

Health Ministry Announced on Monday That the Number of Deaths From the Coronavirus Pandemic in Iran Stayed Unchanged at **144,727** With Another **Zero** Death Day Over the Past 24 Hours

IRAN NEWS

TEDPIX, the Main Index of Tehran Stock Exchange (TSE), Gained 36,970 Points to 1.68m on Monday as Per Report, Over 14.841b Securities Worth 90.575 Trillion Rials (About \$226.43b) Were Traded at the TSE

VOL. XXVIII, No. 7689 TEHRAN Price 50,000 Rials

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Manufacturing Activity Peaked in December

TEHRAN (PressTV) - A new report by the Iranian parliament shows manufacturing activity in the country rose to a nine-month high in December last year.

The report by the Islamic Consultative Assembly's Research Center published on Sunday showed that the manufacturing index of major companies registered in the Iranian stock market had risen by 12.9% in December last year compared to the same month in 2021.

Sales of major Iranian factories also rose by 15.7% year on year in December 2022, said the report.

The report put the month-on-month rise in December of the manufacturing and sales indices of the Iranian factories at 2.7% and 3.6%, respectively.

The figures showed that manufacturing index at Iranian automotive companies, including parts makers, had risen by 48.4% year on year in December last year, adding that vehicles and parts sales in the country had also risen by 86.7% over the same period.

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West Apparently Not Ready For Finalizing Iran Talks

TEHRAN (MNA) - Russia's representative in Vienna-based international organizations said Sunday that Western countries are not ready to finalize the talks on the removal of the sanctions against Iran.

"The best way to prevent negative trends in the region would be finalization of the Vienna talks on the JCPOA," Russian Permanent Representative to International Organizations in Vienna Mikhail Ulyanov said in a post on his Twitter account on Sunday.

"A breakthrough in this field can ease tension and open the way to intensified dialogue on regional security," Ulyanov added.

According to the Russian diplomat, "Apparently Western countries are not ready for that."

The Western countries have recently increased their sanctions against Iran and interfering in the country's internal affairs by backing recent riots in the country with the aim of putting more pressure on Tehran to give in to their excessive demands at the negotiating table in the nuclear talks.

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UK Furious Over Intelligence Failure



IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Iran says the United Kingdom fumes over intelligence failure after a senior Iranian official, Alireza Akbari, was executed for spying for the British intelligence agency.

"The UK is not sorry about Akbari's execution. It always makes sacrifices to achieve its intelligence goals. It fumes over an intelligence failure," Ebrahim Azizi, deputy chairman of the National Security and Foreign Policy Committee, said.

He explained that Akbari has acted against a nation and imperiled precious defense and security intelligence. "Spy elements are all treated harshly across the world and this is an internationally recognized fact," Azizi added.

He said that what the British are upset about is the fact that they have found out that they were making decisions based on wrong information fed to them by Iran's intelligence services all along.

"They have invested on someone for years, and now they realized that Iranian intelligence services kept close watch on him, and that has infuriated them," he added.

It is unnecessary to respond to the "baseless, unfounded, and irrational" statements with no national and international legal basis about Akbari's execution, he concluded.

Akbari was arrested in 2019. He had received 1,805,000 euros, 265,000 pounds, and \$50,000 for espionage activities for the United Kingdom.

Iran's Judiciary said 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.

In a statement on Wednesday, Iran's Intelligence Ministry described Akbari as "one of the most infiltrating agents of the spying service of the evil UK in the country's sensitive and strategic centers," noting that he was identified and arrested after a "long and multi-layered process" involving "counter-intelligence" and "deception operation."

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

British Foreign Secretary James Cleverly appealed for the spy's release when reports of his planned execution emerged earlier in the week, saying in a tweet, "Iran must halt the execution of British-Iranian national Alireza Akbari and immediately release him."

The United Kingdom has a long history of spying activities in Iran which can be traced back to the 1953 coup against the democratically-elected government of Mohammad Mosaddeq.

Iranian intelligence forces have arrested many foreign-linked spies in the past years who had been involved in acts of sabotage against Iranian people and facilities in the past decades.

The British government was also actively involved in the instigation of the recent foreign-backed riots in Iran after the death of a young woman of Kurdish descent.

Encircling Israel With Missiles Was Martyr Soleimani's Idea

BEIRUT (Dispatches) - Iran's martyred anti-terror commander General Qassem Soleimani was behind the idea of surrounding the Israeli regime with missiles, and he succeeded in finalizing and implementing his plan, says a senior member of the Lebanese resistance movement Hezbollah.

Mahmoud Qamati, a member of the Political Council of Hezbollah, said if the Lebanese resistance movement is ready to go to war with Israel and relies on its own missiles and drones, it is because of the great efforts made by General Soleimani.

"Martyr Soleimani's idea was to encircle Israel, and he managed to do so in practice. It was Martyr Soleimani who made plans for the missiles of Lebanon and Gaza, as well as Iraq and even Yemen," Iran's Tasnim news agency on Sunday quoted Qamati as saying.

General Soleimani, the commander of the Quds Force of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC), was assassinated in a US drone strike authorized by former US president Donald Trump near Baghdad International Airport on January 3, 2020.

He has been praised in the region as the champion in the fight against terrorist groups, particularly Daesh, which has been supported by the United States and the Israeli regime.

Highlighting the world-renowned general's endeavors, Qamati said the Lebanese resistance movement, as part of the broader Axis of Resistance in the region, was founded by General Soleimani. He said General Soleimani managed to transform the resistance in all aspects due to his "pioneering spirit" and "strategic outlook."

"He was among us in resistance operation rooms since the 2006 war," Qamati recalled, adding that General Soleimani began to help with the reconstruction of Lebanon immediately after the war.

Sanctions Fail to Prevent Iran From Progress In Drone Production

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - The unilateral sanctions imposed by the United States on Iran have failed to disrupt the country's drone program, said the US media.

An article by the leading American international relations magazine made a reference to decade-old sanctions imposed on Iranian drone manufacturers like the Quds Aviation and Aerospace Industries Organization (IAIO) and the Iran Aircraft Manufacturing Industries Corporation (HESA).

"For years, the United States has imposed sanctions against Iran's military complex and manufacturing base, including entities like IAIO, HESA... Nevertheless, Iran's aerospace sector and drone industry have continued to expand and thrive," Eric Lob and Edward Riehle wrote. The article said, "Iran has manufactured and operated military drones since the Iran-Iraq War in the mid-1980s. With over thirty-three models, Iran's highly developed, sophisticated military drone complex comprises one of the four pillars of its security strategy and force structure, complementing its missile technology, proxy forces, and cyberwarfare."

"Drones have increasingly offered an asymmetric advantage to Iran," it pointed out.

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"Made in Iran" Exhibition Opens in Karachi

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN (MNA) - Islamic Republic of Iran has opened an exhibition to showcase its domestic products in the Pakistani city of Karachi.

The Governor of Sindh Kamran Tesori, the head of Iran's Trade Promotion Organization (TPO) Alireza Peyman-Pak and the Consul General of Iran in Karachi Hassan Noorin in addition to some other Iranian and Pakistani business officials attended the opening ceremony of the "Made in Iran" exhibition.

The exhibition is held at the Karachi Expo Centre, in Karachi, the capital of Sindh province located in southern Pakistan, and will last three days.

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Germany Summons Iran Envoy in Fresh Act of Interference

TEHRAN (MNA) - In a fresh meddlesome move, the German Foreign Ministry summoned the Iranian envoy to Berlin following Tehran's measure to execute the British spy Alireza Akbari.

"I can confirm that the Iranian ambassador was summoned to a meeting at the Foreign Office today," the German spokesperson told a regular government news conference in Berlin, according to Reuters.

Akbari was executed on Saturday on charges of spying for the British intelligence agency.

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

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

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

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

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

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Iran Sympathizes with Nepal over Deadly Plane Crash

TEHRAN (Tasnim) – The Iranian Foreign Ministry offered condolences to Nepal over its deadliest plane crash in 30 years.

In a post on its Twitter account on Monday, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Iran offered condolences to the Nepalese government and nation and the families of victims of the plane crash.

Rescuers have recovered 68 bodies out of the 72 people on board the ATR 72 aircraft operated by Yeti Airlines that crashed in the tourist city of Pokhara minutes before landing on Sunday in clear weather.

President Urges Nation to Manage Gas Consumption

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Referring to the reports about the sale of cars to some departments, outside of the established criteria, President SEyed Ebrahim Raisi emphasized the necessity of selling cars within the framework of the eight-point directive that was announced last year during a visit to the Iran Khodro parking lot, and tasked the Ministry of Industry, Mines and Trade and Presidential Inspection Committee with investigating the handing over of cars to the departments and deal with the violators in this regard.

Speaking at the cabinet session, Raisi referred to the increase in air temperature and gas consumption in the country, while appreciating the measures taken by the relevant government agencies to supply gas to people's homes and administrative and commercial units, and emphasized the importance of consumption management.

Stating that the completion of phase 11 of the South Pars complex in the past years could have played an effective role in resolving the gas imbalance, the President stated, "After the foreign companies left the work, the completion of this phase continued vigorously and will reach the final stages in the near future".

In another part of his speech, referred to the widespread use of the cyberspace in



people's lives and business, urging the Minister of Communications and Information Technology to urgently follow up and solve people's concerns regarding slow internet speed and other existing problems.

Pointing to the reports about the sale of cars to some departments, outside of the established criteria, the President emphasized the necessity of selling cars within the framework of the eight-point directive that was announced last year during a visit to the Iran Khodro parking lot, and tasked the Ministry of Industry, Mines and Trade and Presidential Inspection Committee with investigating the handing over of cars to the departments and deal with the violators in this regard.

Raisi also emphasized once again the need to explain and inform about the promising programs and actions of the government and executive bodies, and referring to the uncertainty about holding meetings related to the issue of housing by some media, and stated, "The issue of housing has always been important to the government and its weekly meetings have been held regularly".

Saudi Arabia, Egypt to Open Embassies in Iran Soon

TEHRAN (IFP) - An Iranian lawmaker says Saudi Arabia and Egypt are set to open their embassies in Iran in the near future, and that both countries are willing to have diplomatic relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran.

