

Majlis Lawmakers Described the European Parliament's Blacklisting Of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) as an "Ignorant Move," Which Would Bring About Repercussions for the Europeans

IRAN NEWS

Health Ministry Announced on Sunday That the Number of Deaths From the Coronavirus Pandemic in Iran Increased to **144,735** With **One** More Iranian Killed by the Deadly Disease Over the Past 24 Hours

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Holy Qur'an Desecration In Sweden Clear Example of Anti-Muslim Violence

IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Foreign Ministry has strongly condemned the desecration of the Holy Qur'an in Sweden, saying the move is a clear example of hate-mongering and violence against Muslims.

"The repetition of the desecration of the holy book of one and a half billion Muslims is a clear example of hate-mongering and the spread of violence against all Muslims [around the world]. Such actions have nothing to do with freedom of expression and opinion," Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesman Nasser Kanaani said.

He added that extremist elements are unfortunately given free rein in some European countries, under the false pretext of the freedom of expression, in order to promote hatred against Islamic sanctities and values.

The Iranian spokesperson emphasized that the world public opinion expects the Swedish government to prevent the recurrence of such moves against Islam and punish all those who hurt the feelings of Muslims.

According to reports, Swedish right-wing leader Rasmus Paludan received permission from his country's government to burn the Holy Qur'an in front of the Turkish embassy in Stockholm. He was protected by the police while committing the act.

Paludan, accompanied by police, went to an open public space in the southern Swedish city of Linköping and reportedly placed the Muslim holy book down and tried to set it on fire while ignoring protests from onlookers.

General Outlines of National Budget Bill Approved

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Majlis approved the general outlines of the national budget bill for the next Iranian calendar year 1402, which starts on March 21.

During an open session of Majlis (Iranian parliament) on Sunday, the national budget bill for the next year was put to a vote and 169 MPs out of 235 MPs who were present voted in favor of it and the generalities of the bill were approved.

Talfiaq Committee, a body consisting of MPs from different committees, which is established each year to study the national budget bill, approved the general policies of the bill for the next year on January 17.

President Ebrahim Raisi submitted the administration's draft of the national budget bill for the next Iranian calendar year to the Majlis on January 11.

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Iran Warns of Quitting NPT If Europe Not Stop Hostile Stances

IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - If the Europeans do not change their anti-Iran positions, Iran will possibly withdraw from the NPT as a countermeasure, the Iranian Foreign Minister said.

Reacting to a recent move by the European Union to designate the IRGC as a "terrorist" entity, Hossein Amirabdollahian told reporters on Sunday, "Parliament's Sunday measure that binds the government to designate the armies of the European countries as terrorist is a countermeasure."

Referring to his conversations with EU Foreign Policy Chief Josep Borrell, Amirabdollahian said that the resolution is not binding and it's just an expression of the feelings of a part of the European Parliament representatives.

Answering a question about whether withdrawal from the NPT would be one of Iran's countermeasures, Amirabdollahian said, "A small number of European political leaders, including the German Foreign Minister, have no experience in the field of diplomacy."

Therefore, if they do not move in the direction of rationality and do not correct their positions, any measure is possible, he noted.

Earlier in a tweet Foreign Minister had warned the European Union of "reciprocal" measures after the European Parliament voted to add the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) to the EU's terror list.

"The parliament (of Iran) is working to place elements of European countries' armies on the terrorist list," Hossein Amirabdollahian said on Twitter.

"The European Parliament shot itself in the foot," Iran's top diplomat said, adding that the response would be "reciprocal."

Amirabdollahian's tweet came after the European Parliament on Wednesday adopted an amendment that was added to an annual foreign policy report and called on the EU and its member states to include the IRGC in 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.

Iran Launches Operational Phase of Gen. Soleimani's Satellite Project

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The head of the Iranian Space Agency has announced the launching of the operational phase of the country's first satellite system project, named after the late top Iranian anti-terror commander General Qassem Soleimani.

Hassan Salarieh made the announcement on the Agency's official website on Sunday as he elaborated on the latest implementation status of General Soleimani's project, which is part of Iran's ongoing 10-year space program.

"Based on the 10-year space program and in order to provide services to people, government institutions, and organizations as well as to provide services to private sector companies, the Iranian Space Agency has been tasked with placing a telecommunication satellite system in Earth's orbit," Salarieh said.

"The implementation of the project, which is called 'Martyr Soleimani Project' and is considered to be the first satellite system project of our country, is of great importance owing to the achievements in the production of satellite series and their network formation," he added.

He said that the Iranian Space Agency had prepared the operational plan of the project and codified the executive program of a narrowband telecommunication system with limited service long ago and even before the finalization of the country's 10-year space program.

"In less than a month since the approval of the 10-year space program, one of the most important clauses of which is the implementation of the Martyr Soleimani Project, ... the implementation phase of the project was officially launched," Salarieh said.

Praising steps taken by the Agency to build small satellites, Salarieh said, "It is axiomatic that upon success in this step, the way to complete and develop satellite systems and provide more services will be paved in the next steps."

Iran launched its first satellite Omid (Hope) in 2009 and its Rasad (Observation) satellite was sent into orbit in 2011. In 2012, the Islamic Republic successfully put its third domestically-made satellite, Navid (Good News), into orbit.

