

As the 34th Tehran Int'l Book Fair Is Scheduled to Be Held in Tehran Within the Next Few Months, the Event Organizers Are Preparing to Register Foreign Publishers for the International Section of the Event

Health Ministry Announced on Saturday That the Number of Deaths From the Coronavirus Pandemic in Iran Increased to **144,734** With **Two** More Iranians Killed by the Virus Over the Past 24 Hours

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Iran-China Annual Trade Rises 7%

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – The value of trade between Iran and China increased by seven percent in 2022 compared to the previous year, according to the data released by China's customs administration.

Based on China's customs data, the Islamic Republic and China traded \$15.795 billion worth of commodities in 2022, \$1.035 billion more than the figure for 2021, IRNA reported.

As reported, China's exports to Iran grew by 14 percent in the period under review compared to the preceding year to reach \$9.44 billion. The Asian country exported \$8.258 billion worth of goods to Iran in 2021.

The value of Iran's non-oil exports to China, however, registered a two-percent decrease in 2022, reaching \$6.355 billion. Iran exported \$6.502 billion worth of goods to China in 2021.

Iran's share of China's total global trade last year was only 0.25 percent. China's trade with the world reached \$6.308 trillion in 2022, of which \$3.593 trillion was the share of the country's exports and \$2.715 trillion was related to imports. China's global trade grew by 4.4 percent last year.

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"Fire of Terrorism" Would Have Engulfed Europe If Not for IRGC



IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - The chief commander of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) has blasted the European Parliament's resolution that calls for labeling the elite force as a "terrorist organization," warning that the Europeans will have to suffer the consequences of repeating their past mistakes as the continent owes its security to the IRGC.

Major General Hossein Salami made the remarks after a meeting on Saturday with Iranian Parliament Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf as the two discussed a recent move by the European Union to designate the IRGC as a "terrorist" entity.

Praising sacrifices made by the IRGC, particularly the IRGC's Quds Force and its late commander General Qassem Soleimani, Salami said the top Iranian anti-terror icon "played the biggest and most leading role in eliminating [a manifestation of] worldwide terrorism," referring to the Takfiri Daesh terrorist group.

"But for the IRGC's endeavors, especially the Quds Force and the leadership of Martyr Soleimani, the volcano of terrorism created by the Americans would have engulfed the Europeans and the security that prevails in Europe today would have been destroyed," the IRGC chief said.

"The fire [of terrorism] was reaching the edge of Europe and had it not been contained, it would have covered all the geographical levels of Europe; but the Europeans and Americans are accustomed to replacing executioner with martyr, and oppressor with oppressed," he added.

Salami called on the European governments to avoid committing their past mistakes, stressing that they will have to accept the consequences if they make a mistake again.

"Europe has not learned lessons from its past mistakes and thinks that it can undermine the glorious IRGC, which is empowered by faith, trust, strength and determination, with such statements," he said, adding, "We are never worried about such threats or even acting on them, because the more opportunities our enemies give us, the stronger we act...but we advise the Europeans not to repeat their past mistakes."

The European Parliament on Wednesday adopted an amendment which was added to an annual foreign policy report, calling on the EU and its member states to include the IRGC on their terror list. The parliament also passed another resolution on Thursday, calling for more sanctions against Iranian individuals and entities and putting the IRGC on the EU terrorist list over alleged human rights violations during the 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.

The move by the European Parliament has been strongly condemned by Iranian officials, commanders, and the Armed Forces.

Meanwhile in the meeting, Majlis Speaker announced on Saturday that if the European Parliament wants to close "the window of logic" and defend terrorism, the Islamic Republic will be ready for taking strong measures against any action.

If they want to damage the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps, the Majlis will be ready to counter, Qalibaf said after his visit to the IRGC headquarters and his meeting with the IRGC Commander Major General Hossein Salaami.

The enemies do not have exact knowledge about "our nation and our IRGC" and the relations between the two, the speaker added to his words.

They think that the IRGC is just a military force like their own military forces, but they should know that the IRGC and Basij have come from the people and the nation, he underlined.

Qalibaf went on to say that General Soleimani who was assassinated by the US forces in Iraq over three years ago is today the most popular figure among the people, and he was from IRGC.

Such an analytical mistake made by the Europeans about the IRGC has to be put right, Qalibaf noted.

As the speaker stated, the European Parliament is an advocate of terrorism today as they support Mujahedin-e Khalq Organization (MKO) which has killed and tortured over 17,000 Iranian people including women and children.

The Islamic Republic is powerful enough at the present time to strongly respond to any threats, he stressed.

Sanctions Not to Stop Pakistan From Buying Russian Oil

ISLAMABAD (Dispatches) -Pakistan has said that the U.S.-led sanctions targeting Russia over the Ukraine war will not stop Islamabad from purchasing oil from Russia.

In an interview with RT on Friday, Pakistani Oil Minister Musadik Malik said his government is set to start importing crude oil from Russia in March, following the yearly intergovernmental commission held between Moscow and Islamabad.

Malik explained that many countries had already come up with some sort of mechanism for importing Russian oil that has been working for them and there were no concerns about possible repercussions.

"I don't see any problems, we're not violating anything, we're not doing anything completely new, which the world hasn't done," Malik said, referring to the oil imports by European countries.

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Pakistan Asks Iran To Take Action Against Terrorists

ISLAMABAD (Dispatches) - Pakistan has called upon the Iranian authorities to investigate the cross-border terror attack in the Panjgur district of Balochistan and bring the perpetrators to task.

Foreign Office (FO) Spokesperson Mumtaz Zahra Baloch, at her weekly media briefing in Islamabad, said the terrorists used Iranian soil to target a convoy of security forces patrolling along the Pakistan-Iran border. She said Pakistan commits that its territory will not be used for undertaking cross-border attacks in Iran, and we expect the same from Iran. Baloch added that communication channels are active, and Pakistan has shared its concerns regarding the attack with the Iranian authorities.

The Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), on Wednesday, reported that four security personnel were martyred in a terrorist attack carried out from "Iranian soil".

The FO spokesperson, responding to a question, said Pakistan wants pleasant relationships with all its neighbors, including India, and seeks to settle all issues, including Kashmir, through dialogue. However, India's unabated hostility and retrogressive moves have vitiated the environment and hindered the process of peace and collaboration, she added.

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European Parliament's Anti-IRGC Vote Violates UN Charter

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian has roundly criticized the European Parliament's unconstructive resolution labeling the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) a terrorist organization, saying it violates the United Nations Charter.

"The destructive measures by the European Parliament vis-à-vis the IRGC run counter to the UN Charter," Amirabdollahian said in a Friday phone call with his Swedish counterpart Tobias Billström, whose country holds the European Union's rotating presidency.

He said the IRGC has played a "constructive role in the fight against Daesh terrorist group in Iraq, Syria and the West Asia region" and stopped attacks on European capitals by Daesh terrorists. "Therefore, the Europeans are indebted to the IRGC efforts in the fight against terrorism."

The European Parliament on Wednesday adopted an amendment which was added to an annual foreign policy report, calling on the EU and its member states to include the IRGC on their terror list. The parliament also passed another resolution on Thursday, calling for more sanctions against Iranian individuals and entities and putting the IRGC on the EU terrorist list over alleged human rights violations during recent riots.

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Int'l Association of Women of Influence To Be Established

TEHRAN (IRNA) -In the specialized meeting of the First International Congress for the Women of Influence, an agreement was raised to establish the International Association of Women of Influence centered on Iran.

The First International Congress for the Women of Influence opened in Tehran on Friday with the participation of women from different countries.

300 foreign guests from China, Australia, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Pakistan, Cameroon, Serbia, Armenia, Sweden, Bulgaria, South Africa, Syria, Lebanon, and Russia, including 70 female officials, have attended the event that is to continue for a day.

The conference was held at three levels: cultural figures, scientific and celebrity; ministers; and first ladies.

Vice President for Women's Affairs Ensiyeh Khazali, Jamileh Alamolhoda, the spouse of the Iranian President, and her counterparts from Armenia, Burkina Faso, Iraq, Kyrgyzstan, Serbia, Guinea, Nigeria, and Sri Lanka as well as the chair of the Central Council of women of Turkmenistan and special envoy for the president of Syria took part in the first ladies level of this conference.

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Regular Container Shipping Line Active From Chabahar To Indian Ports

TEHRAN (MNA) - Spokesman of Iran's Valfajr Shipping Company says his company is operating a regular container shipping line from southeastern Chabahar port to various ports in India.

According to Abbas Kabousi, 15 voyages have been conducted along the mentioned line over the past three months, ISNA reported.

"The first vessel with a full capacity of 550 TEU arrived in Chabahar from Indian ports a few weeks ago and its cargo has been completely unloaded," Kabousi said, adding that his company is ready to transport more goods between Indian ports and Chabahar port.

The official noted that his company has also been operating some direct lines from Persian Gulf Arab countries to Chabahar port.

"Valfajr Shipping Company has reduced the time of cargo transportation on the route from the southern ports of the Persian Gulf to Chabahar while reducing the freight rate and improving the schedules," he said. Kabousi further said the shipping company is ready to launch a direct line from Oman to Chabahar port.

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IRGC Navy Seizes Ship Carrying Smuggled Fuel

TEHRAN (MNA)- IRGC naval forces seized a vessel carrying 90,000 liters of smuggled fuel, along with 5 crew members, in Persian Gulf waters.

The head of the provincial judiciary office of the Hormozgan Province Mojtaba Ghahramani said on Saturday that the IRGC naval forces at the 4th Naval District in the Persian Gulf responded to a local judicial order in the Parsian County in the southern Iranian province and after identifying a vessel carrying smuggled fuel in the waters of the Persian Gulf, they managed to seize it.

The Hormozgan judiciary chief added that 5 crew members of the ship were arrested by the IRGC marines and were handed over to the Judicial authorities to go on trial.

Iran Constantly Concerned About Women, Children in War-Hit Countries

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Addressing a Tehran-hosted international conference on women, Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian says the Islamic Republic is constantly concerned about the situation of women and children in war-ravaged countries across the world.

The top diplomat made the remarks on Friday, speaking during the first edition of the International Congress for Women of Influence in the Iranian capital.