During an interview with the Tasnim News Agency, Shahriar Heydari, who sits on the Iranian Parliament's National Security and Foreign Policy Committee, said Iran's reconciliation negotiations with Saudi Arabia as well as the country's talks with Egypt had made progress.

He praised the role of neighboring Iraq and Oman in mediating the diplomatic processes involving Iran.

"Soon, we will witness the opening of embassies of both Saudi Arabia and Egypt," the lawmaker said. "Saudi Arabia and Egypt are willing to establish relations with Iran."

Late last year, foreign ministers of Iran and Saudi Arabia met on the sidelines of a conference in Jordan, amid efforts by the two Middle East powers to resume diplomatic ties, which was cut off in 2016.

The meeting followed five rounds of talks between the two sides in Baghdad aimed at narrowing down their differences and restoring ties.

Tehran also announced earlier this month that the foreign ministers of Iran and Egypt held a similar meeting on the sidelines of the Jordan summit.

Iran, Russia Discuss Creation of Joint Gold-Backed Stablecoin

TEHRAN (MNA) – The Central Bank of Iran is considering the creation of a stablecoin with Russia as a means of payment in foreign trade transactions, said the executive director of the Russian Association of Cryptocurrency and Blockchain.

Alexander Brazhnikov told Vedomosti that the coin would be pegged to gold (i.e. a stablecoin).

The potential coin would work in a special economic zone in Astrakhan, where Russia has begun to accept Iranian cargo, Meduza reported.

The existence of the negotiations was confirmed by Duma deputy Anton Tkachev, who is a member of the Committee on Information Policy, Information Technology and Communications.

Tkachev noted that the topic would only be discussed at the state level after cryptocurrencies are fully regulated in Russia, which should happen sometime in 2023.

The Central Bank of Russia is against the use of cryptocurrencies as a means of payment within the country. However, it supports the use of cryptocurrency in import and export transactions.

Gas Company Hailed for Steady Supply in Harsh Winter

TEHRAN (MNA) - President Ebrahim Raisi has visited the National Iranian Gas Company amid the dropping temperature in the country to ensure the continuous supply of natural gas to households.

President Raisi paid an unannounced visit to the National Gas Company compound and sat down for a meeting with the personnel there as the consumption of gas in the country hits a new record high this year amid the frigid temperature.

Raisi hailed the oil ministry and the national gas company for their intensified efforts these days to ensure a steady gas supply and urged the people to help the authorities for continued supply amid the dropping temperature in cities and villages in the country.

He also called on national TV and radio to inform the people to turn off their unnecessary heating devices to help their fellow Iranians not to face gas outages in the harsh winter.

The president pointed out that the recent measures taken in the country to tackle possible gas shortages like the closure of administrative bodies and education centers are not a good solution, stressing that the steady supply must continue.

"Today, the most important issue is to deliver energy to people's homes and then to businesses and administrative offices," Raisi stressed.

He criticized the previous administration for neglecting storing gas for difficult days such as

these days, stressing to the national gas company and the oil ministry to store necessary energy for later use from now on.

Huge snow and freezing cold weather have caused difficulties in most Iranian provinces over the past few weeks.

Iran Meteorological Organization has forecast the continuation of snow and frigid temperature for most parts of the country, including the capital Tehran in the coming days.

Flare of Bilal Gas Field Lit

TEHRAN (Shana) - The CEO of Pars Oil and Gas Company (PGOC) announced that the flare of the Bilal gas field was lit as gas has reached the appraisal well of the offshore field.

According to POGC, Mohammad Hossein Motejalli considered the drilling of the appraisal-exploratory well of the Bilal gas field as the first step in the more targeted and principled development process of this joint field.

He said: "Drilling of this well is aimed at exploratory evaluation, description and production of gas layers began in mid-July with the installation of the rig in the field."

The official added: "In the continuation of the appraisal of the gas layers of Bilal Field, the gas of the first reservoir layer of the field reached the surface on Sunday, January 15, and thus the flare of the drilling rig of this field was lit."

The POGC CEO said that lighting the flare of the drilling rig of this field in a situation where the country is facing the challenge of energy supply in the cold days of the year, is promising for the planning and all-round efforts of the National Iranian Oil Company to compensate for the gas imbalance through the development of new gas fields, including Bilal gas field.

Over 18.4m Car Tires Produced in 9 Months

TEHRAN (MNA) -Iranian tire manufacturers produced 18,420,876 car tires in the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year (November 22-December 21, 2022), rising two percent from the output in the same period of time in the previous year.

This number of produced tires weighed over 196,238 tons, with one percent growth year on year.

According to the statistics, in the mentioned period, 121,943 tons of passenger car tires were produced, showing an eight-percent rise year on year.

Meanwhile, 18,823 tons of van tires were produced, indicating a nine-percent fall, and 38,355 tons of truck and bus tires were produced, showing a nine-percent drop.

Production of the tires of agricultural vehicles experienced a decline of 11 percent to stand at 13,958 tons, and that of road building and industrial vehicles fell 15 percent to 3,158 tons in the period under review.

In the first nine months of the present year, 14,119 tons of bicycle and motorcycle tires were also produced, indicating a three percent rise year on year.

Production of tubes fell seven percent to stand at 6,966 tons.

Iranian tire manufacturers produced 47,624,426 vehicle tires in the past Iranian calendar year 1400 (ended on March 20, 2022), which was one percent more than the figure of the preceding year.

This number of produced tires weighed over 288,149 tons, with a four-percent drop year on year.

As reported, 24,179,708 car tires weighing 259,096 tons were produced in the past year, with a four percent drop in number, and a five percent fall in weight as compared to the preceding year.

In the previous year, 152,251 tons of passenger car tires were produced, showing a five-percent fall year on year.

Passenger cars accounted for 58.7 percent of the total tires produced in 1400.

Temperatures Below Freezing Point in Most of Iran

TEHRAN (IFP) - Iran's Center for Management of Natural Disasters says the recent cold spell has affected large swathes of the country and many provinces



have experienced temperatures of down to -29 degrees centigrade that is unprecedented in the past 14 years.

The director of the center says temperatures are now below the freezing points in 27 out of the 31 provinces of Iran and this has caused problems amid low natural gas supplies to certain parts of the country.

Ali Torkian says thanks to the lower consumption across the country that followed related calls by government and local officials, the shortage in the supply is being addressed.

Torkian added that the interior minister and provincial governors decided in an urgent meeting held Monday that the National Iranian Gas Company should immediately tackle the problem of low gas pressure in the eastern and northeastern provinces, which have borne the brunt of the cold snap, especially where supply to residential homes has been cut off over the past 24 hours.

The shortage has been attributed to a suspension in gas swap between Iran and Turkmenistan.

He said officials have been working hard to solve the problem of short supply and have held over 200 crisis management meetings and meetings of the energy working group over the past week.

Iran-Turkey Joint Consular Commission Convenes in Tehran



TEHRAN (IRNA) - The 19th meeting of the Iran-Türkiye joint consular commission was held in the Iranian capital.

The meeting was co-chaired by Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister for Consular, Parliamentary and Expatriates Affairs Alireza Bigdeli and his Turkish counterpart.

Officials from the Interpol and ministries of justice of both countries and some other related organizations were also present in the meeting.

The two sides discussed different consular issues, including those related to university students, tourists, transit drivers, those arrested and being held in prisons of the other side, border issues, extradition of prisoners, facilitation of services at joint borders, solving the problems of personal status of nationals residing in two countries, mutual recognition of documents issued by the two governments and other problems of nationals.

They underlined the need for identifying and resolving the problems through regular negotiations.

165 Investors Building New Manufacturing Units in Isfahan

ISFAHAN (IRNA) - A government official in the central Iranian province of Isfahan says that some 165 new investors have been attracted to industrial zones in the province since the start of the Iranian calendar year on March 21, 2021.

Rasoul Savari, who serves as top local official from Iran Small Industries and Industrial Parks Organization, announced on Monday that some 103 hectares of lands have been allocated to new investors to set up manufacturing units in industrial parks across the province of Isfahan.

Savari told the IRNA that the new investments would generate nearly 6,000 direct and indirect jobs in the region.

Isfahan is one of the main industrial provinces of Iran with some 35 active industrial zones where more than 140,000 people are employed.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	12:14
■ Evening (Maghreb)	17:35
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	05:44
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	07:12

124. "But whosoever turns away from My Message, verily for him is a life narrowed down, and We shall raise him up blind on the Day of Judgment."

125. He will say: "O my Lord! why hast Thou raised me up blind, while I had sight (before)?"
Surah 20. Ta-ha (124 - 125)

Iran, Oman Ready to Sign MoU On Cooperation

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Secretary of Secretary of the Supreme Council of Free Trade-Industrial and Special Economic Zones says signing the MoU on cooperation with Oman will lead to job creation and broadening investments in the free zones.

In the meeting with Ambassador of Oman to Tehran Sayyid Dr Ahmed bin Hilal bin Saud Al Busaidi, Secretary of the Council Hojjatollah Abdolmaleki emphasized accelerating the process for signing the MoU on cooperation between the free zones of the two countries.

He said that both sides have reached good agreements for broadening the joint free zones and they have progressed well, adding that he believes the trade relations of both countries can be more than the current amount and signing the mentioned MoU will have great impact on broadening trade and economic relations between Iran and Oman.

He then pointed to the amount of Iran's exports to Oman in the past year which had been two times more than the preceding year, adding that cooperation between the



free zones of the countries will be creating the ground for investment as well as it can increase exports and imports to and from Oman more than ever and it can create the ground for increasing occupation and investment in these zones.

He then pointed to creating bunkering infrastructures in Qeshm Free Trade Zone and noted that Iran is ready to create a joint company with Khasb Free Zone of Oman to offer services to the opposite side.

Abdolmaleki went on to say that financial turnover of bunkering industry in the Persian Gulf is over \$20b per year and emphasized that some part of this turnover can be attracted in Oman and Iran.

He stated that Qeshm Free Zone is planning for offering bunkering services to different demanding countries and interested countries in this field, adding that by the way the priority of the country is to share interests with neighboring countries like Oman.

Then Ambassador of Oman expressed his country's interest for the MoU cooperation between the free zones of both states.

