

Health Ministry Announced on Tuesday That the Number of Deaths From the Coronavirus Pandemic in Iran Increased to 144,828 With One More Iranian Killed by the Virus Over the Past 24 Hours

IRAN NEWS

The Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei in a Message Expressed Condolences Over the Demise of Ayatollah Al-Sayyid Muhammad Baqir Muhsin Al-Hakim's Wife

VOL. XXVIII, No. 7690 TEHRAN Price 50,000 Rials

www.irannewsdaily.com

WEDNESDAY JANUARY 18, 2023 - DEY 28, 1401

2 DOMESTIC

FM, Turkish President Hold Meeting



> SEE PAGE 2

3 DOMESTIC

Iran, Pakistan Sign MoU to Expand Trade Ties



> SEE PAGE 3

4 INTERNATIONAL

Death Toll From Strike on Ukraine Apartment Block Rises



> SEE PAGE 4

8 SPORTS

Medvedev Demolishes Giron to Signal Australian Open Intent



> SEE PAGE 8

Persian Gulf's Name Eternal Heritage of Ancient Time

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Foreign Ministry Spokesman Nasser Kanaani said on Tuesday that the Persian Gulf has been under the same name in ancient documents, maps, travelogues and texts for thousands of years and will remain under the same name forever.

Nasser Kanani on Tuesday in response to a question regarding the use of fake label for the Persian Gulf by some Iraqi institutions and officials, including Iraqi Prime Minister, said that Persian Gulf's name is a historical, permanent, documented and undeniable fact.

He emphasized that repeating fake label for a name does not change the truth and does not create legitimacy for it.

Kanaani stated that the Persian Gulf has been under the same name in ancient documents, maps, travelogues and texts for thousands of years and will remain under the same name forever.

Meanwhile, Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian said on Jan 16, 2023 that the Iraqi ambassador to Iran has been summoned to the Ministry over the use of a fake label for Persian Gulf during a football tournament that was held in the country earlier this month.

"We summoned the Iraqi ambassador to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs after the Iraqi authorities used a fake name for the Persian Gulf," Amirabdollahian said, adding that "we conveyed to the Iraqi side the sensitivity the great Iranian nation has about the (need to) use of the accurate and complete designation of the Persian Gulf".

Tehran Criticizes South Korean President's Interventionist Remarks

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The Iranian Foreign Ministry strongly slammed the South Korean president's latest remarks on Iran's relations with the United Arab Emirates as totally "invalid," saying it expects an explanation from Seoul.

Nasser Kanaani, the ministry's spokesman, said on Monday that Tehran is following up on Yoon Suk Yeol's "interventionist" remarks concerning the quality of the Islamic Republic's relations with the UAE.

Addressing the UAE-based Korean forces during a recent trip to the Persian Gulf Arab state, Yoon drew a parallel between the alleged threat posed to his country by North Korea and what he called the "threat" facing Abu Dhabi from Iran. He then described Iran as the "most-threatening nation" to the UAE. **See Page 7**

Iran-Russia Economic Cooperation In Line With Strategic Agreements



IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Iran's top security chief says Tehran and Moscow are strengthening their economic cooperation in line with strategic agreements through constant efforts and a firm determination.

Ali Shamkhani, Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council (SNSC), said on Tuesday it is important that Iran and Russia play a complementary role in the global energy and transit markets.

He made the remarks in a meeting with the Russian president's aide, Igor Levitin, in Tehran.

He also highlighted the importance of accelerating the implementation of joint economic projects within the framework of the agreements reached between the two countries' presidents.

According to Shamkhani, the U.S.-led unilateral sanctions hinder the expansion of relations between countries and escalate regional and global crises.

He called for the formation of joint bodies to counter the restrictive measures. The targeted countries should make use of the international potential to counter the sanctions, he said.

Levitin, for his part, pointed to the strategic impact of completing the North-South railway project, saying it is a top priority for Moscow to quickly start the operational measures related to the completion of the Rasht-Astara railway.

He said that Iran enjoys great capacities in the energy and transit sectors, and Russian firms are keen to invest in Iran's infrastructural projects.

The Russian official also referred to the two countries' agreements to develop trade relations using national currencies, saying the two countries' economic and banking officials have adopted the necessary mechanisms to evade the sanctions.

Tehran and Moscow would soon witness a serious leap in trade relations, Levitin added.

Meanwhile Russia and Iran are exploring the development of a joint stablecoin that would be backed by gold, two Russian officials have been quoted as saying.

According to Alexander Brazhnikov, the Central Bank of Iran is considering the creation of a stablecoin with Russia as a means of payment in transactions involving international trade, local Russian news outlet Vedomosti wrote.

Iran is working to create a "token of the Persian Gulf region" that would serve as a payment method in foreign trade, it said.

The stablecoin aims to enable cross-border transactions instead of fiat currencies like the United States dollar, the Russian ruble or the Iranian rial.

Brazhnikov, who is the executive director of the Russian Association of the crypto industry and blockchain, said the coin's value would be tied to gold.

Vedomosti said the stablecoin would be usable in Astrakhan, a free-trade zone where Russia has started accepting Iranian merchandise.

Anton Tkachev, a member of the Duma and the Committee on Information Policy, Information Technology, and Communications, confirmed the report, but said the issue would be considered at the governmental level after cryptocurrencies are completely regulated in Russia.

The Russian Central Bank does not support the usage of cryptocurrencies like bitcoin or ethereum as a method of payment anywhere inside the nation, but it allows for the usage of cryptocurrencies in business dealings, including international trade.

Syria Condemns Inhumane U.S. Sanctions on Its Health Sector

DAMASCUS (Dispatches) - The Syrian foreign ministry has condemned the United States for targeting its health sector with unilateral sanctions, calling for urgent international action and saying that the fresh "inhumane measures" fall within the context of Washington's cruel and unethical blockade against the Syrian nation.

In a statement, the ministry said the sanctions imposed by the US Bureau of Industry and Security (BIS) hinder Syria's import of medical equipment and spare parts for a large number of public and private hospitals.

The Syrian foreign ministry noted that the targeted hospitals, including the General Authority for Children's Hospital in the capital Damascus, provide healthcare to millions of Syrians.

It dismissed Washington's false claims that medicine and medical supplies were exempt from the illegal sanctions, as no party is exempt from the unilateral coercive measures.

It called for urgent action from the United Nations, the World Health Organization, and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to put an end to such sanctions.

Syria has been in the throes of foreign-backed militancy since March 2011. While the Daesh terrorist group was vanquished by the Syrian government, the Takfiri terrorist groups continue to hold sway in some parts of the country under the patronage of Western powers. **See Page 7**

IRGC Navy Holds War Game in Persian Gulf

TEHRAN (Tasnim) - The Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Navy held a military exercise in the Persian Gulf with the launch of various missiles.

IRGC Navy Commander Rear Admiral Ali Reza Tangsiri said a broad range of weapons and equipment have been employed in the war game, including naval cruise missile systems, drones dropping bombs with pinpoint accuracy, unmanned smart submarine systems, and rockets fired by helicopters.

He noted that IRGC Navy commandos have carried out heliborne operations in the drill, named after martyred General Nasrollah Shafiee.

The outstanding features of the war game included combat operations by assault vessels and the launch of naval cruise missiles and rockets, naval minelaying in the drill zone, and detonation of a single target by cruise missiles fired from two different locations, the commander added.

The IRGC Navy chief also noted that his forces have set off huge explosions off the coasts of Farsi Island to practice defense and have employed smart submarine weapons to attack and annihilate the hypothetical enemy's naval and coastal bases in cooperation with the Army Air Defense and Air Force units.

He emphasized that the Iranian naval forces have ensured sustainable security in the Persian Gulf, the Sea of Oman and the Strait of Hormuz, saying the extra-regional forces are well aware of Iran's preparedness to act decisively against any threat or adventurism.

Iran Reaches Gas After 7 Months of Drilling In Belal Gas Field

TEHRAN (PressTV) - An Iranian oil and gas company commissioned for development of the Belal gas field in the Persian Gulf says it has finally reached gas from its exploration well in the field which is located on the maritime border between Iran and Qatar.

CEO of Pars Oil and Gas Company (POGC) Mohammad Hossein Motajalli said that gas from a first layered reservoir of Belal had reached the surface during a drilling operation a day earlier. "The gas torch on the well is now burning," said Motajalli, adding that exploration drilling in the field had started in early June.

The POGC won a contract to develop Belal gas field in 2019 amid efforts by Iran to rely more on domestic companies for large-scale projects in its petroleum sector after foreign firms withdrew from the country under pressure from the United States. **See Page 7**

Iran, UAE Strengthen Commercial Relations

DUBAI (Dispatches) - Iran strengthens its political and commercial discussions with the United Arab Emirates, the only country in the Persian Gulf to entertain cordial relations with the Islamic Republic, regional rival of Saudi Arabia. The UAE also normalized their relations with Israel, Iran's arch-enemy.

As UAE media reported on Monday, an Iranian government delegation held talks with UAE government officers in Abu Dhabi to discuss economic cooperation.

Following the tension that came after the normalization of relations between the UAE and Israel, Tehran and Abu Dhabi re-launched strong political and diplomatic relations since 2021. According to the UAE news agency, the Minister of State, Khalifa al Marar, in the last days, met with the Deputy Foreign Minister of Iran for economic diplomacy, Mahdi Safari and other members of the delegation from Tehran.

The two parties, writes the news agency Wam, held a series of meetings geared to economic bilateral cooperation in various sectors, focusing mainly on: energy, trade, transport and tourism. Said Hajari, the assistant to the Foreign Affairs Minister for Economic Affairs of the UAE, stated that commercial relations between the United Arab Emirates and Iran are "an example of partnership in the private sector, based on cooperation, trust and mutual benefits".