In April 2020, Iran announced the successful launch of its first military satellite into orbit. And in March 2022, it blasted its second military satellite into space.

ViewPoint

By: Hamid Reza Naghashian



One Nation And One IRGC

The Islamic Revolution since its emergence in 1979 in Iran has disappointed the West as Westerners have tried any plot since then to bring down the Islamic Republic but so far they have failed because of Strong the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and a united nation against plots and now the Westerners have targeted IRGC to weaken the country after they failed to provoke the nation for regime change in the country.

In recent days Europeans have tried to copy the hands of their lord, the U.S., by designating IRGC as a terrorist organization in order to increase the pressure on Tehran to accept what they want but we know that IRGC does not fear such threats as it has shown in the past it gets stronger under the pressure and threats because of national backing and people's support which is the most valuable asset.

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.

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

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

EU is to decide on this resolution today and it will be a decisive moment in the relation of EU with the Islamic Revolution and any miscalculation may deteriorate this relation and cause further consequences.

Europeans in recent months and especially since the Ukraine war have blindly followed the U.S. and it seems they have handed over their own control to Washington and it is Washington which decides for them. European states are better to blame the U.S. rather than Iran for the war in Ukraine and they should not look for a scapegoat to blame it for the war rather than confessing their own mistakes.

If the Europeans think that by designating the IRGC as a terrorist group war in Ukraine and terrorism in the world will come to an end they are fully wrong because the Islamic Republic of Iran, led by the IRGC, has been the leading country in fight with terrorism.

The chief commander of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) on Saturday 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 and 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.

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Russian Parliamentary Delegation Due in Tehran

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Vyacheslav Volodin, the Speaker of the Russian State Duma, the lower house of the Russian parliament, will pay an official two-day visit to Iran, the State Duma's press service said.

"On January 22-23, the delegation of the State Duma headed by State Duma Speaker Vyacheslav Volodin will visit the Islamic Republic of Iran with an official visit," the press service said. Heads of relevant committees of the State Duma are among delegation members, it noted.

The third meeting of the commission on cooperation between parliaments of the two countries is planned during the visit on Monday.

"The agenda meeting comprises legislative support of trade and economic cooperation in spheres of energy, transport and agriculture, issues of interaction in the Caspian region, regional security and countering terrorism and extremism," the press service said. The previous meeting of the commission was in January 2020.

Qalibaf Warns EU Over Labeling IRGC as Terrorist Organization

TEHRAN – Majlis Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf warned Europe against taking measures against the IRGC and pledged a quick, firm, and reciprocal response by the Iranian parliament to any such measures.

The European Parliament on January 19 passed a resolution that calls on the European Union to put the IRGC on its terror list and expand its sanctions list to all foundations linked to the Iranian military organization.

Qalibaf, in a speech ahead of the open session of the Iranian Parliament (Majlis) on Sunday, said that the legislature will give a quick, firm, and reciprocal response to any action against the IRGC, and will designate the armies of the European countries as terrorist groups.

He said that the latest resolution showed that European countries, under the influence of pro-Zionist groups, have made miscalculations and taken a wrong path against their national interests.

"I should make it clear that such measures, which follow long-running and extensive sanctions by the West, especially the US, will not have more dire legal consequences against the Iranian nation. The pro-Zionist groups are seeking to make a media propaganda campaign to frighten the Iranian people and independent countries of the world," the top lawmaker added.

He also said everybody should know that the Iranian people consider the IRGC part



of the nation, which has protected their security and served people in tough times such as natural disasters and the COVID pandemic.

"The IRGC is the most unique anti-terror organization in the world, which defeated the Daesh terrorist group with the help of people in the region and despite the US support for the group. The IRGC eliminated global threats of Daesh," Qalibaf said, adding that the IRGC has made great sacrifices in its fight against terrorism.

He further criticized Western states, especially European countries, for supporting anti-Iran terror groups like the Mujahedin Khalq Organization (MKO).

European countries are also supporting "media terrorism" against Iran as they are hosting media organizations that foment violence in Iran, the parliament speaker said, warning that the Islamic Republic cannot connive at the move and will use all its tools to give a deterrent and reciprocal response.

At the end of his speech, Qalibaf urged Europe to free itself from the influence of the "child-killing Zionist regime" and take a "wise policy", otherwise European nations will be the weakest among Western states putting themselves against the IRGC and the Resistance Front in the region, and will fully pay the cost.

EU to Be Main Loser of Blacklisting IRGC

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Minister of Interior Ahmad Vahidi reacted to the blacklisting of IRGC by the European Parliament, noting that the EU will be undoubtedly the main loser of this unwise decision.

He said that the decision is indicative of the fall of rationalism, politics and realism among the European countries.

The minister believed that the European countries have made the decision following the line of the US and the Zionist regime under the influence of certain people who have been carrying out terrorist and anti-human measures both in Iran and abroad.

Vahidi also said that Europe's decision was a fatal blow to the European Union.

The minister went on to say that turning a blind eye to the noticeable efforts of the IRGC in combating takfiri terrorist groups will further reinforce the terrorist groups.