"We are serious opponents of war" no matter where it takes place, Amirabdollahian said. "Avoiding all dual politics and standards, the Islamic Republic is concerned about the situation of Ukrainian women and children, in the same way that it is concerned about the situation of women and children in Palestine, Yemen, Afghanistan, and other countries, which have been afflicted with war," he explained.

The Islamic Republic tries its utmost towards the realization of a ceasefire in Ukraine -- where Russia has been waging a war since last February -- and prompting the warring sides to focus on peace, he asserted.

Most recently, President Ebrahim Raisi assured his Russian counterpart Vladimir



Putin of Iran's preparedness to play a positive intermediary role in ending the 11-month-long war between Russia and Ukraine.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Amirabdollahian noted how the conference had highlighted "the need for the creation of the best living conditions and brightest future for women all over the world," and featured an emphasis on the role of women in the efflorescence of families and societies worldwide.

Amirabdollahian also lambasted the United States-led drive that led to Iran's ouster from the United Nations' Commission on the Status of Women last year.

Depriving Iran of its seat at the commission, he said, does not serve to distract the Islamic Republic from its efforts to enhance women's status in the Iranian society and further empower women's presence across various political, social, cultural, scientific, and artistic arenas.

Seven Outstanding, Influential Women Praised In Tehran Congress

TEHRAN (IRNA) - In closing ceremony of the 1st International Congress of Influential Women, seven most influential and outstanding women from different countries around the globe were praised and awarded.

The first foreign award of the congress was for Ms. Lee, a prominent chemistry researcher and university professor from Thailand.

The second award was granted to Dr. Sudeh Ghafouri, a medical genetics professor from Iran. Ms. Elina, a prominent Russian researcher gained the 3rd prize of the congress and Iranian scientist Zahra Emam Jomeh was the 4th lady who was praised in the congress.

Ms. Maria Beatriz Yunes, an influential lady from Argentina was the 5th praised and awarded woman.

Also, Ms. Mozghan Zandi, who has written several articles in chemistry and polymers fields from Iran was the sixth praised prize winner.

The last award, too, was for Ms. Pen Abe Shiami from China.

The wife of the Armenian prime minister, the wife of Burkina Faso prime minister, the first lady of Kyrgyzstan, the first lady of Serbia, and the first lady of Iran Jamileh Sadat Allamalhoda, were requested to stand on the scene to donate the awards, and Zeinab Nasrallah, the daughter of Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, the secretary general of the Lebanese Hezbollah was the special guest of the ceremony.

The 1st World's Influential Women Congress held in Tehran Azadi Parsian Hotel in the presence of women from over 90 countries, opened by Vice President for Women's Affairs Ensiyeh Khazali began on January 19th.

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, Cameroon, 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-Iran propagations and reflect it in their own countries.

Iran-China Ties Enjoy High Capacity

TEHRAN (MNA) - The head of the Iran-China Friendship Association said that Iranian-Chinese relations enjoy a high capacity.

Alaeddin Boroujerdi expressed hope that Iran and China could seize the opportunity to further mutual ties in concurrence of removing COVID-related restrictions in China.

In his congratulatory message on the occasion of the Chinese New Year, also known as Spring Festival or Lunar New Year, he said that the New Year begins with lifting COVID-19 restrictions.

The 14th annual joint meeting of the two associations, which is slated to be held in person in Iran, is a good opportunity for the practical steps of the two associations, he underlined.

He voiced hope that the two associations can take positive actions to develop scientific, cultural, economic, and tourism relations.

Akbari's Execution Direct Result of British Spy Agency's Crime

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's Intelligence Ministry says the execution of Alireza Akbari, a former Iranian official convicted of spying for the UK, was the "direct" outcome of a crime committed by the British spy agency.

In a statement, the ministry said the British regime had covetously urged Akbari to obtain information about Iran's secret military and missile projects, ways to circumvent sanctions, information related to some security, defense and political institutions and distinguished scientists such as top nuclear scientist Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, who was assassinated in a terrorist attack in November 2020.

"Regardless of success, the spy made his utmost efforts to play that traitorous role," it said.

It said Akbari's betrayal of his country was the outcome of the "British regime's dirty game" by taking advantage of his weak points and directing him into treason. The ministry said the British regime must be held accountable for Akbari's betrayal, who had acquired British nationality.

This blow damaged the dignity and credibility of a regime that claims to be the oldest spy service in the

eyes of the general public and the world's intelligence agencies and caused serious challenges in the motivation of intelligence officers and their spies, it added.

Faced with increasing public pressure due to internal problems, the British government has adopted strategies that are all rooted in its desperation, the statement said, adding that making the US, France and Germany participate in media warfare against Iran is among London's approaches.

"Western [states'] crocodile tears for Akbari are under circumstances that Iran's military institutions have always been the target of media and information propaganda of Western countries. So how and based on what justification did they grant residency and citizenship to one of its officials easily and quickly?" it said.

Akbari, who had been sentenced to death on charges of "corruption on earth" and "extensive activities against the country's internal and external security" through espionage for the British government's spy agency, was hanged on January 14. He was arrested in 2019, had received 1,805,000 euros, 265,000 pounds, and \$50,000 for espionage activities for the United Kingdom.

Tehran, Managua Ready to Cooperate in Health Field

TEHRAN (MNA) - Iranian and Nicaraguan officials have voiced readiness to cooperate in the health sector.

Iranian Minister of Health and Medical Education, Bahram Einollahi held a meeting with his Nicaraguan counterpart Martha Reyes Alvarez in Tehran on Saturday.

Nicaragua is considered among the first states that authorized the usage of Iran-made vaccines during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Iranian minister said.

Academic, medical education and exchange of professors and students are regarded as the most significant areas of cooperation between Iran and Nicaragua, Einollahi underscored.

He stressed the need for setting up a joint working group to further strengthen bilateral relations.

Apart from enjoying commonalities and fraternal ties, both countries are under sanctions of arrogant powers, he stated. This could motivate the two countries to bolster the cooperation in health exchanges and medical, pharmaceutical, and medical equipment as well as scientific training, he further noted.

The Nicaraguan health minister, for her part, voiced hope that the documents of cooperation between the Islamic Republic and the Republic of Nicaragua will be ready and inked by the officials of the two countries.



Navy Flotilla Reportedly To Arrive in Brazil in Days

TEHRAN (MNA) - Several Brazilian media outlets reported that the 86th flotilla of the Iranian Navy consisting of Dena and Makran ships will dock in the Port of Rio de Janeiro in the coming days.

The 86th flotilla of the Iranian Army Navy Force started its mission several months ago with the aim of traveling around the globe, and as reported by Brazilian sources, it will reach this country in a few days, Tasnim News Agency reported. The Iranian Navy flotilla must cross through the Panama Canal to continue its journey.

The Navy of the Islamic Republic of Iran started its seafaring missions in the ocean in the Iranian year 1388 (starting from March 21, 2009) with the aim of combating piracy in the Gulf of Aden.

Last year, the 75th flotilla of the Iranian Army Navy Force, consisting of the Sahand and Makran ships, made the biggest military sea voyage in the country's history by reaching Russia's Port of St. Petersburg and traveling a distance of 250 thousand kilometers.

After informing three oceanic commands in the Indian, Pacific, and Atlantic oceans, the Iranian Navy is seeking to expand its activity and presence in the world's waters to protect the country's interests.

Saying that Iran's Navy has so far been deployed to all the strategic straits in the world except two, the Iranian Navy Commander recently stated that the Navy planning to have a presence in the Panama Canal as well.

"The army navy has been present in all the strategic straits in the world to date, and we have not been present in only 2 straits, and we will be present in one of these straits this year. We are planning to be present in the Panama Canal," The commander of the Iranian Army Navy Rear Admiral Shahram Irani stated in a ceremony in Tehran on January 11.

"Today we have to strengthen our maritime presence in international waters and today we can say that there is no scientific barrier to grow in that field," he continued, adding that the Iranian naval forces are sailing in the Pacific Ocean for the first time.

Weekly Commodities Trade On IME Exceeds 2.1m Tons

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Iran Mercantile Exchange (IME) last week witnessed trade of 2,077,181 tons of commodities and 10,155 vehicles with a total trading value of more than \$813m on its physical market.



According to a report by the IME's International Affairs and PR, the exchange saw on its metals and minerals trading floor trade of 1,715,839 tons of commodities valued at more than \$597m.

On this floor the IME sold 860,447 tons of cement, 440,000 tons of iron ore, 356,207 tons of steel, 42,000 tons of sponge iron, 9,125 tons of aluminum, 8,500 tons of copper, 1,625 tons of zinc, 200 tons of molybdenum concentrate, 13 kg of gold bars and 10,155 vehicles.

Furthermore, the IME witnessed on both domestic and export rings of its oil and petrochemical trading floor 357,301 tons of commodities worth almost \$211m.

Commodities traded on this floor included 134,857 tons of bitumen, 75,000 tons of vacuum bottom, 90,536 tons of polymeric products, 17,000 tons of lube cut, 31,930 tons of chemicals, 12,050 tons of sulfur, 4,665 tons of base oil, 500 tons of petroleum products and 200 tons of insulation.

The IME also traded within the same week 4,041 tons of commodities on its side market.

European Parliament's Showoff Move to Backfire

TEHRAN (IRNA)- Iran's Vice president for parliamentary affairs said here on Friday European Parliament's demonstrative move of inclusion of IRGC in EU terrorist groups blacklist was due to their conflict due to defeat in recent unrests, and its aftermaths will backfire on Europeans.

Mohammad Hosseini, emphasizing that testing the tested move is a mistake, wrote in a tweet, "Breaching the international laws and the European Parliament's obedience of the US demands in branding the IRGC as a terrorist organization was due to a conflict, they had due to the defeat of the recent unrests, which made the arrow they had shot hit a stone, and this demonstrative move of them, is no more than a doping of the antagonists, but its aftermaths will plague the Europeans.

TV Manufacturing Up 61% in 9 Months

TEHRAN (MNA) - Manufacturing of TV sets in Iran has risen 61 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 1.43 million TV sets have been manufactured in the nine-month period of this year, while the figure was 886,000 in the same time span of the previous year.

Based on the data previously released by the ministry, 1,305,400 TV sets were

manufactured in the country during the past Iranian calendar year 1400, showing 3.6 percent growth year on year. Manufacturing of home appliances in Iran rose 7.56 percent during the previous year from its preceding year.