Sokhan Gostar Institute

IRAN NEWS

PRIVATE ENGLISH NEWSPAPER IN IRAN



Advertisement Department
021-44253335-39

www.irannewsdaily.com
info@irannewsdaily.com

@irannewsdaily @irannewsdaily

Russian, Iranian FMs Agree to Postpone Talks

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian and his Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov mutually agreed to postpone their talks scheduled for January 17, the Russian Foreign Ministry announced on Monday.

"By mutual agreement, the talks between Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and Iran's Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian, originally scheduled for January 17, have been postponed," Russian news agency TASS quoted the Foreign Ministry. The Ministry did not say when the talks would be held.

FM, Turkish President Hold Meeting

IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian during his visit to Ankara on Tuesday met and held talks with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

Earlier on Tuesday, Amirabdollahian met and held talks with his Turkish counterpart, Mevlut Cavusoglu.

Amirabdollahian who arrived in Ankara on Tuesday afternoon told reporters upon his arrival, "Fortunately, the relations between the two countries are on the right track and today, we can mention Turkey as one of the neighbors that has the best relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran."

He said that regional and international issues will be discussed during his meetings in Turkey.

Earlier and upon his arrival in Ankara, hailing the perfect interaction between Tehran and Ankara, Amirabdollahian said he would hold talks with senior Turkish officials about regional and international developments.

Amirabdollahian said he has traveled to Turkey for talks about issues relating to bilateral ties "considering the premium level of relations between Tehran and Ankara".



"Fortunately the relations between the two countries are on the right track," he stated. The foreign minister said Iran considers Turkey as one of the neighbors which has the best relations with the Islamic Republic.

Before leaving for Ankara, he addressed reporters in Tehran saying that he plans to put on the agenda the developments in West Asia and the Levant during his visit to Turkiye.

He added that the administration of President Raisi attaches importance to neighborhood policy as well as the Look East strategy, which seems to be of great significance in today's world

Iran, Belgium FMs Speak on Phone

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Foreign ministers of Iran and Belgium on Monday discussed issues of mutual interest on the phone.

Belgian Foreign Minister Hadja Lahbib made the call, discussing Tehran-Brussels cooperation with her Iranian counterpart Hossein Amirabdollahian, including on consular issues.

The two diplomats expressed hope that relations between the two countries are further boosted in light of joint cooperation.

Strengthening Regional Security Iran's Principled Policy

TEHRAN (MNA) - The Islamic Republic of Iran has always tried to ensure its security and the regional countries, the Iranian Foreign Ministry said, stressing that strengthening regional security is the country's principled policy.

Nasser Kanaani made the remarks on Tuesday in the meeting of the foreign military attaches residing in Iran.

One of the most important measures of Iran in ensuring the security of the region is the fight against terrorists, narcotics, and extremism, as well as smuggling, Kanaani said.

Referring to Iran's strong presence in international organizations, he stated, "Following its membership in Shanghai Cooperation Organization, Iran expanded and continued its cooperation with the Eurasian Union."

Iran seriously pursues the strengthening of bilateral cooperation with the surrounding areas and started to prepare and sign long-term cooperation programs and documents with China, Russia and Turkey.

Saying that Iran has achieved good results in increasing cooperation with its neighbors, he added that trade relations with some countries in the region have increased noticeably.

Strengthening military, security, and law enforcement cooperation with neighboring countries and friendly countries in all parts of the world is the priority of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Iran, Kanaani said, adding that it will spare no efforts to realize common goals and interests in cooperation with friendly countries.

Elsewhere in his remarks, he said that Iran believes that the Zionist regime is an illegitimate regime whose presence in the region does not create security.



Iran Enjoys No Int'l Support in Fighting Narcotics Transit

TEHRAN (IRNA) - The secretary general of Iran Headquarters for Campaign against Drug Trafficking said that the Islamic Republic of Iran has received no international assistance in fighting narcotics transit.

Eskandar Momeni said that no financial support has been provided by international organizations to Iran to fight drug transit and the country has been alone in this regard.

Referring to the international bodies' reports that Iran ranks first in discovering narcotics and a significant distance from other countries, he said that not only countries and international organizations do not help Iran in this field, but sometimes they even threw a wrench in this issue.

Earlier, Momeni elaborated on Iran's moves and achievements in its comprehensive campaign against narcotic drugs trafficking, arguing that the Islamic Republic of Iran managed to launch about 5,000 operations, many of which included armed engagements with over 2,300 active local, regional and international drug networks.

"We have also inflicted heavy losses on them by launching a campaign against money laundering by resorting to related laws and appropriate monetary apparatus," he added.

He said that in those operations some 1,100 tons of various types of narcotics and psychedelic drugs, inclusive of 62 tons of heroin and morphine, 835 tons of opium, 125 tons of hashish, and 25 tons of methamphetamine, were confiscated and eliminated, in which 14 of the best officers of Iran were martyred, while 26 other officers, too, were martyred in clashes with armed bandits and terrorists.



IRGC Quds Force Commander Pays Tribute to Anti-Terror Commanders

TEHRAN (MNA) - The commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Quds Force paid a visit to Iraq on Monday. During his visit to Baghdad, Brigadier General Esmail Ghaani paid tribute to anti-terror commanders by attending the martyrdom site of the former commander of the Quds Force of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Lt. Gen. Qassem Soleimani and the second-in-command of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Units (PMU) Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis who were assassinated by the US terrorist forces.

On January 3, 2020, a US drone strike near Baghdad International Airport assassinated General Soleimani, former commander of the Quds Force of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps. The attack -- that also killed Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, the second-in-command of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Units (PMU) anti-terror group, along with several others -- came while General Soleimani was on an official visit to the Iraqi capital.

28th Razi Festival Values Technology, Knowledge-Based Firms

TEHRAN (IP) - The knowledge-based firms active in the health sector, biotechnology, and technology have a special place at the 28th Razi Research and Technology Festival, Iran's Deputy Health Minister for Research and Technology said.

Younes Panahi said that the festival will be held on January 23, 2023, at Tehran's International Conference Center.

Delivering a speech at the press briefing, Iran's Deputy Health Minister for Research and Technology stated: "More than 570 participants will attend the upcoming Razi Festival."

Panahi expressed hope that Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi may attend the event.

The official said that the 28th Razi Research and Technology Festival is one of the biggest festivals in the field of health in the country.

"Every year, the research performance of the country's medical sciences in the field of technology is evaluated, and this year, we chose the main axis based on the slogan of the year, 'production, knowledge-based and job-creating'" Panahi explained, elaborating on the event.

He said a significant percentage of winners and awardees are technologists, knowledge-based companies, and people who were active the most in the field of technology.

Exploration Talks With 3 Countries

TEHRAN (Shana) - The head of exploration at National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) has said talks have been held with three countries for implementation of oil and gas exploration projects.

"That has been done for improving interactions," Mehdi Fakour said at a symposium with upstream oil and gas associations. Noting that amplified cooperation in exploration was a major objective of NIOC's energy diplomacy, he said: "Currently 11 major and 300 minor projects have been planned by the NIOC Directorate of Exploration."

He referred to augmented budget allocation to oil and gas projects, Fakour said: "In terms of budget allocation, we are standing at a high level. For the first time, we have managed to achieve the second rank in drilling among NIOC subsidiaries and directorates." He said that the budget allocated by NIOC to the Directorate of Exploration's drilling activities was more than that of other companies. He added that the NIOC Directorate of Exploration came second to National Iranian South Oil Company (NISOC) in terms of drilling budget allocation.

"Among NIOC directorates, the Directorate of Exploration has received the most credit, thereby giving impetus to further exploration activities in the country," he said.

Fakour said significant exploration seismic projects had been defined for the first time in two decades, adding that more than 4,000 persons were engaged in the exploration sector.

He said specialized associations of upstream oil and gas sector were combining knowledge and experience, adding: "Such associations are scientifically important and therefore they can help the Directorate of Exploration materialize its objectives." Fakour said that monitoring modern technologies and their application along with setting up communications channels between associations, knowledge-based companies and universities were among approaches expected by the NIOC Directorate of Exploration.

Noting that absorbing elite within associations was much easier than within state-owned companies, he said: "This issue can be seen as great potential in setting up technology and innovation network within associations."

The head of research and technology at NIOC also said 10 megaprojects were envisaged in oil and gas exploration. "These projects are worth more than €30 million plus IRR 1,500 billion, which would be of great help to job creation and technology development in the country," he said.

Mahdia Motahari said: "With the agreement of the NIOC Board of Directors, a list of 14 strategic commodities needed by the petroleum industry has been prepared by the Directorate of Commodities to be made public in the near future."

She said the list may give rise to \$1bn turnover for domestic manufacturers and knowledge-based companies and contribute to the formation of knowledge-based and technological companies.

Motahari said cooperation between the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology and NIOC was an effective step towards upgrading the level of national science, adding that about 80% of research projects assigned to the ministry pertained to the petroleum industry.

Besides, she added that effective measures had been taken by NIOC in support of students.

Mohammad Chahardoli, head of education at Petroleum Ministry, said: "With the aim of obtaining modern technologies, the contract of four exploratory research projects will be signed with the domestic universities by the end of the [current calendar] year."

"Establishing strong interactions between the university and the industry is one of the main strategies of the oil industry, and in this regard, with the aim of consolidating these two-way communications, by the end of the year, contract for four major research projects will be signed with universities," he said. "Last year, 2 defined projects were converted into contracts, and this year, a contract was concluded for one project title, and it is planned to complete 3 other contractual titles by the end of the year," he added.

Salman Farsi Propylene Project, 67% Complete

TEHRAN (Shana) - The CEO of Salman Farsi Petrochemical Project said the progress of this strategic and important project, which is being carried out for the first time in the country, has reached 67%.

According to National Petrochemical Company (NPC), Hossein Zamani stated: "This project is the first project to complete the propylene production chain using the propane dehydrogenation method with a capacity of 450,000 tons, and it is expected to come on stream next year."

He added: "With the domestic production of the important product of propylene, while preventing raw sales, a favorable value added will be created in the industry."

The official noted: "We need the facilitation and support of NPC to complete this important project."