Iran, Zimbabwe to Sign Cooperation Agreements

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iran and Zimbabwe plan to sign cooperation agreements in the coming weeks, Iran's Minister of Cooperatives, Labor and Social Welfare Solat Mortazavi said.

Mortazavi made the announcement following talks with Zimbabwe's Minister of Industry and Commerce Hon. Dr. Sekai Nzenza in the Iranian capital Tehran.

The Iranian official said that the two countries will soon hold the ninth session of their joint committee, without giving an exact date.

He said that cooperation agreements are set to be signed during that meeting.



The Zimbabwean minister was in Tehran to attend the First International Congress of Influential Women.

EU's Anti-IRGC Move Part of Bigger Anti-Iran Hybrid War

TEHRAN (MNA) - The heads of three power branches of the Iranian government emphasized support for IRGC amid the EU's decision to blacklist it, saying that the EU's move is part of an anti-Iran hybrid war.

In Saturday evening's regular meeting of the heads of three power branches, which was hosted by President Seyed Ebrahim Raisi at the presidential compound, they exchanged their views on the most important issues of the country.

The top officials condemned the European Parliament's decision regarding the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, considering it a part of the combined (hybrid) war measures against the Iranian nation and the Islamic Republic.

"The IRGC is a part of the military power and armed forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran, which has been the source of meritorious service with a brilliant record in the defense of the glorious land of Iran for more than 40 years," they said.

President Raisi, Parliament Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf and Judiciary Chief Gholmhossein Mohseni-Ejei emphasized advancing the development goals of the country with the coordination and cooperation of the three branches and all the elements of the establishment.

Iranian, Pakistan Navy Participated in Naval Exercise

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Iranian Navy ships and submarine port called Karachi and participated in naval exercise with Pakistan Navy (PN).

Upon arrival at Karachi port, PN officials along with Iranian consulate Staff warmly welcomed the visiting flotilla and National Anthems tunes of both countries were played as mark of respect.

The recent visit of Iranian Navy to Pakistan reaffirms joint efforts to promote regional stability and maritime security for protection of Sea Lines of Communication and Seafarers in the region.

During stay at port, both navies held mutually rewarding professional interactions, exchange visit sand table top

discussions on matters of mutual interests. Upon culmination of visit, passage exercise between the two navies was conducted to enhance naval cooperation.

The visit of Iranian navy ships to Pakistan is a manifestation of strong bilateral ties between two countries and resolve towards regional peace.

Earlier, Turkish Navy Ship TCG BURGAZADA visited Karachi port and participated in bilateral naval Exercise TURGUTREIS – VII.

The Turkish ship port called Karachi harbor was welcomed by senior officers of the Pakistan Navy along with officials of the Turkey Consulate.

During the stay at port, the Commanding Officer of the Turkish Ship called on Commander Pakistan Fleet and matters of mutual interest & bilateral collaboration were discussed.

Syria Urges Closer Cultural Ties with Iran



TEHRAN (Tasnim) – Lauding the perfect relations between Damascus and Tehran, a Syrian presidential adviser called for closer cultural cooperation with Iran, particularly in the fields relating to the women's affairs.

Syrian president's political and media adviser Bouthaina Shaaban, who has visited Iran to attend the 1st International Congress for the Women of Influence, met with Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian in Tehran on Saturday.

She described Iran-Syria ties as excellent and stressed the need to pay attention to different fields of cooperation between the two nations, including culture and women.

The Syrian adviser also described the successful congress on women as positive and praised the Islamic Republic's initiative and its progress in the field of women's empowerment.

For his part, Amirabdollahian described the ties between the two countries as strategic and multi-faceted, and said the relations continue to make progress in different spheres thanks to the resolve of the two countries' top authorities.

The two officials also exchanged views on the latest developments in the bilateral ties, the situation in the region, and cooperation among neighborly countries.

Iran Nearly Self-Sufficient in Shrimp Farming

TEHRAN (MNA) - Iran is 98 percent self-sufficient in the production of equipment, larvae, and the feed used in shrimp farming, Deputy Head of Iran's Fisheries Organization (IFO) Mehdi Shakouri said.

According to Shakouri, Iranian shrimp farmers have managed to produce 61,000 tons of shrimp in the current Iranian calendar year (ends on March 20), which is five percent more than the figure for the previous year.

He said this year over 5.5 billion shrimp larvae were produced in the country and more than 90,000 tons of feed was also produced by domestic producers, Mehr News Agency reported.

West's War on Iran Doomed to Failure

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Foreign Ministry Spokesman Nasser Kanaani has underlined that the current hybrid warfare against Iran is doomed to fail as in the past.

"Demonstrations, protests, clashes and violence in Paris, London and Tel Aviv! But their media speak of protests in Iran, which faded over a month ago despite all Western attempts to ignite the protests, fuel them and keep them up," Kanaani wrote in a Twitter thread on Sunday.

"The West's ongoing cognitive and hybrid warfare against Iran is the continuation of their military, economic, political and psychological campaign, and it is doomed to failure just like the past."

The European Parliament on January 19 passed a resolution that calls on the European Union to put the IRGC on its terror list and expand its sanctions list to all foundations linked to the Iranian military organization.