According to the industry ministry's data, over 6,273,600 sets of large home appliances, including TV sets, refrigerators and freezers, washing machines, and air coolers were manufactured in 1400, while the figure was 5,832,400 in 1399.

Among the mentioned products, just air cooler experienced a production drop, and production of the other items increased.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	12:15
■ Evening (Maghreb)	17:40
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	05:43
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	07:10

132. Enjoin prayer on thy people, and be constant therein. We ask thee not to provide sustenance: We provide it for thee. But the (fruit of) the Hereafter is for righteousness.

133. They say: "Why does he not bring us a sign from his Lord?"

Has not a Clear Sign come to them of all that was in the former Books of revelation?

Surah 20. Ta-ha (132 - 133)

Handmade Carpet Exports Down by 85%

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Head of Association of Handmade Carpet Sellers says the exports of handmade carpets have declined by 85% and the markets for exports have been narrowed.

Masoud Sepehrzad said that sanctions have put carpet traders in an uneven war and has deprived Iran of promoting its carpets which is considered as the second flag of the country in the foreign markets. He noted that exporters of carpet face problems for attending exhibitions in Europe and Germany did not issue license for their presence in an exhibition in Germany.

He then pointed to the fluctuation in the forex market and its effect on the handmade carpet market and said that the handmade carpet market is chaotic and producers and sellers do not have any willing for trade because they do not know how much they will have to pay for providing raw materials for their next production, adding that the price of dollar should be stabilized in a way that the sales, production and exports could be fixed based on it.

He reiterated that the commanding measures of the government for controlling the forex price could not solve the problem and in the current condition purchase of carpet is not a priority for the people and people are more concerned about their basic needs. Sepehrzad added that the handmade carpet market is experiencing almost 80%



recession adding that exports of this product have declined by 85% and each week one or two consignments are exported while in the past exporters used to stand in the lines in the customs offices for getting licenses for exporting their carpets.

He added that rivals of Iran like India, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Turkey have define a certain direction in the carpet market and continue it and all markets in the world are open for their producers while the markets for Iranian carpet producers are limited and sanctions have put Iranian carpet traders in an uneven war as they are unable to promote the carpets which are considered as the second flag of the country in the foreign markets and Iranian carpet traders face problems for attending exhibitions in Europe.

He added that officials urge carpet traders to focus on Eurasian markets and Venezuela but those markets do not show any interest to carpets and major buyers of Iranian carpets are from Europe, the U.S. and Arab countries.

Exhibition Seeking Reconciliation of Public with Handmade Carpet Art

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – The CEO of Isfahan International Exhibition Company in a press conference on the eve of the 23rd Exporting Exhibition of Persian Handmade Carpet expressed hope that the exhibition



would provide the ground for inclusiveness of carpet industry and reconciliation of people and the society with the carpet art.

Mr. Ahmad Reza Tahanian said that the planning for holding this exhibition took almost six months and stipulated that company is trying to hold the exhibition in style and in accordance with the value of this art and industry, and this edition of the exhibition will be held on a land over 6,000 square meters where 11 provinces with 110 participants are to take part and put on display their achievements.

He reiterated that this exhibition is an event-centered one and explained that concurrent with the exhibition 6 more events are to be held on the sidelines of the exhibition and in Isfahan Chamber of Commerce, and these events despite decline in exports and problems in way of handmade carpet industry is held in line with culturalization this art industry and it is aimed at reconciling people with this art.

Meanwhile head of association of producers and exporters of handmade carpets of Isfahan Province briefed the participants in the presser with the latest development in the handmade carpet exports, and said that in 1995, the amount of handmade carpet was \$2b while last year the amount had declined to only \$65m due to sanctions and other banking problems and according to the official statistics, Isfahan accounts for 13% of this amount of export as he believes the amount of export of handmade carpet from Isfahan is more than the announced figure.

He then pointed to some problems in way of carpet export which have created serious challenges for this business.

Over 20m Tons of Crude Steel Produced in 9 Months

TEHRAN (MNA) - Production of crude steel in Iran stood at 20.845 million tons in the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21-December 21, 2022), according to the data released by Industry, Mining and Trade Ministry.

The ministry's data indicate that the nine-month crude steel output has fallen two percent as compared to the production in the same period of time in the past year.

After the withdrawal of the United States from Iran's nuclear deal, the Islamic Republic has faced sanctions in various industries, including steel sector.

The United States has sanctioned entities and individuals associated with Iran's steel industry. In January 2021, the U.S. Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) added twelve Iranian producers of steel and other metal products to the list of sanctions.

However, at that time, the U.S. experts said that the Islamic Republic of Iran had resisted the so-called U.S. maximum pressure policy for the past three years, and the Trump administration had failed to achieve any of its goals in the face of sanctions against Iran.

Also, those active in Iran's steel sector believed that sanctions against Iran which were in place for 40 years had nothing to do with the Iranian industry.

The latest report released by the World Steel Association (WSA) shows that Iran's crude steel output has increased 8.5 percent in the first 11 months of 2022, while the world steel output has fallen 3.7 percent in the said period.

Production of crude steel in Iran reached 27.9 million tons during the mentioned 11 months, as compared to 25.7 million tons in the first 11 months of 2021.

The WSA put the crude steel output by the world's top 64 producers at about 1.691 billion tons in the mentioned time span. During the first 11 months of the current year, all of the world's top 10 steel producers except for Iran and India experienced a decline in their steel output, according to the WSA report. Iran's monthly crude steel output stood at 2.9 million tons in November, registering a 3.9 percent rise compared to the figure for the same month in 2021.

Iran to Complete Rasht-Astara Railway in Three Years

TEHRAN (MNA) – Deputy Iranian road minister said that the Rasht-Astara, which is a part of the South-North Corridor will be completed in next three years.

Kheirollah Khademi made the comments on the sidelines of the Russian delegation's visit to the construction of the Rasht-Astara railway, declaring the railway line "a revolution in international and regional transit."

"With the completion of this part of the North-South corridor, there will be a change in terms of goods and cargo trade in the east and west, and it can be an attractive, economical and completely safe route for shipments of goods movement compared to the existing route," Khademi said. The Iranian economic official said that the necessary budget needed for the projects amounts to 20 trillion toman which will be allocated in the next three years, according to the plans.

The deputy road minister said that the length of the Rasht-Astara railway is 164 km, adding that "the implementation operation of 12 km from the Astara and 10 km from the Rasht has already started, and if part of the necessary budget is earmarked, we hope that the other parts will become operational before the end of the year." Khademi, who is also CEO of the Iranian Construction and Development Company, said about the other railway, Rasht-Caspian railway, as the first part of the North-South rail corridor, "the operational stage of this part of the project is also being implemented. 15 kilometers of the rail has been laid and we hope that after the approval of the president's visit to Gilan province and the allocation of a part of these funds, this railway will be completed by the coming spring of the next Iranian next year."

First Announcement

شناسه آگهی: ۱۴۴۲۶۱۰

TENDER NO.:
08-21-0140005



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The applicants should have relevant background in supplying the required goods and capability to provide and submit a bid bond of 293,581.14 EURO or 85,300,000,000 RIAL, in favor of NISOC.

Tender documents including the materials thorough technical specifications and Qualitative Assessment Forms can be accessed via: www.nisoc.ir-material-procurement-management-tab

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HOSCO to Support Top Projects of Hormozgan Province

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Hormozgan Steel Company (HOSCO,) in line with enjoying the modern technology and science, innovation and creativity as well as supporting the scientific centers of Hormozgan Province, signed three MoUs during the third specialized exhibition on knowledge-based and technology products and innovation ecosystem Hormozgan Province.

The MoUs were signed in a ceremony where the CEO of HOSCO Mr. Ataollah Maroufkhani as well as senior officials of the company were present. The MoUs were signed between HOSCO with scientific centers of the province in the International Fairground of Bandar Abbas.

The MoUs are on cooperating for design and manufacture of 3d printer and support of 10 top innovative projects in line with indigenization and supporting ideation and elites.

Addressing the ceremony, Maroufkhani pointed to the slogan of the year which is production, knowledge-based and job creation which has been announced by the Supreme Leader and said that the approach of HOSCO has been to support the knowledge-based companies and the scientific, research and technology centers, adding that HOSCO is one of the leaders in using science and technology in the country among the steel industries and always employs domestic capacities especially in the fields of knowledge-based for improving its performance.

He then pointed to successive record-breaking of HOSCO in the current year and said that using scientific, creativity and innovative capacities along with team work in HOSCO has proved that the company can set new records whenever it does not face with energy restriction and it bespeaks of high scientific capacity of the company and using the technical knowhow in its production lines.

Maroufkhani reiterated that one of the approaches of the company is to support knowledge-based companies and scientific and native technology of Hormozgan Province and all the three signed MoUs have been in this line.

He reiterated that maximum use of domestic capabilities is on the agenda of the company and the company will not spare any support for the scientific centers.

Officials of Two Giant Car Manufacturers Visit Goharzamin Co.

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – The CEOs of two national giant vehicle manufacturers Bahaman and Deputy Head on Sales of Iran Khodro Diesel paid a visit to Goharzamin Iron Ore Company.

According to the public relations of Goharzamin Iron Ore Company, the visit took place in presence of manager of complex and deputy head on exploitation of Goharzamin Company Mr. Vahid Jalili, deputy head on sales of Iran Khodro Diesel and the CEO of Bahman Group Mr. Biok Alimoradloo as well as some of the officials of this group.

In the meeting, Mr. Jalili pointed to the potential capacities of Goharzamin Company in the national

steel production and termed transportation as one of the important issues of Goharzamin Company.

Then the CEO of Bahman Group Mr. Alimoradloo, for his part, pointed to the diversity in production of this car manufacturing group and announced readiness of the group for providing transportation vehicles like bus and mini-bus for transporting the personnel of Goharzamin Company as well as demands of the company to trucks.

Meanwhile Iran Khodro Diesel official emphasized deepening bilateral ties between Goharzamin and Iran Khodro Diesel and welcomed suggestion for the launch of a representative office for provision of parts and machineries in the site of Goharzamin Company.



Gabon FM Dies After Heart Attack at Cabinet Meeting



LIBREVILLE (Dispatches) - Gabon's foreign minister Michael Moussa Adamo died after suffering a heart attack during a cabinet meeting, the government and a presidential source said.