TCCIMA to Host Belarus Trade Delegation

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Tehran Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Mine and Agriculture (TCCIMA) will host a trade delegation from Belarus, led by Belarus Deputy Agriculture Minister, today (Tuesday).



According to the chamber, a Belarus trade delegation, comprised of economic activists in the fields of agro products and food industries, will attend the TCCIMA today to exchange views with their Iranian counterparts.

The delegation will be headed by deputy agriculture minister of Belarus and the visit is aimed at boosting bilateral cooperation between traders of both countries.

Steel Production to Cut Back Dramatically Amid Gas Shortage

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - An Iranian industrialist says the gas and electricity shortage will probably lead to a two-million-ton decrease in the country's steel production.

In an interview with ILNA, Reza Shahrestani said there is a severe gas shortage in steel companies, adding that the steel industry needs 40 million cubic meters of gas daily, but at present their consumption has reached 15 million cubic meters per day.

He further added that almost 50% of the electricity supply for industries has been cut off too.

"Gas shortage has also led to electricity shortage because the current amount of natural gas does not meet the needs of power plants to produce electricity," he underlined.

"It seems that the gas and electricity shortage will be more severe next year and if it continues like this. It will have a tangible impact on the production rate of all industries," said the member of board of directors of the Steel Manufacturers Association.

"In my opinion, the people, who are in office at the oil ministry, are not up to the task, so we are witnessing inefficiency in all fields," reiterated Shahrestani.

Export of Citrus Fruits Reach 150,000 Tons

TEHRAN (MNA) - Iran has exported 150,000 tons of citrus fruits valued at \$57 million in the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21-December 21, 2022), according to a senior official with the country's Agriculture Ministry.

Zahra Jalili-Moqadam, the director-general of the tropical and semi-tropical fruits office of the Agriculture Ministry, put the country's total citrus production in the current year at 5.6 million tons, of which 3.4 million tons were oranges.

According to Jalili-Moqadam, in the first nine months of this year, 107,000 tons of oranges, 37,000 tons of tangerines, and 5,000 tons of lemons were exported to other countries, IRNA reported.

Iran exported about 177,000 tons of citrus fruits worth \$66 million in the previous year, the official said.

She attributed the growth of the country's citrus production to the implementation of technical recommendations and optimal orchard management by gardeners in addition to the timely control of diseases and pests compared to previous years.

5% Rise in South Pars Gas Output



TEHRAN (Shana) -- The CEO of South Pars Gas Complex said over the past 23 days since December 22, more than 15 billion cubic meters of gas has been injected into the national distribution network by this complex, which is a 5% increase compared to the same period last year.

Ahmed Bahoush told Shana: "At the same time as the cold snap enters the country and the increase in household gas consumption, the hardworking specialists and employees of the South Pars Gas Complex are active around the clock in all refinery units to supply the gas needed by people all over the country."

He stated: "From the beginning of this winter season (December 22) to January 15, more than 15 billion cubic meters of gas was injected into the national pipeline, which is more than 5% more than the same period last year."

The CEO of South Pars Gas Complex stated: "This volume of production and injection into the national line shows the firm determination of the experts and employees of the complex for the sake of peace and comfort."

Outlook of Exemplary Farm Is Very Bright

BY: VAHID BAHRAMI

TEHRAN - The CEO of Exemplary Farm (Mazrae Nemouneh) Company Eng. Mohammad Astani says the outlook programs of the company are very bright and the Farm has plans to broaden its activities.

Speaking in a press conference in Gorgan, capital of Golestan Province, Mr. Astani said that after implementation of subsidy scheme, most of livestock and poultry industry activists faced with working capital that with the order of the CEO

of Etkha Organization, Exemplary Farm Company entered the field to rush to help producers in this level and prevented idle or semi-idle producers in this field from closing down and the way of cooperation of the company is that it provides the production units with 90% of their required raw materials which include one-day broiler chicken, animal feed, medicine, vaccine and with supporting these units, the company benefits some percentage of their production and this cooperation is a win-win for both parties and above all it prevents production units from being closed down.

He went on to say that the farm is able to provide 10% of ancestral chickens in the country which is a very important job and if today the country faces cut in imports of chickens, it is able to meet the needs of the country.

He then pointed to the ancestral chicken farming and said that two plants exist in the country and one fully belongs to Exemplary Farm which came on stream last year by the senior official of defense ministry and the plant had a lion's share of job creation in the province and the products of this farm are strategic.



Astani noted that there are 6 production units in the agro chain of the farm and there is a plot of land for cultivation with an area over 4400 hectares and all products of this area are strategic like wheat, barley and cotton.

He then pointed to other sectors and activities of this farm like activities in dairy products, chocolate- and biscuit producing factories that the products are sold at Etkha Chain Stores.

He said in the five-year outlook plan of Exemplary Farm, the company has devised plans in two fields of chicken meat and rice, adding that the outlook of the company is very bright.

He reiterated the farm has no problems with sanctions and continues export of its products to the neighboring countries and reiterated that the only problem is the policy of the related bodies which affects the exports.

Then the CEO of industrial poultry slaughterhouse of the farm Mr. Abbas Farahani said that to support chicken farmers of Golestan Province, the slaughterhouse buys 30% of its chicken from the joint venture farms of the province and said that some 50 tons of chicken meat is produced in this slaughterhouse and it can be increased to 70 tons through planning. He added that the capacity of the slaughterhouse is 4,000 chickens per hour.

Then Director General of Agriculture Jihad of Golesta Province Dr. Bazr Ali said that this province is producer of many agro, livestock and aquaculture products, adding that Exemplary Farm is a jihadi model in the country.

Monthly Production of Industrial Companies in Stock Market Up 12.9%

TEHRAN (MNA) - The production index of Iranian industrial companies active in the stock market has grown 12.9 percent in the ninth Iranian calendar month of Azar (November 22-December 21, 2022) as compared to the figure for the same month in the previous year.

Based on the data released by the Iranian Parliament Research Center (IPRC), this is the highest level the index has reached in the current Iranian calendar year (ends on March 20), IRNA reported.

As reported, the sales index of the mentioned companies has also grown 15.7 percent in the mentioned month, year on year.

According to the IPRC report, automobile and auto parts companies had the best performance this month, so that the production and sales indices for this sector show a growth of 48.4 percent and 86.7 percent, respectively, compared to the same month of the previous year.

The production index of the pharmaceutical sector also reached the highest level in the last two years and increased by 25.6 percent compared to the same month of the previous year and seven percent compared to the previous month.

Last month, IPRC reported that the revenues of Iranian industrial companies active in the stock market increased by 14.4 percent in the eighth Iranian calendar month of Aban (October 23-November 21) as compared to the figure for the same month in the previous year.

Based on the IPRC data, the production index of the mentioned companies grew 8.2 percent in the mentioned month, year on year.

Iran's Securities and Exchange Organization (SEO) had earlier announced that the revenues of 67 percent of the Iranian companies active in the stock market increased in the eighth Iranian calendar month as compared to the same month in the previous year.

Iran Launches Restoration Project for Key UNESCO Site

AHVAZ (IRNA) - Iran has launched a major restoration project for the Shushtar Historical Hydraulic System, an ancient irrigation network located in southwestern Iran that has been registered on the list of World Heritage Sites of the United Nations' cultural agency UNESCO.

An official from Iran's Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts (MCTH) said on Sunday that restoration project on Shushtar Historical Hydraulic System would cover maintenance and improvement works on its hanging wall, a partition located to the west of the site and a 1,700 year old tunnel, known as Boleiti.

Mohammad Hossein Arastouzadeh, who serves as head of MCTH's

local department in the province of Khuzestan, where the UNESCO site is located, said the launch of the restoration project is a dream come true for cultural heritage advocates in Iran.

Arastouzadeh said a contract worth 470 billion rials had been awarded to a local company to carry out the restoration project.

Shushtar Historical Hydraulic System became Iran's 10th cultural heritage site to be registered on UNESCO's list of World Heritage Sites in 2009.

The complex irrigation system, which is a combination of bridges, mills, dams, waterfalls, canals, and tunnels, was completed during the Sassanid in the third century AD.

Bomb Kills 10 at DR Congo Church

BENI (Dispatches) - A bomb killed at least 10 people and wounded 39 others after ripping through a church in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo on Sunday, an attack blamed on suspected Islamists.

Details of the attack are hazy, but Congolese military spokesman Antony Mualushayi said the "terrorist act" happened in a Pentecostal church in North Kivu province's Kasindi, a town on the border with Uganda.

A Kenyan was arrested following the bomb blast, he added, although the perpetrator of the attack in the turbulent region remains unclear. The explosion killed at least 10 people and wounded 39, Mualushayi said, revising up an initial death toll of five. Both tolls were provisional, he said.



Latvia Hit by Worst Flood in Decades

JEKABPILS (Dispatches) - Latvian authorities urged residents of certain central areas to evacuate their homes in response to the worst flooding the Baltic state has seen in decades.

"It will be near impossible to get you out from among the ice cold sludge once it rushes into your homes," Raivis Ragainis, mayor of the city of Jekabpils, warned on local radio.

Particularly exposed are Jekabpils and the town of Plavinas and surrounding areas, where the flow of the Daugava river has been blocked by pack ice that drifted in from Belarus. "Chunks of ice and torrents of ice-cold water rapidly took over our city," Jekabpils resident Maris Kodols told



Ukraine Puts Dnipro Toll at 21 After Wave of Russian Strikes



KYIV (Dispatches) - Ukraine said Sunday that the death toll had risen to 21 after a Russian missile slammed into a tower block in the city of Dnipro during a massive wave of strikes causing power outages and blackouts across the war-torn country.

Ukrainian officials said more than 40 people were still missing after the Dnipro strike Saturday, which came as Ukraine celebrated the Old New Year, a popular holiday, and as Britain became the first Western country to offer Kyiv the heavy tanks it has long sought.

At least 21 people were killed and 73 others wounded in Saturday's attack on the Dnipro tower block, Ukraine's regional council head Mykola Lukashuk said.

A 15-year-old girl was among the dead, officials said, after dozens of people were pulled from the rubble. "Rescue operations continue. The fate of more than 40 people remain unknown," regional governor Valentyn Reznichenko said. Rescuers battled through the night in a bid to free a woman trapped under the rubble after hearing her voice, the state emergency service said.

