

Deputy Foreign Minister  
Ali Bagheri-Kani Met With Niger's  
Foreign Minister During His Trip  
To Niamey, Capital of Niger,  
To Discuss Strengthening Bilateral  
Relations With the African Country

# IRAN NEWS

Iran Chamber of Commerce,  
Industries, Mines and Agriculture  
Will Dispatch a Trade Delegation  
To Kazakhstan's Capital Astana  
Concurrent With the Two Countries'  
Joint Economic Committee Meeting

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## Russia Ready to Upgrade Cooperation With Iran

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Russian President Vladimir Putin says his country is ready to upgrade cooperation with Iran in different fields as he held talks with President Raisi for the second time in less than ten days.

The Iranian and Russian presidents discussed bilateral ties and regional developments during a phone conversation initiated by the Kremlin on Thursday.

During the phone conversation, Raisi stressed the need to boost bilateral cooperation and coordination in various fields.

He also described as "positive and constructive" the agreements between the two countries for expanding cooperation in the fields of energy and transit.

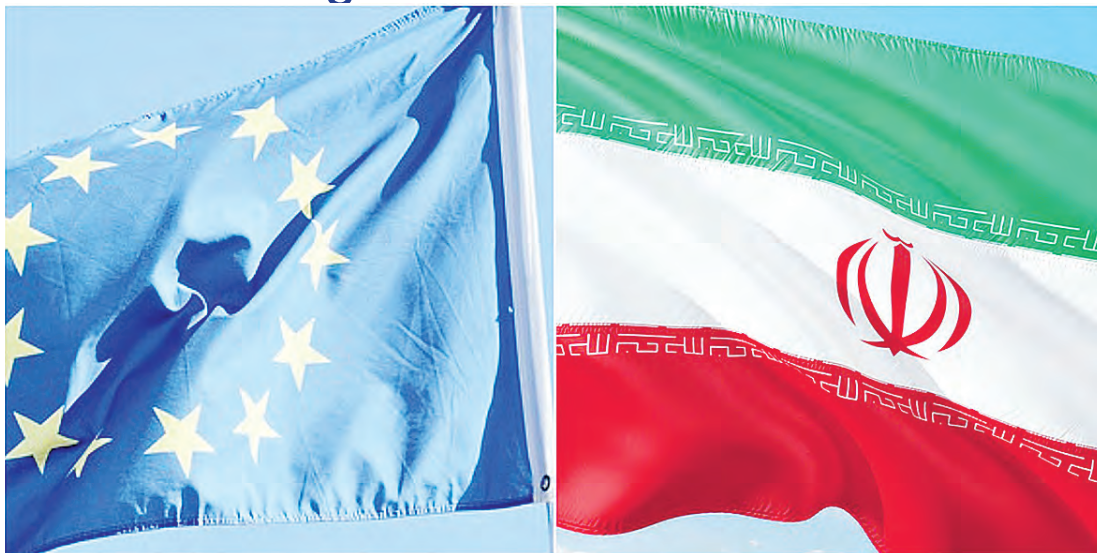
For his part, Putin said Moscow is ready to boost cooperation with Tehran in the areas of energy as well as transit.

Iran and Russia are working to advance the North-South corridor which will facilitate transportation and greatly reduce transportation time.

In 2002, Russia, Iran, and India signed an agreement for the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC), a 7,200 km multi-mode network of ship, rail, and road route for moving freight between India, Iran, Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Russia, Central Asia and Europe.

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## IRGC Blacklisting "Out of Desperation", Against UN Charter



### IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - President Ebrahim Raisi has condemned an EU move to designate the Islamic Revolution Guard Corps (IRGC) as a terrorist organization, noting that the measure comes due to the "desperation" of Europeans.

Speaking in a cabinet session on Thursday, Raisi briefly referred to a recent amendment to a resolution by the European Parliament which calls on the EU and its member states to include the IRGC on their terror list.

"This move is out of desperation and it comes after their failed attempts on the streets to deal a blow to Iranian people," he said, referring to the foreign-backed riots that started in Iran in mid-September 2022 after the death of Mahsa Amini.

Europe thought that it could "stop the Iranian nation" with such measures, he said.

The Islamic Revolution Guard Corps is an "official force" and part of Iran's Armed Forces, Raisi stressed, adding, "The measure is in contravention of the international law and the UN Charter."

The remarks come as the European Parliament adopted another resolution on Thursday, calling for more sanctions against Iranian individuals and entities, including Raisi, as well as putting the IRGC on the EU terrorist list over alleged human rights violations during recent riots.

This is while Iran's intelligence bodies have found footprints of American and other Western spy agencies in recent violent riots inside Iran which claimed the lives of dozens of people and security forces.

Meanwhile the European Union (EU) is reportedly planning to impose sanctions on dozens of Iranian individuals amid its efforts to blacklist Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) as a "terrorist organization," despite Tehran's stern warning of the consequences of such a hostile measure.

Citing two European diplomats, Reuters said on Thursday the European bloc was to add 37 names to its sanctions list on Monday.

"We will adopt the fourth package of sanctions against Iran on Monday," the officials said.

The 27-nation bloc has been slapping sanctions against Iran over, what it calls, the country's confrontation against the foreign-backed violence and riots that erupted across the Islamic Republic in September after the tragic death in police custody of a young Iranian woman, named Mahsa Amini.

The unfortunate incident was immediately picked up by Western-based media outlets and officials, who -- without providing any convincing evidence -- started claiming that the woman had been "murdered" by police forces.

Iran immediately released the CCTV footage showing the young woman fainting at a police station and being subsequently transferred to a hospital. In the meantime, Iranian authorities conducted an investigation into the incident, concluding that Amini's death had been caused by an illness, rather than alleged bodily harm.

One of the European diplomats, who were speaking to Reuters, meanwhile, said, "We believe we should already start working on the fifth one (sanction package) to list IRGC as a terrorist organization."

## UN Urged to End Israel Crimes Against Palestinians

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - A senior Iranian diplomat has strongly criticized the United Nations' silence on the Israeli regime's crimes, saying the world body must act immediately to support the Palestinian people.

Iran's Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the United Nations Amir Saied Iravani made the remarks while addressing a UN Security Council open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question.

"Sympathy alone is not enough," he said.

He added that the Israeli regime's oppressive, expansionist and apartheid practices against Palestinians continued unabated in 2022, and the Palestinian people, particularly women and children, are facing severe poverty and violation of their basic rights.

The Israeli regime has committed atrocities in the occupied Palestinian territories without accountability for more than 70 years, he said, stressing the importance of fully recognizing, upholding and protecting the Palestinian nation's right to self-determination.

But long as the Security Council remains silent, this is impossible to do so, Iravani added.

The Security Council is duty-bound to remain committed to the UN Charter and maintain international peace and security, he noted, emphasizing that it should use all legal channels to hold the Israeli regime accountable for all the crimes it is committing.

The Iranian envoy said the Israeli regime's incursion into the al-Aqsa Mosque compound earlier this month violated the mosque's sanctity and worship rites and was a brazen provocation of Muslim feelings.

"This illegality and recklessness have serious consequences that should not be underestimated," he said, noting that if not properly addressed, it can further destabilize an already fragile situation and endanger regional and international peace and security.

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## ViewPoint By: Hamid Reza Naghashian Sanctions Turning Into an Ineffective Tool

The Islamic Republic of Iran has proved to the world and nations that if there is a will there is a way for achieving goals as Iranians through their strong determination have made ineffective the unilateral U.S. sanctions and have marched towards considerable successes and these progresses are in a way that even the U.S. officials and experts have been forced to acknowledge it.

Last week many media outlets in the U.S. have admitted that Iran has progressed in many fields like missiles and drones and made ineffective the U.S. sanctions.

The unilateral sanctions imposed by the United States on Iran have failed to disrupt the country's drone program, said emphatically the U.S. media.

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

"For years, the United States has imposed sanctions against Iran's military complex and manufacturing base, including entities like IAIO, HESA... Nevertheless, Iran's aerospace sector and drone industry have continued to expand and thrive," Eric Lob and Edward Riehle wrote.

The article said, "Iran has manufactured and operated military drones since the Iran-Iraq War in the mid-1980s. With over thirty-three models, Iran's highly developed, sophisticated military drone complex comprises one of the four pillars of its security strategy and force structure, complementing its missile technology, proxy forces, and cyberwarfare."

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

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

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

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## South Korea Summons Iran Envoy

SEOUL (Dispatches) - South Korea's Foreign Ministry has summoned the Iranian ambassador to Seoul to provide explanations once again over the recent controversial remarks by President Yoon Suk Yeol in the United Arab Emirates.

Saeed Badamchi Shabestari was called in by South Korean First Deputy Foreign Minister Cho Hyun-dong on Thursday, Lim Soo-suk, the spokesperson of Seoul's Foreign Ministry, said on Thursday.

"As we explained several times, (Yoon's) reported comments were meant to encourage our troops serving their duties in the UAE, and had nothing to do with Iran's foreign relations, including South Korea-Iran relations," Lim said.

"Our government's will to develop relations with Iran remains unchanged," the official said.

Lim further explained the South Korean president's comments on a possible move to develop nuclear weapons, and said the remarks were in line with the intention of strengthening the effectiveness of extended deterrence in order to respond to North Korea's escalating nuclear and missile threats.

According to Lim, Shabestari told Cho that he would "faithfully" convey Seoul's explanation to the authorities in Tehran.

Earlier, Iran's Foreign Ministry summoned the South Korean ambassador to protest Yoon's interventionist remarks regarding the Islamic Republic's relations with the UAE.

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## Iran to Counteract for Branding IRGC Terrorist

RASHT (IRNA) – Majlis Speaker warned EU countries that Iran Parliament will counteract for inclusion of IRGC in list of terrorist organizations by treating the Europeans in a different method, and brand EU countries that support terrorists and their armies in its list of terrorists.

Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf who was speaking on Thursday night in a commemoration service for 437 martyrs said that the European countries had better rid themselves of the hegemony of the global oppression, led

by the United States and the Israeli regime, and act rationally, since otherwise they will pay dearly for it.

“The European countries showed that supporting the terrorists and terrorism is a part of their official policies now, and this new ratification of the European Parliament in including the IRGC in their list of terrorist organizations is in fact encountering the center of culture, martyrdom, and selfless services to the people,” he added.

## Tehran Holds World's Influential Women Congress

*IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK*

**TEHRAN - The 1st World's Influential Women Congress held in Tehran Azadi Parsian Hotel in presence of women from over 90 countries, was opened by Vice President for Women's Affairs Ensiyeh Khazali.**

Also present on behalf of the hosts of the congress held on Thursday with 300 foreign guests, there was science faculty member of Martyr Beheshti University Jamileh Sadat Allamalhoda.