Moussa Adamo, 62, an ally of President Ali Bongo Ondimba, suffered a heart attack and died "despite efforts by specialists" to revive him, the government said in a brief statement.

He "had sat down at the start of the cabinet meeting and began to feel unwell", a source close to the presidential palace told AFP. He was taken to a military hospital while unconscious but died just after midday, the source who spoke on condition of anonymity said.

Death Toll in Tibet Tunnel Avalanche Rises to 20



BEIJING (Dispatches) - Twenty people have been confirmed dead and eight remain missing following an avalanche in Tibet that buried multiple vehicles in deep snow and ice on a section of road connected to a highway tunnel.

Images on Chinese state media showed rescue workers digging with mechanical diggers in deep snow to locate vehicles that were buried when the avalanche hit a road and highway tunnel connecting the city of Nyingchi in Tibet's southwest with outlying Medog county.

Allies Offer More Weapons to Ukraine



BERLIN (Dispatches) - Western allies dampened Ukraine's hopes for a rapid shipment of battle tanks to boost its firepower for a spring offensive against Russian forces, with the United States urging Kyiv to hold off from mounting such an operation.

The United States' top general, speaking after a meeting of the allies at Ramstein Air Base in Germany, also said it would be very hard for Ukraine to drive Russia's invading forces from the country this year.

The run-up to the Ramstein meeting had been dominated by the issue of whether Germany would agree to send Leopard 2 tanks to Ukraine, or permit other countries that have them to do so.

In the end, no decision on supplying Leopards was reached on Friday, officials said, although pledges for large amounts of other weapons including air defense systems and some other model of tanks, were given.

The United States was also holding fast to its decision not to provide Abrams tanks to Ukraine yet, a senior U.S. official said in Washington. It wanted to see the latest supply of U.S. weaponry in place and training provided, the official said.

In Ramstein, U.S. General Mark Milley, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told a news conference: "From a military standpoint, I still maintain that for this year, it would be very, very difficult to militarily eject the Russian forces from every inch of Russian-occupied Ukraine."

The developments were likely to come as a disappointment to Ukraine as the war unleashed by a Russian invasion last February grinds on with no solution nor let-up in the suffering in sight. President Volodymyr Zelenskyy had specifically requested more battle tanks.

The German-built Leopards are seen as especially suitable for Ukraine as they are widely in use, meaning several countries could each chip in some of their tanks to support Ukraine. They would give Ukraine an edge as it switched from defensive to offensive operations.

U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin told a news conference at the end of the Ramstein meeting that while time was of the essence in getting Ukraine the equipment and training it needed to take the fight to Russia's forces in the spring, Ukraine was well-equipped even without the Leopards.

"Ukraine is not dependent on a single platform," he said.

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg told Reuters Ukraine's backers needed to focus not only on sending new weapons, but supplying ammunition for older systems and helping maintain them.

For its part, the Kremlin said supplying tanks to Ukraine would not help and that the West would regret its "delusion" that Kyiv could win on the battlefield.

Germany has been under heavy pressure from allies to allow Leopard tanks to be sent. Chancellor Olaf Scholz's Social Democrat party is traditionally sceptical of military involvements and wary of sudden moves that could cause Moscow to further escalate in Ukraine.

German Defense Minister Pistorius said he could not say when there would be a decision on the tanks but that Germany was prepared to move fast if there was consensus among allies.

"All pros and cons must be weighed very carefully," Pistorius said, adding that the issue had been discussed on Friday but no decision had been made.

The defence ministers from NATO and other countries met at Ramstein amid concern that Russia will soon reenergise its military campaign to seize parts of Ukraine's east and south that it says it has annexed but does not fully control.

Zelenskyy, speaking at the start of the meeting, thanked allies for their support, but said more was needed and more quickly.

"We have to speed up. Time must become our weapon. The Kremlin must lose," he said.

Thousands March on Peru's Capital as Unrest Spreads



LIMA (Dispatches) - Thousands of protesters in Peru, many from the country's heavily indigenous south, descended on Lima, the capital, angered by a mounting death toll since unrest erupted last month and calling for sweeping change.

Police estimated the march at around 3,500 people, but others speculated it attracted more than double that.

Rows of police in riot gear faced off against rock-hurling protesters on some streets, and one historic building in the city's historic center caught fire.

The building, on San Martin Plaza, was empty when the massive blaze ignited from unknown causes, a firefighter commander told local radio.

Canada-based miner Hudbay said in a statement that protesters had entered the site of its Peru unit, damaging and burning key machinery and vehicles.

"This has not been a protest; this has been a sabotage of the rule of law," Prime Minister Alberto Otrola said alongside President Dina Boluarte and other government ministers.

Interior Minister Vicente Romero disputed claims circulating on social media that the Lima blaze had been caused by a police officer's tear gas grenade.

Over the past month, raucous and sometimes deadly protests have led to the worst violence Peru has seen in more than two decades, as many in poorer, rural regions vent anger at the Lima establishment over inequality and rising prices, testing the copper-rich Andean nation's democratic institutions.

Protesters are demanding the resignation of Boluarte, snap elections and a new constitution to replace the market-friendly one dating back to the days of right-wing strongman Alberto Fujimori in the 1990s.

"We want the usurper Dina Boluarte to step down and call for new elections," said protester Jose De la Rosa, predicting the street protests would only continue.

The protests have been sparked by the dramatic Dec. 7 ouster of leftist former President Pedro Castillo after he tried to illegally shutter Congress and consolidate power.

France to Boost Defense Spending by a Third

PARIS (Dispatches) - President Emmanuel Macron announced plans to increase France's defence budget by a third for the next seven years, after Russia's invasion of Ukraine last year rattled Europe.

The announcement came a day after more than a million people protested in France against a proposed reform to cut pensions deficits.

Macron said he would ask parliament to approve a new budget of more than 400 billion euros (\$430 billion) for 2024-2030, up from 295 billion euros for the 2019-2025 period.

"After repairing the armed forces, we are going to transform them," he told soldiers at the southwestern air base of Mont-de-Marsan.

"We need to do better and do it differently," Macron added.

We need to "privilege rapid action and increasing power because we won't choose the conflicts we will have to wage."

Macron also said the budget for military intelligence would be increased by 60 percent for the same period, and he hoped to double the country's ability to respond to major cyber attacks.

The presidency has also said France wanted to increase its air defences by 50 percent.

The new defence bill for 2024-2030, that still requires a parliamentary vote, also hoped to boost military equipment production "to respond to the needs of the armed forces" but also "to the expectations of a partner" like Ukraine, the Elysee has said.

Paris has boosted defense spending in recent years, but its military capacities have come under scrutiny since Russia in February last year invaded pro-western Ukraine. France has delivered weapons to Ukraine since the invasion, but less than some of Kyiv's other Western allies.

It has provided weaponry like the Caesar howitzer artillery system and created a fund of 200 million euros for Ukraine to buy equipment directly from French manufacturers.

Hundreds Join Anti-France Protest in Burkina Faso Capital

OUAGADOUGOU (Dispatches) - Hundreds demonstrated against France in Burkina Faso's capital Ouagadougou, the latest expression of growing anti-French sentiment in the insurgent-hit West African country.

Hundreds gathered in central Ouagadougou on Friday, chanting anti-France slogans and wielding placards calling on the French army to "get out". Some set fire to French flags or used them to collect rubbish.

"We want... to show France that we no longer need her," said protester Adama Sawadogo.

Relations between Burkina Faso and its former colonizer have soured following two military coups last year spurred partly by authorities' failure to protect civilians from jihadist activity in the arid north.

Some of the tension revolves around perceptions that France's military presence in Burkina Faso has not improved security.

Demonstrator Lassane Sawadogo deplored how security has steadily deteriorated in Burkina Faso since unrest began in 2015.

The protest was largely peaceful and ended without incident, according to a Reuters reporter at the scene.

Angry mobs have previously targeted the French embassy, cultural centre and military base.

Burkina Faso's military government has also been at odds with France since it toppled the previous junta in a coup at the end of September.

Authorities suspended the broadcast of France's RFI radio in December over reports they said were false and gave voice to Islamist militants.

Earlier this month, the government requested the replacement of France's ambassador.

France has some 400 special forces based in Burkina Faso to help local forces battle the Islamist insurgency that has spread across the Sahel from Mali over the past decade.

Thousands have been killed and over 2 million displaced. The violence has exacerbated regional food insecurity.

Authorities in Burkina Faso are still searching for over 60 women kidnapped by armed assailants last week.

Relations between Paris and Bamako have also deteriorated since a military coup in August 2020. In February 2022, France announced withdrawal of troops from the country.



India Says No Conducive Atmosphere For Talks With Pakistan



ISLAMABAD (Dispatches) - Days after Pakistan offered to hold talks with archrival India, New Delhi says the atmosphere for dialogue is not conducive yet.

"India's position has remained clear and consistent. We desire normal neighbourly relations with Pakistan in a conducive atmosphere that is free of terror, hostility, and violence," Indian foreign ministry spokesman Arindam Bagchi said during a news briefing.

Earlier this week, Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif called for talks with India to discuss "burning issues such as Kashmir", the Himalayan territory claimed in full by the two nuclear powers, who have ruled over parts of it since 1947.

The South Asian rivals have fought two of their three full-scale wars over the disputed territory.

"I will give my word that we will talk to India with sincerity, but it takes two to tango," Sharif said during an interview with Al Arabiya news channel aired on Tuesday.

"My message to the Indian leadership and Prime Minister Narendra Modi is that let us sit down on the table and have serious and sincere talks to resolve our burning issues like Kashmir," he added.

The Pakistani leader made the remarks during a visit to the United Arab Emirates, which he said could play a role in resolving the differences between the two neighbors.

Relations between India and Pakistan worsened in 2019 when Modi's Hindu nationalist government revoked Article 370 of the Indian constitution, which granted Indian-administered Kashmir partial autonomy.

New Delhi accuses Islamabad of providing logistical and financial support to the armed rebels fighting either for independence or for the merger of Indian-administered Kashmir with Pakistan.

Islamabad denies the allegations, saying it only provides diplomatic support to the region's struggle for the right to self-determination.

