine, the main reason for the collapse is the heavy Western sanctions against countries like Russia, has said an analyst.

Meanwhile, Todd went on to say that the collapse of the European economy poses many risks for the United States itself.

The expert further emphasized that the war in Ukraine "leads to a real economy that allows for gauging the real wealth of states and their productive capacity."

He also mentioned the doubling of Russian wheat production after the imposition of the first major sanctions in 2014, as well as Russia's leading position in the construction of nuclear power plants not only domestically but also abroad.

Todd believes that a military conflict's outcome depends on both sides' ability to produce weapons. The historian also notes that engaging in a war of attrition would reduce the influence of advanced US military technologies used by Ukraine.

He further emphasized that "we have transferred so many industries that now we don't know if our military factories are able to maintain their desired production speed or not."

Since the beginning of the Ukraine war, the U.S. and its European allies have imposed unprecedented waves of economic sanctions against Moscow while supplying large rafts of heavy weaponry to Kiev. Moscow has been critical of the weapons supplies to Kiev, warning that they will prolong the war.

Despite all of these unfair actions against Russia and sometimes against other nations, the U.S. is realizing that it is no more the big power or at least for most independent nations, and this is a big warning to the U.S. which is currently struggling with domestic and international challenges and this is what makes most experts and analysts say that the U.S. will have the fate like what the former Soviet Union had, and this country will collapse as the rift among its people is widening and people do not trust their statesmen and they want to get rid of the current condition and any moment the country may explode and the time bomb in the U.S. has started its ticking and the explosion is imminent but only time matters and all incidents show that the collapse is imminent.

Nothing Can Undermine...

FROM PAGE 1

The Iranian foreign minister also pointed to Israel's newly formed far-right cabinet headed by Benjamin Netanyahu as prime minister, stating that the change of names and faces doesn't make any difference in the regime's policies as its officials are all radical in nature and responsible for the ongoing problems and boiling security and social crises across the occupied territories. "Of course, we have witnessed greater cohesion between resistance forces and the Palestinian nation anytime that extremists ascended to power [in occupied territories]," Amirabdollahian said.

For their part, officials from Palestinian resistance groups briefed the Iranian foreign minister on the latest developments in occupied lands and lauded the Islamic Republic's untrammelled support for Palestinians and resistance fighters.

They also paid tribute to top Iranian anti-terror commander General Qassem Soleimani, who was assassinated in a U.S. drone strike near Baghdad airport three years ago, stating that he offered great support to the Palestinian cause and empowerment of the resistance front.

Jordan Truckers' Strike Exposes Woes of Impoverished South



MAAN (Dispatches) - Striking Jordanian trucker Suleiman Abu al-Zait spent several long nights on a national highway along his native city of Maan, manning a picket line that created havoc to overland trade.

"Diesel is my lifeline," said 54-year-old Abu al-Zait, who has seen his livelihood thrown into jeopardy by high fuel price rises since Russia invaded Ukraine.

The month-long sit-in cost Jordan tens of millions of dollars in losses when it paralysed unloading at the Red Sea port of Aqaba, according to officials and industrialists.

The stoppage petered out late last year, after a security clampdown to stop disgruntled Bedouin youths from desert hamlets near Maan throwing stones at tourist coaches and trailers.

The crackdown led to four deaths among security forces and one man whom authorities said was a militant fugitive, as well as scores of injuries and hundreds of arrests.

It was the latest bout of unrest in Maan, a poor tribal stronghold about 250 km (156 miles) south of the capital.

Its location between Aqaba and a main pilgrimage route along the old Hejaz railway to Mecca had made it an important transport hub - and a cross-current of crime, smuggling and Bedouin disaffection.

Known for its defiance of central authority, the southern region around Maan has repeatedly erupted into violent protests in recent years against International Monetary Fund-backed reforms to cut fuel subsidies.

Fuel price rises, combined with high taxes and spiralling food costs in a nation that imports most goods, has made life unaffordable for many.

"Spare parts, motor oil and operating costs have gone up - this is putting pressure on us," said Salamah Abdullah, a truck owner in Maan. "A truck used to have value. In better times you would put the trailer in front of your house to boast in front of people. Now it's like you have a bicycle."