The foreign guests of the event were from China, Australia, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Kameron, Serbia, Armenia, Sweden, Bulgaria, Kyrgyzstan, Algeria, South Africa, Lebanon, Syria, Russia, and... including 70 female politicians, such as ministers, vice presidents, and parliament members, who had come to witness the status of Iranian women free from western media's negative anti-Iranian propagations and reflect it in their own countries.

A representative of the Philippine women, Melina Dubina said, “We must travel around the globe and especially visit the different parts of the Islamic countries to empower the young girls, because outstanding women are so powerful that need to have high stands, but traditions do not tolerate some modernist tendencies.”

A representative of the women of Afghanistan and member of merchant women in Kabul, Maryam Rezaie said, “I am proud to be present in this congress in Iran”, adding that the Taliban have imposed harsh laws against the women, which has decreased the women's presence in various social activities.

A representative of Congolese women, Zahedah Ramshi said that her country is the second most populated country in Africa, with unstable status due to war and economic crises.

The representative of Thailand women, Mena Lee, too, said that in her meeting with the Iranian first lady they spoke about the women's status in Iran and Thailand.

Pen Ji Oui, from China, said that she teaches the Arabic language in her country and that she is a Muslim Chinese woman.

Addressing the congress on Thursday, President Ebrahim Raisi highlighted the considerable improvement in the status of Iranian women in different areas and lambasted Western governments for their double standards on women's rights, stating that their anger towards the country is due to the success of Iranian women in the Islamic establishment.



“There is no doubt that there are built-in differences between men and women, but no differences from a humanitarian perspective. There is no difference between men and women in reaching the apex of human civilization, and whoever tries harder on this path will reach the summits of morality, spirituality, and humanity,” he said.

He added that women have played an important role in historic events, stressing that they must neither be marginalized nor isolated in any society.

“The reactionary viewpoint about women, along with the instrumental view of Western powers and politicians towards women, is ... doomed to failure and rejected. The correct narrative is that men and women are both similar human beings, and that there are even women who influence men,” Raisi said.

He went on to note that the Islamic Republic attaches paramount significance to women's rights, and the dignity of women is enshrined in the country's constitution.

“The West's anger towards the Islamic Republic is due to the fact that women can achieve success here while observing the [Islamic] establishment's principles,” Raisi said.

Raisi also elaborated on the significant measures Iran has taken to improve the situation of women after victory of the Islamic Revolution in 1979.

He pointed to the empowerment of women and improving their status in scientific, cultural, social and economic arenas while observing their human dignity.

Raisi noted that women constitute more than 30 percent of university lecturers in Iran, and close to 60 percent of university students in the country are women.

The Iranian president also hailed the outstanding role of Palestinian women in defending their legitimate cause and resistance against the occupying Israeli regime.

He underlined that Tehran's principled policy is to strengthen its relations with neighboring countries on the basis of mutual cooperation.

“Iran will never give in to any oppression. We call for freedom for all nations. Oppression of the Palestinian nation amounts to the suppression of the entire humanity,” Raisi said.

## Europe Shooting Itself in Foot



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian says the European Parliament (EP) shot Europe in the foot by voting to call on the European Union and its member states to place Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) on the bloc's “terror” list.

In a Thursday phone conversation with EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell, Amir-Abdollahian strongly criticized the European Parliament's “emotional, injudicious, incorrect and unprofessional” behavior, which is in conflict with political rationality and civility.

“It is necessary to respect mutual security in the world of diplomacy and increase mutual trust instead of following the language of threats and unfriendly actions,” he said, vowing retaliation.

Iran has repeatedly announced that the IRGC is an official state body which “has had and will continue to have an important and key role in ensuring the security of Iran and the region, particularly in the fight against terrorism,” he added.

The top diplomat emphasized that Iran's Parliament would give a “legal and strong” response to the plan and urged the European Parliament to “think about the adverse consequences of its emotional; behavior and to focus instead on the path of diplomacy, constructive interaction and rationality.”

Borrell, for his part, said he agreed that the European Parliament's text included emotions and worries, but the body is completely independent in decision-making.

The decisions are, however, non-binding and the recent measure merely reflects Europe's concerns, he added.

The EU foreign policy chief hailed diplomatic efforts which are underway to revive the 2015 Iran deal, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), and vowed to continue his bids to help the sides achieve a final agreement.

## Armed Forces Warn EU Against Repercussions of Blacklisting IRGC

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The General Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces has sharply condemned the European Parliament's “desperate” call for the European Union and its member states to place the elite Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) on the bloc's “terror” list, warning about the consequences of such a move for regional and global peace and stability.

In a statement on Thursday, the General Staff of the Armed Forces said the unwise call by the European Parliament is in contravention with all international regulations.

“In addition to being unprecedented in international rules and regulations, the recent move by the European Parliament will affect regional and global security, tranquility and peace, and the European Parliament must be careful about its consequences,” the statement read.

The statement praised the IRGC as a “strong and popular” institution and highlighted the significant role of the elite military force in fighting terrorism in the region.

Had it not been for the IRGC's great efforts in the resistance front, under the command of Iran's martyred Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani, the European countries could have now been under the control of the Daesh terrorist group, it added.

It emphasized that Iran's Armed Forces, particularly the IRGC, would never give up on their role of safeguarding security, national interests and lofty ideals of the Islamic Revolution as well as on continuous confrontations with the terrorists nurtured by the US, Britain and the Israeli regime.

“The hostile governments will understand soon that they have made a mistake in their calculations once again,” the statement said.

The measure taken European Parliament's measure, which is following in the footsteps of the US and the fake Israeli regime, showed its unlawful “dual and counter-security approaches” to the world.

## Security Forces Dismantle Two Daesh-Linked Terror Teams

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iranian security forces have dismantled two teams affiliated with the Daesh terrorist group in the southeastern province of Sistan and Baluchestan before they could sow insecurity in the area.

The two teams were dismantled in a joint operation by the Intelligence Ministry, the IRGC, and the police, said a Thursday report by Tasnim News Agency, adding that members of the team and a number of accomplices were arrested and handed over to the judiciary.

The teams were planning to sow insecurity in the country's southeast, it said. “One of the objectives of these teams was to take foreign nationals and business persons in Chabahar as hostages.”

“Confessions by the groups' members, including Afghan and Tajik nationals, show that they have had extensive plans

to foment insecurity in southeast Iran,” the report added.

In recent months, terrorist teams affiliated with Deash and Mujahedin-e-Khalq Organization (MKO) have taken advantage of riots in Iran to carry out acts of terror and sabotage across the country.

Last October, 15 civilians, including a woman and two children, were killed at Shah Cheragh shrine in Shiraz in a terrorist attack claimed by Daesh.

In early November, the Iranian Intelligence Ministry said the country's security and intelligence forces had arrested 26 Takfiri terrorists for involvement in the terrorist attack.

The ministry said authorities had launched rigorous, round-the-clock intelligence, counter-intelligence and security operations soon after the attack and managed to identify and capture all those behind the bloody act of terror.

## New Record Set in Iran Gas Production

achievements in the country's oil and gas industry was made, which is the highest figure of gas production from independent and joint fields.”

He added: “During this period, we processed gas in 21 refineries, which was a unique record.”

The Oil Minister pointed to the transmission of gas from the south of the country to the central and northern regions to supply gas to the northern and northeastern provinces.

TEHRAN (Shana) – Oil Minister Javad Owji said: “In these days, the highest amount of gas recovery from independent and joint gas fields was set, which is a new record in the 13th government.”

Javad Owji told reporters: “In these days, one of the good

## Response to Enemies Harsh, To Make Them Repent

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iranian Army's Deputy Commander for Coordination Rear Admiral Habibollah Sayyari said Iran's response to the enemies' mistake in encountering Islamic Iran will be harsh and make them repent.

Rear Admiral Sayyari who was speaking at a commemoration service for martyrs of Varamain, reiterated, “Iran was governed in the past in the presence of military consultant officers from alien countries, but the youth of yesterday, led by the late Imam Khomeini, have made the status of the global oppressor system in west Asia and inflicted fatal blows against them.

“After the victory of the Iranian nation in the Islamic Revolution blew a severe blow against the global oppression which is why they resort to any move against Iran out of enmity,” he added.

He reiterated that the sworn enemies of the Islamic Iran resort to various means, including sowing the seeds of religious and tribal discord, and assassination of more than 17,000 innocent Iranian citizens, but those means all led to their humiliating defeat and they have never managed to impose their hegemony over Islamic Iran.

## FM Talks on Phone With New Chinese FM

TEHRAN (IRNA) - The new Chinese minister of foreign affairs in a phone talk with his Iranian counterpart Hossein Amirabdollahian invited him to have an official visit to China.

The Iranian foreign minister in his Thursday evening phone talk with Chin Gang, the new Chinese foreign minister congratulated the Chinese New Year and spring season celebration to him and the Chinese government and people, wishing him success in his new political position.

The two countries' top diplomats in the phone talk reviewed the latest status of bilateral ties, as well as the most important regional and international developments of mutual interest.

Amirabdollahian referred to the recent successful visit of a Chinese deputy prime minister to Tehran, saying that exchange of high-ranking delegations between the two countries will further deepen Iran-China comprehensive strategic relations and are therefore of great importance.

Foreign Minister Chin Gang, for his part, said that his country attaches great importance to expanding ties with Iran, adding that all the existing opportunities, including negotiations between the two foreign ministers and exchange of high-ranking delegations, must be used to expand bilateral ties.

## European Parliament's IRGC Vote Destructive

TEHRAN (PressTV) - A senior Iranian lawmaker lambastes the European Parliament for voting overwhelmingly earlier to call on the European Union and its member states to place Iran's Islamic Revolution Guard Corps (IRGC) on the bloc's “terror list.”

Abolfazl Amouei, spokesman for the National Security and Foreign Policy Commission of Majlis (the Iranian Parliament), made the remarks to Iran's Tasnim news agency on Wednesday.

He called the EP's move “anti-Iranian” and “undoubtedly destructive,” adding that “Majlis would definitely issue a serious reaction to the European Parliament's undiplomatic move.”

“The European Parliament's destructive and negative measure would be examined in the next meeting of the National Security and Foreign Policy Commission, which would likely be joined by senior officials from the Foreign Ministry and other relevant [Iranian] bodies,” the lawmaker added.

Earlier in the day, the European Parliament's members backed an amendment added to an annual foreign policy report, calling for “the EU and its member states to include the IRGC in the EU's terror list.”

And it would hit “any economic and financial activity involving businesses and commercial activities related to, owned, wholly or in part, by, or fronting for, the IRGC or IRGC-affiliated individuals, regardless of their country of operation.”