Jalil Abbas Jilani, Pakistan's former foreign secretary, told Al Jazeera that Sharif's statements on the resumption of ties with India appeared to be "genuine" and that Pakistan would like to have peace and stability in the region.

"Pakistan wants to resolve all disputes peacefully. The tension that exists between the two nations is not in either's interests," he said.

Covid: Half a Million People Missed Out on Heart Drugs



LONDON (Dispatches) - During the pandemic, nearly half a million people in the UK missed out on starting medication to help prevent heart attacks and strokes, a new study suggests.

The British Heart Foundation (BHF) team looked at prescribing data for the first 18 months after Covid hit. Some 491,000 people - 27,000 a month - appear to have missed out on blood pressure pills.

And 316,000 did not get treatment to lower their cholesterol. The team says more needs to be done to make sure that anyone who needs treatment gets it. During the pandemic, normal NHS services were severely disrupted.

For example, there was a reduction in diagnosis, monitoring and treatment of high blood pressure, and other heart and circulation disease risk factors.

Although the NHS took action, including providing more than 220,000 blood pressure monitors for people to use at home, data shows two million fewer people in England were recorded as having controlled hypertension in 2021 compared to the previous year.

The BHF researchers analyzed 1.32 billion records of routinely dispensed prescriptions in England, Scotland and Wales, from April 2018 to July 2021.

Lead investigator Prof Reecha Sofat, who is based at the University of Liverpool, said the findings, published in the journal Nature Medicine, highlight the impact Covid has had on other important health conditions: "Despite the incredible work done by NHS staff, our data show that we're still not identifying people with cardiovascular risk factors at the same rate as we were before the pandemic."

She said it was more than just a blip, and it would take time to catch up. "The NHS has already taken important and positive steps towards identifying people with high blood pressure as early as possible.

"However, we need this focus to be sustained in the long term to prevent any increase in heart attacks and strokes which will add to a healthcare system already under extreme pressure."

Dr Sonya Babu-Narayan, Associate Medical Director at the British Heart Foundation and consultant cardiologist, said: "Yet again we're seeing clear evidence of the major disruption to healthcare people in the UK experienced during the Covid-19 pandemic. "But it's not too late to limit the damage. These findings demonstrate how getting heart healthcare back on track can curb the additional strain that untreated risk factors - such as high blood pressure - would otherwise place on the NHS."

Some factors - like older age - are unavoidable, but others can be managed:

- *High blood pressure
- *High cholesterol
- *Diabetes
- *Obesity
- *Smoking
- *Physical activity

Adam Toms was 47 when he suffered a stroke in 2015. He had undiagnosed and untreated high blood pressure. Now 54 and living in north-west London, Mr Toms said: "You can appear completely healthy, and it can just happen. then you've got a whole lot of adaptations to make. I was never ill but then bang, everything changed - my whole world changed.

"My father and my brother had high blood pressure. The connection wasn't made.

Why Stars Are Disappearing Before Our Eyes



LONDON (Dispatches) - Humans have generally had a phenomenal view of the night sky throughout history, inspiring the earliest myths and legends, all the way up to Hollywood films and the pursuit of a career in space exploration. But light pollution means an increasing number of people are losing out.

Stars are disappearing before our eyes at a faster rate than originally thought, with almost a third of people around the world now unable to see any at all, according to new research.

While the unaided human eye should be able to spot several thousand stars on a clear, dark night, our view of our home galaxy - the Milky Way - and dozens of intricate constellations is rapidly being lost.

Due to light pollution, it is estimated that 30% of people worldwide have been robbed of their nightly view. The startling figure comes via analysis from a citizen science programme called Globe at Night, which published its findings in the journal Science.

NOIRLab, a US research centre for nighttime astronomy, runs the study, which projects that a child born today in a place where 250 stars are visible would only be able to see 100 by the time they turn 18.

Astronomer Connie Walker said the findings underscore "the importance of redoubling our efforts" to protect the nighttime sky from a phenomenon dubbed "sky glow".

Sky glow refers to the illumination of the night sky beyond that caused by natural sources, like stars or the moon.

It has long been known to be a problem, but Globe at Night's observations suggest it is increasing far more quickly than shown in satellite measurements of the Earth's brightness at night.

The study is based on crowdsourced reports from all over the world, with people submitting their findings online.

They are then shown a number of star maps and record which one best matches what they can see in the sky, providing an estimate of what's known as "the naked eye limiting magnitude".

This is a measure of how bright an object must be in order to be seen, and estimates the brightness of sky glow. Globe at Night's findings are based on more than 50,000 observations submitted from Europe and North America between 2011 and 2022.

Light pollution doesn't just spoil the view of the sky, it can also impact our health - and that of wildlife. This is because it disrupts the natural cyclical transition from sunlight to starlight that we and other organisms have evolved alongside - and sky glow is anything but natural.

Humans have generally had an awe-inspiring view of the starry night sky throughout history, but the path we are on now means that an ever-increasing number of people are losing out.

The loss of visible stars reported by Globe at Night indicates an increase in sky brightness of 9.6% per year over the past decade, much more than the 2% measured by satellites.

"This shows that existing satellites aren't sufficient to study how Earth's night is changing," said study lead author Christopher Kyba, of the German Research Centre for Geosciences.

And while the new findings are focused on the western world, the paper notes that the sky is likely brightening more quickly in developing countries, where the prevalence of artificial lighting is growing at a higher rate.

"The increase in sky glow over the past decade underscores the importance of redoubling our efforts and developing new strategies to protect dark skies," said Connie Walker.

"The Globe at Night dataset is indispensable in our ongoing evaluation of changes in sky glow, and we encourage everyone who can to get involved to help protect the starry night sky."



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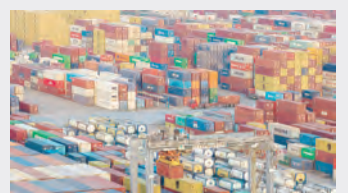
China's Exports to N. Korea More Than Tripled in 2022

BEIJING (Dispatches) - China's overall exports to North Korea more than tripled in 2022 from a year earlier as freight train operations between the two countries resumed following a suspension to limit the spread of COVID-19.

Chinese outbound shipments to North Korea surged 247.5% year-over-year to \$894 million, trade data released by China's General Administration of Customs showed Friday. The top export items in terms of value were soybean

oil, rubber tires, granulated sugar, tobacco and unnamed medicines.

Pyongyang had stockpiled large amounts of Chinese medical goods including masks and ventilators in early 2022. North Korea declared victory over COVID-19 in August, but in December it still bought 2.27 million masks, 12,000 thermometers and 40,000 pairs of medical rubber gloves from China, trade data released by Beijing showed.



Cost-of-Living Squeeze Takes Toll as UK Shoppers Cut Back on Spending

LONDON (Dispatches) - British consumers pinched by inflation cut spending by the most in at least 25 years in the critical shopping month of December, official data showed, dashing hopes for a Christmas boost for the country's flagging retail sector.

Sales were down by 5.8% compared with December 2021, the biggest fall for that month in records going back to 1997 and the ninth month in a row that they fell in annual terms.

Month-over-month, sales unexpectedly fell by 1% from November, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) said, confounding a forecast for a 0.5% increase in a Reuters poll of economists.

Olivia Cross, with consultancy Capital Economics, said the surprise fall suggested that some of the resilience seen in the economy toward the end of last year petered out in December.

"What's more, we think the bulk of the drag on activity from high inflation and rising interest rates has yet to be felt and will weigh more heavily on retail spending and the overall economy in 2023," she said.

A survey published earlier on Friday showed the first drop in three months in consumer confidence in January, which fell close to its lowest level since 1974.

Britain's economy is widely expected to fall into a recession.

Retail sales volumes fell by 3% in 2022, their worst full-year performance since 1997.

Heather Bovill, the ONS's deputy director for surveys and economic indicators, said food sales had risen in November as shoppers stocked up early for Christmas. Still, they fell again in December, with supermarkets linking the drop to higher food prices and the rising cost of living, she said.

Nonfood stores' sales volumes fell by 2.1% over the month as consumers cut back on nonessential spending. As a result, food sales fell by 0.3% in December after a rise of 1.0% in November.

In terms of value, overall spending was down by a month-on-month 1.2% from November.

On Thursday, Bank of England (BoE) Governor Andrew Bailey sounded a more hopeful note on the outlook for the economy this year, saying two consecutive falls in inflation in recent months was "the beginning of a sign that a corner has been turned."

Helen Dickinson, chief executive of the British Retail Consortium, said many of the cost pressures facing retailers and their customers remained in 2023. Still, she also said the situation would improve in the year's second half.

Christmas trading updates from Britain's biggest retailers, including Tesco, Sainsbury's, and Marks & Spencer, were better-than-expected with shoppers returning to stores at the expense of online a key trend.

The ONS said online sales fell in December, with strikes by postal workers believed to have encouraged people to buy more goods in stores.

Google to Slash 12,000 Jobs in Latest Record Round of Layoffs in Tech

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Google is laying off 12,000 workers, or about 6% of its workforce, becoming the latest tech company to trim staff as the economic boom that the industry rode during the COVID-19 pandemic ebbs.

Google CEO Sundar Pichai, who also leads its parent company Alphabet, informed staff Friday at the Silicon Valley giant about the cuts in an email that was also posted on the company's news blog.

It's one of the company's biggest-ever round of layoffs and adds to tens of thousands of other job losses recently announced by Microsoft, Amazon, Facebook parent Meta and other tech companies as they tighten their belts amid a darkening outlook for the industry. Just this month, there have been at least 48,000 job cuts announced by major companies in the sector.

"Over the past two years we've seen periods of dramatic growth," Pichai wrote. "To match and fuel that growth, we hired for a different economic reality than the one we face today."

He said the layoffs reflect a "rigorous review" carried out by Google of its operations.

The jobs being eliminated "cut across Alphabet, product areas, functions, levels and regions," Pichai said. He said he was "deeply sorry" for the layoffs.

Regulatory filings illustrate how Google's workforce swelled during the pandemic, ballooning to nearly 187,000 people by late last year from 119,000 at the end of 2019.

Pichai said that Google, founded nearly a quarter of a century ago, was "bound to go through difficult economic cycles."