The strike destroyed dozens of flats in the Dnipro apartment block leaving hundreds of people homeless, said Kyrlo Tymoshenko, a senior official at the presidency.

The Ukrainian army said the block was hit by an X-22 Russian missile that it lacked the capacity to shoot down. "Only anti-aircraft missile systems, which in the future may be provided to Ukraine by Western partners... are capable of intercepting these air targets," it said.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky on Saturday pleaded for more Western military weapons, saying that Russian "terror" could be stopped only on the battlefield.

"What is needed for this? Those weapons that are in the warehouses of our partners," Zelensky said.

On Saturday, British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak pledged to provide Challenger 2 tanks to Ukraine, the first Western country to supply the heavy tanks Kyiv has been demanding.

The tanks would arrive in Ukraine in the coming weeks, Downing Street said, adding that Britain would also train the Ukrainian Armed Forces on how to use them.

Russia's embassy in Britain warned that "bringing tanks to the conflict zone, far from drawing the hostilities to a close, will only serve to intensify combat operations, generating more casualties, including among the civilian population".

Moldova, Ukraine's southwestern neighbour, said it had found Russian missile debris on its territory after Saturday's strikes.

"Russia's brutal war against Ukraine directly impacts Moldova again," President Maia Sandu tweeted, posting photographs of the wreckage. "We strongly condemn today's intensified attacks."

Ukraine's energy facilities were still reeling Sunday from what was a 12th wave of large-scale Russian attacks on energy infrastructure in recent months.

The attacks targeted power infrastructure in the Kharkiv, Lviv, Ivano-Frankivsk, Zaporizhzhia, Vinnytsia and Kyiv regions, Energy Minister German Galushchenko said.

On Sunday, operator Ukrenergo said energy infrastructure was "being restored" but that the attacks had "increased the energy deficit".

"The period of outages may increase," it acknowledged.

Zelensky said Ukraine shot down 20 of the more than 30 Russian missiles fired.

Iraq PM al-Sudani Backs Continued U.S. Troop Presence

BAGHDAD (Dispatches) - Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani has defended the presence of United States troops in his country in an interview with the Wall Street Journal, his first since taking office in October.

The position contradicts the stance of several Iran-aligned groups that in part make up the Shia-dominated Coordination Framework, the political bloc that nominated the prime minister last year. Al-Sudani was subsequently appointed by President Abdul Latif Rashid, whose election ended more than a year of political deadlock fuelled by scholar and political leader Muqtada al-Sadr.

In the interview published on Sunday, al-Sudani did not give a timeline for US and NATO forces - who are currently serving in a training capacity - to leave Iraq, despite calls from some political allies for a full withdrawal.

"We think that we need the foreign forces," al-Sudani said. "Elimination of ISIS needs some more time."

The US invaded Iraq in 2003 amid its global "war on terror", with troop numbers reaching a peak of about 170,000 soldiers in 2007 before forces were withdrawn in 2011. They were redeployed to Iraq in 2014 in response to the rise of ISIL (ISIS), as the armed group overran a large swath of territory across Iraq and Syria.

However, combat operations largely fizzled in the wake of ISIL's territorial defeat in 2019. Two years later, Washington officially ended the US-led combat mission in Iraq and transitioned to an advisory role assisting Iraqi forces. The US currently has about 2,000 troops stationed in the country, with NATO housing several hundred troops there, all in non-combat roles.

Meanwhile, rocket attacks launched by Iran-aligned armed groups on bases housing foreign troops and other foreign installations have remained relatively frequent.

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Climate Activists in Davos Protest Over Role of Oil Firms at WEF

DAVOS (Dispatches) - Scores of climate activists have gathered in Davos to protest against the role of big oil companies at the World Economic Forum (WEF) and demand stronger action to tackle the climate crisis.

The annual meeting of global business and political leaders in Switzerland started yesterday.

It will be attended by some 1,500 business leaders, including major energy firms like BP, Chevron and Saudi Aramco.

"We are demanding concrete and real climate action," said Nicolas Siegrist, the 26-year-old organiser of the protest, who also heads the Young Socialists party in Switzerland.

"They will be in the same room with state leaders and they will push for their interests," Siegrist said of the involvement of energy companies at the WEF meeting.

The oil and gas industry has said that it needs to be part of the energy transition because fossil fuels will continue to play a major role in the world's energy mix as countries shift to low-carbon economies.

More than 100 protesters gathered in a Davos square were chanting "change your diet for the climate, eat the rich". Others booed oil firms cited during a speech.

"I know some of the companies are involved in alternatives, but I think governments with their subsidies have to skew the field in favor of alternative energy," Heather Smith, a member of the 99% Organization, a volunteer movement.

Smith was holding a sign saying "Stop Rosebank", a North Sea oil and gas field she is campaigning to halt plans for.

The economic crisis and rising interest rates have made it harder for renewable energy developments

to attract financing while energy companies have been profiting from the energy crisis.

"There is still too much money to be made from fossil fuel investments," Smith added.

At Least 68 Killed in Nepal's Air Crash

KATHMANDU (Dispatches) - At least 68 people were killed on Sunday when a domestic flight of Yeti Airlines crashed in Pokhara in Nepal, the worst air crash in three decades in the small Himalayan nation.

Hundreds of rescue workers scoured the hillside where the flight carrying 72 people from the capital Kathmandu went down. Officials late in the evening called off the search operations for the day, saying they will resume today.

Local TV footage earlier showed rescue workers scrambling around broken sections of the aircraft. Some of the ground near the crash site was scorched, with licks of flames visible.

The weather had been clear and there was no immediate indication of what caused the crash.

It was Nepal's deadliest air crash since 1992, the Aviation Safety Network database showed, when a Pakistan International Airlines Airbus A300 crashed into a hillside upon approach to Kathmandu, killing all 167 people on board.

Nearly 350 people have died since 2000 in plane or helicopter crashes in Nepal - home to eight of the world's 14 highest mountains, including Everest - where sudden weather changes can make for hazardous conditions.

The European Union has banned Nepali airlines from its airspace since 2013, citing safety concerns.

The plane on Sunday made contact with Pokhara airport from Seti Gorge at 10:50 a.m. (0505 GMT),

the country's Civil Aviation Authority said in a statement. "Then it crashed." At least 68 people were confirmed dead, it said.

"Half of the plane is on the hillside," said Arun Tamu, a local resident, who told Reuters he reached the site minutes after the plane went down. "The other half has fallen into the gorge of the Seti river."

Khum Bahadur Chhetri, another local resident, said he watched from the roof of his house as the flight approached. "I saw the plane trembling, moving left and right, and then suddenly it nosedived and it went into the gorge," Chhetri told Reuters.

The government has set up a panel to investigate the cause of the crash and it is expected to report within 45 days, the finance minister, Bishnu Paudel, told reporters.

Those on board the twin-engine ATR 72 aircraft included three infants and three children, the Civil Aviation Authority's statement said.

Passengers included five Indians, four Russians and one Irish, two South Korean, one Australian, one

The journey to Pokhara, Nepal's second largest city tucked under the picturesque Annapurna mountain range, from the capital Kathmandu is one of the Himalayan country's most popular tourist routes, with many preferring a short flight instead of a six-hour-long drive through hilly roads.



Nearly One Billion Served By Healthcare Facilities Without Reliable Electricity



GENEVA (Dispatches) - The study presents the latest data on electrification of healthcare facilities in low- and middle-income countries, and projects investments required to achieve adequate and reliable power.

It was published by the World Health Organization (WHO), the World Bank, the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA), and Sustainable Energy for All (SEforAll).

"Electricity access in healthcare facilities can make the difference between life and death," said Dr Maria Neira, WHO interim Assistant Director-General for Healthier Populations.

"Investing in reliable, clean and sustainable energy for health-care facilities is not only crucial to pandemic preparedness, it's also much needed to achieve universal health coverage, as well as increasing climate resilience and adaptation."

Access to electricity is critical for providing people with quality healthcare, from delivering babies to managing emergencies like heart attacks, or ensuring children receive lifesaving vaccines.

Electricity is required to power the most basic devices - lighting, communications equipment and refrigeration, for example, or those that measure vital signs like heartbeat and blood pressure. It is also crucial for both routine and emergency procedures.

However, more than one in 10 health facilities in South Asia and sub-Saharan African countries lack any electricity access whatever, according to the report, and power is unreliable in half of all facilities in sub-Saharan Africa.

Despite recent progress, approximately one billion people are served by healthcare facilities without reliable electricity supply, or none at all - a number that is nearly as large as the entire populations of the United States, Indonesia, Pakistan and Germany combined.

There also stark disparities in access within countries themselves. Primary healthcare centres and rural facilities are considerably less likely to have electricity access than hospitals and facilities in urban areas, according to the report.

The report stressed that electrification of healthcare facilities "must be considered an utmost development priority".

A World Bank needs analysis, included in the report, showed that almost two-thirds of healthcare facilities in low and middle-income countries require some form of urgent intervention, such as a new electricity connection or backup power supply.

Nearly \$5 billion is urgently needed to bring them to a minimal standard of electrification.

The authors said decentralized sustainable energy solutions are available which would have a huge impact on health delivery, citing the example of solar photovoltaic systems which convert sunlight into electricity.

Such solutions are cost-effective, clean and rapidly deployable on site, meaning there is no need to wait for the arrival of the central energy grid.

Healthcare systems and facilities are increasingly affected by the impacts of the climate emergency, the authors added.

Therefore, making them more resilient calls for building facilities and services that can meet the challenges of climate change while improving environmental sustainability.

Meanwhile the World Health Organization (WHO) has welcomed data from China on its COVID-19 surge, according to a statement issued following a conversation on Saturday between Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus and Minister Ma Xiaowei, Director of the country's National Health Commission.

Pandemic Cooking Boom Sharpens Japan Knife Sales



TOKYO (Dispatches) - In a Japanese city once famous for forging samurai swords, craftsmen sharpen and polish kitchen knives, but even at full tilt their small factory can't keep up with global demand.

The export value of knives and other bladed tools like scissors hit a record high in Japan last year, partly thanks to a home-cooking boom sparked by the pandemic.

Japanese knives are also winning more converts among aspiring and professional chefs, who prize their delicate precision, sleek finish and long lifespan.