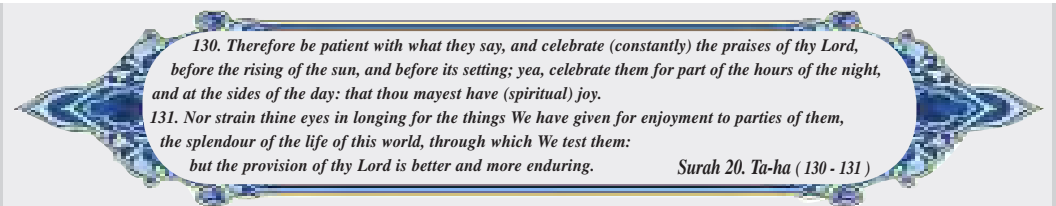
Also on Wednesday, Iranian Interior Minister Ahmad Vahidi censured “some Europeans” for their attempts to designate IRGC as a foreign terrorist organization, stating that the move clearly attested to the mental and political weakness of its architects.





## PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	12:15
■ Evening (Maghreb)	17:39
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	05:43
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	07:10



130. Therefore be patient with what they say, and celebrate (constantly) the praises of thy Lord, before the rising of the sun, and before its setting; yea, celebrate them for part of the hours of the night, and at the sides of the day: that thou mayest have (spiritual) joy.  
131. Nor strain thine eyes in longing for the things We have given for enjoyment to parties of them, the splendour of the life of this world, through which We test them: but the provision of thy Lord is better and more enduring.

Surah 20, Ta-ha ( 130 - 131 )

# Investment in Iraq Housing Market Less Risky Than Iran

**IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK**

**TEHRAN - Secretary for Iran's Mass Construction Center Farshid Poorhajat says there are some certain factors which show investment in Iraq is less risky than Iran.**

Speaking to ILNA, Poorhajat reacted to Iraq Housing Minister's invitation from Turkish companies for entering the housing sector of Iraq and said that one should ask Iran's Roads and Urban Development Ministry, Iran Trade Promotion Organization and Iran Chamber of Commerce why Iraq does not invite Iranian companies to enter its housing sector and these bodies should be asked why the condition and ground has not been prepared for the presence of Iran's construction and mass construction companies.

He noted that in the issue of technical and engineering services export, there are strong companies in Iran which are able to enter housing sector of other countries but the ground and condition should be provided by the governments and commercial attaches but currently this ground is not ready.

Poorhajat went on to say that Trade Promotion Organization, Roads and Urban Development Ministry and Iran Chamber of Commerce are custodians of this field and they are in charge of creating proper ground for presence of Iranian construction companies in foreign countries, adding that while with the current condition of the country in the past one and half years ago, domestic companies have been willing to enter foreign markets and they have capability to be active in the housing market of countries.

He stated that for mass constructors, Iraq's market is a less risky market than Iran, adding that while they face a 50% inflation in the country, risk of investment has



increased highly and inflation rate is the most influential factor in investment and with such an inflation rate for the private sector and companies there is no possibility for planning in the markets.

Poorhajat emphasized that definitely in terms of factors, investment in housing market of Iraq is less risky than Iran's market because in Iran people have no notion about the price of housing in the near future and for this reason the project of National Housing Movement and leap in housing production (construction of 4m houses in 4 years) is one of the essential problems because the final price of these houses in the project is not known and the government announces a new price every day and essentially people do not know with what price they will own the house.

He then pointed to the experience of presence in the international housing sector by Iranian construction and mass construction companies and said that his colleagues in this sector in the past decade have had presence in markets in Africa, Azerbaijan and the UAE, and in the past decade they have entered Iraq's market.

Poorhajat reiterated that they had successful experience in the foreign markets but they face problems and one of them is restriction created by the sanctions. He emphasized that constructors have faced with restrictions because of the sanctions and they cannot carry considerable amount of money by the baggage because of the financial systems of those countries.

He stressed that the main issue is dollar and value of the national currency and the cost of construction in other countries has been dependent of the dollar rate and they have faced only one to two percent inflation but the story is completely different for Iran's rial and all international contracts are signed based on the dollar.

## New Step for Observing Int'l Marine Conventions

**IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK**

TEHRN – The CEO of Persia Hormoz Ship Repair Yard Company says according to the ballast water management convention requirements, the ballast water management devices should be installed on the ships active in the domestic and international



waterways and this action has started for installing ballast water management processing devices on the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Line Group (IRISL) fleet.

The International Convention for the Control and Management of Ships' Ballast Water and Sediments is a 2004 international maritime treaty which requires signatory flag states to ensure that ships flagged by them comply with standards and procedures for the management and control of ships' ballast water and sediments.

Speaking in a presser, Mr. Hajizadeh said that IRISL observes precisely all international and national marine conventions and has properly observed and acted based on details of the conventions.

He went on to say that International Maritime Organization (IMO) approved a convention in which all ships are assigned to install ballast water management system in order to minimize damages on the marine environment which happens due to transfer of water microorganisms from a region to another region.

He added that for this reason, refining and ballast water management system (BWTS) has been designed for eliminating harmful microorganisms which enter the balancing reservoirs during filling the reservoirs with water.

Hajizadeh went on to say that to support the domestic capabilities, it has been planned to invest ballast water management systems on 7 vessels by the yearend in Persia Hormoz Company as the installation operation of the system on Shiba Ship, one of the fleet of IRISL, has been done for the first time and it is underway.

He added that the Persia Hormoz is to install the system on at least 12 vessels of the IRISL by the end of next year.

He also briefed the reporters of the major performance of the company in its yard and said that some 40 periodical repairs were carried out last year, stipulating that in the first half of the current year the number of total periodical repairs has been 13 items.

Hajizadeh noted that in the first 10 months of the current year, 31 vessels have been repaired which is 3 more than repairs in the same period last year while \$6m has been saved because of the repairs and the figure will reach \$9m by the yearend.

He said that some 700 people including the contractor forces are directly working in Persia Hormoz and the figure is around 100 people with inclusion of the suppliers.

He then explained the five-year development plan of the company which will start next year as the company eyes improving its human forces, infrastructures and purchase of required equipment.

He reiterated that the company will help the shipping fleet of the country to broaden its activities while it reduces its dependence on foreigners and saves forex.

## Top Iranian, Eurasian Officials Discuss Mutual Cooperation

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Deputy Foreign Minister for Economic Diplomacy Mehdi Safari and Andrey Slepnev, Minister in charge of Trade of the Eurasian Economic Commission, on Wednesday discussed ways on expanding economic cooperation between the Islamic Republic and Eurasia.

Safari proposed that a corridor is formed for transport through rail, road and sea routes so that free trade of agricultural and industrial goods can be carried out among Iran and the five member states of the Eurasian Economic Commission; namely, Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Armenia.

The Eurasian Economic Commission is the executive body of the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU).

The Iranian official said that cooperation between the union and the Islamic Republic can go beyond trade and expanded into areas such as energy, as well as banking and tourism.

He announced Iran's readiness to begin work to boost cooperation in those fields.

The country's interaction with the Eurasian Economic Union entered a new phase on October 27, 2019 when a preferential trade agreement (PTA) took effect between the two sides.

Parties are now engaged in negotiations to upgrade the PTA to a free trade agreement (FTA).

Andrey Slepnev briefed Safari on those negotiations, expressing hope that talks with the Iranian Ministry of Trade, Industry and Mines are finalized during his current trip to Tehran.

The Eurasian official also said that the EEU is determined to promote cooperation with the Islamic Republic of Iran.

## Iran, Russia to Cooperate in Tamin Holding Co.

**IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK**

TEHRAN – The CEO of Tamin General Industrial Holding Company Mr. Hassan Mohammadi says the holding is one of the top three companies in the country and it has good outlook for growth and development and for this reason it welcomes any new idea and thought which is offered by the knowledge-based company.

The conference on reviewing the grounds for technology, research and development cooperation between Tamin Holding Company and Skolkovo School of Management of Moscow was in held Tehran in the presence of the CEO of Tamin Holding Company Mr. Mohammadi, Advisor and deputy of the CEO of National Iranian Oil Company Mr. Hossein Shameli, Head of Institute for International Energy Studies of Oil Ministry Mr. Sadeq Jokar and representatives of Skolkovo School of Management and some Russian experts.

This holding with having 30,000 cows and annual production of 200,000 tons of milk is one of the top milk producers in Iran and the holding has predicted in its outlook and mid-term plans to expand its activities by launching the projects and increasing its cows to 130,000 in order to become the top milk producer of the country and the Middle East. Meanwhile some famous and reputed brands like Pars with its long history are considered as the value assets of the holding which can increase its share of home appliances products.

Addressing the conference, the CEO of Tamin Holding Company welcomed the participants and said that the holding as one of the top companies of the country eyes expanding its activities and development and for this reason it welcomes any new idea and thought from the knowledge-based companies. He added that major part of activities of the holding is in the field of agriculture and animal husbandry which have important role in the country and other activities of the holding are in the fields like electronic industries and it makes the holding welcome any cooperation with domestic experts and the knowledge-based companies.

Mohammadi said that the holding is one of the subsidiaries of Social Welfare Organization and it has increased its milk production from 9,000 tons to 200,000 tons and in five years it will hit one million tons.

He said that in the field of the home appliances production, the holding has increased its production from 10,000 to 20,000 and the figure will hit 200,000 in five years and for this reason the holding welcomes involvement of the knowledge-based companies.

Then representative of Russian participants in the conference said that holding such a conference showed that the Iranian side is seriously pursuing this issue and the main goal of the conference is to review the joint interests and potentials between them and the holding for future cooperation.

He added that his group is active in different fields and it can share its experiences in the field of science and technology, adding that they seek academic solutions for joint cooperation between the trade companies if Iran and Russia.



## Iran, Uzbekistan Stress Further Cooperation in Transit

TEHRAN (MNA) - Iran and Uzbekistan have called for further boosting mutual ties in the field of transit.

Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran to Uzbekistan Hamid Nayyerabadi and Acting Minister of Foreign Affairs of Uzbekistan Bakhtiyor Saidov held talks in Tashkent.

During the meeting, the recent enhancement of bilateral relations between the two countries is emphasized.

It also stressed the significance of fully implementing the agreements reached within the framework of the Iranian President's official visit to Uzbekistan in September 2022.

Both sides also called for the proximity of Uzbekistan and Iran's stances on Afghanistan.

In this meeting, the two countries voiced readiness to advance joint projects in the economic and trade fields.



## Iran, Belarus Call for Expanding Cooperation in Agriculture

TEHRAN (MNA) - The Islamic Republic of Iran and Belarus have stressed the need for bolstering mutual ties in field of agriculture.

Referring to the cruel sanctions imposed on Iran and Belarus, the director of the Iranian Research Institute of Plant Protection (IRIPP) said that the two countries should expand their bilateral relations.

Hossein Ranjbar Aghdam added that further steps could be taken in import and export areas.

Iran pays close attention to the quality of the agricultural process, he further noted.

The country utilized the minimum amount of chemicals in agriculture, he said, adding that the amount will be minimized via advanced science in the future.