TCCIMA Honors Exemplary Entrepreneurs

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Tehran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (TCCIMA) awarded Amin al-Zarb badge of entrepreneurship to 10 exemplary entrepreneurs of the country in a ceremony on Monday.

The seventh edition of the mentioned award ceremony was held at Vahdat Hall in Tehran on the occasion of the 139th establishment anniversary of the TCCIMA, the chamber's portal reported.

The ceremony was attended by TCCIMA Head Masoud Khansari and representatives of the selected top companies active in various fields.

Speaking at the ceremony, Khansari emphasized that the country's current economic conditions require the government to implement a wise approach, saying that this is not the time to create discord and the entrepreneurial community is ready to help the government in this regard.

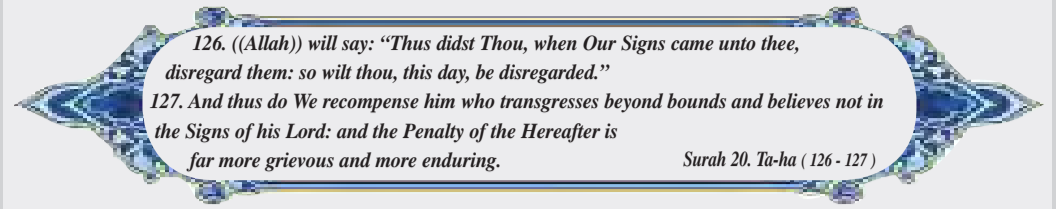
The Amin al-Zarb award ceremony was first held in January 2017 on the occasion of the 133rd establishment anniversary of TCCIMA and the second ceremony for awarding the prize was held in January 2018 concurrent with the 134th establishment anniversary of the chamber.

The mentioned prize is named after Mohammad-Hassan Amin al-Zarb, a highly influential Iranian businessman (born in 1856), who was the first private sector investor in Iran and set up the first union of the private sector in the country. He was one of the most famous and influential entrepreneurs in Iran with many prominent achievements in entrepreneurship.



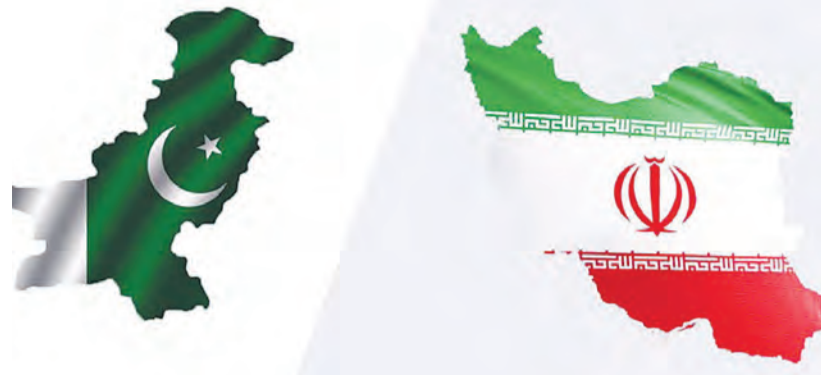
PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	12:15
■ Evening (Maghreb)	17:35
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	05:44
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	07:12



Iran, Pakistan Sign MoU to Expand Trade Ties

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK



TEHRAN - Iran and Pakistan signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to boost bilateral efforts that could lead to a quick expansion of trade ties between the two neighboring countries.

The MoU was signed on Monday on the sidelines of an Iranian trade exhibition in the Pakistani city of Karachi between head of Iran's Trade Promotion Organization (TPO) Alireza Paymanpak and head of The Trade Development Authority of Pakistan Muhammad Zubair Motiwala.

The agreement allows Iran and Pakistan to exchange trade information while enabling businesses to increase their presence in trade events held in the two countries, according to a report published on the TPO's website.

It said the MoU will also facilitate the exchange of trade delegations and experts between Iran and Pakistan, adding that trade authorities of the two countries will be committed under the agreement to holding training courses for businesses involved in bilateral trade.

Peymanpak expressed hope upon signing the document that it could help Iran and Pakistan soon reach a target of \$5 billion in bilateral trade. He also invited Pakistan traders to attend an exhibition which will be held by Iran which can be a good ground for broadening the bilateral trade.

The signing of the MoU comes days after local authorities in border regions of Iran and Pakistan signed an agreement to boost cross-border trade and people-to-people exchanges between the two countries.

It also comes amid Iran's continued efforts to expand trade ties with neighbors as the country moves ahead with plans to diversify its economy away from oil revenues targeted by US sanctions.

Iran and Pakistan are currently on a preferential trade arrangement under which the two countries have sought to reduce some trade barriers and tariffs in recent years.

Media reports have suggested the two countries are seeking to sign a free trade agreement by March.

Chabahar-Zahedan Railway Complementary of Regular Chabahar Shipping Line to China, India

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – The CEO of Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Line Group (IRISL) pointed to the launch of regular shipping line between China and India to Chabahar and expressed hope this shipping line can be an incentive to encourage owners of goods, adding that with completion of the logistical chain of this transit route like Chabahar-Zahedan railway, this corridor will be more attractive.



Touching upon developing Makran shores, Mohammad Reza Modarres Khiabani said that one of the issues that IRISL feels it necessary to pursue is to play its role in the north-south corridor and in this line, IRISL tries to develop and materialize this goal with defining projects like launching regular shipping line between Chabahar and China.

He then reiterated that the group has planned regular lines on the transit route of the North, adding that this decision has been made on the North transit route from India to Astrakhan and from several China's ports to Astrakhan on the route of North corridor to the South, and from the South to the North regularly. He expressed hope with completing other national logistical infrastructures, this route can be materialized very fast and regularly.

Modarres Khiabani went on to say that in the regular shipping line service between China and Chabahar once in two weeks, one of the ocean liners will be used and it will be used once in a week on the route between Chabahar and India.

He said that this ocean liner in its previous journey brought 600 containers to Chabahar and these containers should be transferred to their main destinations by trucks and their transfer can play a serious role in development of Chabahar region.

He expressed hope with observing disciplines in the shipping lines of the group, traders would show more interests in entering the region and this will become more attractive for owners of goods with completion of the logistical chain like rail chain of Chabahar to Zahedan which will complete this transit corridor.

CBI Governor Urges Boosting Monetary and Banking Ties With Russia



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN- The Governor of the Central Bank of Iran emphasized the implementation of the joint action document of the central banks of Iran and Russia for the development of monetary and banking relations.

Mohammad Reza Farzin, the Governor General of the Central Bank of Iran, on Tuesday, during the meeting with Igor Levitin, the aid to the Russian president, and the accompanying delegation in Tehran, considered it important to further strengthen monetary and banking cooperation between Iran and Russia.

He further said: "The Central Bank of Iran is ready to promote bilateral monetary and banking relations with Russia as well as friendly and neighboring countries to a high level that will increase economic and Trade exchanges."

Farzin also pointed to the different capacities of cooperation between Iran and Russia in monetary and banking, economic, construction and commercial fields and added: "The development of relations between the two countries based on the implementation of the joint action document of the central banks of Iran and Russia will provide a clear economic perspective for Draws two countries."

According to this report, "Igor levitiin", the aide to Russian President Vladimir Putin, by enumerating the important issues in the document of joint action of the central banks of Iran and Russia, on the strengthening and development of relations and cooperation in economic, commercial and especially monetary fields and Bank of the Russian Federation emphasized with the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Iran Exporting Tiles, Ceramics to 150 States

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iranian-made tiles and ceramics are exported to 150 countries, including 80 percent of the export products to Pakistan and Iraq, an Iranian union official said.

Asghar Ahaniha, the chairman of the Iranian Ceramic Society, said on Tuesday that the export of Iran-made products to different countries hiked in recent years, so these products are exported to the African and Russian markets.

Since the cost of transportation in export is of great importance, the Iranian producers prioritize the export of their products to the neighboring and regional states, he noted, adding that Pakistan with a population of 280 million can become an extraordinary market for Iran.

Some Iranian producers export 50 to 60 percent of their products to other countries because the high-quality Iranian products are comparable with European products, he said.

Rozita Golpur, the secretary of the Iranian Ceramic Society, said that the share of Iran-made tiles and ceramics in the total export of the country experienced

significant growth and that the Islamic state is unique in the region in this respect.

The quality of Iran-made tiles and ceramics is higher than that of Chinese products; therefore, Iran is a tough rival of China in the Middle East and Eurasia, she argued.

Iran's export of tiles and ceramics has increased from 48 countries in 2020 to 150 states in the present, she said, adding that the Pakistani and Iraqi merchants purchase these products in rial rather than dollars.

Mahmoud Bazari, the director general of the Trade Promotion Electronic Office of the Trade Promotion Organization of Iran (TPOI), said that the 23rd International Fair of Tile, Ceramic, Sanitary Ware and Related Industries will be held at the Tehran International Permanent Fairground on January 19-22.

Some 100 Iranian and foreign companies will take part in the exhibition, he said, adding that tradesmen from Turkey, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Iraq, Afghanistan, Russia, Syria, Belarus, and Tajikistan have so far expressed readiness to participate in the event.

Iran Willing to Introduce Polo, Pahlevani Sports to Nicaragua

TEHRAN (MNA) – Iran's sports minister and Nicaraguan ambassador held a meeting in Tehran Monday to discuss bilateral cooperation in the field of sports in light of the upcoming visit of a delegation from the Latin American country to Tehran.

Isaac Lenin Bravo, the Nicaraguan Ambassador to Iran paid a visit to Iranian Sports and Youth Affairs Ministry compound to meet with Minister Seyed Hamid Sajjadi on Monday.

Bravo said in the meeting that six ministers from his country will come to Iran on an official visit later this year, saying "A quarter of the Nicaraguan government's cabinet is traveling to Iran. An invitation has been sent to the vice president of Nicaragua, but due to the oppressive US sanctions, the veep cannot travel to Iran along with the six ministers. On this trip, we will have a very important opportunity to meet with the ministers of the Islamic Republic. I am grateful to the government of the Islamic Republic, especially the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Sports and Youth, for laying the ground for this meeting."