Katsumi Sumikama, head of Sumikama Cutlery in the central city of Seki, puts the popularity down to a "combination of technology and traditional craftsmanship".

To achieve the formidably sharp edge needed to make perfect sushi or cut precise slices of Wagyu beef, the company uses machines that guarantee accuracy to one-thousandth of a millimetre, then artisans finish the job by hand.

But even at full capacity, "we can't keep up", Sumikama told AFP.

"We're seeing demand stronger than pre-pandemic levels in all countries."

Seki's renowned blade expertise dates back to the 14th century, when the city became a major producer of swords thanks to its rich natural environment.

"The clean water, charcoal and raw materials were ideal for sword-making," Sumikama said.

High-quality iron made from ironsand was forged into a tough sword by folding red-hot metal multiple times, and moulded into a curved shape by plunging it into cool water.

When samurai were ordered to abandon their swords in 1876, the industry faltered, but after World War II the city began producing pocketknives for export.

Business boomed at first, with the fixed yen-to-dollar rate a boon for mass exports to the United States.

But when that policy ended in the 1970s and China began making cheaper products, Japan could no longer compete.

"There were difficult times," Sumikama said.

"Seki's blade-makers decided they needed a new direction."

At the time, German products, including knives by Zwilling, dominated the market for high-end knifeware, and luxury Japanese offerings were few and far between.

In the 1990s, Sumikama went all in - launching a full line-up of top-of-the-range kitchen knives that cost up to several hundred dollars each.

To emphasise their made-in-Japan pedigree, his company adds a wavy two-tone finish to the metal that evokes the traditional appearance of samurai blades, and a kanji-character logo.

Despite their elegant appearance, Sumikama said he faced scepticism from both within and outside the company that his expensive knives would sell.

"We were trapped in the idea that Japanese products... would not be accepted by consumers unless they were cheaper than German products," he said.

But the line was a success and the company now sells their luxury knives in more than 50 countries.

The export value of kitchen bladed tools hit a record ¥12 billion (RM408 million) in 2021, a 30 per cent jump from around nine billion yen the previous year, according to Japan Customs.

French chef Olivier Oddos, whose Tokyo restaurant boasted a Michelin star between 2014 and 2021, has been a devotee for more than two decades.



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UAE Pledges to Invest \$30b in South Korea

SEOUL (Dispatches) - The United Arab Emirates (UAE) has decided to invest \$30 billion in South Korea's industries, South Korea's presidential office said on Sunday, as the two countries seek to expand economic cooperation.

The investment decision was announced as South Korea's President Yoon Suk-yeol met his UAE counterpart, Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed al-Nahyan, in Abu Dhabi during a four-day state visit, Yoon's office said.

"We have decided a \$30 billion investment based on the trust on South Korea which keeps promises under any circumstances," Yoon's office quoted the UAE president as saying.



Growth in 2022 Likely to Mark China's Weakest in 40 Years

BEIJING (Dispatches) - China has likely seen its weakest economic growth in four decades in 2022 after the twin crises of the pandemic and property woes, analysts said ahead of Tuesday's data announcement.

Ten experts interviewed by Agence France-Presse (AFP) forecast an average 2.7% year-over-year rise in the gross domestic product (GDP) for the world's second-largest economy, a sharp plunge from China's 2021 growth of more than 8%.

It could also be China's slowest pace since a 1.6% contraction in 1976 - the year Mao Zedong died - and excluding 2020, after the COVID-19 virus emerged in Wuhan in late 2019.

Beijing had set itself a growth target of around 5.5% for 2022, but this was undermined by the government's "zero-COVID" policy, which put the brakes on manufacturing activity and consumption.

Strict lockdowns, quarantines, and compulsory mass testing prompted abrupt closures of manufacturing facilities and businesses in significant hubs - like Zhengzhou, home of the world's giant iPhone factory - and sent reverberations across the global supply chain.

Beijing abruptly loosened pandemic restrictions in early December after three years of enforcing some of the harshest COVID-19 measures in the world.

China is battling a surge in COVID-19 cases that have overwhelmed its hospitals and medical staff.

This is likely to reflect in 2022's fourth-quarter growth, which will also be announced on Tuesday alongside other indicators such as retail, industrial production, and employment.

"The fourth quarter is relatively difficult," said the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences economist Zhang Ming in Beijing. "No matter whether it's by the metrics of consumption or investment, the growth is slowing."

China's exports took their biggest plunge since the start of the pandemic in December, contracting 9.9% year-over-year, while consumption was in the red in November, and investment has slowed.

"The three horse carriages of the Chinese economy are all facing a relatively evident downward pressure in the fourth quarter," Zhang said.

Rabobank analyst Teeuwe Mevissen echoed Zhang, saying the final quarter will "almost certainly show a decline because of the fast spread of COVID-19" after the loosening of health restrictions in December.

"This will affect demand and supply conditions for the worse," he said. In addition, problems in the property sector are still weighing on growth, Mevissen added. This sector, which along with construction, accounts for more than a quarter of China's GDP, has suffered since Beijing started cracking down on excessive borrowing and rampant speculation in 2020.

This regulatory tightening marked the beginning of financial worries for Evergrande, the former Chinese number one in real estate now strangled by colossal debt. Real estate sales have fallen in many cities, and many developers struggle to survive.

Dubai Property Price Rises Seen Slowing Further in 2023

DUBAI (Dispatches) - Residential property prices in Dubai are expected to rise at a record pace in 2023 after a record year that saw a more than 60% increase in total units sold, according to one of the city's biggest real estate consultancies.

Prices are seen rising by about 5% this year, after climbing 11% in 2022, which itself was a slowdown from a 21% increase in 2021, Richard Waind, group managing director of Betterhomes, told Reuters.

"(Higher) interest rates haven't removed the underlying demand. But they are certainly having an impact on people's willingness and ability to pay more for properties," Waind said, though he said the market has taken rising rates and a strong dollar "in their stride so far".

"We're obviously less exposed to interest rates here through the prevalence of cash purchases. So, in the UK, U.S., cash purchases are somewhere between 20 and 40% of all transactions. Over here, it's roughly 70%," he added.

Dubai's property sector surged in 2020 as it opened up again during the pandemic before most major cities and as rich buyers snapped up luxury units, boosting a sector that had been sluggish since the 2014-15 oil price crash.

Russians were Betterhomes' top non-resident buyers in 2022, accounting for 15% of transactions, followed by Britons taking 12%, Indians with 11%, Italians 7% and French 4%. Buyers from Pakistan were sixth, Lebanon seventh, China eighth, the United States and Canada ninth and Kyrgyzstan 10th, Betterhomes said in a report.

Russians poured in after the war in Ukraine and snapped up properties in some of Dubai's most sought-after areas, like Palm Jumeirah and Downtown. Among residents of Dubai, Indians were the top buyers, followed by Britons, Russians, Italians and Canadians. Foreigners make up a majority of the United Arab Emirates population.

Sales of apartments surged 73% last year in volume terms, while villas - which led the start of the recovery in 2020 - saw just a 3% rise in volumes, "mainly due to a lack of supply, both in the ready and off-plan markets", Betterhomes said in the report.

Concerns of oversupply have long plagued the sector which saw a property bubble burst in 2009-2010, causing prices to plunge by more than half.

Last year, 34,000 new units were added, according to Betterhomes. Waind expects 30,000-35,000 new units in 2023, which he viewed as "a lack of supply in this market with population growth".



Iraq's Currency on Roller Coaster Ride Amid Foreign Transfers Scrutiny

BAGHDAD (Dispatches) - Iraq's local currency has been on a two-month roller-coaster ride following tightening procedures for international transfers, with some blaming Washington for the dinar's woes.

While the official exchange rate has been fixed at 1,470 Iraqi dinars against the dollar, the currency was trading at up to 1,600 to the greenback on local markets from mid-November before settling at about 1,570 dinars, according to state media.

Though the depreciation does not seem particularly dramatic compared to other countries in the region, it has sent panic through the Iraqi population, fearing a price surge in imported goods such as gas and wheat.

"The fundamental reason" for this depreciation is "external constraints," said Muzhar Saleh, a financial adviser to Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani.

But other Iraqi officials have placed the blame squarely on the shoulders of one actor - the United States.

Hadi al-Ameri, a key figure in the pro-Iran former paramilitary Hashed al-Shaabi, has accused the U.S. of using the dollar "as a weapon to starve nations."

But Iraqi economic expert Ahmed Tabaqchali said that "contrary to current misconceptions, rumors and misinformation, there is no evidence of U.S. pressure on Iraq."

Since mid-November, Iraqi banks have had to comply with specific SWIFT international transfer system criteria to access their foreign reserves, estimated at \$100 billion and held at the U.S. Federal Reserve (Fed).

"Taking part in the international cross-border fund transfers requires complying with global anti-money laundering provisions, counterterrorist financing provisions, and sanctions provisions - such as those that apply to Iran or Russia," Tabaqchali said.

"The new regulations require high levels of disclosure and transparency," he said, adding that this came as a "shock for many ... of our banks, who were not used to this."

According to Saleh, Iraqi banks must now register their dollar transfers "on an online platform that reviews transfer requests."

"The U.S. Federal Reserve examines the requests, and if there are any suspicions, it stops the transfer," he said.

Since the adoption of the new mechanism in November, the Fed has blocked about 80% of transfer requests to Iraqi banks due to doubts over the final destination of these transfers, according to Saleh.

This has led to a shortage of dollars on the Iraqi market and a depreciation in the dinar's value.

Asking for More Loans From Friendly Countries Is Embarrassing



ISLAMABAD (Dispatches) - Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has said that it was embarrassing for him to seek more loans from friendly countries, saying it was not a permanent solution for the cash-strapped country's economic challenges.

Addressing the passing out ceremony of probationary officers of the Pakistan Administrative Service (PAS) here in the capital of Punjab province on Saturday, Prime Minister Sharif regretted that during the past 75 years, different governments whether headed by political leadership or military dictators could not address the economic issues.

Sharif said it really embarrassed him to ask for further loans while lauding the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for the financial support, Geo News quoted him as saying.

He said that seeking foreign loans was not the right solution to address Pakistan's economic challenges as the loans would have to be eventually returned.