VP Terms European Parliament Reckless Act as Violation of Int'l Law

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Vice-President for Political Affairs Mohammad Dehqan said that blacklisting the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) is against the provisions of international law and violates the political independence and national sovereignty of the Islamic Republic of Iran, which creates international responsibility for the European Union.

Designating the IRGC as a terrorist organization by the European Parliament, which is recognized in Article 150 of the Iranian Constitution as the official military force, is considered as blindly following the policies of the United States and disrespecting the principles of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic Iran, Dehqan said.

He added that Europe's cooperation with Washington's policies has turned this continent into a battlefield, which is unprecedented since World War II.

Blacklisting the IRGC is contrary to the provisions of international law and violates the political independence and national sovereignty of the Islamic Republic of Iran and creates international responsibility for the European Union, he stated.

He referred to the IRGC's role in safeguarding the region and fighting terrorist groups, saying that the IRGC is the flag bearer of fighting terrorism in the region by observing international law.

The Iranian government and people will never forget the failure of the European countries to fulfill their JCPOA commitments, he said.

Part of today's problems of the Iranian people is caused by European countries following the United States in re-imposing unilateral sanctions against the Iranian nation, he added.

He stressed the fact that the European Parliament's act is against the fundamental principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries.

8.7m Tons of Commodities Traded on IME Last Month

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Iran Mercantile Exchange (IME) in last Iranian month of Dey witnessed trade of 8,776,034

tons of commodities and 28,455 vehicles with a total trading value of more than \$3b on its physical market, logging growths of 4.1% in value of trades compared with the month before that.

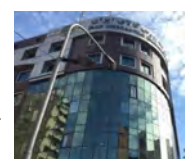
According to a report by the IME's International Affairs and PR, the exchange saw on both domestic and export pits of its oil and petrochemical trading floor, trade of 1,589,743 tons of commodities valued at more than \$911m.

The IME's customers purchased on this floor 377,000 tons of vacuum bottom, 508,989 tons of bitumen, 383,683 tons of polymeric products, 144,560 tons of chemicals, 129,100 tons of lube cut, 20,535 tons of sulfur, 21,552 tons of oil, 6,524 tons of petroleum products, 560 tons of insulation and 740 tons of feedstocks.

Moreover, the exchange saw trade of 7,017,408 tons of commodities and 28,455 vehicles worth more than 2 billion USD on its metals and minerals trading floor.

Items traded on this floor included 4,071,313 tons of cement, 1,173,000 tons of iron ore, 1,483,512 tons of steel, 262,075 tons of zinc, 69,325 tons of aluminum, 42,000 tons of sponge iron, 30,178 tons of copper, 2,000 tons of coke, 800 tons of molybdenum concentrate, 550 tons of lead, 42 tons of precious metals concentrate and 45 kg of gold bars.

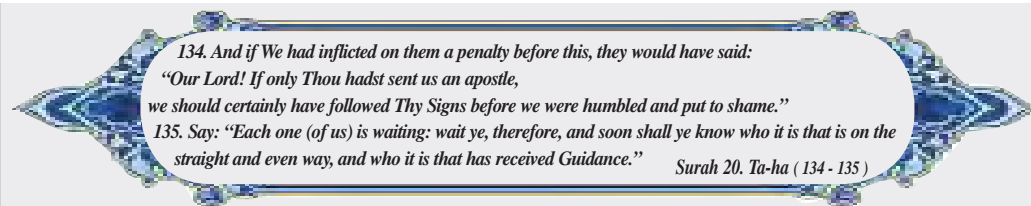
Last was the IME's side market on which the exchange traded 168,882 tons of commodities





PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	12:16
■ Evening (Maghreb)	17:41
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	05:42
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	07:09



Iran's FTA With EAEU To Be Operationalized In September

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Head of Iran's Trade Promotion Organization (TPO) Alireza Peyman-Pak says member states of Eurasia in the small and medium industries like apparel, food industries, parts and equipment, medical equipment and medicines do not have brands but they are strong in other fields like crude oil, basic goods, coke, sheet and iron ore and Iran can take advantage in these fields.

Speaking to ILNA, Peyman-Pak pointed to the details of Iran's free trade agreement (FTA) with EAEU and said that 90% of the goods are in the green line and tariffs of these goods which are around 8,000 items is also zero and tariffs are levied on only 10% of the goods as usual.

He added that Russians levied more tariffs on Iranian goods, adding that in the past year different sections of the Ministry of Industry, Mine and Trade held several specialized meeting and the ministry tried to involve the private sector in this field.

Emphasizing the role playing of Iran in small industries of Eurasia, he said that Iran can take advantage of strong points of these countries like in iron ore, coke and basic goods.

Peyman-Pak went on to say that Eurasian member states import some \$500b of goods annually and Iran has advantages in all fields which are required by Eurasian states, and on the whole a good market is ahead of Iranians and Iran can provided required raw materials with good prices from those countries in the sanctions era.



He noted that the free trade agreement has been signed by the ministries of EAEU states and it needs approval of their governments and parliaments and it will then come into effect in September 2023.

Meanwhile deputy head of Iran-Russia Joint Chamber of Commerce Mr. Kambiz Mirkarimi pointed to the agreement between Iran and EAEU and said that Iran can compete in the Eurasian markets because tariffs for 90% of goods are almost zero and it reduces the cost of trade for Iranians.