Referring to the good relations between the two countries, the Nicaraguan envoy added, "Iran and Nicaragua's revolutions occurred in the same year, and we consider these two revolutions to be united sisters."

"The two countries have always had very good relations. Since Ayatollah Raeisi became the president of Iran, we realized that it is possible to increase relations with Iran. The leaders of the two countries believe that bilateral ties should not only focus on politics and that bilateral interaction should be established in other areas as well."

Iranian Minister of Sports and Youth, for his part, said, "We are very interested in Nicaragua and that we can have good cooperation with that country in the field of sports, and we hope that the cooperation between the two countries will increase more than before. In advance, I would like to welcome the 6 Nicaraguan interior ministers who are going to visit Iran soon. We would like to welcome them here at the sports ministry compound and hold meetings with them."

Sajjadi said there are good sports facilities that the Iranian sports officials are willing to show to the Nicaraguan delegation.

The minister added that the Iranian side is willing to introduce its traditional polo and traditional Pahlevani and Zoorkhaneh sports to the Latin American country.

TCCIMA Reviews Next Year's National Budget Bill

TEHRAN (MNA)- The 42nd meeting of the Board of Representatives of the Tehran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (TCCIMA) was held on Tuesday in which the attendees addressed various subjects including the national budget bill for the next Iranian calendar year (starts on March 21) and the issues related to the gas industry.

The meeting was attended by TCCIMA Head Masoud Khansari and members of the chamber's board, the TCCIMA portal reported.

During the gathering, a report was presented on the current situation of the country's gas industry and international experiences in this regard were reviewed; the attendees also discussed some proposals to be included in the Seventh National Development Plan (2022-2026) and expressed their opinions and criticisms about the draft of the government's budget bill for the upcoming year.

KHOEC Enjoys All Domestic And Int'l Standards

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – The CEO of Khorramshahr Oilseed Extraction Company (KHOEC) Mr. Teymour Mohammadi says the main challenge of the country for producing edible oil is in the agriculture sector and this problem is about the cultivation of oil seed.



He said that drought and water tension in the country has led to the halt in cultivating oilseeds in the country, adding that of course some part of this problem is also lack of mechanization in the agro sector.

He noted that the other problem regarding the oilseeds cultivation is lack of support of the government bodies when the farmers face loss.

Mr. Mohammadi also suggested palm fruit to be produced in the country in order that the amount of forex dependence can be reduced for production of oil. He said that oil production in the country is 95% dependent on imports and spending forex because in the country and in the southern part, farmers cultivate dates, and palm is a fruit like date and farmers in the southern part of the country can cultivate palm fruit to reduce Iran's 95% dependence on imports.

He said that 20% of different types of oils are related to palm that are imported.

Mohammadi reiterated that all factories in the country observe the national and international standards and Iranian factories work in compliance with international standards.

On ban of exporting this basic product, he said that in the past the group had exports to countries like Iraq and Afghanistan but after the sanctions, the government banned its exports.

Mohammadi added that the annual capacity of refining oil in the country is 5m tons but last year the country just refined 2.241m tons and therefore 40% of the capacity were active last year.

He reiterated that the problem for producing edible oil is the provision of the raw material and crude oil in order that all capacities can become fully active.

He noted that last year 260,000 tons of oilseeds were used while the total capacity of the country is around 6m tons.

He expressed hope with cultivation of this fruit the forex dependence of the country would reduce. Mr. Mohammadi then hailed Etkha Organization and Defense Ministry for their financial support from the group and this industry which helped the group to materialize its five-year outlook.

Islamist Militants Kidnap Dozens of Women in Burkina Faso

OUAGADOUGOU (Dispatches) - Ouagadougou Islamist militants kidnapped around 50 women in Burkina Faso's northern province of Soum on January 12 and 13, the government said in a statement on Monday, confirming earlier reports in the media.

Local officials and residents speaking on condition of anonymity said roughly 40 women were seized a dozen kilometres southeast of Arbinda on Thursday.

About 20 others were abducted the next day to the north of the town, the sources said, adding that several managed to escape and return to their villages to raise the alarm.



Nepal Finds Black Boxes of Aircraft

KATHMANDU (Dispatches) - Searchers found the cockpit voice recorder and flight data recorder on Monday from a passenger flight that crashed, killing at least 70 people in Nepal's worst plane accident for 30 years, officials said.

The data on the recorders may help investigators determine what caused the Yeti Airlines ATR 72 aircraft, carrying 72 people, to go down in clear weather on Sunday just before landing in the tourist city of Pokhara.

Both recorders were in good shape and will be sent for analysis based on the recommendation of the manufacturer, Teknath Sitaula, a Kathmandu airport official, told Reuters.



Death Toll From Strike on Ukraine Apartment Block Rises



DNIPRO (Dispatches) - The death toll from a Russian missile strike in the Ukrainian city of Dnipro rose to 40, with dozens more missing, making it the deadliest civilian incident of Moscow's three-month campaign of firing missiles at cities far from the front.

Ukraine says the mass civilian deaths, which it describes as terrorism, demonstrate why it needs more weapons to defeat Russian forces 11 months after they invaded. Russia denies intentionally targeting civilians.

German Defense Minister Christine Lambrecht resigned as her government came under rising pressure to let allies send Ukraine German heavy tanks, at the start of what looks like a pivotal week for Western plans to further arm Kyiv.

Officials acknowledged little hope of finding anyone else alive in the rubble of Saturday's attack in the central city of Dnipro, but President Volodymyr Zelenskiy said the rescue operation would go on "as long as there is even the slightest chance to save lives".

"Dozens of people were rescued from the rubble, including six children. We are fighting for every person!" Zelenskiy said in an overnight televised address.

Dnipro was in mourning on Monday.

A serviceman in uniform laid flowers and sobbed, clutching his head in grief next to an impromptu shrine to the dead at a bus stop across the street from a gaping hole where the apartment block had stood.

The missile flattened all nine storeys in a section of the long concrete housing unit. Rescue workers shovelled through debris more than 48 hours after the attack.

"We all live in buildings like this one and we all imagine what if it happened to us. It is awful," said Polina, 28, a resident of the neighbourhood.

Russia, which since October has been conducting large scale strikes on Ukrainian cities mainly targeting power generation infrastructure, said it was not to blame for the destruction in Dnipro as it was caused by Ukrainian air defenses. Kyiv says the apartment building was hit by a Russian ship-to-ship missile, a type that Ukraine does not have the capability to shoot down.

At least 40 people were killed in the attack with 30 still unaccounted for, city official Gennadiy Korban said. He said 75 people were wounded, including 14 children.

Tens of thousands of people have been killed since Russian troops invaded Ukraine on Feb. 24, and about a quarter of the population have fled their homes.

Ukrainian forces recaptured swathes of eastern and southern territory during the second half of 2022. But front lines have largely been frozen in place for the past two months, despite intense fighting in which both sides have taken heavy losses.

Ukraine says a key to breaking the stalemate would be Western battle tanks and armoured vehicles as these would give its forces the capability to break through Russian lines.

Western countries have so far stopped short of sending tanks, loath to provoke the Kremlin which claims Ukraine is fighting on behalf of a broader Western plot to destroy Russia.

The tank taboo was finally broken at the weekend by Britain pledging a first squadron of Challengers to Kyiv. On Monday it confirmed the supply of 14 Challenger 2 tanks and other hardware including hundreds more armoured vehicles and advanced air defence missiles to "accelerate Ukrainian success".

In announcing the added military aid, British defense minister Ben Wallace urged Germany to permit the supply of Leopard tanks to Ukraine, stressing that this could unlock support from other nations and Berlin would not be acting alone.

Sweden, Finland Pushed to Send Up to 130 "Terrorists" to Turkey for NATO Bid

ANKARA (Dispatches) - Sweden and Finland must deport or extradite up to 130 "terrorists" to Turkey before the Turkish parliament will approve their bids to join NATO, President Tayyip Erdogan said.

The two Nordic states applied last year to join NATO following Russia's invasion of Ukraine but their bids must be approved by all 30 NATO member states. Turkey and Hungary have yet to endorse the applications.

Turkey has said Sweden in particular must first take a clearer stance against what it sees as terrorists, mainly Kurdish militants and a group it blames for a 2016 coup attempt.

"We said look, so if you don't hand over your terrorists to us, we can't pass it (approval of the NATO application) through the parliament anyway," Erdogan said in comments late on Sunday, referring to a joint press conference he held with Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson last November.

"For this to pass the parliament, first of all you have to hand more than 100, around 130 of these terrorists to us," Erdogan said. Finnish politicians interpreted Erdogan's demand as an angry response to an incident in Stockholm last week in which an effigy of the Turkish leader was strung up during what appeared to be a small protest.



Colombian Police Seize Weapons in Important Blow to Armed Group

BOGOTA (Dispatches) - Colombia's national police force has said it confiscated an arsenal of weapons, including grenades and a machine gun, belonging to dissidents from the now-disbanded Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) rebel group.

Though the Estado Mayor Central dissidents rejected a 2016 peace deal between Bogota and the FARC, they had agreed to a recent ceasefire with the government of left-wing President Gustavo Petro.

The arsenal of 33 guns, an M60 machine gun, grenades, more than 30,000 bullets and uniforms was being transported in two vehicles found abandoned in the Narino province in southwestern Colombia.

"The confiscated arsenal constitutes one of the most important blows in recent years," national police Director General Henry Armando Sanabria told reporters on Monday. "With this we avoid the strengthening of an armed group."

The guns — made in the United States, Israel and Russia — had previously been used, and it remained to be established if they had been purchased on the black market or stolen from the military during attacks, Sanabria said.

He added that it was up to the government to decide if the movement of the arsenal constitutes a violation of the dissidents' ceasefire with the government.

Petro, Colombia's first left-wing president, has promised to pursue a "total peace" plan and negotiate with armed groups to try to bring an end to the armed conflict that has killed more than 450,000 people across the country.