Though adamant that diesel price cuts would imperil reforms crucial for fiscal prudence, the government sought to meet drivers' demands half-way by raising rates they could charge for commercial haulage and transport.

"We seek in all directions to ease the intensity of the economic situation on citizens," Interior Minister Mazen Farayeh said after troops quelled the December rioting.

Like many Arab states, Jordan has in the last decade seen widespread unrest as it reduced food and fuel subsidies.

Its aid-dependent economy - already reeling from \$40 billion public debt and high unemployment - is seeing its once-bustling transit business to neighbours Iraq and Saudi Arabia shrink.

Tesla Extends Price Cuts to U.S., Europe to Drive Demand

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Tesla has slashed prices on its electric vehicles in the United States and Europe by as much as 20%, extending a strategy of aggressive discounting after missing Wall Street estimates for 2022 deliveries.

The move, which prompted a 4.5% fall in Tesla's shares in pre-market U.S. trade,

came after CEO Elon Musk warned that the prospect of recession and higher interest rates meant it could lower prices to sustain volume growth at the expense of profit.

The lower pricing across Tesla's major markets marks a reversal from the strategy the automaker had pursued through much of 2021 and 2022 when orders for new vehicles exceeded supply. Musk acknowledged last year that prices had become "embarrassingly high" and could hurt demand.

More stable cost inflation was also a factor in reducing prices, said a spokesperson for Tesla Germany, confirming price cuts in its top European market.

The U.S. price cuts, announced late Thursday on its global top-sellers the Model 3 sedan and Model Y crossover SUV, were between 6% and 20%, Reuters calculations showed.

The basic version of its Model Y now costs \$52,990, down from \$65,990 previously.

That is before an up to \$7,500 federal tax credit that took effect for many electric vehicle models at the start of January.

Following is a table of the price cuts by model in Germany and the United States:

Tesla also cut prices for its Model X luxury crossover SUV and Model S sedan in the United States.

In Germany, it cut prices on the Model 3 and the Model Y by between about 1% and almost 17% depending on the configuration. It also cut prices in Austria, Switzerland and France.

For a U.S. buyer of the long-range Model Y, the new Tesla price combined with the U.S. subsidy amounts to a discount of 31%. In addition, the Tesla



move broadened the vehicles in its line-up eligible for the Biden administration tax credit.

Before the price cut, the five-seat version of the Model Y had been ineligible for that credit, a designation Musk called "messed up". After the price cut, the long-range version of the Model Y will qualify.

The cuts may make EV cars affordable to people who may have been previously priced out of the market.

In France, customers buying the Model 3 for 44,990 euros (\$48,773) will now get a further price reduction through a government subsidy of 5,000 euros. The threshold for the EV scheme is 47,000.

"This should really boost 2023 (Tesla) volumes," Gary Black, a Tesla investor who has remained bullish on the company and its prospects through the recent, sharp share price decline, said in a tweet. "It's the right move."

Still shares in U.S. pre-market trading were lower, as investors worried the move might erode bumper margins, particularly as competition intensifies.

"Tesla is an outlier because it's still got eye watering valuations when it comes to the number of cars that it actually sells. But ultimately there are all the other providers that sell a hell of a lot more cars overall," said Michael Hewson, chief market analyst at CMC Markets UK.

Some users on Tesla fan forums online also complained the price cuts disadvantaged those who had recently bought their vehicle, leaving them with a lower second-hand value.

"Just reducing 10,000 euros like that - definitely makes you feel that you just paid far too much," one user wrote on a 'Tesla Drivers and Friends' forum.

In China, where Tesla cut prices last week by 6-13.5%, owners protested at delivery centres, calling for compensation.

Iranian oil Exports...

FROM PAGE 1

The Iranian oil ministry did not respond to a request for comment on exports. Iran's draft state budget is based on even higher shipments of 1.4 million bpd, the semi-official Fars news agency reported this week.

China is Iran's biggest customer. To evade sanctions, most of Iran's crude exports to China are rebranded as crude from other countries, according to analysts including FGE. Iran in the past has said documents were forged to hide the origin of Iranian cargoes.