He went on to say that it is expected the trade volume between Iran and Russia to reach \$5b by the yearend (mid-March) and this is possible the trade volume to hit \$10b in 3 to 4 years provided that there will be no disrupt in the current trend of trade between the two states.

He then pointed to the necessity of developing infrastructures of transportation in Iran and said that if Iran wants to broaden trade in the region, it should provide facilities for developing transportation and it needs more investment in this field.

Mirkarimi added that in 2019, the trade volume between Iran and Russia was around \$270m but with gradual tariff, Iran experienced 61% growth in exports in 2020 and it reached \$473m and even the pandemic was unable to stop this growth and expressed hope by the year end a new record would be registered in trade between Iran and Russia.

Hand-Woven Carpet Output Up By Over 46% in March-December

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's production of hand-woven carpets rose significantly in the nine months to late December last year, according to figures by Iran National Carpet Center (INCC).

INCC's head Farahnaz Rafe' said on Saturday that weavers across Iran had churned out a total of nearly 2.266 million square meters of Persian rugs and carpets in March-December last year, up 46.8% from the same period in 2021.

Rafe' did not elaborate on figures related to carpet export from Iran over the nine months to late December.

However, reports have suggested that demand for Iranian carpets in international markets has increased steadily over the past two years mainly because of devaluation in Iranian currency rial, which has made exports more lucrative, and also because of increased government support for carpet weavers and exporters.

Carpet exports from Iran had dropped to historic lows after the United States imposed sanctions on the country in 2018.

That comes as hand-woven carpet was once a main export earner for Iran besides crude and oil products. Annual carpet exports had reached a record of nearly \$700 million in 1997, amounting to nearly a fifth of the total non-oil exports from Iran over that year.

In a recent decision to encourage more exports, the government eased a requirement for carpet exporters to return their hard currency proceeds to the country within a short period of time.

Rafe' said the INCC will continue to provide support to the hand-woven carpet sector in Iran to help boost exports and to create more jobs in the country.

Iran Export to India Rises 6% in 9 Months

TEHRAN (MNA) - The value of Iran's export to India increased by six percent during the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21-Decemehr 21, 2022), as compared to the same period of time in the past year, according to the data released by the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA).

IRICA data put Iran's worth of export to India at \$1.474 billion in the nine-month period of this year, while the figure was \$1.397 billion in the same time span of the previous year.

As reported, petroleum products and fruits have been the major goods imported by India from Iran in the said months.

In late May 2022, Iranian ambassador to India said that Iran and India are trying to diversify the channels of payments to expand the bilateral trade.

In an exclusive interview with Financial Express Online, Ali Chegeni said, "We are trying to

diversify the channels of payments and accordingly wish to extend and expand an already existing mechanism in order to cover all of the goods and services including all of non-oil goods and to achieve this".

During the past two years, because of Covid restrictions, we pursue the issue via virtual dialogues and currently our officials are following the matter through the exchange of delegations, the envoy stated at the time.

"We want to develop our economic and trade relations beyond energy and petrochemical products. Since due to the complementarity of Iran and India economies, an extensive range of non-oil trade exists between two sides including trade on goods and services, investment, tourism, education and ... which may pave the way for multiplying our economic relations ten times more than current relations in mid and long terms", Chegeni said.



Iran, Tajikistan Sign MoU on Pharmaceutical Cooperation

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iran and Tajikistan on Saturday signed a memorandum of understanding to cooperate in pharmaceutical industry.

According to the Iranian Health Ministry, the MoU was signed in the presence of the ministry's Director General of International Affairs Mohammad Hossein Niknam, the Tajik ambassador to Tehran, and a delegation from Tajikistan.

The ministry did not provide further details about the MoU.

Niknam said that the document was signed following visits by the Tajik delegation to Iranian pharmaceutical companies and centers which were praised by the Tajik side for the progress they have made.

He also said that Iran and Tajikistan have good political relations, with grounds already prepared to expand mutual cooperation in other sectors.

Parts Supply Has Saved 650m Euros in Steel Industry

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The CEO of Khorasan Steel Complex Company (KSC) emphasized the significance of holding the Fourth National Festival and Exhibition of Iran Steel in the field of self-sufficiency in supply of the required parts of steel industry and said in supply of parts, some 650m euros has been saved.



Speaking an interview, Kasra Ghafoori said that with signing over 27 MoUs with domestic producers during the festival, some 650m euros has been saved in the national steel industry. He said that unfortunately in the condition which has been imposed against the country, provision of parts and equipment of the steel industry has faced difficulties so focusing on the domestic capabilities of the companies and private sector is important in this field for producers and industrialists.

Ghafoori who is also Vice-Chairman of Iranian Steel Producers Association emphasized that in this condition with the prudence of the association and industrialists they seek self-sufficiency and cutting dependence on foreigners in supply of parts and equipment of iron and steel chain.

He reiterated that the association seeks strengthening bonds with producers, industrialists and consumers, adding that in case this bond gets stronger, the cost of producers will be less. He noted that last year due this cooperation between producers of parts and equipment required by the steel industry, the country could save one billion euros.