"These are important moments to sharpen our focus, reengineer our cost base, and direct our talent and capital to our highest priorities," he wrote. He called out the company's investments in artificial intelligence as an area of opportunity.

There will be job cuts in the US and in other unspecified countries, according to Pichai's letter.



2023 Economy Will Be a Lot Better Than Feared

LONDON (Dispatches) - The eurozone economy will fare "a lot better" this year than initially feared, European Central Bank (ECB) chief Christine Lagarde said, as hopes grow that countries can avoid a painful recession.

The economic "news has become much more positive in the last few weeks," Lagarde told an audience at the World Economic Forum in Davos.

The rhetoric has shifted from talk of a recession in the 20-nation club to "a small contraction," she said, with some major economies like Germany possibly dodging a contraction altogether.

The ECB is expecting 0.5% growth in the eurozone in 2023, according to its latest forecast.

"So, it's not a brilliant year, but it is a lot better than what we had feared," Lagarde said.

The cautious optimism comes as sky-high energy prices, which soared last year because of the war in Ukraine, have started to fall.

Mild winter weather has also helped, easing fears of gas shortages.

Lower energy costs have contributed to a drop in eurozone inflation, which peaked at 10.6% in October.

Consumer price growth slowed to 9.2% in December, fueling hopes that inflation had finally passed its zenith.

Lagarde however warned that inflation was still "way too high."

The ECB has already hiked interest rates aggressively to tame inflation, lifting its key rates by 2.5 percentage points since July.

OPEC Development Fund Raises \$1b With First Ever Bond

LONDON (Dispatches) - The OPEC Fund for International Development, a development institution established by the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries' member governments nearly 50 years ago, has raised \$1 billion by selling its first ever bond.

With the money earmarked for food security, healthcare, infrastructure, education, employment and renewable energy projects, the three-year

bond which will pay investors an interest rate of 4.5 per cent, will also be classed as a 'sustainable development' bond.

It is a label that has a growing appeal for investors increasingly looking to use their resources in more environmentally and socially-beneficial ways.

The OPEC Fund's Head of Funding, Martine Mills Jansen, said that central banks from the Middle East, Europe and Asia and other types of "official" institutions, including from the United States, accounted for 62 per cent of the bond's buyers.

Commercial banks made up another 19 per cent, asset managers and insurance and pension funds accounted for almost all the rest, while geographically overall, 52 per cent of the buyers were from the Europe, Middle East and Africa region, 27 per cent from Asia-Pacific and 21 per cent were from North America.

Mills Jansen said the OPEC Fund now planned to issue a dollar-denominated bond every year to build what bankers call a 'curve', something which helps gauge borrowing costs.

It may also do "opportunistic" smaller deals alongside it in smaller markets and potentially other currencies. "The beauty of having a transaction out there is that you have something to build on," she said.

One of the Fund's stipulations is that it only invests in countries that are not members of OPEC.

It had originally planned to sell the bond last year but put the plans on hold when the global surge in interest rates triggered by inflation and the war in Ukraine unsettled funding markets.

This year's calmer conditions, though, have seen a deluge of issuance globally and allowed the OPEC Fund to go for a jumbo deal.

"The momentum was very strong" Mills Jansen said. "So it quickly became clear \$1 billion was in our sights."

Russian Oil Price Cap Could Save African States \$6b Annually

DAKAR (Dispatches) - Russia's war against Ukraine is hitting Africans particularly hard by exacerbating food insecurity and putting an unnecessary drag on the continent's economy, US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said in Senegal's capital Dakar.

Yellen said ending the war would be the best thing to help the global economy, but Treasury estimated that a Group of Seven-led price cap on Russian crude oil and refined products to limit Russia's revenues could save the 17 largest net oil-importing African countries US\$6 billion annually.

Speaking at the start of a three-country visit to Africa, Yellen said some emerging market countries were saving even more by using the price cap to negotiate steeper discounts with Russia, and Treasury was encouraging others to follow suit.

G7 countries and Australia implemented the oil price cap on December 5, banning the use of Western-supplied maritime insurance, finance and other services for cargoes priced above US\$60 (RM257) per barrel. A further cap on Russian refined petroleum products, such as diesel and fuel oil, is due to take effect on February 5.

Yellen said the United States was working with African leaders to mitigate the damage caused by Russia's "illegal and unprovoked war" in Ukraine, which along with Covid-19 had slowed growth and pushed millions of Africans into poverty and hunger.

Washington provided about US\$13 billion in emergency aid and food assistance last year, and was now setting up a US-Africa strategic partnership to address the short-term food needs of more than 300 million Africans, Yellen said. It is also helping to build more resilient and sustainable systems for the future.



Yellen is the first of a number of top US officials who plan to visit Africa this year, including President Joe Biden, as Washington seeks to deepen ties with the continent and provide a counterweight to China, whose collateralized loans have left many nations deeply in debt.

Speaking at a co-working space that helps women and young entrepreneurs, Yellen said US investments in Africa were motivated by "our mutually beneficial, long-term partnership" with a goal of generating positive economic returns.

Yellen met earlier with Senegal's Minister of Economy, International Planning, and Cooperation Oulimata Sarr, who like Yellen is also the first woman to serve in her current role.

The US Treasury secretary will meet later with Senegalese President Macky Sall and Finance Minister Mamadou Moustapha Ba. Yellen said US investments prioritized rigorous technical standards, had high standards for accountability and transparency, and also carefully considered risk to the longer-term sustainability of a country's debts.

Japan's Consumer Inflation Hits Fresh 41-Year High



TOKYO (Reuters) - Japan's core consumer prices in December rose 4.0% from a year earlier, double the central bank's 2% target, hitting a fresh 41-year high and keeping alive market expectations the central bank could phase out ultra-low interest rates.

But analysts are divided on whether the Bank of Japan (BOJ) could raise rates this year, due to uncertainty on whether wages will increase enough to offset the hit to consumption from rising living costs and keep inflation sustainably around 2%.

"Companies aren't that cautious about raising prices any more. We might see inflation stay above the BOJ's 2% target well into autumn this year," said Yoshiaki Shinke, chief economist at Dai-ichi Life Research Institute.

"But wages are key. If inflation stays around 2% and Japan sees significant wage hikes, the BOJ could normalize monetary policy. If it deems the pace of wage hike as insufficient, there's an equal chance it will stand pat," he said.

The December increase in the core consumer price index (CPI), which excludes volatile fresh food but includes oil costs, matched a median market forecast and followed a 3.7% annual gain seen in November. It was the fastest annual rise since December 1981, when the index also rose 4.0%.

The annual rise in core CPI exceeded the BOJ's 2% target for a ninth straight month, as prices rose for goods ranging from hamburgers and potato chips to air conditioners.

Core-core CPI, which strips away both fresh food and energy costs, was 3.0% higher in December than a year earlier, accelerating from a 2.8% gain seen in November.

A closer look at the data, however, shows that Japan has yet to face the risk of a wage-inflation spiral that has prodded U.S. and European central banks to raise interest rates.

12 Plays to Be Performed On 1st Day in Tehran

TEHRAN (MNA) – The capital city of Iran is hosting 12 plays on the first day of the 41st edition of the Fajr International Theater Festival. As many as 23 troupes will give performances in the international competition this year. Also, the prestigious event is to host 40 plays in the national competition. Foreign troupes from Brazil, Russia, Oman, Spain, Iraq, Armenia, Tunisia, and Jordan have taken part in the artistic event. The 41st edition of the Fajr International Theater Festival features a scientific section during which twenty papers from ten Muslim countries are slated to be presented on January 27 and 28.



German "All Quiet on The Western Front" Gets Most Nods

LONDON (Dispatches) - A German remake of the anti-war classic "All Quiet On The Western Front" led nominations for the British Academy Film Awards on Thursday, overtaking other award season favourites with 14 nods.

Based on the epic 1928 novel by German author Erich Maria Remarque about the horrors of conflict during World War One, the Netflix movie was recognised in the best film category, as well as for films not in the English language, director, supporting actor, adapted screenplay, original score and other craft and technical prizes.

It equals 2001's "Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon" as a film not in the English language that has garnered the most nominations in BAFTA's history, organisers said.

Malte Grunert, producer of "All Quiet On The Western Front" told Reuters the nominations in 14 categories was "unbelievably special when looking at who we are up against and the other nominees, we really are in the best company."

"And these 14 nominations puts us on par with 'Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon', which is one of my favourite films and that is a huge honour and a great joy."

Anna Higgs, chair of the BAFTA Film Committee, told Reuters cinema viewers were watching a broader range of films, adding: "We're really getting to a stage where subtitles aren't considered scary anymore and actually the power of cinema can communicate across borders and cultures."

The last non-English language movie that won the BAFTA best film prize was Netflix's "Roma" in 2019.

Dark comedy "The Banshees of Inisherin" and the dimension-hopping "Everything Everywhere All At Once" each secured 10 nominations.

"Banshees", a tale of two feuding friends on a remote island off the coast of Ireland, received nominations for leading actor Colin Farrell as well as supporting cast members Brendan Gleeson, Barry Keoghan and Kerry Condon.

That film and Steven Spielberg's coming-of-age story "The Fabelmans" were the two big winners at the Golden Globes earlier this month, but the latter received just one BAFTA nod, for original screenplay.

"Everything Everywhere All At Once" secured nominations for leading actress Michelle Yeoh, supporting actress Jamie Lee Curtis and supporting actor Ke Huy Quan,



as well as for best film, original screenplay and director for Daniel Kwan and Daniel Scheinert.

Baz Luhrmann's Elvis Presley biopic "Elvis" came in third with nine nominations, including best film and a leading actor recognition for Austin Butler.

Drama "Tar", in which Cate Blanchett plays a gay conductor of a Berlin orchestra whose career comes tumbling down due to an abuse scandal, had five nods, including best film, director, original screenplay and leading actress.

Box office hits "Avatar: The Way of Water" and "Top Gun: Maverick" received nominations in technical categories.

Gina Prince-Bythewood ("The Woman King") is the only woman in the running for the director award, but the outstanding debut by a British writer, director or producer category features all female nominees.

Known as the BAFTAs (British Academy of Film and Television Arts), Britain's top movie honours will be awarded on Feb. 19 in London.

Study Suggests Political News Negatively Impacts Mental Health



LONDON (Dispatches) - Although avoiding political news can safeguard mental wellbeing, it may also reduce an individual's motivation to get involved in political causes.