Also, Iran last year expanded its role in Venezuela, also under U.S. sanctions, sending supplies of light oil for refining and diluents to produce exportable crude grades.

There is no definitive figure for Iranian oil exports and estimates often fall into a wide range. Tanker-tracking companies use various methods to track the flows, including satellite data, port loading data and human intelligence. Iran generally does not release figures.

According to another analyst, Vortexa, China's December imports of Iranian oil hit a new record of 1.2 million bpd, up 130% from a year earlier.

"Most of these shipments found home in Shandong, where independent refiners have turned to discounted grades since the second half of 2022 amid sluggish

domestic demand and depressed refining margins," the company said.

The press department of China's Foreign Ministry, in response to a request for comment, said: "The legitimate and reasonable cooperation between China and Iran under the international legal framework deserves respect and protection," without directly addressing Reuters query on China's record Iranian oil purchases.

Vortexa said supply of Russian Urals, the main competing grade to Iranian oil, fell in December - when a price cap on Russian crude exports and European Union ban created uncertainty for buyers.

A revived nuclear deal would allow Iran to boost sales to former buyers like South Korea and Europe.

Still, talks have been at a stalemate since September, and Washington's special envoy for Iran said in November Tehran's crackdown on anti-government protesters and the sale of drones to Russia have turned Washington's focus away from the deal.

Following Trump's removal of the United States from the nuclear deal and reimposition of sanctions, Iran's crude exports fell back to as little as 100,000 bpd at times in 2020 from over 2.5 million bpd in 2018, according to tanker trackers.

Dakar Rally to Remain In Saudi Arabia

RIYADH (Dispatches) - Saudi Arabia will continue to be the home of the Dakar Rally for the next few years with race director David Castera telling AFP "we still have so many deserts to explore". Castera was speaking after Saturday's penultimate stage with Qatari Nasser Al-Attiyah poised for his fifth title. "I'm very happy we're staying here, with so many deserts still to explore and with this country's enormous potential," he said.

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Napoli, Roma Fans Given Two-Month Away Game Ban

MILAN (Dispatches) - Napoli and Roma fans have been banned from travelling to away games for two months after last weekend's mass brawl which caused chaos on a major Italian motorway, Italy's Interior Ministry said. Hardcore "ultra" supporters of both teams were involved in running battles on the A1 motorway on Sunday after they met at the Badia al Pino service station in Tuscany on their way to matches at Sampdoria and AC Milan, creating queues of up to 15 kilometres long.

Warriors Rout Spurs In Front of Record NBA Crowd

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - The Golden State Warriors were the stars of the party in San Antonio, cruising to a 144-113 NBA victory over the Spurs before a record crowd at the Alamodome.

Jordan Poole led the defending champion Warriors with 25 points off the bench, and Donte DiVincenzo added 22 as Golden State's reserves came up big.

They weren't the names that attracted a raucous crowd of 68,323 to the Alamodome — the Spurs' home from 1993 to 2002 before their move to the AT&T Center arena.

But that hardly mattered as fans celebrated both teams and the sheer size of the crowd — which shattered the previous record attendance for a regular-season NBA game of 62,046 for a showdown between Michael Jordan's Chicago Bulls and the Atlanta Hawks at the Georgia Dome on March 27, 1998.

The Spurs played the game at their old home as part of the celebrations of the franchise's 50th anniversary season.

Old-school Spurs fans relished a chance to return to the 'Dome, but plenty of those in the crowd were drawn by Warriors star Stephen Curry and his teammates.

Curry scored 15 points on six-of-12 shooting. Klay Thompson and Andrew Wiggins had 16 apiece as eight Warriors players scored in double figures.

It was a morale-boosting away win for the Warriors, who have struggled mightily on the road this season.

And it was an emotional night for Warriors coach Steve Kerr, who played four seasons in San Antonio and won two titles with the Spurs.

"Just the presentation of the game was spectacular," said Kerr, who received a huge cheer before the game.

"To get an ovation from 68,000 fans gives you chills," Kerr said. "Tonight was a great display of how special the Spurs are and how special San Antonio is."