Ghafoori went on to say that considering the signed MoUs between big steel companies and companies of iron and steel with domestic producers, the industry will save over 650m euros in the field of supplying parts required in the industry.

He added that unfortunately the current restriction in gas supply, Khorasan Steel Company has faced with fall in production and this restriction will continue by mid-March. He noted that Khorasan Steel Company produces annually 2.5m tons of pellet, 1.6m tons of sponge iron and 1.35m tons of steel ingots, and therefore supply of parts, equipment and energy for continuation of production are very important for this complex.

News Record Set for Final Product Production at IASC



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - A new record for monthly production of heavy rolling section of Iran Alloy Steel Company (IASC) was set with efforts of staff in this unit in last Iranian calendar month of Dey.

According to the public relations of Iran Alloy Steel Company, with endeavors of personnel in the heavy rolling unit of the company and supporting units, the unit could set a new record for monthly production last month.

The report says despite some technical problem and incident and halt in production, the heavy rolling unit of the company could produce 2281 tons more than the production schedule and with producing 9729 tons of final cost production could set an unprecedented record in the heavy rolling unit.

Iran Alloy Steel Company could produce 9729 tons final products in the month of Dey after 8 years which shows 5.8% and the monthly rebar production in the heavy rolling unit with 6.8% growth reached 9709 tons and the monthly production of sixe 120 rebars in this unit with 24.1% growth reached 3634 tons and all of them are new records.

Despite halts for overhaul and some restrictions for energy supply, the heavy rolling unit of the company last month could compensate the lag in its annual production schedule which is itself a great achievement.

Tanzania Opposition Holds First Rally Since Ban Lifted

MWANZA (Dispatches) - Tanzania's main opposition party held its first mass rally since the lifting of a ban imposed in 2016, raising hopes the government is committed to increased political freedom in the East African nation.

"It was not easy after those seven years of banning political meetings," the director for communications and foreign affairs for the Chadema party, Jon Mrema, told cheering supporters.

Thousands of Chadema supporters gathered at the Furahisha grounds in the lakeside city of Mwanza, draped in the party's blue, red and white colours. "We have been silent for almost seven years but finally, our right is restored and we are ready to move ahead," Mwanza resident and party supporter Mary Dismas said.



Lula Heads to Argentina On First Trip Abroad

BRASILIA (Dispatches) - Just weeks after taking office and the major violence that ensued in the capital Brasilia, leftist President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva was making his first trip abroad Sunday, swiftly putting in action his plan to return Brazil to the international stage.

Lula will head to Argentina, the customary first stop for Brazilian presidents. Beyond tradition, however, the trip will also allow him to meet with a faithful ally, President Alberto Fernandez, as well as regional counterparts at the summit of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC). "Brazil is back," Lula vowed on the evening of his October 30 victory against far-right president Jair Bolsonaro, whose four years in office were marked by international isolation.



Anti-Turkey Demo in Sweden Deepens Tensions Over NATO Bid



ISTANBUL (Dispatches) - Turkey cancelled a visit by the Swedish defense minister over a demonstration by an anti-Islamic extremist in Stockholm, sparking a fresh crisis over Ankara's blocking of Sweden's bid to join the NATO military alliance.

Turkish officials denounced the permission granted to Rasmus Paludan, a right-wing Swedish-Danish politician, to stage a protest Saturday in front of its embassy in the Swedish capital.

After a diatribe of almost an hour in which he attacked Islam and immigration in Sweden, Paludan set fire to the Koran with a lighter.

"If you don't think there should be freedom of expression, you have to live somewhere else," he told the crowd.

Last year, Paludan's announcement of a Quran-burning "tour" during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan sparked riots across Sweden.

A day after summoning the Swedish ambassador over Paludan's latest demo, Ankara said it had called off the visit by Defense Minister Pal Jonson for January 27, aimed at overcoming Turkey's objections to Sweden's NATO bid.

The meeting "has lost its significance and meaning, so we cancelled," Turkish Defence Minister Hulusi Akar said.

Jonson said the decision to postpone was made jointly with Akar on Friday at the U.S. military base in Ramstein, Germany, where Ukraine's allies were meeting to discuss further weapon supplies for Kyiv.

"Our relations with Turkey are very important to Sweden, and we look forward to continuing the dialogue on common security and defense issues at a later date," Jonson tweeted.

Swedish Foreign Minister Tobias Billstrom also blasted Paludan's protest.

"Islamophobic provocations are appalling," he said. "Sweden has a far-reaching freedom of expression, but it does not imply that the Swedish government, or myself, support the opinions expressed."

Paludan's protest was held under heavy police protection, according to an AFP journalist, with around 100 people -- including a large number of reporters -- gathered near the Turkish embassy in Stockholm.

Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu vented fury at Swedish authorities' failure to ban the protest.

"It's a racist action, it's not about freedom of expression," he said.

A small pro-Turkey demonstration also took place, on the other side of the embassy, while a pro-Kurdish rally called by the Rojava Committee of Sweden and others also took place in Stockholm, drawing several hundred people.

Swedish police gave their authorisation for the demo after determining it fell under the country's liberal freedom of speech laws.

But Turkish presidential spokesman Ibrahim Kalin said allowing the protest was "encouraging hate crimes and Islamophobia".