Violence has surged in Colombia in recent years, especially in parts of the country that lie outside government control and where armed groups are involved in drug trafficking and other illicit activities. The INDEPAZ research institute recorded nearly 100 massacres last year.

The Colombian government signed a peace agreement with the FARC

in 2016, which saw members of the left-wing rebel group disarm, but some FARC dissidents rejected the deal and continued to use armed violence.

Somalia Claims Capture of Key Port Town From al-Shabab

MOGADISHU (Dispatches) - Somalia's government-led forces have captured an al-Shabab stronghold on the Indian Ocean, the defense minister said, in one of their most significant victories since launching an offensive against the group last year.

The forces took the port town of Harardhere and the nearby town of Galcad, Defence Minister Abdulkadir Mohamed Nur said in a broadcast on state-owned television.

Harardhere was a major base for pirates hijacking merchant ships until 2011. It was later taken over by al-Shabab, which first rose up against the government in 2007 before pledging its allegiance to al-Qaeda.

"Harardhere and Galcad districts have been taken from the hands of the al-Shabab terrorists," Nur said. "This means al-Shabab is overpowered and gone. The remaining towns will also be liberated soon."

Al-Shabab's spokespeople could not immediately be reached for comment.

The government and allied clan militias have forced the rebels from swathes of territory in central Somalia

since launching a major offensive last August.

The successes have led some officials to claim al-Shabab is on its last legs. However, experts have cautioned that the group has been pushed out of major towns before only to regroup and reclaim areas the army does not have the capacity to hold.

"The make or break is not in the offensive phase, but in everything that comes after that," said Omar Mahmood, International Crisis Group's senior analyst for East Africa. "Al-Shabab is definitely under pressure but they play a long game."

The group has responded to the military pressure with a series of high-profile attacks in the capital Mogadishu and other cities, including car bombs this month that killed at least 35 people.

Hassan Mohamed, a former military officer, said the government should replicate its cooperation with clan-based militias across the country.

"Al-Shabab would be extinct if government and clans were launching attacks in the entire country at the same time," he told Reuters.



Top Brazil Court Greenlights Probe of Bolsonaro for Riot

RIO DE JANEIRO (AP) - A

Brazilian Supreme Court

justice on Friday authorized

adding former President Jair

Bolsonaro in its investigation

into who incited the Jan. 8 riot in the nation's capital, as part of a broader

crackdown to hold responsible parties to account.

According to the text of his ruling, Justice Alexandre de Moraes granted the request from the prosecutor-general's office, which cited a video that

Bolsonaro posted on Facebook two days after the riot. The video claimed

President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva wasn't voted into office, but rather was

chosen by the Supreme Court and Brazil's electoral authority.

Prosecutors in the recently formed group to combat anti-democratic acts

argued earlier Friday that although Bolsonaro posted the video after the

riot, its content was sufficient to justify investigating his conduct

beforehand. Bolsonaro deleted it the morning after he first posted it.

Legal analysts consulted by The Associated Press said investigating

Bolsonaro was overdue and justified.

"Bolsonaro's positioning, in general, is being investigated as an

incitement method. The fact that the video was published after the attacks

doesn't mean he wasn't involved previously in inciting the acts," said

Georges Abboud, a constitutional law professor at Sao Paulo's Pontifical

Catholic University.

Otherwise, Bolsonaro has refrained from commenting on the election since

his Oct. 30 defeat. He repeatedly stoked doubt about the reliability of the

electronic voting system in the run-up to the vote, filed a request afterward to

annul millions of ballots cast using the machines and never conceded.

He has taken up residence in an Orlando suburb since leaving Brazil in late

December and skipping the Jan. 1 swearing-in of his leftist successor, and some

Democratic lawmakers have urged President Joe Biden to cancel his visa.

Following the justice's decision late Friday, Bolsonaro's lawyer Frederick

Wassef said in a statement that the former president "vehemently repudiates the

acts of vandalism and destruction" from Jan. 8, but blamed supposed "infiltrators"

of the protest — something his far-right backers have also claimed.

The statement also said Bolsonaro "never had any relationship or

participation with these spontaneous social movements."



Foreign Investors Pour \$925m Into Egypt Since Last Wednesday

CAIRO (Dispatches) - Foreign investors transferred more than \$925 million dollars into the Egyptian foreign exchange market in the three days since its currency sharply depreciated last week, Egypt's central bank said in a statement on Monday.

The Egyptian pound weakened to about 32 to the dollar from 27.60 at the open on Wednesday before rebounding to 29.61 pounds by end-Monday.

Additional foreign currency from local sources, remittances from Egyptians working abroad and tourism also flowed into the market over the past three business days, the central bank statement added.



WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM

Global Recession in 2023 Seen as Likely in WEF Survey

DAVOS (Dispatches) - Two-thirds of private and public sector chief economists surveyed by the World Economic Forum (WEF) expect a global recession in 2023, the Davos-organizer said on Monday as business and government leaders gathered for its annual meeting.

Some 18% considered a world recession "extremely likely" - more than twice as many as in the previous survey conducted in September 2022. Only one-third of respondents to the survey viewed it as unlikely this year. "The current high inflation, low growth, high debt and high fragmentation environment reduces incentives for the investments needed to get back to growth and raise living standards for the world's most vulnerable," WEF Managing Director Saadia Zahidi said in a statement accompanying the survey results.

The organization's survey was based on 22 responses from a group of senior economists drawn from international agencies including the International Monetary Fund, investment banks, multinationals and reinsurance groups.

The survey comes after the World Bank last week slashed its 2023 growth forecasts to levels close to recession for many countries as the impact of central bank rate hikes intensifies, Russia's war in Ukraine continues, and the world's major economic engines sputter.

Definitions of what constitutes recession differ around the world but generally include the prospect of shrinking economies, possibly with high inflation in a "stagflation" scenario.

On inflation, the WEF survey saw large regional variations: the proportion expecting high inflation in 2023 ranged from just 5% for China to 57% for Europe, where the impact of last year's rise in energy prices has spread to the wider economy.

A majority of the economists see further monetary policy tightening in Europe and the United States (59% and 55%, respectively), with policy-makers caught between the risks of tightening too much or too little.

While a global slowdown would risk hitting investment in areas from education and health to tackling poverty and climate, some see it driving inflation down and forcing the U.S. Federal Reserve and others to hold back from further rate hikes.

"I want the outlook to become a little weaker so that the Fed rates start going down and that whole sucking-out of liquidity by global central banks eases," Sumant Sinha, chairman and CEO of Indian clean energy group ReNew Power, told Reuters on the sidelines of the Davos meeting.

"That will benefit not just India but globally," he said, adding the current round of rate hikes was making it dearer for clean energy companies to fund their capital-intensive projects.

Others said that while more affluent people would likely escape the worst effects of recession on the back of high inflation levels, it would hit lower middle income groups hard.

"If you only have your time and your energy which is creating your income, you're getting ravaged right now because your wages are just not keeping pace," said Anthony Scaramucci, founder of U.S.-based investment firm SkyBridge Capital.

Other main findings of the WEF survey included:

China Growth Seen Rebounding to 4.9% in 2023

BEIJING (Dispatches) - China's economic growth is likely to rebound to 4.9% in 2023, before steadying in 2024, a Reuters poll showed, as policymakers pledge to step up support for the COVID-ravaged economy.

Gross domestic product (GDP) likely grew just 2.8% in 2022 as lockdowns weighed on activity and confidence, according to the median forecasts of 49 economists polled by Reuters, slower than a 3.2% rise seen in October's forecast and braking sharply from 8.4% growth in 2021.

Chinese leaders have pledged to spur the world's second-largest economy this year while addressing some key drags on growth - the "zero-COVID" policy and a severe property sector downturn.

Strict COVID curbs were abruptly lifted in December, but surging infections are causing some near-term pains.

"We expect economic activities and consumption to rebound strongly from March-April onwards, helped by post-COVID re-opening and release of excess savings," Tao Wang, chief China economist at UBS, said in a research note.

"The lack of large-scale income- and consumption-stimulus will likely limit the rebound."

The expected 2022 growth rate would be far below the official target of around of 5.5%. Excluding the 2.2% expansion after the initial COVID hit in 2020, it would also be the worst showing since 1976 - the final year of the decade-long Cultural Revolution that wrecked the economy. GDP in the fourth quarter of 2022 likely grew 1.8% from a year earlier as anti-virus restrictions intensified, the poll showed, slowing from the third-quarter's 3.9% pace.

On a quarterly basis, the economy is forecast to contract 0.8% in the fourth quarter, compared with growth of 3.9% in July-September, the poll showed. The government is due to release 2022 and Q4 GDP data, along with December activity data today.

At an agenda-setting meeting in December, top leaders pledged to focus on stabilising the \$17-trillion economy in 2023 and step up policy adjustments to ensure key targets are hit.

China is likely to aim for economic growth of at least 5% in 2023 to keep a lid on unemployment, policy sources said.

The central bank has promised to make its policy "precise and forceful" this year to support the economy, keeping liquidity reasonably ample and lowering funding costs for businesses.

Analysts expect the central bank to cut the benchmark lending rate - the one-year loan prime rate (LPR) - by 5 basis points (bps) in the first quarter.



Russia May Hike Taxes as Military Spending, Oil Price Weigh on Budget

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russia is becoming too dependent on oil revenues to support its budget as it ramps up military spending, economists said, warning that the government may have to raise taxes if prices of crude fail to meet expectations this year.

The price of Urals oil - Russia's main export - has plunged more than 20% since early December, when Western nations led by the Group of Seven (G7) imposed a \$60 price cap on Russian oil exports to restrict Moscow's ability to finance what it calls its "special military operation" in Ukraine.

Given that the 2023 federal budget is based on a projected Urals price of just over \$70 a barrel, and prices are currently trading closer to \$50, this could prove problematic.

As the price cap, Western sanctions and EU embargo make it harder for Russia to export oil, Moscow has relied on China and India - the world's largest and third-largest importers, respectively - to fill the gap.