Kilde Storms to Wengen Downhill Win

Wengen Downhill Win

WENGEN (Dispatches) - Norway's Aleksander Aamodt Kilde claimed back-to-back wins in Wengen, beating Swiss Marco Odermatt in the men's World Cup downhill a day after winning the super-G.

Kilde, also a winner in the downhill at the Swiss resort last year, stormed down the Lauberhorn piste to finish 0.88sec ahead of overall World Cup leader Odermatt.

Italy's Mattia Casse was third at 1.01sec behind World Cup downhill leader Kilde.

The start of the race, the longest and oldest on the World Cup circuit, had been lowered because of high wind.

For his final race on home snow, Swiss skier Beat Feuz, a three-time Wengen winner who retires after Kitzbuehel, Austria next weekend, finished fifth at 1.25sec.

Odermatt leads the overall World Cup standings with a 340-point lead on Kilde.

Swiatek Inspired by Barty For Intense Australian Open

MELBOURNE (Dispatches) - World number one Iga Swiatek said today she was ready for an "intense" opening Australian Open match while paying tribute to retired champion Ashleigh Barty for inspiring her to greater heights.

Poland's Swiatek begins her Grand Slam campaign on Monday against Jule Neimeier, the German world number 68 who reached the quarter-finals at Wimbledon last year.

More recently, the pair clashed in the last 16 at the US Open, where Swiatek had to dig deep after dropping the first set before coming through 2-6, 6-4, 6-0 and going on to win the tournament.

"We played in the US Open, and you saw how intense that match was, how tough," Swiatek told reporters.

"It's not going to be easy. But any match in a Grand Slam is always more intense and more stressful than other tournaments. I'll be ready for it."

Swiatek, the top seed, is a strong favourite for the first Grand Slam of the year in the absence of last year's retired champion Barty.



There was more on-court drama in Indianapolis, where Atlanta's John Collins tipped in the game-winner with seven-tenths of a second remaining in the Hawks' 113-111 victory over the Pacers.

Dejounte Murray's dunk put Atlanta up 108-107 with 2:08 to play. Bennedict Mathurin answered with a basket that gave the Pacers the lead with 58 seconds remaining.

Mathurin fouled but missed the free throw, and Trae Young drained a three-pointer for Atlanta before two free throws from Indiana's Buddy Hield knotted the score at 111-111 with 21.5 seconds to play.

There were 2.1 seconds on the clock when Murray managed to corral a miss from Young but couldn't get his own basket to drop. Collins grabbed that rebound and made the put-back basket — just his second of the night — for the win.

Young led the Hawks with 26 points and De'Andre Hunter added 25. Indiana was led by 26 points from Mathurin.

New York point guard Jalen Brunson continued his recent strong form, scoring 34 points — including four free throws in the final 14 seconds — in a 112-108 Knicks victory over the Wizards in Washington.

Julius Randle added 23 points and 16 rebounds for the Knicks, who withstood a 40-point performance from Washington's Kyle Kuzma.

In Detroit, New Orleans center Jus Valanciunas led all scorers with 33 points and grabbed 16 rebounds to lead the New Orleans Pelicans to a 116-110 victory over the Pistons.

Minnesota's Anthony Edwards scored 31 to power the Timberwolves to a 121-116 home victory over a Phoenix Suns team missing Chris Paul and Devin Booker.

Gasquet Defeats Norrie for 16th Title In Auckland

AUCKLAND (Dispatches) - French veteran Richard Gasquet won his first ATP title in nearly five years as he fought back to stun second seed Cameron Norrie in the final of the Auckland Classic.

In a gruelling match two days before the Australian Open in Melbourne, Gasquet prevailed 4-6, 6-4, 6-4 over the British world number 12.

Gasquet was emotional after winning the 16th title of his career.

Norrie held triple break point to go 4-0 up in the third set but 36-year-old Gasquet held serve and then broke his opponent twice.

Ranked 67th in the world, Gasquet will go into his Australian Open first-round match against compatriot Ugo Humbert full of confidence.

It was a first loss of the year for left-hander Norrie.

The 27-year-old won all three of his matches at the recent United Cup in Australia, where his victims included Spanish great Rafael Nadal and American Taylor Fritz.

It was his second defeat in the Auckland final, having lost to American Tenny Sandgren in 2019.