"The attack on sacred values is not freedom but modern barbarism," he tweeted on Saturday.

Devlet Bahceli, head of the nationalist MHP party that is the junior partner in President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's governing coalition, vowed that "Sweden's NATO membership will not be approved by the parliament".

Turkey had already summoned Sweden's ambassador on Friday to "condemn this provocative action which is clearly a hate crime -- in strongest terms," a diplomatic source said.

It was the second time this month that Sweden's Turkey envoy had been summoned.

On January 12, he was called to answer for a video posted by the pro-Kurd Rojava Committee of Sweden that depicted Erdogan swinging by his legs from a rope.

U.S. Officials Advise Ukraine To Wait on Offensive

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - Senior U.S. officials are advising Ukraine to hold off on launching a major offensive against Russian forces until the latest supply of U.S. weaponry is in place and training has been provided, a senior Biden administration official said.

The official, speaking to a small group of reporters on condition of anonymity, said the United States was holding fast to its decision not to provide Abrams tanks to Ukraine at this time, amid a controversy with Germany over tanks.

President Joe Biden, who approved a new \$2.5 billion weapons package for Ukraine this week, told reporters at the White House, "Ukraine is going to get all the help they need," when asked if he supports Poland's intention to send German-made Leopard tanks to Ukraine.

U.S. talks with Ukraine on any counter-offensive have been in the context of ensuring the Ukrainians devote enough time first to training on the latest weaponry provided by the United States, the official said.



Peru Anti-Gov't Protests Force Closure of Machu Picchu

LIMA (Dispatches) - Peru has closed its famed tourist site Machu Picchu amid anti-government protests, its Ministry of Culture said Saturday, with hundreds of tourists having been left stranded near the Inca citadel amid deadly unrest.

Demonstrations demanding the resignation of Peruvian President Dina Boluarte have been ongoing since early December, leaving 46 people dead and prompting the government to impose a state of emergency in violence-hit areas.

Authorities announced Saturday yet another protester had died following demonstrations in the country's south, with the victim arriving already deceased at the local hospital in the town of Puno.

Prior to Saturday's closing of Machu Picchu, rail services to the site had already been suspended due to the track being damaged by demonstrators.

At least 400 people, including 300 foreigners, are stranded at the foot of the site, in the town of Aguas Calientes, and pleading to be evacuated.

"The closure of the Inca trails network and the Machu Picchu citadel has been ordered due to the social situation and to preserve the safety of visitors," the Ministry of Culture said in its Saturday statement.

"We don't know if a train will pick us up. All the tourists here are queuing to register" for evacuation, Chilean tourist Alem Lopez told AFP Friday.

Tourists "cannot leave because the railway has been damaged in different places," Tourism Minister Luis Fernando Helguero said on Friday.

"Some tourists have chosen to walk to Piscacucho, but that takes six hours or more and very few people can do it," he said.

Piscacucho is the closest village to Machu Picchu connected to the roads. In December, several hundred stranded tourists were evacuated from near the site.

Protesters are trying to keep up pressure on the Peruvian government, defying a state of emergency that now covers almost one-third of the country. Among the 46 dead, 45 were protesters and one was a police officer.

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Hipkins Faces A Tough Road As New Zealand's PM

WELLINGTON (Dispatches) - Chris Hipkins, set to become New Zealand's prime minister, built a reputation for competence in tackling COVID-19, though he acknowledges some mistakes in handling the pandemic and faces a tough battle to retain power in an October general election.

Known as "Chippy", the former COVID minister is a close ally of Jacinda Ardern, who shocked the nation on Thursday by announcing she was resigning.

Hipkins, 44, expected to succeed Ardern as Labour leader on Sunday after no other candidates emerged, faces a stern test upon taking power, with Labour trailing the opposition in opinion polls and the country expected to fall into recession next quarter before a general election on Oct. 14.

Often brought in by Ardern when other cabinet colleagues were struggling with their portfolios, Hipkins pledged on Saturday to continue her governing style while putting his own stamp on running the country.

"Jacinda provided calm, stable, reassuring leadership, which I hope to continue to do. We are different people though, and I'm sure that people will see that," Hipkins told a news conference on Saturday after emerging as the only candidate to lead the ruling Labour Party.

First elected to parliament in 2008, Hipkins became a household name fronting the government's response to the pandemic. He was appointed health minister in July 2020 before becoming the COVID response minister at the end of the year.

Under Ardern's "go hard, go early" approach to COVID, the island nation of 5 million was among the first to close borders.

The policy was hailed around the world for keeping New Zealanders virus-free through the first half of 2021, but the public tired of the zero-tolerance strategy, which included a nationwide lockdown over a single infection.

Criticism over the strict lockdowns grew as officials struggled to control a Delta outbreak from August 2021. Hipkins later said quarantine measures should have been scaled back earlier.



China Reopening? Good for Growth, But Tread With Caution

DAVOS (Dispatches) - China's declaration that it is open for business was welcomed by attendees at the World Economic (WEF) as a likely boost to global growth, though many also expressed caution over how it could drive up global COVID-19 cases and inflation.