The Belarus side expressed hope that during the Belarusian president's visit to Iran, a cooperation agreement between the two states would be inked in a bid to protect plants.

## Tehran, Yerevan Named Sister Cities



TEHRAN (IRNA) - Tehran Mayor Alireza Zakani and his Armenian counterpart Hrachya Sargsyan declared the two cities as sisters.

The sister city signing ceremony between Tehran and Yerevan was held at the Milad Tower Conference Center in Tehran, Iran.

During the ceremony, Zakani said that one of the definitive policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran is to establish communication, cooperation, and good neighborliness with its neighboring states, especially Armenia.

Referring to the existing capacities in cooperation between Iran and Armenia, he added that the main cooperation between the two states is categorized into issues such as transportation, environment, waste, and urban services as well as technical and construction cases.

Sargsyan, for his part, said that the two countries share a historical path, and given this issue, there are good capacities for cooperation between the two sides.



## Fire Kills 15 at Armenian Military Barracks

YEREVAN (Dispatches) - A fire killed 15 servicemen and seriously injured three others in Armenia on Thursday after ripping through a military barracks overnight, the defense ministry said.

The blaze “broke out in the barracks of an engineer and sniper company of a military unit”, the ministry said. “Fifteen servicemen were killed as a result... The condition of three (other) servicemen is assessed as serious.” It said the fire started at around 01:30 am on Thursday (2130 GMT Wednesday) in the barracks in Azat, a village in the eastern region of Gegharkunik, near the border with Azerbaijan. The incident was “a result of the violation of fire safety rules, during which prohibited substances were used”, Defense Minister Suren Papikyan told a cabinet meeting, citing preliminary information.



## China Says Critical COVID Cases Have Peaked

BEIJING (Dispatches) - The number of COVID patients needing critical care in China’s hospitals has peaked, health authorities said on Thursday, as millions travelled across the country for long-awaited reunions with families, raising fears of fresh outbreaks.

There has been widespread skepticism over China’s official COVID data since it abruptly axed anti-virus controls last month that had shielded China’s 1.4 billion people from the disease for three years.

China said last Saturday that nearly 60,000 people with COVID had died in hospitals between Dec. 8 and Jan. 12 - a roughly ten-fold increase from previous disclosures.



## U.S., Germany Try to Resolve Differences Over Tanks for Ukraine



KYIV (Dispatches) - The United States and Germany tried to resolve a stand-off that has so far prevented the West from sending heavy tanks to Ukraine, as Kyiv pleaded for the weapons help it to turn the tide against Russian forces.

U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and Germany’s new Defence Minister Boris Pistorius talked in Berlin just hours after Pistorius was sworn into office.

But there was no word on whether they had resolved differences that could see Berlin block Western plans to send Kyiv heavy tanks when dozens of allies gather on Friday at Ramstein, Washington’s main European air base. Billions of dollars worth of military aid is expected to be pledged at the Ramstein meeting, billed as a chance for the West to give Ukraine what it needs to defeat Russia in 2023.

Countries including Canada, the Netherlands and Sweden have already announced armoured vehicles and air defenses. But the big question will be whether the meeting brings heavy tanks, which Kyiv says it needs to fend off Russian assaults and recapture occupied land.

“We have no time, the world does not have this time,” Andriy Yermak, head of the Ukrainian presidential administration, wrote on the Telegram messaging app on Thursday.

“The question of tanks for Ukraine must be closed as soon as possible,” he said. “We are paying for the slowness with the lives of our Ukrainian people. It shouldn’t be like that.”

Berlin has so far blocked allies from sending its Leopard 2 tanks, workhorse of militaries across Europe. Washington and many Western allies say the Leopards - which Germany made in the thousands during the Cold War and exported to its allies - are the only suitable option available in big enough numbers.

A German government source said Berlin would lift its objections if Washington sends its own Abrams tanks. But U.S. officials say they have no plans yet to send the Abrams, which runs on powerful turbine engines seen as using too much fuel for Kyiv’s strained logistics system to supply at the front.

Pistorius and Austin both spoke about the importance of supporting Ukraine ahead of their meeting, but neither addressed the tank issue directly.

At a ceremony after being sworn in, Pistorius said: “These are not normal times, we have a war raging in Europe. Russia is waging a brutal war of annihilation on a sovereign country, on Ukraine.”

Austin described Germany as one of Washington’s closest allies and thanked it for its support for Ukraine so far.

Poland and Finland have already said they would send Leopards if Germany lifts its veto. In a sign of mounting frustration, Poland suggested it might do so even if Germany tries to block it.

“Consent is of secondary importance here. We will either obtain this consent quickly, or we will do what is needed ourselves,” Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki told private broadcaster Polsat News late on Wednesday.

Russia has responded to the prospect of more weapons for Kyiv with threats of escalation. Dmitry Medvedev, a Vladimir Putin ally who stood in as president from 2008-2012 when Putin took a hiatus to act as prime minister, made one of Moscow’s clearest threats to use nuclear weapons if it loses in Ukraine.

“The defeat of a nuclear power in a conventional war may trigger a nuclear war,” Medvedev said. “Nuclear powers have never lost major conflicts on which their fate depends.”

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, a Social Democrat, has been reluctant to send weapons seen as provoking Moscow. Many of Berlin’s Western allies say that concern is misplaced, with Russia already fully committed to war.

There have been signs of friction within Germany’s governing coalition. Scholz’s deputy Robert Habeck, from his coalition partners The Greens, said just last week that Germany would not stand in the way of other countries sending Leopards to Ukraine.

## French Strikers Say “Non” to Macron’s Pension Reform

PARIS (Dispatches) - French workers went on strike and joined marches across the country, halting trains and cutting electricity production in protest against government plans to raise the retirement age by two years to 64.

The stoppages are a major test for President Emmanuel Macron, who says his pension reform plan, which opinion polls show is hugely unpopular, is vital to ensure the system does not go bust.

“It’s salaries and pensions that must be increased, not the retirement age,” read one large banner carried by workers that opened the protest march in Tours, in western France. “I’ll have to prepare my walking frame if the reform goes through,” said Isabelle, 53, a social worker, saying her job was too tough to add two more years.

In Nice, in southern France, a large banner read: “No to the reform.”

Pushing back the retirement age by two years and extending the pay-in period would bring an additional 17.7 billion euros (\$19.1 billion) in annual pension contributions, allowing the system to break even by 2027, according to Labour Ministry estimates.

“This reform is necessary and fair,” Labour Minister Olivier Dussopt told LCI TV.

Unions argue there are other ways to ensure the viability of the pension system such as taxing the super-rich or increasing employers’ contributions or those of well-off pensioners.

“This problem can be solved in a different way, through taxation. Workers should not have to pay for the public sector deficit,” said Laurent Berger, the leader of CFDT, France’s biggest labour union.

At the same Paris protest rally, Michel Liger, a 65-year-old retired firefighter, said he was there because he worried about his two daughters.

“My children shouldn’t have to work longer than me,” he said, adding that the government should instead tackle what he called “real problems” including the healthcare sector.

The challenge for the unions is to transform opposition to the reform - and anger over a cost-of-living crisis - into a mass social protest which could eventually force the government to change tack.

## New Election Possible in N.Ireland If Stalemate Continues

DUBLIN (Dispatches) - Fresh elections could be held in Northern Ireland if a deadline passes without the resumption of power-sharing government in Belfast, a senior British minister indicated.

Northern Ireland Secretary Chris Heaton-Harris said he would “assess carefully all options” if there is no change to the political stand-off sparked by a row over post-Brexit trading rules.

“The restoration of the devolved institutions in Northern Ireland is an absolute priority for my government,” Heaton-Harris wrote in the Irish Times before a British-Irish conference in Dublin.

“If this stalemate continues, sadly, I will have to do more,” he added.

Northern Ireland has been without a devolved government for almost a year because of a walk-out by the pro-UK Democratic Unionist Party (DUP).

The DUP collapsed the power-sharing executive with pro-Irish nationalist party Sinn Fein in February 2022 because of its opposition to the Northern Ireland Protocol.

The protocol, signed between London and Brussels as part of the UK’s Brexit divorce from the European Union, governs trade in the British province, and keeps Northern Ireland in the European single market and customs union.

The DUP wants the deal overhauled or scrapped entirely, arguing it casts Northern Ireland adrift from the rest of the UK and makes a united Ireland more likely.

It had been due to share power with Sinn Fein, who became the biggest party in the assembly after elections last May.

“The DUP are hiding behind the protocol,” Sinn Fein’s first minister-elect Michelle O’Neill told a news conference in London.

“I suspect it’s a lot more about the election result in May. I suspect it’s because they don’t want to serve alongside a republican first minister,” she said.

## Medvedev Warns NATO of Nuclear War If Russia Is Defeated in Ukraine

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - An ally of President Vladimir Putin warned NATO that a defeat of Russia in Ukraine could trigger a nuclear war, while the head of the Russian Orthodox Church said the world would end if the West tried to destroy Russia.

Such apocalyptic rhetoric is intended to deter the U.S.-led NATO military alliance from getting even more involved in the war, on the eve of a meeting of Ukraine’s allies to discuss sending Kyiv more weapons.

But the explicit recognition that Russia might lose on the battlefield marked a rare moment of public doubt from a prominent member of Putin’s inner circle.

“The defeat of a nuclear power in a conventional war may trigger a nuclear war,” former Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, who serves as deputy chairman of Putin’s powerful security council, said in a post on Telegram.

“Nuclear powers have never lost major conflicts on which their fate depends,” said Medvedev, who served as president from 2008 to 2012.

Striking a similar tone at what he described as an anxious time for the country, the head of the Russian Orthodox Church said in a sermon for Epiphany that trying to destroy Russia would mean the end of the world.

Medvedev said NATO and other defense leaders, due to meet at Ramstein Air Base in Germany on Friday to talk about strategy and support for the West’s attempt to defeat Russia in Ukraine, should think about the risks of their policy.

Putin casts Russia’s “special military operation” in Ukraine as an existential battle with an aggressive and arrogant West, and has said that Russia will use all



available means to protect itself and its people.

The Kremlin chief has sought in recent months to gird Russians for a much tougher battle while promising eventual victory in a war that the leaders of the West say they will never let him win.

The United States has denied Russian claims that it wants to destroy Russia, while President Joe Biden has cautioned that a conflict between Russia and NATO could trigger World War Three.

But top Putin allies say the tens of billions of dollars’ worth of U.S. and European military assistance to Ukraine shows that Russia is now in a confrontation with NATO itself - the Cold War nightmare of both Soviet and Western leaders.

Patriarch Kirill, the head of the Russian Orthodox Church, said in a sermon: “We pray to the Lord that he bring the madmen to reason and help them understand that any desire to destroy Russia will mean the end of the world.”

“Today is an alarming time,” state news agency RIA quoted him as saying. “But we believe that the Lord will not leave Russian land.”