The prime minister said that sustainable development goals (SDGs) could be achieved and foreign loans avoided had their "bus could have moved at a fast pace" and on the right track.

Pakistan is battling to fix its economic and political fissures amidst a parochial political rivalry between former premier Imran Khan and the current government headed by Sharif.

During Sharif's recent visit to the United Arab Emirates (UAE), President Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed announced a grant of a further USD 1 billion loan to Pakistan.

Saudi Arabia and the UAE are the two key supporters of Pakistan who come to its rescue when the chips are down.

The country faces a serious crisis as its foreign reserves are down to USD 5.8 billion, the lowest since February 2014. The reserve includes deposits worth USD 5 billion from Saudi Arabia and China with specific conditions of use.

Global Leaders Will Tackle Multiple Crises at World Economic Forum

DAVOS (Dispatches) - More than 2700 world leaders will seek solutions for multiple global crises when they convene at the World Economic Forum's annual meeting in the posh Swiss Alpine village of Davos this week.

This auspicious gathering includes 52 heads of state, leaders in business, finance, and culture as well as humanitarians and members of civil society from 130 countries. More than 5,000 Swiss army soldiers will be on hand to guarantee security and ensure any protests do not get out of hand.

The theme of this year's meeting is cooperation in a fragmented world. After emerging from three years of pandemic isolation, delegates once again will be meeting in person. During the week, they will address critical political, economic, and social issues that demand urgent attention. Klaus Schwab, founder and executive chairman of the World Economic Forum, says this personal interaction will create the necessary level of trust to bring people together.

"One of the root causes of this fragmentation is actually a lack of cooperation. This in turn increases fragmentation in society and leads even more to short-term and self-serving policy making. It is a truly vicious circle," he said. Schwab says the erosion of trust between the government and business sectors must be stopped. He says cooperation must be reinforced and conditions for a strong and durable recovery created.

Managing director of the forum, Mirak Dusek, says world leaders will be encouraged to work together on such interconnected issues as energy, climate, and nature. He says discussion on the economy and society will take center stage.

"On the economy, we are going to be putting a lot of emphasis on infrastructure. Particularly on how we make sure that the investments around infrastructure, particularly clean infrastructure - how do we make sure that this leads to new growth, growth that is more inclusive and makes us more resilient in the future... Of course, we will also be looking at social vulnerability that are stemming from these crises," he said.

Kazakhstan Is Ready to Raise Oil Exports In 2023

ASTANA (Dispatches) - The Caspian Pipeline Consortium (CPC), which handles the transportation and exports of most of the crude oil pumped in Kazakhstan, is ready to transport more crude to the export terminals on the Black Sea, CPC's director general Nikolay Gorban said.

Last year, a total of 58.7 million tons of

oil were transported through the Tengiz-Novorossiysk pipeline system, of which about 52.2 million tons were pumped in Kazakhstan, Gorban told Kazakhstan's Energy Minister Bulat Aqchulaqov during a meeting today.

The 1,500-km CPC pipeline from the giant Kazakh oilfields in the Caspian Sea to Novorossiysk, on the Russian Black Sea coast, moves over two-thirds of all Kazakhstan export oil along with crude from Russian fields, including those in the Caspian region.

Kazakhstan's oil production and exports were lower in most of the second half of 2022, due to a partial outage at the huge Kashagan oilfield due to a gas leak and urgent repairs needed at two of the CPC's terminals on the Black Sea.

CPC was expected to complete the repairs at one of the mooring points at its Black Sea oil export terminal in November, in what would soon mark an increase in Kazakh oil shipments.

Oil exports from Kazakhstan via the Black Sea terminal faced at least a month of reduced shipments and disrupted loading schedules due to urgent repairs needed at two of the terminal's three Single Point Moorings, the consortium said at the end of August.

In the third and fourth quarter of 2022, Kazakhstan's massive oilfield Kashagan was down or pumping at reduced rates after a gas leak was detected on the site in August. A few days later, the field operator said that the 400,000 barrels per day (bpd) oilfield would partially restart production, and upon completion of repairs and integrity verification, full production would be restored at the facility.

In 2023, Kazakhstan hopes to deliver up to 1.5 million tons of oil through the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline, as part of growing efforts to find export routes bypassing Russia.

S. African, Filipino Film Festivals to Host "Kanpamenar"

TEHRAN (MNA) – The Iranian film "Kanpamenar" by Ashkan Darvishi is scheduled to participate in two film festivals in South Africa and the Philippines.

The Joburg Film festival will run from Thursday, 31st January 2023 to Sunday, 5th February 2023 in South Africa. "Kanpamenar" depicts the story of children in the poor neighborhoods of Tehran. It also supports the oppressed girls of Afghanistan. Siamak Safari, Babak Nouri, Alireza Ostadi, Neda Hosseini, Sirus Hemmati, Mehdi Tarokh, and Fariba Kosari are among the cast members.



Indonesia Challenges China With \$3b Offshore Gas Project

JAKARTA (Dispatches) - Last week, Indonesia's government approved an offshore gas project with a price tag of over \$3 billion. On the surface, that's just business as usual. Below the surface, the move is a direct challenge to China's territorial claims because the gas block is in the South China Sea.

The Tuna block, Reuters reported last week, lies in the waters between Indonesia and Vietnam. The Indonesian oil and gas regulator, SKK Migas, says the block could see peak production of 115 million cubic feet daily by 2027. The gas will be exported to Vietnam, per an earlier statement by the Indonesian energy minister.

"There will be activity in the border area which is one of the world's geopolitical hot spots," the chairman of the oil and gas regulator, Dwi Soetjipto, said. "The Indonesian navy will also participate in securing the upstream oil and gas project so that economically and politically, it becomes an affirmation of Indonesia's sovereignty."

The challenge, then, is a perfectly deliberate decision that could put Indonesia on a collision course with China, with the latter known to flex its military muscles in the South China Sea whenever another country in the basin dares try to establish a presence for oil and gas production purposes.

The South China Sea is seen by many, including in China, as a vast untapped oil and gas reservoir. The U.S. Geological Survey in the 1990s estimated these reserves at some 28 billion barrels of crude, but a 2019 report by the U.S. Energy Information Administration put these at 11 billion barrels, both proven and probable.

Natural gas reserves are also quite significant, at an estimated 190 trillion cubic feet, per the EIA, also proven and probable. But there may be a lot more oil and gas in as-of-yet undiscovered deposits under the waters of the South China Sea, according to a USGS study from 2010. To be more precise, the USGS estimates these at between 5 and 22 billion barrels of crude and 70 and 290 trillion cubic feet of natural gas.

Now, as the EIA notes in its report about the South China Sea reserves, most of the discovered oil and gas is in undisputed waters. This, however, is not really the case with the Tuna block, which lies near the Natuna Islands.

Although China does not have a claim to the islands themselves, the Wall Street Journal reported this week that it does have a claim to part of the waters around



them, including fishing rights. And there have already been clashes between Indonesia and China in this area.

In 2016, the WSJ recalls, Chinese coast guards stopped the Indonesian authorities from detaining a Chinese fishing boat in the waters around the Natuna Islands. Then, in 2021, when the Indonesians sent a rig to the Tuna block for some exploratory drilling, the Chinese sent the coast guard.

According to an exclusive report by Reuters from that time, Beijing had also demanded that Jakarta stop drilling in the block because its ownership is under dispute. Jakarta, however, refused. Drilling at the Tuna block ended successfully.

The situation, however, is tricky. As Reuters noted in its 2021 report, China is Indonesia's biggest trade partner and the place where a lot of investments in Indonesia come from. Yet Indonesia also considers the development of fields like the Tuna a strategic goal. And, apparently, it is ready to confront its bigger, intimidating neighbor to advance that goal.

"While China may return for another round of harassment, I don't expect Indonesia will be cowed by anything short of physical force," the director of the Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, Gregory Poling, told the WSJ. The question, then, is whether China is prepared to use physical force to advance its claim to most of the South China Sea.

Manufacturing Activity...

FROM PAGE 1

Iranian pharmaceutical companies saw their output increase by 25.6% in December last year compared to the same month in 2021, the highest in two years, said the report, adding that December output figure reported in the sector was an increase of 7% from November.

Production and sales of industrial machinery and equipment in Iran rose by 35.5% and 95%, year on year in December, respectively, said the report.

Iran has reported increased activity in its manufacturing sector since the country came under American sanctions in 2018.

The growth has helped the Iranian government better cope with the impacts of US sanctions on its oil exports while enabling it to boost jobs for the country's youth population.

West Apparently...

FROM PAGE 1

The talks to salvage the JCPOA kicked off in the Austrian capital of Vienna in April 2021, with the intention of examining Washington's seriousness in rejoining the deal and removing anti-Iran sanctions. The negotiations have been at a standstill since August due to Washington's insistence on its hard-nosed position of not removing all the sanctions that were slapped on the Islamic Republic by the previous US administration. Iran maintains it is necessary for the other side to offer some guarantees that it will remain committed to any agreement that is reached.

Sanctions Fail to...

FROM PAGE 1

"(Iranian) drones have also enabled Iran to project power and earn profits, showcase technology and enhance prestige, strengthen alliances in the Middle East and beyond," the US article added.

Earlier this month, the US imposed sanctions against six executives and board members of Iran's Quds Aviation Industries under the false pretext that the Islamic Republic had provided Russia with the UAVs to be used by Moscow against Ukraine.

The Islamic Republic has, on repeated occasions, roundly rejected Washington's allegations. Last December, Iranian Defense Minister Brigadier General Mohammad Reza Ashtiani said Ukrainian officials had failed to provide any evidence for their claim that Russia was using Iranian drones in the Ukraine war.

Russia has similarly denied deploying any Iranian UAVs in the war on Ukraine.

The National Interest article acknowledged that, "Western sanctions have been unable to prevent Iran from becoming a prominent player in the military drone market and sharing drone technology with partners inside and outside of the Middle East."

The article also said that Iranian drones are less expensive than their "Western counterparts and have proven to be effective on the battlefield."

Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces Major General Mohammad Baqeri said last month that the Islamic Republic is currently among the world's top five powers in the unmanned aerial vehicles industry. He said Iran's drones can carry out various missions with great accuracy and flight endurance.

"Made in Iran"...