A Wimbledon semi-finalist last year, Norrie has drawn French teenager Luca Van Assche in the first round in Melbourne.



Murray Undaunted by Difficult Draw at Melbourne Park

MELBOURNE (Dispatches) - Andy Murray said he was much more comfortable taking on a top player early on in a Grand Slam this year than he was in 2022, as the former world number one prepares to battle big-serving Matteo Berrettini in the Australian Open first round.

A five-times Australian Open runner-up, Murray's career looked set to end prematurely due to a long-standing hip injury after his first-round defeat in 2019 when he received an emotional 'farewell' on the court.

But the three-time Grand Slam champion has continued to push himself after multiple surgeries and said he was not worried about being drawn against the 2021 Wimbledon runner-up.

"Obviously a tough draw, but I also feel like I'm in a much better place than where I was during any of the Grand Slams last year ...," Murray told a news conference today.

"I feel ready to play a top player early ... whereas maybe last year at times my game didn't feel that great and getting a difficult draw or a tough match early didn't feel great.

I feel I'm in a better place this time to deal with that."

Berrettini has won their previous three meetings, including a four-set victory at last year's US Open.

"Obviously the match at the US Open was close, the match we played in Stuttgart was close and I won in Beijing," Murray added. "I know how I feel today in comparison to where I felt going into the US open and I'm playing better."

Fellow Briton Emma Raducanu said she was feeling good about her fitness ahead of the Australian Open after rolling her ankle in a tune-up event last week.

Raducanu retired from her second-round match at the Auckland Classic, sparking concerns she could miss the year's first Grand Slam where she will bid to add to her 2021 US Open crown.

"At the time you're a bit worried about it, when you just go over you don't know what's going on," Raducanu, who plays Tamara Korpatsch in her opener, said.

"But we've been working hard. It's been a team effort to get me to this place. We've expedited the process, but I'm feeling really good and looking forward to getting out on the court."

Raducanu said she resumed practice in midweek and was not too concerned about the shortened preparations.

Guardiola Fumes After VAR Controversy Sparks Man Utd Win

MANCHESTER (Dispatches) - Pep Guardiola was left fuming by the controversial VAR decision to allow a Bruno Fernandes goal that sparked Manchester United's thrilling fightback in their 2-1 win over Manchester City on Saturday.

City were leading through Jack Grealish's second-half header at Old Trafford when United snatched their dubious 78th-minute equaliser.

Marcus Rashford was clearly offside when he ran onto a through ball but Fernandes ran past him to fire home.

Although the goal was initially disallowed, it was eventually allowed to stand after a VAR check because Rashford didn't touch the ball before Fernandes scored.

With Guardiola and his players furious that VAR ignored Rashford's presence as a clear distraction to keeper Ederson, United took advantage of the champions' loss of focus to grab a late winner through Rashford's close-range finish.

"Marcus Rashford is offside, Bruno Fernandes is not. Rashford distracted our keeper and center defenders," Guardiola said.

"It is what it is. We know where we play. It is difficult for the referees in these stadiums."



Kwon Wins His Biggest title In Adelaide

ADELAIDE (Dispatches) - Korean lucky loser Kwon Soon-woo won the biggest title of his career when he outlasted Roberto Bautista Agut in a thrilling final at the Adelaide International.

Kwon had lost in the second round of qualifying for the tournament but was given a place in the main draw as a lucky loser.

After victory over Czech player Tomas Machac in the first round, the South Korean defeated second seed Pablo Carreno Busta, Sweden's Mikael Ymer and rising English star Jack Draper to reach the decider.

In a dramatic final that lasted 2hrs 43mins, Kwon saw off Bautista Agut 6-4, 3-6, 7-6 (7/4) in a match that swung both ways.

Kwon broke the Spaniard's first service game then used his powerful shot-making, his forehand in particular, to close out the first set.

Bautista Agut struck back immediately, breaking Kwon at the start of the second set and lifting his own service percentages to level the match at one set apiece.

When the 35-year-old Bautista Agut skipped out to a 3-0 lead in the third it seemed all over, but Kwon dug deep and broke back, taking the set to a tiebreak.