"The growing dependence of the budget on oil raises concerns," Alfa Bank said in a note that warned a decline in revenue from gas and oil product exports "looms on the horizon."

Analysts say that as the government increased spending by more than a quarter in 2022, in part to finance its military in Ukraine, the oil price required to balance the budget jumped from \$67 to \$101 a barrel.

When state-owned energy giant Gazprom's 1.85 trillion roubles (\$27.5 billion) of dividends and one-off taxes last year are factored in, the actual price of oil needed to balance the books could be as high as \$115 a barrel.

Russia's budget hole last year totaled 3.3 trillion roubles (\$49 billion), or 2.3% of gross domestic product, and may exceed 2% again in 2023 as the price cap curbs Russia's export revenues, Finance Minister Anton Siluanov said in December.

"When there is a big gap between the actual price (of oil) and the balancing price, it cannot be sustainably covered by borrowing," said Natalia Orlova, chief economist at Alfa Bank.

"Some measures are needed to adjust fiscal policy, either by cutting spending or looking for additional revenues."

With President Vladimir Putin expected to seek a historic fifth term in an election due in 2024 and regional votes taking place later this year, spending cuts are out of the question, she added.

Last year's budget, which was heavily skewed towards defence spending, has raised the risk of a higher tax burden in the medium term, Renaissance Capital economists said.

Deputy Finance Minister Alexei Sazanov hinted at the possibility of another tax hike in December, suggesting that the government would continue to look at areas of tax potential in 2023.

France to Push for "Made in Europe" Strategy at February EU Summit

BRUSSELS (Dispatches) - France wants the European Union to adopt a "Made in Europe" industrial strategy in response to the U.S. scheme of subsidies for green investment, to keep industrial firms from leaving Europe and reduce members' dependence on outside suppliers.

EU leaders are to discuss such industrial policy for the 27-nation bloc at a summit on Feb. 9-10 in Brussels, worried that Washington's \$369 billion Inflation Reduction Act subsidising products from batteries to electric cars, solar panels and wind turbines, will draw companies away from the EU.

"The implementation of an ambitious and robust European industrial policy is therefore essential today. The French authorities propose that it take the form of a 'Made in Europe' strategy," France said in a paper seen by Reuters.

EU leaders agreed last March, just after the Russian invasion of Ukraine which sent energy prices soaring, that Europe must cut its dependence on outside suppliers of energy, critical raw materials, semiconductors, drugs and food.

The French paper called for urgent measures in particular to retain Europe companies involved in solar panels, batteries, hydrogen and critical raw materials, noting the "Made in Europe" strategy should be based on four pillars.

The first would be EU targets for cutting a dependence on outside suppliers and setting production goals by 2030 in key sectors which would be regulated by EU laws, like the bloc did for semiconductors with the Chips Act.

The EU would also have to simplify and speed up the granting of permits for the installation of new production sites and overhaul its energy market to ensure European industries have access to affordable power, the paper said.

EU's Record Recovery Fund at Risk

MADRID (Dispatches) - The risk that European Union governments will not be able to spend the largest aid package in its history is growing as members struggle to meet deadlines imposed by the bloc, officials from four countries have told Reuters.

Difficulties in renegotiating the 724-billion-euro post-pandemic recovery plan - less than two years after it was approved - raises doubts about its ability to deliver at all, said Manuel Hidalgo, a senior fellow at the Esade Centre for Economic

Policy, a Madrid-based think-tank.

"If all the money isn't spent this will have a reputational cost for the EU," Hidalgo said. "If it doesn't turn out well they will have to justify many things, such as the very existence of these kinds of plans."

The thorniest issue will be securing unanimity from the bloc's 27 members on extending the disbursement of financing beyond 2026, which would require approval in each country's parliament, including Hungary and Poland, which are already at odds with the EU and may use their support as leverage to secure concessions.

The EU froze funds earmarked for Hungary and Poland over their nationalist governments' track record of undercutting liberal democratic rules.

Poland's access to nearly 36 billion euros of funds is dependent on an overhaul of its judicial system. The EU is withholding 5.8 billion euros until Hungary implements measures to curb corruption and boost its judiciary's independence.

Extending the implementation period faces "a major problem - the decision on own resources would have to be reopened, which requires unanimity, which is almost unthinkable", said Czech EU Affairs Ministry spokesperson Marek Zeman.

Countries are already behind. While milestones and targets must be reached by August 2026, 70% of grants and loans should have been committed by last year and the remainder by 2023. The actual amount committed so far is around 20%, according to EU data.

Recipients of the funds say that the rising cost of raw materials, a product of the war in Ukraine, and supply chain bottlenecks have delayed the adjudication and implementation of recovery projects. Portugal had disbursed 1.4 billion euros, or 8.5% of the total recovery funds assigned to it, to project promoters by the end of 2022.

A spokesperson for Portuguese Cabinet Minister Mariana Vieira da Silva said talks with the European Commission about a "reassessment of goals" would begin this month and include a "review of the execution period". Portugal was analyzing which projects had been most affected "by the current macroeconomic context," the spokesperson said.

Global Jobs Growth Will Halve in Challenging 2023



LONDON (Reuters) - Global employment growth is expected to slow down sharply to 1% this year compared to 2% in 2022, hit by the economic fallout of the war in Ukraine, high inflation and tighter monetary policy, the International Labour Organization (ILO) said.

At the same time, the number of unemployed people in the world is expected to rise by 3 million to 208 million in 2023, while inflation will eat into real wages, the ILO said in a report on global trends.

The scarcity of new jobs will hit countries at a time when many are still recovering from the economic shock of the global pandemic and the coronavirus is tearing through China after Beijing lifted tight lockdown restrictions.

"The slowdown in global employment growth means that we don't expect the losses incurred during the COVID-19 crisis to be recovered before 2025," said Richard Samans, Director of the ILO's Research Department and coordinator of its newly published report.

Progress in reducing the number of informal jobs in the world is also likely to be reversed in the coming years, the ILO said.

The global jobs forecast is lower than the previous ILO estimate of 1.5% growth for 2023.

"The current slowdown means that many workers will have to accept lower quality jobs, often at very low pay, sometimes with insufficient hours," ILO said. "Furthermore, as prices rise faster than nominal labour incomes, the cost-of-living crisis risks pushing more people into poverty."

The situation could worsen further if the global economy slows down, ILO added.

Iran Advances to Next Stage of World Handball Championships

TEHRAN (MNA) – Iranian handball players could advance to the next stage of the 2023 IHF World Men's Handball Championship.

For the first time in Iranian sporting history, Iran advanced to the next round of the tournament however Team Melli was defeated by Spain 35-22. Earlier, Iranian players earned their first-ever win in the 2023 IHF World Men's Handball Championship, beating Chile 25-24 on Thursday. The 28th edition of the IHF Men's World Championship is being held in Poland and Sweden from Jan. 11 to 29.



World's Most Powerful Passports Revealed

LONDON (Dispatches) - A list of the world's most powerful passports has been revealed, with Japan taking first place for the fifth year running.

The Henley Passport Index is a comprehensive list which compares passports using data from the International Air Transport Association, specifically looking at holders able to gain visa-free access.

Some 199 passports are examined as part of the process, for travel to 227 destinations.

Singapore came joint second with South Korea, followed by Germany and Spain.

The UK slid into sixth place alongside Ireland and Portugal, beating the US, which came joint seventh with Belgium, Czech Republic, New Zealand, Norway and Switzerland.

At the other end of the scale, Iraq, Syria, Pakistan, Yemen and Afghanistan were the lowest scoring countries.

As reported by Traveller, "Henley said the difference of 166 destinations between it and Japan is the widest global mobility gap in the index's 18-year history."

Meanwhile, it was found that the United Arab Emirates passport now enables visa-free travel to 178 destinations, bumping it up the list; the destination's score has jumped 49 places up the index over the last decade.

The index uses a scoring system to establish the most powerful passports globally, awarding nations' travel documents with points for each country its holders can visit visa-free, as well as each place they can obtain a visa on arrival.

The Japanese passport enables visa-free entry to 193 destinations out of the 227, the equivalent of 85 per cent of the world.

Meanwhile, the Afghanistan passport came last in the list with a score of 27, as holders are only able to gain visa-free access to 12 per cent of global destinations.

Henley & Partners said of its latest index: "What emerges is an unequivocal link between passport strength and economic power."

"While we don't usually associate our passports with financial affairs, the research reveals that a powerful passport is a conduit to economic opportunity and wellbeing."



World's most powerful passports 2023

- *Japan (193)
- *Singapore, South Korea (192)
- *Germany, Spain (190)
- *Finland, Italy, Luxembourg, Austria (189)
- *Denmark, Netherlands, Sweden, France (188)
- *Ireland, Portugal, United Kingdom (187)
- *Belgium, Czech Republic, New Zealand, Norway, Switzerland, United States (186)
- *Australia, Canada, Greece, Malta (185)
- *Hungary, Poland (184)
- *Lithuania, Slovakia (183)

Is Canadian Inflation on A Sustainable Path to 2%?



TORONTO (Dispatches) - As Canadian inflation slows, the cost of essentials, such as food and rent, offers pointers as to whether it will return sustainably to the Bank of Canada's 2% target, say economists, as those items are key drivers of inflation expectations.

Canada's consumer price index report for December, due on Tuesday, is expected to show headline inflation cooling to 6.3%, its lowest annual rate since last February, from 6.8% in November.

That's good news for the economy, but analysts say that much of the slowdown will be due to energy prices and don't expect much improvement in the annual rate of underlying inflation.

Their focus is on the breadth of price increases as well as more timely, three-month rates of core inflation and items in the CPI basket that are essential to consumers.

Price increases for food and rent, as well as those for gas, which have already slowed, are highly visible, so they tend to have a pronounced impact on inflation expectations.

If inflation expectations rise, it could push up wage demands, particularly in a tight labor market, leading to further price pressures.