Putin’s foreign minister, Sergei Lavrov, told reporters in Minsk that Russia would do everything to ensure NATO and European Union leaders “sobered up” as soon as possible.

“I hope that the sobering up will come,” Lavrov said. “We will do everything so that our colleagues from NATO and the European Union sober up as soon as possible.”

Russia’s Feb. 24 invasion of Ukraine has triggered one of the deadliest European conflicts since World War Two and the biggest confrontation between Moscow and the West since the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis.

## New Zealand Prime Minister Ardern Resigns



AUCKLAND (Dispatches) - Jacinda Ardern has put tiny New Zealand on the map in her five years as prime minister, becoming a global icon for left-leaning politics and women in leadership, even as she struggled at home with the economy and COVID-19 restrictions.

The 42-year-old - who gained attention for bringing her baby to a United Nations meeting and wearing a hijab after a massacre targeting Muslims - announced in similarly dramatic fashion on Thursday that she will step down in less than three weeks, saying she had “no more in the tank”.

“Be strong, be kind,” New Zealand’s youngest prime minister in more than a century repeated through her eventful tenure, but her empathetic leadership and crisis management skills often masked her government’s shortcomings.

Considered personable and engaging, Ardern turned speaking from the heart and smiling through adversity into a winning formula for surging to power in 2017 and returning with a blowout win in 2020 that ushered in New Zealand’s first purely left-leaning government in decades.

Her leadership was marked by unprecedented events for the island nation of 5 million: the 2019 massacre of 51 Muslim worshippers in Christchurch by a white supremacist and the eruption of the White Island volcano, and, the next year, the pandemic.

“I hope I leave New Zealanders with a belief that you can be kind but strong, empathetic but decisive, optimistic but focussed,” Ardern said in an emotional resignation announcement. “And that you can be your own kind of leader - one who knows when it’s time to go.”

Ardern received worldwide praise for her response to the Christchurch attacks, which she labelled terrorism. Wearing a headscarf, she met the Muslim community, telling them New Zealand was “united in grief”.



## China's First Population Drop In Six Decades Sounds Alarm On Demographic Crisis

BEIJING (Dispatches) - China's population fell last year for the first time in six decades, a historic turn that is expected to mark the start of a long period of decline in its citizen numbers with profound implications for its economy and the world.

The country's National Bureau of Statistics reported a drop of roughly 850,000 people for a population of 1.41175 billion in 2022, marking the first decline since 1961, the last year of China's Great Famine.

That possibly makes India the world's most populous nation. U.N. experts predicted last year India would have a population of 1.412 billion in 2022 though they did not expect the South Asian nation to overtake China until this year.

India, however, only collects population figures every 10 years and its latest census, originally scheduled for 2021, has been delayed due to the pandemic.

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

That's caused domestic demographers to lament that China will get old before it gets rich, slowing the economy as revenues drop and government debt increases due to soaring health and welfare costs.

"China's demographic and economic outlook is much bleaker than expected. China will have to adjust its social, economic, defense and foreign policies," said demographer Yi Fuxian.

He added that the country's shrinking labour force and downturn in manufacturing heft would further exacerbate high prices and high inflation in the United States and Europe.

"Economic growth will have to depend more on productivity growth," added Zhiwei Zhang, chief economist at Pinpoint Asset Management.

Kang Yi, head of the national statistics bureau, dismissed concerns about the population decline, telling reporters that "overall labour supply still exceeds demand".

China's birth rate last year was just 6.77 births per 1,000 people, down from a rate of 7.52 births in 2021 and marking the lowest birth rate on record.

The number of Chinese women of childbearing age, which the government defines as aged 25 to 35, fell by about 4 million, Kang said.

The death rate, the highest since 1974 during the Cultural Revolution, was 7.37 deaths per 1,000 people, which compares with a rate of 7.18 deaths in 2021.

Much of the demographic downturn is the result of China's one-child policy imposed between 1980 and 2015 as well as sky-high education costs that have put many Chinese off having more than one child or even having any at all.

The one-child policy and a traditional preference for boys have also created a deep gender imbalance. The latest data shows China with around 722 million males compared to 690 million females. The imbalance, which is more pronounced in rural areas, has led to fewer families being formed in recent years.

The data was the top trending topic on Chinese social media after the figures were released on Tuesday. One hashtag, "Is it really important to have offspring?" had hundreds of millions of hits.

"The fundamental reason why women do not want to have children lies not in themselves, but in the failure of society and men to take up the responsibility of raising children. For women who give birth this leads to a serious decline in their quality of life and spiritual life," posted one netizen with the username Joyful Ned.

Chinese netizens have also previously complained about pressure on newlyweds to have offspring as soon as possible, reporting regular calls from their local government asking when they can expect a pregnancy.



## Tesla Video Promoting Self-Driving Was Staged

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - A 2016 video that Tesla used to promote its self-driving technology was staged to show capabilities like stopping at a red light and accelerating at a green light that the system did not have, according to testimony by a senior engineer.

The video, which remains archived on Tesla's website, was released in October 2016 and promoted on Twitter by Chief Executive Elon Musk as evidence that "Tesla drives itself."

But the Model X was not driving itself with technology Tesla had deployed, Ashok Elluswamy, director of Autopilot software at Tesla, said in the transcript of a July deposition taken as evidence in a lawsuit against Tesla for a 2018 fatal crash involving a former Apple (AAPL.O) engineer.

The previously unreported testimony by Elluswamy represents the first time a Tesla employee has confirmed and detailed how the video was produced.

The video carries a tagline saying: "The person in the driver's seat is only there for legal reasons. He is not doing anything. The car is driving itself."

Elluswamy said Tesla's Autopilot team set out to engineer and record a "demonstration of the system's capabilities" at the request of Musk.

Elluswamy, Musk and Tesla did not respond to a request for comment. However, the company has warned drivers that they must keep their hands on the wheel and maintain control of their vehicles while using Autopilot.

The Tesla technology is designed to assist with steering, braking, speed and lane changes but its features "do not make the vehicle autonomous," the company says on its website.

To create the video, the Tesla used 3D mapping on a predetermined route from a house in Menlo Park, California, to Tesla's then-headquarters in Palo Alto, he said.

Drivers intervened to take control in test runs, he said. When trying to show the Model X could park itself with no driver, a test car crashed into a fence in Tesla's parking lot, he said.

"The intent of the video was not to accurately portray what was available for customers in 2016. It was to portray what was possible to build into the system," Elluswamy said, according to a transcript of his testimony seen by Reuters.

When Tesla released the video, Musk tweeted, "Tesla drives itself (no human input at all) thru urban streets to highway to streets, then finds a parking spot."

Tesla faces lawsuits and regulatory scrutiny over its driver assistance systems.

The U.S. Department of Justice began a criminal investigation into Tesla's claims that its electric vehicles can drive themselves in 2021, after a number of crashes, some of them fatal, involving Autopilot, Reuters has reported.

The New York Times reported in 2021 that Tesla engineers had created the 2016 video to promote Autopilot without disclosing that the route had been mapped in advance or that a car had crashed in trying to complete the shoot, citing anonymous sources.

When asked if the 2016 video showed the performance of the Tesla Autopilot system available in a production car at the time, Elluswamy said, "It does not."

Elluswamy was deposed in a lawsuit against Tesla over a 2018 crash in Mountain View, California, that killed Apple engineer Walter Huang.

Andrew McDevitt, the lawyer who represents Huang's wife and who questioned Elluswamy's in July, told Reuters it was "obviously misleading to feature that video without any disclaimer or asterisk."



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## Indonesia Central Bank Sees 2022 Q4 GDP Growth at 4.81%

JAKARTA (Dispatches) - Indonesia's economic growth in the fourth quarter of 2022 may have slowed to 4.81% on a yearly basis, from 5.72% in the previous three months, according to a presentation made by central bank governor Perry Warjiyo. Bank Indonesia (BI) expected full-year 2022 economic growth to be at 5.25% and for 2023 growth to slow to 5.03%, his presentation slide for a forum with provincial governments showed. "Our projection for 2023 ... could be higher than the numbers I showed," he said, referring to his slide. "Nationally, we predict growth could reach 5.2%," Warjiyo said, adding that local governments must support sectors that are key to boosting growth.



## Russia Sees Sanctions Impact on Oil Products

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russia expects Western sanctions to have a significant impact on its oil products exports and therefore its production, but that will likely leave more crude oil to sell, a senior Russian source with detailed knowledge of the outlook told Reuters. In what the West casts as unprecedented sanctions and President Vladimir Putin deems a declaration of economic war, the United States and its allies are trying to constrict the economy of Russia, the world's second largest oil exporter after Saudi Arabia.

In an attempt to punish Russia for the conflict in Ukraine, the European Union banned seaborne Russian crude imports from Dec. 5 and will ban Russian oil products from Feb. 5.

"The oil products' embargo will have a greater impact than the restrictions on crude oil," said the senior Russian source who spoke on condition of anonymity due to the sensitivity the situation.

The source said the sanctions will lead to more crude oil supplies from Russia, which lacks storage capacity for oil products.

Crude oil is easier to export than products, which require smaller tankers and markets within closer proximity, while crude can sail to far-flung regions of Asia and America.

"We think that the refined product embargo may be more significant than the crude embargo, given that exporting a given amount of products is much more logistically complex than an equivalent amount of crude," said Ron Smith of Moscow-based brokerage BCS.

"Our assumption has been that the two embargoes combined would reduce Russian oil output and total exports by perhaps 1 million barrels per day by the end of (first quarter) 2023."

The senior Russian source gave a median projection for the decline in refinery runs at 15% this year, in line with an official forecast.

In 2022, Russian oil products output grew by almost 3% to 272 million tons and is set to decline to 230 million tons this year, according to the official forecast.

Russia's energy ministry did not respond to a request for comment.

Despite the Western oil embargo, unseen even during the crises of the Cold War, Russian oil production - concentrated in Western Siberia - has so far shown resilience with crude output rising in 2022.

The Group of Seven nations (G7), Australia and the 27 European Union countries also implemented on Dec. 5 a price cap of \$60 per barrel on Russian crude, though Russian blends were trading below this level.

The G7 including the United States, Australia and the EU, are designing a similar price cap mechanism for Russia's refined fuels such as diesel, kerosene and fuel oil, from Feb. 5.

Putin has urged Russian oil producers to divert supplies away from Europe to other markets, such as Asia and Latin America.

His oil point man, Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak, said last week that the Russian oil producers had no difficulties in securing export deals despite the sanctions and price caps.

China and India have both stepped up their buying.

## UK Pay Growth Speeds Up Again as BoE Frets About Inflation

LONDON (Dispatches) - Pay growth in Britain - which is being closely watched by the Bank of England as it gauges how much higher to raise interest rates - picked up more pace in the three months to November, revealed official data.