Keeping up with the latest news is a part of everyday life for most people. Whether it be political news, current events, or weather reports, people tune into TV or scroll through their newsfeeds to gather information about what's happening around the world.

However, new research suggests that watching political news may take a toll on mental wellbeing.

The study, published in the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, found that daily exposure to political news negatively impacts mental health and overall wellbeing. However, while the research also suggests that disengaging from politics can lessen these mental health risks, doing so may reduce the motivation to take political action.

To investigate how everyday political news impacts mental health, the research team from the University of Toronto asked 198 people in the US to answer questions about the political event or topic they thought about most that day, every night for two weeks.

The participants recorded their emotional response to the political event, how they handled these emotions, their overall mental and physical health, and whether they felt motivated to take political action.

The team found that even when the participants thought about political events that weren't negative, it still caused negative emotions. In addition, those who said they had more politics-related negative emotions also reported worse mental and physical health. However, they also experienced more motivation to take political action.

Strategies the participants used to manage negative politics-related emotions included distraction and cognitive reappraisal or reframing the political news to be more positive. Although effective in reducing the adverse effects on mental health, these strategies also reduced the participants' drive to take political action.

In the second part of the research, the scientists increased the number of participants to include Democrats, Republicans, and people affiliated with another political party or no party.

Then, instead of asking the participants to think about random political news, the team had them watch news clips from popular conservative and liberal-leaning news programs. For example, conservative participants watched Tucker Carlson Tonight, and liberal participants viewed the Rachel Maddow Show.

New Data Show How Quickly Light Pollution Is Obscuring the Night Sky

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - The night sky has been brightening faster than researchers realized, thanks to the use of artificial lights at night. A study of more than 50,000 observations of stars by citizen scientists reveals that the night sky grew about 10 percent brighter, on average, every year from 2011 to 2022.

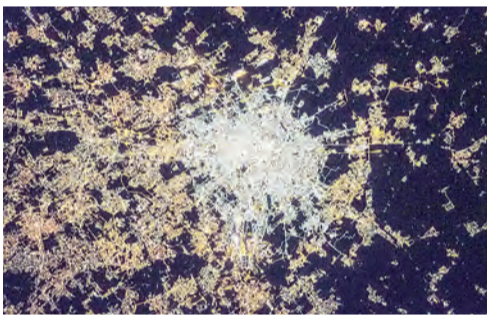
In other words, a baby born in a region where roughly 250 stars were visible every night would see only 100 stars on their 18th birthday, researchers report in the Jan. 20 Science.

The perils of light pollution go far beyond not being able to see as many stars. Too much brightness at night can harm people's health, send migrating birds flying into buildings, disrupt food webs by drawing pollinating insects toward lights instead of plants.

"In a way, this is a call to action," says astronomer Connie Walker of the National Optical-Infrared Astronomy Research Laboratory in Tucson. "People should consider that this does have an impact on our lives. It's not just astronomy. It impacts our health. It impacts other animals who cannot speak for themselves."

Walker works with the Globe at Night campaign, which began in the mid-2000s as an outreach project to connect students in Arizona and Chile and now has thousands of participants worldwide. Contributors compare the stars they can see with maps of what stars would be visible at different levels of light pollution, and enter the results on an app.

"I'd been quite skeptical of Globe at Night" as a tool for precision research, admits physicist Christopher Kyba of the GFZ German Research Centre for Geosciences in Potsdam. But the power is in the sheer numbers: Kyba and



colleagues analyzed 51,351 individual data points collected from 2011 to 2022.

"The individual data are not precise, but there's a whole lot of them," he says. "This Globe at Night project is not just a game; it's really useful data. And the more people participate, the more powerful it gets."

Those data, combined with a global atlas of sky luminance published in 2016, allowed the team to conclude that the night sky's brightness increased by an average 9.6 percent per year from 2011 to 2022.

Most of that increase was missed by satellites that collect brightness data across the globe. Those measurements saw just a 2 percent increase in brightness per year over the last decade.

There are several reasons for that, Kyba says. Since the early 2010s, many outdoor lights have switched from high-pressure sodium lightbulbs to LEDs. LEDs are more energy efficient, which has environmental benefits and cost savings.

But LEDs also emit more short-wavelength blue light, which scatters off particles in the atmosphere more than sodium bulbs' orange light, creating more sky glow. Existing satellites are not sensitive to blue wavelengths, so they underestimate the light pollution coming from LEDs. And satellites may miss light that shines toward the horizon, such as light emitted by a sign or from a window, rather than straight up or down.

Satellites have missed some of the light pollution from LEDs, which emit in blue wavelengths. This image from the International Space Station shows LEDs in the center of Milan glowing brighter than the orange lights in the suburbs. Samantha Cristoforetti, NASA, ESA

Sanctions Not to Stop...

FROM PAGE 1

"Europe is taking energy from Russia, and if you look at the quantum of energy that Europe is taking right now from Russia and compare it with even what Pakistan in times to come may take, it's not even going to be a small fraction," he said.

"We haven't seen any sanctions, anything happening to those transactions. So, we would try to follow suit," Malik explained.

The United States and its allies have imposed a slew of economic sanctions, which include purchasing Russian oil and gas, against Russia over the country's war with Ukraine.

The minister's remarks came in the wake of talks between Russian and Pakistani authorities this week. Malik said the talks were aimed at strengthening their bilateral trade and energy cooperation, adding that Islamabad intends to buy crude oil, gasoline, and diesel from Moscow at discounted rates due to the Western sanctions imposed on the Kremlin.

In the meantime, as the US and its allies tried to choke off Moscow's energy revenues, Russia attempted to cut its oil and gas delivery to customers in Europe to provide the energy to its new customers from across Asia instead.

Reuters reported this week that China, the world's top oil importer, has continued buying Russian oil despite Western sanctions.

At least four Chinese-owned supertankers were shipping Russian Urals crude to China, Reuters reported, adding, a fifth supertanker, or very large crude carrier (VLCC), was shipping crude to India, another top oil importer, which like China has continued buying Russian oil sold at a discount price.

Moscow says both Russia and China understand the urgent necessity of bilateral strategic interactions in the current conditions.

Earlier, Indian foreign minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar said New Delhi will continue to buy Russian oil as it benefits the country.

Iran-China...

FROM PAGE 1

Iran-China non-oil trade stood at \$14.8 billion in 2021, according to China's customs administration.

The value of trade between the two countries during 2021 declined by less than one percent in comparison to 2020 in which the figure was reported to be \$14.9 billion.

China is one of Iran's main trade partners that has maintained strong trade ties with the Islamic Republic despite the strict U.S. sanctions.

Iran and China officially signed the document for 25-year comprehensive cooperation in March 2021.

The document was signed between Iran's former Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi at the Iranian Foreign Ministry.

Back in December 2022, Iran and China finalized 16 memorandums of understanding (MOU) under the framework of the two countries' strategic 25-year agreement.

The MOUs were signed in an Iran-China comprehensive cooperation program summit which was held in Tehran on December 13 in the presence of Iran's First Vice President Mohammad Mokhber and China's Vice Premier Hu Chunhua.

European Parliament's Anti-IRGC...

FROM PAGE 1

The move has been strongly condemned by Iranian officials, commanders, and the Armed Forces.

President Ebrahim Raisi on Thursday condemned the European Parliament's move to label the IRGC a terrorist organization, saying the measure comes out of Europeans' "desperation."

Elsewhere in his Friday remarks, Amirabdollahian underscored the importance of improving mutual relations, saying historical ties between Tehran and Stockholm should not be affected by "certain individuals" for their own "personal and terrorist interests."

Pakistan Asks Iran...

FROM PAGE 1

She said the onus remains on India to create enabling circumstances for meaningful talks adding that the reversal of India's illegal and unilateral actions of 5th August 2019 in the illegally occupied Jammu and Kashmir is key to the initiation of dialogue. She said Pakistan would appreciate it if the international community persuades India to take such measures.

Int'l Association of...

FROM PAGE 1

In this specialized meeting, a proposal from Iran to form the International Association of Women of Influence was proposed and agreed upon, the memorandum of understanding should be signed by the participants.

In fact, the capital of the Islamic Republic is hosting an important summit about women with the presence of influential women from 90 countries, about a month after the political move of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women to remove Iran's membership.

In this specialized meeting, the spouses of the presidents and prime ministers of foreign countries commented on the field of women and how to implement the joint memorandum.

In the meeting, women from different countries emphasized that the Islamic Republic of Iran has an effective role and great potential for the world community.

Defending women's rights and expanding the opportunity for their presence in political, economic, and social fields, as well as fighting injustice against women, were other approaches mentioned by the participants.

The first ladies stated in this congress that they should unite to overcome women's problems and prepare our proper road map.

Regular Container Shipping...

FROM PAGE 1

Back in May 2022, Iran's Ports and Maritime Organization (PMO) announced that three direct container shipping lines were launched from Chabahar Port to Nhava Sheva and Kandla ports in India as well as Jebel Ali Port in United Arab Emirate.

Iran and India had previously launched shipping lines between Chabahar and the Indian ports of Mumbai, and Mundra.

The first shipping route between the two countries was put into operation in 2017 between Iran's Chabahar port and Mumbai.

In January 2019, Iran and India inaugurated the second direct shipping route which passes through Mumbai, Mundra, Kandla, Chabahar, and finally Bandar Abbas in southern Iran.

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West Ham Sign Striker Danny Ings From Aston Villa

LONDON (Dispatches) - Premier League strugglers West Ham have signed Danny Ings from Aston Villa for a reported fee of £15 million (RM79.3 million), the London club announced.
Ings signed a contract that runs until 2025 and the striker is expected to be eligible to face relegation-threatened Everton at home on Saturday.
Hammers manager David Moyes welcomed the boost to his forward options.

Forest Sign Newcastle Striker Wood on Loan

LONDON (Dispatches) - Nottingham Forest signed New Zealand striker Chris Wood on loan from Newcastle as the club maintained their recruitment drive, in place since their promotion to the Premier League last season.
Wood will spend the rest of the campaign with Forest and the move can become a permanent deal running until the end of the 2023/24 season if certain unspecified conditions are met.
The 31-year-old leaves Newcastle just a year after joining them from Burnley for £25 million (\$30 million).