"Central banks, they are transitioning to this idea that, yes, inflation is going to fall - we know that - but even if it drops to less than 2%, will that be sustained?" said Stephen Brown, senior Canada economist at Capital Economics.

"One eye is on wage growth, which is strong but not too bad at the moment, but then this other idea (which is) on the price inflation for essentials that could keep wage demands high, as it affects inflation expectations."

Brown's estimate is for CPI-trim, one of the BoC's preferred measures of core inflation, to increase 5.3% on an annual basis in December, matching November's pace.

The Bank of Canada has vowed to return inflation to target, raising its benchmark interest rate at a record pace of 400 basis points in nine months to 4.25%. Money markets see a roughly 70% chance that it hikes by a further quarter-point at an interest rate decision on Jan. 25.

Food prices rose 10.3% year-over-year in November and shelter was up 7.2%, while the December labor force survey showed growth in average hourly wages of 5.1%.

"If inflation slows and wage growth doesn't, then wages become more of a tailwind for inflation going forward. That's what central banks are more worried about right now," said Nathan Janzen, assistant chief economist at Royal Bank of Canada.

Still, economists are optimistic that a wage-price spiral, or prolonged loop of higher wages and prices, can be avoided.

World COVID Cases Decline 23%, Deaths 13%

GENEVA (Dispatches) - COVID-19 is easing worldwide with a weekly 23% decrease in cases and 13% drop in deaths with one big qualifier: exclusion of mainland China where the virus emerged three years ago.

Since Dec. 25, the nation no longer is listing daily data for deaths, cases and hospitalizations with sparse data now infrequent. Worldometers.info last reported data seven days ago: 5,272 death and 403,302 cases. The world toll is 6,730,360 fatalities and 671,320,754 infections so far Sunday.

On Saturday, the National Health Commission reported 59,938 deaths between Dec. 8 and Thursday for an average of 1,712 a day. Of that number, 5,503 died of respiratory failure caused by COVID-19 and 54,435 died of underlying issues complicated by infection.

Only deaths caused by pneumonia and respiratory failure after contracting the virus are classified as COVID deaths.

China, which has the world's largest population at more than 1.4 billion, stopped reporting asymptomatic cases and has closed a network of PCR testing sites. People who are using rapid antigen tests to detect infections are under no obligation to report positive results.



This is a far cry from the "zero tolerance" policy.

The lack of transparency has caused worldwide concern. The United States, Britain, Canada, Australia, Japan, India and Italy have imposed testing requirements and other restrictions on travelers from China.

And the World Health Organization has accused China of "under-representing" the severity of its current outbreak, which is caused by sub-variants of Omicron, including the most prevalent XBB.1.5, which is nicknamed the Kraken variant.

WHO director-general Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus spoke to Chinese Health Minister Ma Xiaowei on Saturday.

Chinese officials shared latest numbers on outpatient clinics, hospitalizations, patients requiring emergency treatment and critical care, and hospital deaths, the WHO said in a statement. No case data was released.

"WHO is analyzing this information, which covers early December 2022 to January 12, 2023, and allows for a better understanding of the epidemiological situation and the impact of this wave in China," WHO said. "WHO requested that this type of detailed information continue to be shared with us and the public. WHO notes the efforts by Chinese authorities to scale up clinical care for its population at all levels, including in critical care."

Antibiotic Use May Increase Risk of Bowel Disease

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Overuse of antibiotics may trigger inflammatory bowel disease (IBD), new research suggests.

Among folks who were 40 or older, a new study found that antibiotics may increase the risk for bowel diseases, such as Crohn's and ulcerative colitis, for one to two years after use. And the greatest risk was posed by two classes of antibiotics - nitroimidazoles and fluoroquinolones - often used to treat gut infections.

The researchers said these drugs indiscriminately target all bacteria, not just those that cause disease.

"Antibiotics may impact the development of IBD through alteration of the microbiome," said lead researcher Dr. Adam Faye. He is an assistant professor at New York University's Grossman School of Medicine, in New York City. To reduce your risk for IBD, Faye advises using antibiotics only when needed and not for viral diseases such as colds, flu or other respiratory and gastrointestinal illness.

"We want patients to improve quickly, so we may be more apt to prescribe an antibiotic in some of these settings, but in addition to exacerbating bacterial resistance patterns, this is another reason to practice antibiotic stewardship," Faye said. "In other words, use antibiotics when needed, but be cautious about prescribing them for an infection that will likely be self-limiting or is more likely viral."

Overuse of antibiotics can alter the bacterial balance in the gut, called the microbiome, with serious consequences, Faye warned.

This study, however, doesn't prove that antibiotics cause inflammatory bowel disease, only that there appears to be a connection.

For the study, Faye's team used a Danish national medical database from 2000 to 2018 of more than 6.1 million Danes who had not been diagnosed with IBD. In all, 91% were prescribed at least one course of antibiotics during the study period.

From 2000 to 2018, more than 36,000 people were diagnosed with ulcerative colitis and nearly 17,000 with Crohn's disease.



Tehran Criticizes...

FROM PAGE 1

Reacting to his remarks, Kanaani said, "The quoted remarks of this [South] Korean official reveal his complete unawareness of the historical and cordial relations between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Persian Gulf littoral countries, including the UAE, as well as [his lack of knowledge about] high-speed and positive developments [that are unraveling] in this regard."

"The Foreign Ministry is diligently pursuing the recent positions of this country, especially the remarks made by its president, on the relations between Iran and the UAE, which totally lack diplomatic validity," the spokesman stated.

Kanaani added that Iran is awaiting the South Korean Foreign Ministry's explanation in this regard.

The new development came at a time that in addition to its unfriendly positions on Iran, South Korea has been holding billions of dollars in Iranian funds under the pretext that they have been frozen as a result of the unilateral sanctions imposed by Washington on Tehran.

South Korea was the third largest customer of Iranian crude oil and the number one buyer of Iranian condensate, a very light form of crude, before 2018 when the administration of former US President Donald Trump pulled out of a nuclear deal with Iran, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

Syria Condemns...

FROM PAGE 1

Numerous reports have pointed to the US role in transferring Daesh terrorists to the war-ravaged country and even airlifting supplies to the group.

The U.S. government has imposed sweeping economic sanctions against Syria amid the Arab nation's uphill battle for reconstruction and recovery.

The controversial Caesar Syria Civilian Protection Act, signed into law by former president Donald Trump, targeted individuals and businesses that participated either directly or indirectly in Syria's economy.

The restrictive measures have blocked imports of essential goods, affecting the Syrian people's access to medical equipment, food, heating, gas, and electricity.

Iran Reaches Gas...

FROM PAGE 1

The company aims to produce 500 million cubic feet (over 14 million cubic meters) per day of natural gas and some 15,000 barrels of gas condensates from the field once it is fully developed.

The exploration of the field comes amid Iran's plans to further increase its natural gas output to respond to a growing demand for energy in the country.

Latest figures by the Iranian Oil Ministry show natural gas output in the country has reached some 990 million cubic meters per day from a total production capacity of around 1.045 billion cubic meters.

POGC's Motajalli said the company will soon award contracts for drilling work on eight development wells in Belal gas field.

He said a 150-kilometer pipeline and other installations will be constructed to transfer sour gas produced in the field to onshore refineries, adding that a contract for construction of large jacket platform had been awarded to Iranian company SADRA.

Belal is located some 30 kilometers to the southeast of South Pars, the world's largest gas field which is shared between Iran and Qatar in the Persian Gulf.

Tourists Surge Back to Jordan's Desert Marvel Petra

PETRA (Dispatches) - Tending to his camels in Petra, Jordan's spectacular archaeological marvel hidden deep in a desert canyon, Hussein Bdoul is all smiles: The tourists are back.

After years in which the Covid pandemic turned the storied "Rose City" into a ghost town, the father of seven is back at work, offering visitors rides on his decorated animals.

"Tourism has returned and the numbers are even greater," said Bdoul, 35, wearing Bedouin garb with a red keffiyeh scarf over his long black hair, reflecting on a resurgence last year.

"At the time of the coronavirus pandemic, we did not see anyone in Petra," said Bdoul — a disaster for the town where, he said, "90 per cent of people work in tourism."

"We hope from God Almighty that people will stay well." Jordan tourism authorities confirm that Petra is back in business and drew 900,000 visitors last year, close to the record of one million set in 2019.

Jordan as a whole received 4.6 million visitors in 2022 — almost four times the level from 2020 — earning the country US\$5.3 billion.

Shakhtar Donetsk to Allocate \$25m for Aid in Ukraine

KYIV (Dispatches) - Ukrainian club Shakhtar Donetsk will allocate \$25 million to aid soldiers and their families, president Rinat Akhmetov said, a day after receiving a record transfer fee for winger Mykhailo Mudryk from Premier League club Chelsea.

Akhmetov added that Shakhtar would play a friendly against Chelsea at their Donbass Arena in "a Ukrainian Donetsk".

LICENCE HOLDER: SOKHAN GOSTAR INSTITUTE

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:

http://www.irannewsdaily.com

E-Mail Address:

info@irannewsdaily.com

ISSN 1024-6053

P.O. Box: 15875-8551

Address: No 13, Pajouhesh St., Golestan II St, Golestan St.Marzadaran Blvd., Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran

Printed by:Honar Sarzmin Sabz

Distributed by:

Cities of Iran Cultural and Artistic Institute

Managing Director: Fereydoon Taherpour Asl

Ramsdale Confirms Altercation With Spurs Fan

LONDON (Dispatches) - Arsenal goalkeeper Aaron Ramsdale said he was attacked by a fan just after his side had earned a 2-0 victory in a fiery North London derby with Tottenham Hotspur in the Premier League.

Ramsdale was man-of-the-match as he kept Tottenham at bay time and again and also clashed with several Spurs players during the match.

Medvedev Demolishes Giron to Signal Australian Open Intent

MELBOURNE (Dispatches) - Two-time losing finalist Daniil Medvedev fired up his bid to go one better at the Australian Open with a straight-sets demolition of Marcos Giron. The Russian seventh seed, almost a foot taller than his opponent, blasted past the 56th-ranked American 6-0, 6-1, 6-2 on Rod Laver Arena in just 1hr 36mins.