Pay excluding bonuses rose by an annual 6.4% in the September-to-November period, the biggest increase since records began in 2001, not counting jumps in the COVID-19 period which were distorted by lockdowns and government support measures.

Pay including bonuses also rose by 6.4%, said the Office for National Statistics.

Economists polled by Reuters had expected total pay and ex-bonuses measure to rise by 6.2% and 6.3% respectively.

The ONS said Britain's jobless rate held at 3.7%, in line with the poll, close to its lowest in almost 50 years. Employment rose by a faster-than-expected 27,000.

BoE Governor Andrew Bailey said on Monday that a shortage of workers in the labor market posed a major risk to forecasts that inflation will fall from its current levels above 10%. The BoE looks set to raise borrowing costs for the tenth time in a row next month, and the main question for investors is the scale of the increase as it weighs up the risk of a recession.

Financial markets were mostly pricing in a half percentage-point hike in Bank Rate to 4.0% on Feb. 2 and pointed to only a one-in-four chance of a smaller 25 basis-point increase after Tuesday's data.

Sterling rose and was up by 0.1% on the day against the U.S. Dollar and the Euro.

"The latest labor market data maintain the pressure on the Monetary Policy Committee to raise interest rates by another 50 basis points next month, rather than slow down," said Samuel Tombs, an economist with Pantheon Macroeconomics.

The ONS figures showed a wide gap between strong pay growth in the private sector and weaker increases for public sector workers, many of whom are locked in wage disputes with the government. The number of days lost to strikes rose again in November and the period since June saw more days lost to industrial action than in any six months for over 30 years, said the ONS.

Private-sector total pay rose by an annual 7.1% in the three months to November compared with 3.3% in the public sector.

Despite the pay acceleration, the soaring rate of inflation means households are still witnessing their spending power shrink. Total pay, adjusted for the consumer prices index, fell by 3.9% between September and November compared with the same period in 2021. A larger fall had not been witnessed since 2009.



## OPEC's December Production Jumped, But Remains Below Target

VIENNA (Dispatches) - The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries increased its December production, according to the most recent Monthly Oil Market Report published.

OPEC-13's average December production rose by 91,000 barrels per day, according to the MOMR, to 28.971 million bpd, with nearly all of the gains coming from Nigeria.

Nigeria's crude oil production rose by 91,000 bpd in December to 1.267 million bpd, with production also rising in Angola (+42,000 bpd), Iran (+9,000 bpd), Libya (+17,000 bpd), Saudi Arabia (+4,000 bpd), and Venezuela (+13,000 bpd).

Venezuela's production increase comes as Chevron was granted an expansion of its license to export crude oil to the United States for use in its or other refineries.

Kuwait's crude oil production fell sharply, by 35,000 bpd. Other losses were seen in Algeria (-11,000 bpd), Congo (-18,000 bpd), Equatorial Guinea (-1,000 bpd), Gabon (-6,000 bpd), Iraq (-4,000 bpd), and the UAE (-9,000 bpd).

While Saudi Arabia's production based on secondary sources increased in December 2022 at 10.478 million bpd, direct reported figures by Saudi Arabia show a production loss of 32,000 bpd, to 10.435 million bpd. Nigeria's directly reported production gains were more modest than secondary source reporting, at just 50,000 bpd, to 1.235 million bpd.

According to the MOMR, OPEC's share of global crude oil production "remained unchanged at 28.5% in December, compared with the previous month."

## India Tells IMF It Backs Sri Lanka's Debt Restructuring Plan

COLOMBO (Dispatches) - India has informed the International Monetary Fund (IMF) it will support Sri Lanka's debt restructuring plan, a source with direct knowledge of the matter said, as the island nation races to secure a \$2.9 billion bailout from the global lender.

The country of 22 million people is facing its worst economic crisis since independence from Britain in 1948, and policymakers have been grappling with multiple challenges over the past year including a shortage of dollars,

runaway inflation and a steep recession.

"India has written to the IMF," the source told Reuters, asking not to be named because they are not authorized to speak to the media.

A spokesperson for India's finance ministry declined to comment. Sri Lanka's finance ministry did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Sri Lanka requires the backing of China and India - its biggest bilateral lenders - to reach a final agreement with the IMF on the \$2.9 billion loan that is essential to put its battered economy back on track.

"We are working to get our economy onto the right path," President Ranil Wickremesinghe told parliament.

"We now have to get India and China's agreement on debt restructuring. These discussions are continuing and so far they have been successful."

The two Asian giants, which have jostled for influence over Sri Lanka for decades, are also the island nation's biggest trading partners, accounting for about \$5 billion each in bilateral trade in 2021.

Sri Lanka owes India around \$1 billion that will come under the debt restructuring plan, the source said.

New Delhi separately provided Sri Lanka with about \$4 billion in rapid assistance between January and July last year, including credit lines, a currency swap arrangement and deferred import payments.

Sri Lanka owed Chinese lenders \$7.4 billion - nearly a fifth of its public external debt - by the end of last year, according to calculations by the China Africa Research Initiative (CARI).

Japan is Sri Lanka's third significant bilateral lender, and Colombo needs prior financing agreements with all three countries to seek IMF board approval for a four-year program with the lender.

"We are hopeful of finalizing support from the IMF in the first quarter of 2023," Sri Lanka's cabinet spokesperson, Bandula Gunawardana, told reporters.

## China's 2022 Economic Growth One of Worst on Record

BEIJING (Dispatches) - China's economic growth in 2022 slumped to one of its worst levels in nearly half a century as the fourth quarter was hit hard by strict COVID curbs and a property market slump, raising pressure on policymakers to unveil more stimulus this year.

The quarterly growth and some of the December indicators such as retail sales beat market expectations, but analysts noted the overall economic impulse across China remained weak and highlighted the challenges facing Beijing after it abruptly lifted its "zero-COVID" policy last month.

Gross domestic product (GDP) grew 2.9% in October-December from a year earlier, data from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) showed on Tuesday, slower than the third-quarter's 3.9% pace. The rate still exceeded the second quarter's 0.4% expansion and market expectations of a 1.8% gain.

Beijing's sudden relaxation of stringent anti-virus measures has boosted expectations of an economic revival this year, but it has also led to a sharp rise in COVID cases that economists say might hamper near term growth. A property slump and weak global demand also mean a rebound in growth will be heavily reliant on shell-shocked consumers.

"China's 2023 will be bumpy; not only will it have to navigate the threat of new COVID-19 waves, but the country's worsening residential property market and weak global demand for its exports will be significant brakes," Harry Murphy Cruise, economist at Moody's Analytics, said in a note.

For 2022, GDP expanded 3.0%, badly missing the official target of "around 5.5%" and braking sharply from 8.4% growth in 2021. Excluding the 2.2% expansion after the initial COVID hit in 2020, it's the worst showing since 1976 - the final year of the decade-long Cultural Revolution that wrecked the economy.

"Activity data in December surprised broadly to the upside, but remains weak, particularly across demand-side segments such as retail spending," Louise Loo, senior economist at Oxford Economics, said in a note.

The "data so far supports our long-held view that China's reopening boost will be somewhat anaemic at the beginning, with consumer spending being a key laggard in the initial stages," Loo said.

A Reuters poll forecast growth to rebound to 4.9% in 2023, as Chinese leaders move to tackle some key drags on growth - the "zero-COVID" policy and a severe property sector downturn. Most economists expect growth to pick up from the second quarter.

A strong rebound in China could temper an expected global recession, but it could also cause more inflationary headaches worldwide just when policymakers are starting to get a handle on record price surges.

On a quarterly basis, GDP stalled, coming in at 0.0% in the fourth quarter, compared with growth of 3.9% in July-September, highlighting underlying weakness across many sectors.

## German Investor Morale Positive For First Time Since Ukraine War



BERLIN (Dispatches) - German investor sentiment was in positive territory in January for the first time since the Ukraine war began as signs point to a milder recession over the winter months than initially feared, the ZEW economic research institute said.

The institute's economic sentiment index rose to 16.9 from minus 23.3 in December, beating expectations by analysts polled by Reuters of a reading of minus 15.0.

"For the first time since February 2022, the month in which the war in Ukraine began, the indicator points to a noticeable improvement in the economic situation over the next six months," ZEW President Achim Wambach said.

Economy Minister Robert Habeck said in an interview with broadcaster Welt TV on Tuesday he expects Germany to avoid a recession, while the BDI industry association forecast a 0.3% contraction this year.

Wambach said a more favourable situation on the energy markets and energy relief measures by the German government in particular contributed to the index's 40.2-point leap in January.

The prospect of easing inflation lifted expectations for consumer-related sectors while the lifting of COVID-19 restrictions in China has brightened the picture for export-oriented and energy-intensive sectors, he added.

"The easing inflationary shock and well-filled gas storage facilities are making fears of a recession evaporate," said Hauck Aufhaeuser Lampe private bank economist Alexander Krueger.

German inflation eased further in December, with consumer prices rising by 9.6% year on year in harmonised terms, the federal statistics office said, after an annual harmonised inflation rate of 11.3% in November and 11.6% in October.



## Manufacturing of Refrigerators, Freezers Up 18%

TEHRAN (MNA) - Manufacturing of refrigerators and freezers in Iran has risen 18 percent in the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21-December 21, 2022), as compared to the same period of time in the past year, according to the data released by Industry, Mining and Trade Ministry.

The ministry's data indicate that 1.955 million refrigerators and freezers have been manufactured in the nine-month period of this year, while the

figure was 1.653 million in the same time span of the previous year.

Based on the data previously released by the ministry, 2,265,300 refrigerators and freezers were manufactured in the country during the past Iranian calendar year 1400, showing 8.3 percent growth year on year.

Manufacturing of home appliances in Iran rose 7.56 percent during the previous year from the preceding year.



## India's Russian Oil Binge Drags Down OPEC's Share to Lowest in 2022

NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - Russia became the third-largest oil supplier to India in 2022, making up about 15% of total purchases, dragging down OPEC's share to the lowest in more than a decade, data obtained from industry sources show.

Refiners in India, the world's third-biggest oil consumer and importer, have been gorging on Russian oil sold at a discount after some Western companies shunned buying from Moscow following its invasion of Ukraine last February.

In 2021, Russia was at the 17th spot, supplying about 1% of India's overall imports.

Last month India's oil imports from Russia surged to an all-time high of 1.25 million barrels per day (bpd), about a quarter of overall 4.9 million bpd purchase, the data showed.

India's December oil imports were the highest in seven months as refiners were drawn to Russian oil due to the deeper discounts offered ahead of a Dec. 5 embargo by Europe and a price cap by the European Union and G7 nations to cut Moscow's oil revenue.

Members of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), mainly from the Middle East and Africa, saw their share in India's crude imports shrinking to 64.5% in 2022, from a peak of 87% in 2008, a Reuters analysis of the data since 2006 showed.