FROM PAGE 1

After the recent action of the Islamic Republic of Iran in removing the ban on the list of goods related to the preferential trade agreement signed between the two countries, holding an Iranian exclusive exhibition is an effective step for increasing cooperation and coordination between the business people on both sides.

Mohammed Reza Brahoui, the manager of Iran's exclusive exhibition, said on the sidelines of the opening ceremony in an interview with an Iranian media outlet, that about 50 companies from different Iranian provinces operating in the fields of industrial and commercial services, including plastic and polymer materials, food industry, steel industry, copper, services, power plants, construction, turbines, textile machinery, and the construction industry are taking part in the event.

The planning of this exhibition has been done through the efforts of Iran's TPO to increase the trade balance between Iran and Pakistan, Brahoui said, adding, "The officials of the two countries are looking for establishing a constructive trade relationship and negotiations will be held on conducting transactions using a barter mechanism."

ECB Can Cut Carbon Footprint by Shedding Bonds of Biggest Polluters

LONDON (Dispatches)

- The European Central Bank could radically cut the carbon footprint of its corporate bond portfolio by selling just 50 billion euros (\$54.30 billion) of polluting companies' debt, research shows, but analysts say this would risk big market distortions.



The ECB's green ambitions are in the spotlight after board member Isabel Schnabel this week said the bank must step up efforts to become more climate friendly.

But other central bank policymakers, including from the ECB and U.S. Federal Reserve, have said tackling climate change is for governments not central bankers.

And analysts fear such action by the ECB could go against central banks' mission of maintaining market stability.

Schnabel, head of the ECB's market operations, said the ECB was meant to tilt its corporate bond holdings towards greener assets via new purchases but new bond buys have been stopped and reinvestment will soon be wound down as part of its inflation fight.

Schnabel said the ECB needed now to consider a reshuffling of its 345-billion-euro corporate bond portfolio towards greener issuers.

She faced immediate pushback from ECB policymaker Pierre Wunsch, who said it was for governments to fight climate change. But her comments got market watchers running the numbers.

Analysis from sustainable finance think tank Anthropocene Fixed Income Institute (AFII) showed the ECB could cut the carbon footprint associated with its corporate bond holdings by 87% if it sold just 48.3 billion euros of debt from the 25 top polluters.

These included oil and gas companies such as Shell, TotalEnergies, Repsol and BP.

"This is an extremely high concentration of carbon in a few names," said AFII founder Ulf Erlandsson, adding the total emissions they account for is substantial in the context of annual global CO2 emissions of around 30-40 giga tonnes.

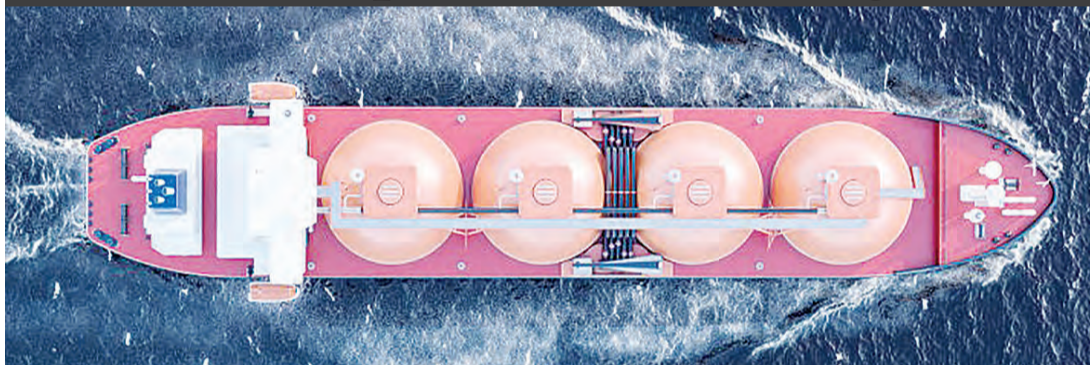
Financial institutions worldwide are looking to reduce the climate-damaging greenhouse gases emitted into the atmosphere by the companies they lend to, as part of efforts to cap global warming, yet central banks have been more cautious.

U.S. Fed chair Jerome Powell has said the bank's regulatory powers give it a narrow role to ensure financial institutions "appropriately manage" the risks they face from climate change. "We are not, and will not be, a 'climate policymaker'", he said.

But ECB President Christine Lagarde has made greening monetary policy one of her objectives. The Bank of England set out plans to "green" its corporate bond portfolio in 2021 but these were soon overtaken by a decision to unwind all holdings as part of its fight against inflation.

While calculating the carbon footprint of the ECB's portfolio is challenging, AFII estimates it to be around 438 million tons of CO2 annually - more than Italy or France emitted in 2017, based on European Union data.

Global LNG Imports Hit a Record High in 2022



LONDON (Dispatches) - Global imports of liquefied natural gas (LNG) hit a record high of 409 million tons last year, as Europe scrambled to replace Russian pipeline gas supply and outbid Asia to draw the majority of cargoes.

The global LNG imports of 409 million tons in 2022 were up from world imports of 386.5 million tons in 2021, per data from Refinitiv quoted by Reuters' Asia Commodities and Energy Columnist, Clyde Russell.

Commodity analytics firm Kpler puts the 2022 global LNG imports at 400.5 million tons, an increase compared to imports of 379.6 million tons in 2021.

While Asia was the primary destination of LNG in previous years, Europe emerged as the premium market for liquefied natural gas as it seeks to replace Russian pipeline gas supply. Europe is estimated to have imported nearly one-quarter of all LNG traded last year, winning the competition with Asia, as European benchmark prices surged after Russia started cutting off pipeline supplies to most of its customers to the west.

In 2022, the EU's imports of LNG hit 101 million tons, which was a 58% surge compared to 2021, per data from Refinitiv cited by the Financial Times. The EU imported a total of 24% of all LNG traded last year, according to the data.

Much of the European LNG imports were aided by lackluster demand in Asia, where China saw a rare drop in gas consumption amid a slowdown in economic growth, while most of South and Southeast Asia simply couldn't afford the skyrocketing spot LNG prices.

Europe's pivot to LNG has created a demand shock to an already tight global LNG market, with additional 50 million tons annually of EU demand, London-based consultancy Timera Energy said in November. Europe's role in the LNG market sharply changed from a passive and flexible LNG sink to a direct and aggressive competitor, Timera Energy noted.

Despite the recent plunge in the European benchmark gas prices to below the North Asian benchmark, Europe continues to attract most of the U.S. exports of LNG as demand in Asia is still weak.

Puma Fighting Vehicle to Return to Key NATO Mission in H1 of 2023

BERLIN (Dispatches) - Germany expects to field Puma infantry fighting vehicles for a key NATO mission in the first half of 2023, its chief of defense said, after Berlin had to withdraw the Puma from the alliance's quick reaction force due to problems in a drill.

"As soon as we have sufficient vehicles repaired and operational for one company, we will use it for the VJTF," Eberhard Zorn said, referring to NATO's Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF).

Germany this year leads the alliance's quick reaction unit that constitutes NATO's first line of response and reinforcement in case of a conflict or heightened tensions with Russia.

"I very strongly expect this (to see the Puma ready for the VJTF) in the first half of the year," Zorn added.

In December, Defense Minister Christine Lambrecht said Germany would not purchase any more Pumas until they had proven themselves reliable, after several were put out of service during a military drill.

The Puma is an armed, armoured vehicle that carries troops into battle.

Shares in Rheinmetall AG, which manufactures the armored vehicles together with Krauss-Maffei Wegmann GmbH & Co, went down 7% after the minister's announcement.

For the VJTF, Germany replaced the Puma temporarily with decades-old Marder infantry fighting vehicles - which the more advanced Puma is meant to succeed in future.

Germany has vowed to boost defense spending and modernize its military in the wake of the Ukraine war.



Badminton King Axelsen Secures Malaysia Open Title

KUALA LUMPUR (Dispatches) - Danish ace Viktor Axelsen stormed to victory in the final of badminton's Malaysia Open, successfully defending his title by outgunning Japan's Kodai Naraoka. The world number one only needed 40 minutes in Kuala Lumpur to secure his first trophy of the year, displaying top form to walk away with the match 21-6, 21-15. Wasting no time in the first game, Axelsen immediately went on the offensive, raining his signature pinpoint smashes on a defenceless Naraoka.

Switchboard:
(+98) (21) 44253448
Public Relations Tel:
(+98)(21) 44253450
Editorial Board: 44253449
Public Relations Fax:
(+98)(21) 44253395
Advertising Department:
Tel/Fax:(+98) (21) 44253335-9/44253234
Website:
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info@irannewsdaily.com
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Stosur to Retire After Australian Open

MELBOURNE (Dispatches) - Veteran Sam Stosur said that the Australian Open would be her final tournament, ending a 23-year career in which she won a singles Grand Slam title and seven others in doubles. The 38-year-old Australian's greatest moment came when she defeated Serena Williams to win the singles crown at the 2011 US Open, which she described as "the pinnacle" of her career. This week will mark her 21st Australian Open.

Arsenal Win North London Derby

LONDON (Dispatches) - Arsenal powered to their first Premier League win at Tottenham in nine years as the leaders took advantage of Hugo Lloris' blunder to seal a 2-0 victory in Sunday's north London derby.

Mikel Arteta's side were gifted the lead by Tottenham goalkeeper Lloris, who pushed Bukayo Saka's cross into his own net early in the first half.

Martin Odegaard added Arsenal's second goal with a superb long-range strike before the interval. Arsenal's first league double over their bitter rivals since 2013-14 moved them eight points clear of second placed Manchester City after the champions' defeat at Manchester United on Saturday.

As Arsenal's unexpected title charge gathers pace, their trip up the Seven Sisters Road to fifth placed Tottenham was a significant test of their mettle.

They passed with flying colours at a venue which had been a house of horrors for the Gunners, who had lost all three games at Tottenham's plush new stadium since it opened in 2019.

Last season's 3-0 collapse was especially painful, with Tottenham going on to snatch a top four finish at their neighbours' expense.

But Arsenal no longer have to worry about scrapping for a top four berth after taking the Premier League by storm this season.

Even losing out to Chelsea in the race to sign Shakhtar Donetsk winger Mykhailo Mudryk on Sunday could be dismissed as a minor inconvenience thanks to this statement success.