Medvedev Latest to Exit Australian Open

MELBOURNE (Dispatches) - Daniil Medvedev became the latest title contender to crash out of the men's draw at the Australian Open, but Iga Swiatek led a charge of the women's seeds into the last 16.

Russia's Medvedev was runner-up at the last two Grand Slams in Melbourne but his tournament ended with a whimper in round three at the hands of Sebastian Korda.

The American, son of 1998 Australian Open champion Petr Korda, won 7-6 (9/7), 6-3, 7-6 (7/4) as seventh seed Medvedev followed defending champion Rafael Nadal and Casper Ruud in exiting in the first week.

Korda, who faces 10th seed Hubert Hurkacz of Poland next, told Rod Laver Arena: "An unbelievable match."

"I sort of knew what I had to do and I stuck with it even when I was going up and down with the emotions."

"I'm thrilled right now, I played amazing," said the 22-year-old.

With world number one Carlos Alcaraz not involved because of injury, Medvedev's surprise defeat to the 29th seed is another boost to nine-time Australian Open champion Novak Djokovic.

The hot favorite, who is nursing a hamstring problem, plays 27th seed Grigor Dimitrov on Saturday.

Stefanos Tsitsipas is now the highest remaining seed at three and the Greek star stretched his unbeaten streak this year to set up a last-16 clash with Italian Jannik Sinner.

The 24-year-old Tsitsipas, who is yet to drop a set, clinched his seventh straight win of 2023 by beating Dutchman Tallon Griekspoor 6-2, 7-6 (7/5), 6-3.

Tsitsipas is refusing to get carried away as he chases a first major title.

"There are no presents," he warned.

"You should be going after it, you should be creating those opportunities and aiming big within yourself, sometimes surpass your own abilities."

Also into the last 16 are sixth seed Felix Auger-Aliassime and 18th seed Karen Khachanov.

The Russian defeated 16th-seeded American Frances Tiafoe in four sets.

In the women's draw, world number one Swiatek and the Americans Coco Gauff and Jessica Pegula were all emphatic winners.



Swiatek, a three-time major winner but chasing a first Australian Open title, swatted aside qualifier Cristina Bucsa of Spain 6-0, 6-1 in just 55 minutes.

The Pole faces Elena Rybakina next after the Wimbledon champion defeated last year's Melbourne runner-up Danielle Collins in three sets.

"For sure she's very strong physically and mentally," Moscow-born Kazakh Rybakina said, sizing up Poland's Swiatek.

"I will have to take all my chances. I think Iga is a great player."

The 18-year-old Gauff stepped up her bid for a maiden major title with a similarly ruthless 6-3, 6-2 victory over fellow American Bernarda Pera.

The talented teenager faces the 2017 French Open champion Jelena Ostapenko of Latvia in the last 16.

Third seed Pegula, who is also chasing a first Grand Slam crown, made light work of Marta Kostyuk with a 6-0, 6-2 victory.

The 28-year-old next faces what should be a sterner test in Barbora Krejickova of the Czech Republic, the former French Open champion.

Two-time former Melbourne champion Victoria Azarenka stayed alive with a 1-6, 6-2, 6-1 triumph over Madison Keys.

Off the court, Australian Open chief Craig Tiley insisted there was "no need" to alter the scheduling, despite stinging criticism after the second-latest finish at a Grand Slam ever.

Veteran Andy Murray battled through a five-set epic against home hope Thanasi Kokkinakis which ended at 4:05 am on Friday, calling the early hours conclusion "a bit of a farce".

Tiley defended the schedule, saying such late matches did not happen often, after Murray's brother Jamie — a doubles specialist playing at Melbourne Park — was among those calling for only one night match at majors.

"If you just put one match at night and there's an injury, you don't have anything for fans or broadcasters," said Tiley.



Dani Alves Detained in Spain On Suspicion of Assault

BARCELONA (Dispatches) - Brazil defender Dani Alves was taken into custody on Friday in Spain over allegations that he sexually assaulted a woman at a Barcelona nightclub in December, police said.

The 39-year-old player was summoned to a Barcelona police station where he was "taken into custody" and will now be questioned by a judge, said a spokesperson for Catalonia's regional police force, the Mossos d'Esquadra.

Catalan police received a complaint on January 2 from a woman who said Alves had touched her inappropriately, police said.

The alleged sexual assault took place at a popular Barcelona nightclub overnight December 30-31, according to Spanish media reports.

The player was accused of putting his hands down the woman's pants, according to the reports.

Alves, 39, has confirmed he was at the night club at the time but has denied any wrongdoing, telling private Spanish television Antena 3 earlier this month that he has "never seen" the woman before.

"I was there, at that place, with more people having fun. Everybody knows I love to dance. Having a good time but without invading the space of others," the former Barcelona and Juventus player added.

Alves, who now plays for Mexican side Pumas UNAM, was in Barcelona on holiday following his participation at the World Cup with Brazil in Qatar.

Prosecutor Seeks Nine-Point Deduction For Juventus

ROME (Dispatches) - An Italian football prosecutor has requested that Juventus be docked nine points in Serie A this season because of the way it accounted for player transfers.

The request was made at a hearing on Friday looking at the way Juve, Italy's most successful club, and a number of other teams dealt with player exchange deals.

A source close to the matter confirmed Italian media reports of the demand for Juventus to be docked points. Other clubs involved would not be punished as severely.

Juve are currently third in Serie A, 10 points adrift of leaders Napoli after 18 games.

Giuseppe Chine, the football prosecutor, also requested that former Juventus chairman Andrea Agnelli be banned from holding office in Italian football for 16 months, and sought a 20-month ban for Fabio Paratici, who was the club's sports director.

Paratici is now managing director of football at England's Premier League club Tottenham Hotspur.

Juventus have denied wrongdoing and said their accounting was in line with industry standards.

Juve and other clubs gave their defence on Friday before the football court decides on its verdict.

The case centered on the values attached to players exchanged between clubs.

The capital gain from a player transfer goes straight onto a club's accounts while the cost of a purchase can be spread over the life of a contract, creating scope to flatter the balance sheet with inflated valuations.

Real Madrid to Host City Rivals Atletico in Cup Quarters

MADRID (Dispatches) - Real Madrid will host city rivals Atletico Madrid in the Copa del Rey quarter-finals next week after the draw was made at the Spanish FA's headquarters on Friday.

The pair last met in the competition in the 2012-13 final, which Atletico won 2-1.

The Spanish and European champions will be a tough assignment for Atletico, whose manager Diego Simeone is on thin ice after a difficult season so far.

Atletico Madrid Sign Depay From Barcelona



session with the Madrid club on Thursday with the permission of Barcelona.
He will give Atletico more options up front after Portugal forward Joao Felix's loan move to Chelsea earlier this month.

MADRID (Dispatches) - Atletico Madrid have signed Memphis Depay from La Liga rivals Barcelona, the two clubs said, with the Netherlands forward penning a 2-1/2 year contract.

The 28-year-old took part in a training

with the Madrid club on Thursday with the permission of Barcelona.

In a statement, Barcelona said they will receive a fee of "€3 million plus €1 million in variables."

Depay, who previously played for PSV Eindhoven and Manchester United, joined Barca on a free transfer from Olympique Lyonnais in July 2021 on a two-year deal.

He played 42 games for the Barcelona, scoring 14 goals, but fell out of favour with manager Xavi Hernandez after the club signed Poland striker Robert Lewandowski last year.

Depay has been capped 86 times since his debut in 2013, scoring 43 goals — leaving him seven short of the Netherlands' all-time top scorer Robin van Persie.

Depay played at last year's World Cup in Qatar, scoring one goal as the Dutch reached the quarter-finals where they lost to eventual champions Argentina on penalties.

Spurs Are Defending Like a Relegation Team

LONDON (Dispatches) - Antonio Conte admits Tottenham are defending like a "relegation team" as they lose ground in the race to finish in the Premier League's top four.

Conte's side crashed to a second successive defeat on Thursday after blowing a two-goal lead in their 4-2 defeat at Manchester City.

Fifth-placed Tottenham have conceded 21 goals in their past 10 league matches, with that leaky defence a significant factor in a damaging run of just one win in their past five games.

Tottenham's defensive frailties were on full display at the Etihad Stadium as mistakes from Hugo Lloris and Clement Lenglet contributed to their dispiriting loss.

Conte is growing frustrated with the blunders and urged his players to make improvements in defence ahead of Monday's trip to Fulham.

"Progress doesn't depend on the final result," he said on Friday. "The progress you see if you start to see the players play with the personality, to start the game with the will and desire to have the ball."

"In other side, compare to last season, we are doing less and to concede 21 goals in the last 10 (league) games, this is usually a team that fight for a relegation zone."

Having taken a 2-0 lead at half-time, Conte's team allowed City to score twice in two minutes after the break to kickstart their comeback.

Conte questioned the mentality of his players, who endured a similar poor run last season only to recover to eventually to secure Champions League qualification.



Celtics Down Warriors in Finals Rematch

PARIS (Dispatches) - The Celtics held on for a gritty 121-118 NBA victory over reigning champions Golden State in Boston on Thursday as the league polished its global credentials with a glitzy game in Paris.

Jayson Tatum and Jaylen Brown came alive late for the Celtics, whose eighth straight win — this one against the team that bested them in last season's NBA Finals — pushed their league-leading record to 34-12.

Even as Tatum and Brown struggled to make shots early, the Celtics built a 10-point lead midway through the second quarter.

But the Warriors chipped away, and grabbed a 55-54 lead on Stephen Curry's shot from the half-court logo at the halftime buzzer.

It looked like the Warriors, who dominated Boston in a December victory in San Francisco, had the Celtics' number again as they pulled away to lead by as many as 11 in the third quarter.

They were up by nine early in the fourth, but Tatum's running dunk pulled Boston within two with two minutes remaining. Al Horford came up with a three-pointer and a big block and Brown's three-pointer tied it at 106-106 with 18.6 seconds left in regulation.

Marcus Smart's opening basket of overtime gave the Celtics their first lead since the first half.

After a three-pointer from Curry put the Warriors up by one, Brown drove for a layup that put the Celtics back on top for good with 2:23 remaining.

They pushed the lead to as many as eight and survived a couple of miscues to seal the win.