Still, Iraq and Saudi Arabia remained India's top two suppliers last year.

"India's oil imports from Russia would continue to rise this year as well mainly because of discounts if there are no further stringent actions by the Western countries targetting Russian oil," said an official at an Indian refiner who declined to be named as he was not authorised to speak to the media.

Russia remained the top oil supplier to India in December followed by Iraq and Saudi Arabia. Higher intake of Russian oil reduced India's appetite for African grades, whose share in 2022 imports declined to a 17-year low while that of Latin



America plunged to the lowest in 15 years, the data show.

In April-December, the first nine months of this fiscal year, Russia replaced Saudi Arabia as the second largest oil supplier to India, while Iraq remained on the top spot, the data showed. Imports from Russia, about a fifth of India's oil imports in April-December, led to OPEC's share falling to about 61.5%, according to Reuters calculations.

## Amirabdollahian Calls for Putting Into Effect Iran-Russia MoUs

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian stressed the implementation of bilateral agreements between Iran and Russia.

Amirabdollahian made the remarks in a meeting with Chairman of Russia's State Duma Committee on International Affairs Leonid Slutsky in Tehran.

Slutsky who is in Tehran to coordinate the visit of the head of the Russian Duma to Iran and the holding of a meeting of the High Commission of Parliamentary Cooperation between the two countries held talks with Amirabdollahian.

During the meeting, Amirabdollahian described the cooperation between the two countries in various fields, including bilateral relations, and cooperation in regional and international forums as constructive.

The Iranian foreign minister also stressed the implementation of bilateral agreements between Iran and Russia.

Slutsky, for his part, termed the growing trend of relations between the two countries as positive, voicing his country's determination to develop all-round relations with Iran.

## Air Pollution Kills 20,800 In Iran Yearly

**IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK**

TEHRAN - An Iranian health official has said that 20,800 people in Iran die of air pollution-caused diseases per year, according to a state media report.

The figure was estimated according to the results of research and studies conducted in 27 Iranian cities with a total population of 35 million, Abbas Shahsavani, Head of the Air Health and Climate Change Department of Iran's Health Ministry, told Tasnim news agency on Thursday.

Nearly 12.6 percent of the annual fatalities in the country are due to diseases caused by air pollution, he said, adding air pollution annually incurs a cost of 8.2 billion U.S. dollars on the country, the semi-official Tasnim news agency reported. Commenting on the situation in Tehran, the Iranian official said air pollution killed 6,400 people in the Iranian capital in the Iranian calendar year ending March 20, 2022, Xinhua news agency reported. Shahsavani blamed Tehran's air pollution on old cars and diesel motorcycles, saying 90 per cent of the country's motorcycles and 50 per cent of Tehran's transport fleet are old and worn out.

With the arrival of the cold season, the air pollution in major Iranian cities, including Tehran, reaches alarming levels, which is hazardous for the health of local residents.

Domestic and foreign experts said under the years-long US sanctions, the forced use of old vehicles, which should have been scrapped long ago, is the cause of the terrible air quality in Tehran. "It is no surprise that Tehran is one of the world's most polluted cities. US sanctions force people to prolong the use of older vehicles that burn fuel less efficiently while making it impossible for Iran to obtain equipment and technology to reduce vehicle emissions," a group of UN human rights experts announced on December 20, 2022.

## Spain's 2023 Tourism Revenue Seen 5% Higher Than Before Pandemic

MADRID (Dispatches) - Revenue from tourism companies in Spain is likely to be 4.7% higher this year than in 2019, before the COVID-19 pandemic ravaged the sector, industry group Exceltur said.

Even with uncertainties over the war in Ukraine and inflation, that is the first time Spain's hotels, resorts, transport companies, car rentals and entertainment businesses have forecast better combined sales than before the pandemic, based on the bookings they are registering.

"The picture is hopeful," Exceltur Vice President Jose Luis Zoreda told a press conference.

"It seems that the desire to travel has prevailed and some firms are telling us that consumers would rather stop buying a shirt or an appliance than stop traveling."

The group said it made its forecast for 2023 based on a survey of some 2,000 businesses up to Jan. 5.

Despite a rebound in 2022 after two years of contraction caused by travel restrictions, overall revenue from tourism companies in Spain was still 2.1% below 2019 levels, Exceltur said. The sector's recovery last year was mixed. For instance, while revenues for holiday hotels were up 7% from pre-pandemic levels, transport companies still sold 5% less than in 2019.

Tourism companies on average were able to increase prices by 6.6% last year, though they saw reduced margins due to rising energy costs and wage increases, according to the survey.

Spain's tourism industry is benefiting from an increase in the number of visitors from central Europe and Mexico.

Companies are now betting the full return of American and British tourists will bolster the recovery, even without counting on the return of Asian travellers.

## Fugitives Involved in Iranian Bank Vault Heist Extradited From Turkey

TEHRAN (Tasnim) - The last two remaining thieves who had fled Iran after robbing a vault of Bank Melli in Tehran in June 2022 have been extradited from Turkey, the Iranian Police said.

The commander of the Iranian Police's international department announced on Thursday that the last two fugitives have been arrested in Turkey and were extradited to Iran on Wednesday night.

General Hadi Shirzad said a group of professional thieves had robbed the safety deposit boxes at the vault of a branch of Bank Melli in downtown Tehran in June 2022.

All other burglars involved in the heist had already been arrested, but the last two fugitives were detected in Turkey after close cooperation among the Iranian Judiciary, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the International Criminal Police Organization, he said.

The general stated that the two culprits were extradited by the Turkish police after Interpol issued a 'Red Notice' for them.

### UN Urged to...

**FROM PAGE 1**

On January 3, far-right Israeli minister Itamar Ben-Gvir entered the holy site of al-Aqsa Mosque through the Moroccan Gate, also known as the Mughrabi Gate, sparking widespread condemnation.

Hardline Israeli legislators and extremist settlers regularly storm the al-Aqsa Mosque compound in the occupied city, a provocative move that infuriates Palestinians. Such mass settler break-ins almost always take place at the behest of Tel Aviv-backed temple groups and under the auspices of the Israeli police in al-Quds.

The al-Aqsa Mosque compound, which sits just above the Western Wall plaza, houses both the Dome of the Rock and the al-Aqsa Mosque.

Iravani further emphasized that the UN silence on Tel Aviv's crimes will only encourage the regime to continue its occupation of the Palestinian territories and intensify its brutal aggression against Palestinians.

He added that Iran is responsible to support the Palestinian people's legitimate right to resist the oppression and violence of the racist Israeli regime in accordance with Palestinians' right to self-determination, emphasizing that it will be Tehran's permanent position until the end of the occupation.

### Iran, EAEU...

**FROM PAGE 1**

Peymanpak added, however, the deal will enable tariff-free exports for more than 90% of products of the two sides.

The EAEU's executive branch the EEC and Iran signed a temporary agreement in December 2021 to set up a free trade zone.

Russia's Tass news agency quoted Slepnev as saying on Thursday that Iran and the EAEU had agreed on a bulk of main issues needed to conclude talks for creating a free trade zone.

Iran signed a preferential trade agreement with the EAEU in November 2019 amid efforts by the Iranian government to diversify trade routes and to offset the impacts of American sanctions on the country's economic exchanges with the rest of the world.

The value of trade between Iran and the EAEU rose by 74% year-on-year in 2021 and by another 25% in the first ten months of 2022, according to figure by the EEC.

Iranian government figures also show that bilateral trade with the EAEU rose 66% in value terms in the year to late March 2022 to stand at \$5.634 billion.

### Sanctions Turning...

**FROM PAGE 1**

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

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

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

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

This is not the first time such a frank admission coming from the U.S. media and in recent months even American statesmen and officials have acknowledged ineffectiveness of the sanctions and progress of Iran in many fields.

The current ruling administration in Washington still follows the policy of its predecessors and continue imposing sanctions despite knowing it is ineffective but it does it to show muscles to Tehran while Iranians give no damn to such sanctions and bullies because Iranians know that they can thwart those sanctions although they may feel some heat but they are eventually the winners of this economic and political war.

Now the U.S. has resorted to its allies in Europe and any part of the world to follow Washington's policy of imposing sanctions against Iran in order to bring Tehran down to its knees but this is a fantasy and this dream will never come true because the Islamic Republic of Iran has a strong Leader, Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei, who is wise and smart and he can read the hands of the U.S. and its allies and he makes wise and effective decisions which thwart any plot against Tehran.

So Europe and other countries which pursue the path of the U.S. or wag their tails for Washington is better to stop following the U.S. path blindly because they will suffer like what they suffered when they followed the U.S. policy in Ukraine war which has affected their economies and now European countries are currently struggling with high inflation, recession and strikes by workers or different walks of the life that their livelihood has been affected by the bad economy.

Once for all we advise Washington to stop its hostile attitude against Iran and stop imposing sanctions against Iranians because these actions are unable to hurt the strong determination of brave Iranians who are ready to fight to their death for their country and independence and expelling any invader from the country and even recent funny move of Europeans are in vain.

### Russia Ready to...

**FROM PAGE 1**

The INSTC is seen a game-changer that will shorten the distance and lower the cost of transportation from South Asia to Europe through Iran and Russia and potentially serve as an alternative to the Suez Canal for East-West trade.

The two leaders also discussed the situation in Syria during the conversation. Raeisi stressed that Iran supports solving the Syrian crisis through the Astana Format.

Putin also highlighted the role of Astana talks in solving the Syrian conflict, noting that all sides are committed to the format.

Iran and Russia, as the allies of the Syrian government, as well as Turkey, which sides with the opposition, set up the Astana peace process in January 2017 intending to put an end to the Syrian conflict through the involvement of the Syrian government and the opposition.

The leaders of Russia and Iran also agreed "to maintain contacts at different levels," the Kremlin's press service said, TASS reported.

The two leaders had discussed issues of mutual interest on January 18. Raisi had then expressed Iran's readiness to play a positive intermediary role in ending the war between Russia and Ukraine.

"The Islamic Republic invariably lays emphasis on the [importance of] strengthening of regional convergence and [points out] the detrimental effect of the foreign intervention [in the region]," he said then while referring to developments in the Caucasus region and Syria.

The latest phone conversation comes a year after Raisi made a two-day visit to Moscow. After arriving in Tehran on January 21, 2022, Raisi told reporters that "fundamental agreements" on expanding all-out bilateral relations were clinched during the trip.

### South Korea...

**FROM PAGE 1**

Addressing the UAE-based Korean forces during a recent trip to the Persian Gulf Arab state, Yoon drew an analogy between the alleged threat posed to his country by North Korea and what he called the "threat" facing Abu Dhabi from Iran. He then labeled Iran as the "most-threatening nation" to the UAE. During the meeting with Yun, Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister on Legal Affairs Reza Najafi stressed Iran's "friendly" relations with most of the Persian Gulf countries and described as "meddlesome" the South Korean president's remarks about Iran and UAE, which Najafi said undermined peace and stability in the region.