His reward is a second-round clash with Australian wildcard John Millman, who came through a five-setter against Switzerland's Marc-Andrea Huesler.

"Really happy with the match, Marcos is a tough opponent and to beat him with this score in the first round of a Slam is great," he said. "I'm really happy about my level."

Medvedev was a losing finalist at the last two Australian Opens, to Novak Djokovic in 2021 and then in a demoralising five-set defeat 12 months ago against Rafael Nadal after leading by two sets.

"Great memories of last year, but I definitely want to have better ones this year," he said. The 2021 US Open champion rebounded from that disappointment by becoming world number one, where he spent 16 weeks.

But he has since seen his ranking slip to eight after only making the round of 16 at both Roland Garros and the US Open last year. He was unable to compete at Wimbledon due to the Ukraine war.

Djokovic and Nadal continue to pose a roadblock in his quest for a second Grand Slam title, but his form against Giron suggests he is peaking at the right time.

The American broke into the top 50 and contested a Tour-level final for the first time in 2022, but he was no match for the Russian.

Medvedev broke his first service game and there was no looking back, steaming through the first set in 37 minutes and the second in only 26 minutes, with Giron hitting just three winners.

The stunned Giron put up a slightly better fight in the third set, but he had already lost the battle.



Medvedev is bidding to become just the fourth man in the Open era to reach three consecutive Australian Open finals, after Djokovic, Mats Wilander and Ivan Lendl.

Meanwhile third seed Stefanos Tsitsipas credited his fighting spirit for helping bank a fifth straight win of the year to speed into the Australian Open second round, as he targets a maiden Grand Slam title.

The 24-year-old Greek outplayed Frenchman Quentin Halys, ranked 61, to win 6-3, 6-4, 7-6 (8/6) at Margaret Court Arena.

He will play either German qualifier Yannick Hanfmann or Australian wildcard entry Rinky Hijikata next.

Tsitsipas led the ATP Tour for most matches won (61) last year and reached seven finals, winning two of them.

He has started 2023 in the same vein, winning all five matches so far this season after going 4-0 at the warm-up United Cup for Greece.

Tsitsipas raced through the first two sets against Halys, but struggled in the third, broken twice before battling back from 2-0 down in the tiebreak.

"It was challenging, he came up with some good tennis in the third set, I kind of lost my rhythm in the serve, I wasn't expecting to get broken twice in a row," he said.

"So I had to find ways to get out of the difficult situation. I think my fighting spirit showed towards the end, I wasn't going to give up."

The world number four burst onto the scene at the Australian Open in 2019 when as a 20-year-old he dethroned defending champion Roger Federer in the last 16.

He went on to reach the semi-finals that year and again in 2021 and 2022, highlighting the consistency that has made him a mainstay of the world's top 10 for nearly four years.

But a Grand Slam crown remains elusive, with his runner-up showing at Roland Garros in 2021 his best result at a major so far.

LeBron Becomes Second Player To Score 38,000 Points

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - LeBron James became only the second player in NBA history to score 38,000 career points as he inches closer to Kareem Abdul-Jabbar's all-time record.

James, playing in his 20th NBA season, needed 11 points to reach 38,000 points and hit a mid-range jumper in the first quarter of the Los Angeles Lakers' home game against the Philadelphia 76ers to move past the milestone.

James eventually finished with 35 points but it was a bittersweet night as the Lakers lost 113-112.

The 38-year-old forward, who started his career with the Cleveland Cavaliers and also played for the Miami Heat, has averaged 29 points per game this season.

A four-times champion and four-times MVP, James is on course to break former Lakers center Abdul-Jabbar's 34-year-old record of 38,387 points in the coming weeks.

When James turned 38 last month, Abdul-Jabbar had wished him happy birthday with the message: "38 is the new 38,388."

James is now 363 points behind Abdul-Jabbar and based on his scoring average, NBA statisticians expect him to break the record before the All-Star break next month.

Swiatek Looks for Missing Spark After Surviving Australian Open Test

MELBOURNE (Dispatches) - World number one Iga Swiatek said she needed to find some extra "intensity" to go deep at the Australian Open after surviving a tough first-round examination on Monday.

The 2022 French and US Open champion was far from the fluent best that took her to a 37-match win streak last season, needing an hour and 59 minutes to see off Jule Niemeier 6-4, 7-5 on Rod Laver Arena.

Swiatek is looking to win the Australian Open for the first time but after edging a tight first set, found herself 5-3 down in the second before coming through against the German world number 69.

Swiatek, who made her Australian Open debut in 2019, admitted she needed to increase her focus and had not been at her best.

"I was happy I was able to come back in that second set and break back. That was an important moment, for sure," the Polish top seed and hot favourite told reporters at Melbourne Park.

"First match of a first Grand Slam. So always tough. Jule is not an easy opponent, so I'm happy I'm through and going to be able to play more matches here."

The first set had been deadlocked on serve when Swiatek finally forced a break to creep over the line 6-4 in 52 minutes.

But the 21-year-old was immediately broken at the start of the second and struggled for consistency, before getting the job done.

"My goal in my next matches is not to get into that situation," she said. "I need to have more intensity."

The Pole insisted she could still take positives from the victory.

"It showed me that I don't have to feel 100 percent to win a match."

Niemeier was coming off the biggest season of her career in 2022, where she made the quarter-finals at Wimbledon and led Swiatek by a set and a break in the last 16 at the US Open.

But the 23-year-old faltered when serving at 5-4 and Swiatek pounced to level before taking the match.



Conte Sack Talk at Tottenham Gathers Pace

LONDON (Dispatches) - A report claims Tottenham chairman Daniel Levy is already considering four possible replacements for Antonio Conte should the axe fall on the Italian in the coming weeks.

Spurs currently sit fifth in the Premier League and are through to the last 16 of the Champions League. However, all is not well at the club and a growing portion of supporters are unhappy with the Italian tactician.

Indeed, Sunday's 2-0 defeat to Arsenal illustrated a pretty sizeable gulf in class and dished up Tottenham's fourth home loss in just 10 games this season.

And with the supporters trust writing to Levy to express their dismay at the direction the club is heading, it seems all is not well for Tottenham. They now sit five points adrift of Manchester United in fourth place. And with a trip to Manchester City next on the horizon, it could get worse for Conte before it gets better.

Indeed, to rub salt into their wounds, Paul Merson has gone all out for Conte, ripping to shreds a major Tottenham embarrassment.

Conte's deal at Tottenham is currently due to expire in the summer anyway. He has regularly indicated that he could walk away from the club, dropping his most recent exit hint a fortnight ago. As a result, Levy has plenty to ponder over Conte's future at Tottenham between now and the end of the season.

Indeed, the Daily Express claims the Spurs chairman has four solid options in place already should a parting of ways occur.

And the name right at the top of Levy's wish list is former boss Mauricio Pochettino.

The Argentine worked wonders during his five years at the helm. Guiding them to the 2019 Champions League, the axe was to fall on his time in charge just a few months later after an unexpected loss of form.

Since then, he has taken charge of PSG after a lengthy sabbatical. However, that reign in charge only lasted 18 months with Pochettino leaving the Ligue 1 giants in the summer.

Man Utd Set Up Shop With Luxury Lounge in Swiss Alps

DAVOS (Dispatches) - Manchester United set out a dazzling Davos shop front this week, but insisted its lounge was to entertain clients and partners rather than to attract buyers for the English soccer club.

United said in November it was looking at options to either get new investment or explore a potential sale, 17 years after the Glazer family bought the 20-times top-flight champions.

There has been no update since, amid British media reports that bids from the United States, Middle East and Asia are expected to come in within the next month.

Ellie Norman, a spokesperson for the club, said the lounge was "definitely not" aimed at attracting buyers, and will be used to meet existing clients and partners.

The strategic review is an ongoing process, Norman told Reuters, adding "we don't know the outcome" and declining to give further details.

On the main high street in Davos, where the ski resort's shops have been temporarily converted into slick spaces by tech companies, banks and governments to host events during the annual gathering, United's luxury lounge stood out. Curious passers-by stopped to peer inside and take photos.

Peter Schmeichel, the former goalkeeper who is revered by fans, and Richard Arnold, the club's chief executive, will host a nightcap for guests on Tuesday with canapes and a specialty "red devil" cocktail. United's executive co-chairman Avram Glazer, a Davos regular, is expected to arrive later this week. A reception emblazoned with golden insignia greeted well-heeled visitors to a space decorated with black velvet lounge chairs and couches, with coffee served by staff in bow ties.



Man City Must Get Haaland More Involved

LONDON (Dispatches) - Pep Guardiola admits Manchester City must find a way to get Erling Haaland more involved after the Norway international was reduced to a peripheral role in 2-1 defeat at Manchester United.

Haaland, who managed just 19 touches at Old Trafford and was limited to half-chances, has now gone three games without a goal after scoring 27 times in his first 21 outings.

City's recent stumbles have sparked debate over whether the introduction of the prolific forward has forced the team to change their approach after becoming accustomed to operating without an out-and-out striker over the past two seasons.

Former City midfielder Dietmar Hamann said on social media that Guardiola's team "were a better team without Haaland, even if he scores 40 goals this season". Guardiola is still working on integrating his £51 million (\$62 million) signing, who joined City from Borussia Dortmund last June.

"At the moment we have that process because when teams are sat in their 18-yard box, it is more difficult but we have to find him a little bit more, yes," said the City boss.

City have struggled for consistency this season, particularly since the World Cup, drawing at home to Everton and now suffering back-to-back defeats against Southampton in the League Cup and United in the league.

But Guardiola, whose defending champions are second in the Premier League, eight points behind Arsenal, refused to blame a change in the system to accommodate Haaland.

"I would say the inconsistency was in terms of results but not performances," he said. "In general, (but) not against Southampton, we were consistent in our games."