Unbeaten in their last 12 league games, the Gunners are in pole position to win the title for the first time since Arsene Wenger's Invincibles reigned supreme in 2004.

With spluttering City looking more vulnerable than usual and Liverpool struggling to shake off a season-long funk, Arsenal have seized the initiative in the title race with a remarkable 15 wins from their 18 games.

Gut-Behrami Denies Brignone Super-G Double at St Anton

St Anton (Dispatches) - Swiss Olympic champion Lara Gut-Behrami denied Federica Brignone a quick-fire World Cup super-G double at St Anton.

In the super-G in the Tyrol Brignone became the first Italian woman to win 21 races in the women's elite alpine skiing competition.

Gut-Behrami was in third but 24 hours later she came out on top from a trio of Italians led by Brignone, 15 hundredths of a second adrift.

Marta Bassino completed the podium.

This was Gut-Behrami's 36th World Cup win and second this season after her giant slalom success in Killington in November.

Brignone's profitable weekend at St Anton lifted her to the top of the discipline standings.

Missing from the super-G show in St Anton was Mikaela Shiffrin, who has a healthy lead in the overall standings, and Italy's Sofia Goggia, who sat out the race "as a precaution" after a crash on Saturday, with next week's speed races at home in Cortina d'Ampezzo.

Unlike Saturday, when the route had been shortened because of high wind, the skiers descended the Karl Schranz piste on a complete course under grey skies.

Gut-Behrami's run was far from perfect with her right ski in the air at one point on the full-length top section, and almost came a cropper following the jump into the Eisfall.

But she recovered impressively to post the best combined time in the last two sectors.

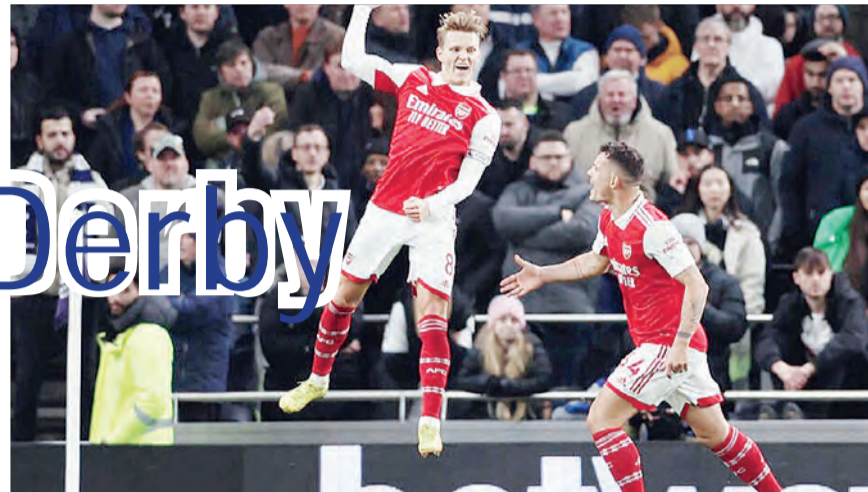
"It didn't really go as planned," said the world super-G champion of the difficult piste which 17 of the 45 starters failed to finish.

"St. Anton is a tough race, it's a really interesting slope.

"On the flat part I made a lot of mistakes and I never expected to be that fast," she said.

"The last part I tried to ski clean and let the ski go. I'm not so happy with the top (section) but I'm happy with the result."

At 31, she collected her 18th victory on the world circuit in the discipline, placing her second all-time behind American Lindsey Vonn's 28.



over Crystal Palace as Newcastle struck late to beat Fulham 1-0 and move up to third in the Premier League.

Kai Havertz scored the only goal at Stamford Bridge with a towering second half header on the day Chelsea paid tribute to former player and manager Gianluca Vialli.

The Italian great died earlier this month aged 58 from pancreatic cancer.

A number of Vialli's former Chelsea teammates joined the players from both sides on the field for a minute's silence, while the home fans unfurled a banner with a picture of Vialli against the backdrop of the Italian flag.

There was not been much to show for that investment so far, but Potter's injury-ravaged squad did enough to grind out just a second win in 10 league games.

Havertz made the breakthrough as he rose highest to power home Hakim Ziyech's cross from a well-worked corner on 64 minutes.

Chelsea still needed some heroics from goalkeeper Kepa Arrizabalaga to see the game out as the Spaniard made a flying save from Cheick Doucoure's sweetly-struck volley.

Despite a much-needed win, Chelsea remain 10 points adrift of the top four after Newcastle kept their title dreams alive at St. James' Park.

The Magpies were given a huge let off when Aleksandar Mitrovic saw a second half penalty ruled out against his former club.

The Serbian slipped as he took the spot kick and his right-footed effort rebounded off his left foot into the net.

Newcastle took full advantage as club record signing Alexander Isak came off the bench to head in the winner a minute from time.

Victory takes Eddie Howe's men back above Manchester United into third in the table on goal difference and within six points of leaders Arsenal.



Kristoffersen Secures 30th World Cup Victory

WENGEN (Dispatches) - Norwegian Henrik Kristoffersen posted his second victory of the season and the 30th of his career winning the men's World Cup slalom at Wengen on Sunday in very challenging conditions.

The 28-year-old's combined time over two legs was 20 hundredths quicker than Swiss racer Loic Meillard -- who had been fastest in the first leg -- with his fellow Norwegian Lucas Braathen third, 49 hundredths adrift.

Kristoffersen's victory came on a course in a bad state due to the recent warm temperatures and it became a veritable battle against the elements when heavy snow fell on the second leg.

"I think that I skied intelligently on the snow, because that was a heck of a battle," said Kristoffersen.

Braathen was more direct saying: "My God that was quite a war!"

Admirably consistent it was Kristoffersen's seventh top three finish of the campaign -- his previous win came at Garmisch a fortnight ago.

The overall World Cup standings were unaffected as neither the leader Switzerland's Marco Odermatt nor second-placed Aleksander Aamodt Kilde -- who trails by 340 points -- competed in the slalom.

Al-Attiyah Retains Dakar Rally Title



Sebastien Loeb, the nine-time world rally champion chasing his first Dakar success, was second in successive years, more than 80 minutes behind.

RIYADH (Dispatches) - Nasser Al-Attiyah won a second straight Dakar Rally just kilometers from his Qatar homeland.

His fifth Dakar title eclipsed Ari Vatanen's total and was second only to Stephane Peterhansel, the Dakar's greatest champion with 14 wins, eight in the premier car category.

Al-Attiyah led the Dakar for the last 13 of its 15 days in Saudi Arabia, from the Red Sea to the Persian Gulf.

Lucas Moraes of Brazil was third, the first rookie on the podium in 35 years.

Argentine rider Kevin Benavides won his second motorbike title by beating KTM teammate Toby Price by 43 seconds after more than 4,000 kilometers in one of the closest finishes in the rally's history.

They were the last riders to start the 136-kilometer 14th stage on the coast east of Al-Hofuf.

Benavides, trailing Price by 12 seconds overall, wiped that out by the first checkpoint. By halfway, he was nearly two minutes ahead of the Australian two-time champion. Price came back but Benavides won the stage by 55 seconds.

He won in 2021 and was up front last year until his engine blew on stage 10. Like Al-Attiyah, Benavides was in the top three from stage three, but made his biggest push on Saturday after stopping to help stricken teammate Matthias Walkner, the 2018 champion.

Nadal Facing Tough Test in Australian Open Defense

MELBOURNE (Dispatches) - Rafael Nadal opens his Australian Open title defense tomorrow feeling vulnerable and against a dangerous young opponent, with women's top seed Iga Swiatek also facing a tricky encounter as she targets a maiden crown.

The first Grand Slam of the year kicks off at Melbourne Park with the men's world number one ranking at stake and a new women's champion set to be crowned after Ashleigh Barty's shock retirement following her win last year.

Spanish great Nadal, 36, has lost six of his past seven matches, including his opening two this year, ahead of a difficult afternoon clash on Rod Laver Arena against Britain's in-form Jack Draper.

"Probably one of the toughest first-round (games) possible, being seeded," said the 22-time Grand Slam winner and top seed. "Young, powerful, growing very, very fast on the ranking, playing well."

The fast-improving Draper, 21, made the semi-finals of the Adelaide International this week and said he would not be overawed, despite Nadal being an idol.

"I want to go and compete hard and really play well and I want to go and win the match, of course. So that will be the plan," he said.

Nadal surged to the title last year with a thrilling five-set win over Russia's Daniil Medvedev, who faces American Marcos Giron on center court in an evening match.

His run to a first Australian crown since 2009 came in the absence of nine-time champion Novak Djokovic, who is back this year and heavy favorite after missing the 2022 event when he was deported over his Covid vaccination stance.



Kohli Leads India To Record ODI Win by 317 Runs

NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - Virat Kohli smashed an unbeaten 166 to help India beat Sri Lanka by 317 runs and record the highest ever victory margin in a one-day international as they swept the series 3-0.

Kohli's third century in his last four matches and 116 by opener Shubman Gill powered India to 390-5 in Thiruvananthapuram.

Fast bowler Mohammed Siraj then returned impressive figures of 4-32 and India bowled out the tourists for 73 in 22 overs as India went past New Zealand's 290-run thrashing of Ireland in 2008.

A 131-run second-wicket stand between Gill and Kohli, who surpassed Sri Lankan great Mahela Jayawardene's 12,650 ODI runs to enter the top five all-time run getters, stood out after India elected to bat first.

Nicknamed "King Kohli", the former captain has been in blazing form since coming out of an extended lean patch last year when he spoke about his mental struggles during the phase.

"Ever since I came back from the break, I am feeling good and I don't have desperation anymore to get to a milestone," Kohli said after being named man of the match and series.

"I want to continue being in this space where I am relaxed and content with how I am playing, and that for me is the most important thing. Today I was happy to be batting out there, and in that space I end up playing my best cricket."

Kohli, 34, has amassed 12,754 runs in 268 ODI matches for India, behind Sachin Tendulkar (18,426), Kumar Sangakkara (14,234), Ricky Ponting (13,704) and Sanath Jayasuriya (13,430).

Gill put on 95 runs for the opening wicket with skipper Rohit Sharma, who made 42, to set the tone for the team's batting domination.