Najafi called for an "immediate" explanation on the part of the South Korean authorities concerning the issue and emphasized the need for them to swiftly rectify their approach.

### South Korea...

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## West Ham Fail With Approach for Maguire

LONDON (Dispatches) - West Ham United are set to fail with their attempt at signing Harry Maguire on loan from Manchester United.

The England defender is not a first choice player under coach Erik ten Hag this season.

Despite having an impressive World Cup, Maguire has been on the bench for United's most recent Premier League games.

However, the Daily Mail states that United have informed West Ham that Maguire is not available.

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## Busquets Rejects Massive Al Nassr Offer

BARCELONA (Dispatches) - Barcelona captain Sergi Busquets has rejected a massive offer from Al Nassr.

Catalunya Radio reports Busquets was offered a contract of €20 million per season. But the 34-year-old has opted to decline Al Nassr's advances. Busquets' deal expires in June. Barça head coach Xavi would like the midfielder to renew his contract, which could still happen, while MLS club Inter Miami, owned by former Real Madrid star David Beckham, are said to be interested in taking the player to the States but haven't yet made an approach.

8 IRAN NEWS

SPORTS

SATURDAY JANUARY 21, 2023

# Djokovic Barrels Into Australian Open Third Round

MELBOURNE (Dispatches) - Novak Djokovic scrapped his way into the Australian Open third round to ramp up his bid for a 22nd Grand Slam crown, but Ons Jabeur was prime among the numerous seeds to crash out.

Most of the carnage occurred in the men's draw — second seed Casper Ruud, Taylor Fritz, Alexander Zverev and Diego Schwartzman were all sent packing on day four at Melbourne Park.

With the shock exit on Wednesday of hobbling defending champion Rafael Nadal, the top two seeds are both now gone.

With top-ranked Carlos Alcaraz also absent through injury, it presents a huge opportunity for Djokovic, who even before that was hot favorite to win a 10th Melbourne crown.

The 35-year-old Serb required a medical timeout and had heavy strapping on his left thigh against 191st-ranked qualifier Enzo Couacaud.

He was also bothered by some rowdy fans and at one point during the match demanded that a drunken fan be thrown out.

But Djokovic recovered his poise and fitness to beat the Frenchman 6-1, 6-7 (5/7), 6-2, 6-0, and faces 27th seed Grigor Dimitrov in round three.

"There was a lot happening tonight in the match," Djokovic, who has been struggling with a hamstring injury, told the Rod Laver Arena.

His on-court interview was momentarily paused when a spectator shouted out.

"I love you too, thank you," said Djokovic, who has enjoyed a warm return to Melbourne

## Grizzlies Edge Cavs For 11th Straight Win

NEW YORK (Dispatches) -Steven Adams put back a missed Ja Morant layup and Dillon Brooks blocked a desperation 3-point attempt from Darius Garland as time expired to lead the Memphis Grizzlies to their 11th straight win, 115-114 over the visiting Cleveland Cavaliers.

The 11 straight wins matches the Memphis franchise record and is one shy of Brooklyn's 12-game run as the longest in the NBA this season.

The Grizzlies rallied after Evan Mobley hit a turnaround hook and a six-footer that put Cleveland up, 114-111, with 1:14 left.

Desmond Bane led Memphis with 25 points, including 5-for-8 shooting from 3-point range, while Morant finished with 24 points and eight assists. Garland had 24 points and 14 assists, knocking down five 3-point tries, to lead Cleveland.

### Nuggets 122, Timberwolves 118

Nikola Jokic had 31 points, 13 assists and 11 rebounds, Jamal Murray scored 28 points -- including a go-ahead basket in the final minute -- and host Denver beat Minnesota.

Jokic, who recorded his 14th triple-double of the season and the 90th of his career, passed Alex English for the most career assists by a Nugget. English dished out 3,679 assists in 837 games with Denver, while Jokic now has 3,686 in 568 games.

Bruce Brown scored 16 for the Nuggets, who have won eight straight overall and 15 in a row at home. Jaden McDaniels put up 18 points for the Timberwolves, who lost their second game in a row.

### Jazz 126, Clippers 103

Lauri Markkanen returned to the lineup and lifted Utah over Los Angeles with 34 points and 12 rebounds in Salt Lake City. Markkanen, back after missing two games due to hip issues, hit 11 of 20 field-goal attempts, 6 of 8 3-point shots and 6 of 6 free throws. Utah evened its record at 24-24 with its fourth win in five outings.

Norman Powell led the short-handed Clippers with 30 points. Los Angeles played without Paul George (rest), Kawhi Leonard (rest), John Wall (abdominal injury) and Luke Kennard (sore calf).



Ruud, who could have become world number one in Melbourne, refused to blame an abdominal injury.

Eighth seed Fritz was also on his way home after wildcard local hope Alexei Popyrin beat him 6-7 (4/7), 7-6 (7/2), 6-4, 6-7 (6/8), 6-2.

Zverev, the 12th seed, suffered another setback on his return from serious injury as he lost to 107th-ranked Michael Mmoh.

In the women's draw it looked as if most of the top seeds would sail through.

But after the clock ticked past midnight, Tunisian number two seed Jabeur was beaten 6-1, 5-7, 6-1 in 1hr 41min by Czech world number 86 Marketa Vondrousova.

It left Jabeur still waiting to win a maiden Grand Slam title.

Earlier in the day, Aryna Sabalenka showed why she is a serious contender by powering into the third round.

Also safely through was France's fourth seed Caroline Garcia, a 7-6 (7/5), 7-5 winner over former US Open finalist Leylah Fernandez.

Belarus's Sabalenka swept past 51st-ranked American Shelby Rogers 6-3, 6-1 in an hour and 27 minutes and faces 26th seed Elise Mertens.

Sabalenka, who reached the semi-finals at the US Open last year, extended her 2023 unbeaten record to six matches. She won the recent Adelaide International without dropping a set.

It is a marked contrast to the start of last season when her serve completely deserted her, reducing her to tears during an Australian Open warm-up event.

Sabalenka served three aces against Rogers but, tellingly, no double faults. She talked openly about the hard work involved in turning her fortunes around.

American qualifier Katie Volynets dumped out Russian world number nine Veronika Kudermetova.

The 21-year-old Volynets won 6-4, 2-6, 6-2 and then paid a heartfelt tribute to her extended family in war-ravaged Ukraine.

## Saudi Arabia Set to Profit From Ronaldo Move

RIYADH (Dispatches) - Cristiano Ronaldo's move to Al Nassr could lead to a financial windfall for his new club and Saudi Arabia, football finance expert Neil Joyce told Reuters, as the Portugal international gears up for his first game in the country since the deal was announced.

The 37-year-old forward's contract with Al Nassr is estimated by the media to be worth more than 200 million euros (\$215.76 million) and the deal has drawn a huge amount of attention which is likely to offer monetary opportunities, Joyce said.

"It's well-publicized the growth of the Al Nassr fanbase after Ronaldo joined, they went from under a million fans to like eight million in a space of like 10 days," said Joyce, who is CEO & co-founder of CLV Group and advises clubs on how best to maximise their revenues through engagement with their global fanbases.

"There are monetary opportunities for them. For sponsorship, suddenly showing the global brands that you can reach eight million fans, there's some monetization that they could benefit from straight away on it.

"He's got a heavy following around celebrities, TV, entertainment and pop music, so, there are content opportunities for Saudi Arabia to almost be a hub for TV and entertainment. Also to promote the country as a destination."



# Nadal Sidelined for Six to Eight Weeks

MELBOURNE (Dispatches) - World number two Rafa Nadal will be sidelined for six to eight weeks by the hip flexor injury he suffered during his second-round loss at the Australian Open, the Spaniard's team said.

Nadal's title defence ended bitterly on Wednesday as he slumped to a 6-4 6-4 7-5 defeat by Mackenzie McDonald, the latest chapter in a long history of fitness problems at Melbourne Park.

The 36-year-old had an MRI scan on his left leg in Melbourne on Thursday, which revealed a grade 2 injury in the Iliopsoas, the primary hip flexor.

"He will be resting the next days once back in Spain and will start with anti-inflammatory

physiotherapy," his team said in a statement.

"The normal time estimated for a complete recuperation is between six and eight weeks."

The 22-times Grand Slam champion arrived in Melbourne with only one win to his name since the US Open after rib, abdomen and foot injuries kept him off court for much of last season after Wimbledon.

"I mean, hopefully it's nothing too bad. In the end (it has) been three positive weeks in terms of practice," he told reporters after his defeat.

"So I really hope that (injury) doesn't put me out of the court for a long time, because then it's tough to make all the recovery again.

"It's not only the recovery. It's all the amount of work that you need to put together to come back at a decent level."

A six-to-eight-week recuperation would allow Nadal to return well before the clay court season and the run-up to the defense of his French Open title in late May and early June.

## Olise Ends Man United's Winning Streak

LONDON (Dispatches) - Manchester United's hopes of moving second in the Premier League were scuppered as Michael Olise's stunning last-gasp equaliser earned Crystal Palace a 1-1 home draw.

United were poised for a 10th successive victory in all competitions for the first time since 2009 thanks to Bruno Fernandes's goal shortly before halftime.

But they were rocked in the 91st minute when Olise's superb left-footed free kick found the top corner.

The week has been dominated by talk of British billionaire Jim Ratcliffe's ownership bid for England's most decorated club as it seeks to restore its former glory.

But whatever is happening off the pitch, on it United were in rude health after the weekend win over Manchester City.

Brimming with confidence they gave a debut to on-loan striker Wout Weghorst, but it was a more familiar face who gave them the lead at a chilly Selhurst Park.

An even first half was almost up when Fernandes was picked out by Christian Eriksen's pass and he fired an unstoppable shot into the net.



## Man City top Premier League Dominated Football Money League

MANCHESTER (Dispatches) - Manchester City topped Deloitte's Football Money League for a second consecutive year as the Premier League accounted for more than half of the top 20 clubs for the first time.

Total revenue from the top 20 revenue generating clubs rose to near pre-pandemic levels of €9.2 billion for the 2021/22 season, according to a report published on Thursday.

That increase was largely due to a €1.3 billion rise in matchday revenue after two seasons impacted by coronavirus restrictions.

The Premier League's rise in international television rights sales and strong commercial growth saw 11 clubs from the English top-flight make the top 20 for the first time.

Leeds and Newcastle replaced Wolves and Zenit St Petersburg in the only changes to the top 20 from last season.

A 13 per cent rise in City's revenue to €731 million saw them retain top spot from European champions Real Madrid on €714 million.

Liverpool rose to third, their highest position in Money League history and above Manchester United for the first time, thanks to a run to the Champions League final, on €702 million.