The topic of China's reopening came up at several discussions, both public and private, as China's economic tsar Liu He made a big pitch for foreign investment in the ski resort of Davos on the first visit abroad by a high-level Chinese delegation since Beijing shelved its three-year-old zero-COVID policy.

While Liu said that people in China were recovering faster than he had expected from COVID-19 after the dismantling of curbs unleashed a giant wave of infections, many executives with businesses in China said they were still forecasting a bumpy few months before things start to get better.

Joe Kaeser, chairman of Siemens Energy, said during an interview with the Reuters Global Markets Forum that the upcoming Lunar New Year week-long holiday, when millions of people are expected to travel home to see family, would be a "super spreader" event.

"The bad news is that there will be a lot of pain and likely fatalities," he said. "The good news is that once that is over, come summer or fall, China will be moving to the second phase of reform and opening up... That could certainly help the world also grow and ease the pain of a lot of industrial countries, including Europe."

Among those who warned on the reopening impact's on inflationary pressures were the International Monetary Fund Deputy Managing Director Gita Gopinath and European Central Bank President Christine Lagarde, as well as Larry Fink, the chief executive of the world's largest asset manager BlackRock.

"It is estimated that the Chinese economy can grow 5% or 6% in the third and fourth quarter. If that's the case, are they going to demand an extra 500,000 or million barrels of oil?" Fink said at an event on the forum's sidelines.

"At the same time, we're estimating a mild recession in Europe and the United States that offset it. If not, the trends would say we're going to have elevated energy prices."

Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, director-general of the World Trade Organization, pointed out that the reopening could help supply chains work better and also boost consumer demand. "But on the other hand we also have to see what the opening up impact is on the pandemic," she told a news briefing.

Adjacent to the discussions on China's reopening was what it could mean for its existing tensions with the United States over issues such as technology, trade and Taiwan, which several WEF delegates expressed concern over.

At one panel, Bank of Japan Governor Haruhiko Kuroda posed a question from the audience to Singapore Senior Minister Tharman Shanmugaratnam on his view on the medium-term future on the economic relationship between the United States and China, commenting that one of his main worries was global fragmentation.

"The current trajectory of that relationship, particularly with regards to the types of restrictions on economic interdependence, and the scale of those restrictions, we're going to end up with not just a zero-sum situation, but a negative-sum situation," Shanmugaratnam responded.

"I think both the U.S. and China will be hurt, which doesn't just mean the national entities but workforces, people will be hurt."

Mark Rutte, Prime Minister of the Netherlands which has been drawn into a tussle over semiconductors and related supply chains between Beijing and Washington, appealed to his fellow European Union members to do more on coordinating the bloc's policy towards China.



Leopard: Mighty German Tank Long Sought by Ukraine

BERLIN (Dispatches) - Germany's Leopard, the powerful tank sought by Kyiv to push forward against Moscow, could have a "significant" impact in the conflict.

But Ukrainian troops would need to be quickly trained up to use the sometimes complex equipment, and it would also need to be maintained.

While European allies have sent Ukraine hundreds of modernized Soviet tanks since Russia's invasion, Kyiv has pleaded for the more advanced Western armaments to bolster its fightback against Moscow.

The German-made Leopard 2 is seen as one of the best-performing models worldwide and is widely used across Europe, meaning spare parts and ammunition could be easily obtained.

First produced in the late 1970s to replace the American M48 Patton and later the later Leopard 1, the Leopard 2 is renowned for its firepower, mobility and sturdy armour.

As German daily Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung put it, the Leopard 2 is "sort of like the (Volkswagen) Golf of the German tank industry: an all-rounder with world recognition".

About 3,500 of the 60-ton battle tanks, developed by German weapons manufacturer Krauss-Maffei Wegmann (KMW), have been produced.

They are armed with a 120 mm smoothbore cannon, can engage the enemy while on the move and can travel at speeds of up to 70 kilometres (44 miles) per hour, with a range of 450 km.

The tanks provide "all-round protection" for troops from threats such as mines, anti-tank fire and IEDs, according to the manufacturer.

They are also equipped with technology that allows their four-member crews to locate and target enemies at long range.

The last four models produced are still in use, from the 2A4 to the 2A7.

How quickly could they arrive?

Germany has been reluctant to provide the tanks. And while some countries that have bought the tanks from Germany are willing to send them to Kyiv, they need German approval for the transfer.

Poland has said it is willing to send 14 Leopard 2 tanks to Kyiv as part of an international coalition, while Finland has said it is not opposed to shipments.

According to experts, the best approach would be for all countries willing to contribute to send 2A4 tanks. "The same model is very important for training and logistical reasons," General Bruno Kasdorf, a former German army inspector, told media group RND.

It is not clear how quickly they would arrive, however.

German weapons manufacturer Rheinmetall, which supplies the Leopard 2's cannon and electronics and has dozens of older models, has warned it would not be able to deliver its tanks to Ukraine until 2024 because of the need to refurbish and repair them.

Officials also warn that once the tanks arrive, Ukrainian troops would need to be rapidly trained on how to use the equipment, which is much more complex than the Soviet-era tanks they are used to.

That would be while also trying to get up to speed on other new gear set to arrive in Ukraine, including recently pledged French AMX-10 RC light tanks, German Marder infantry vehicles, and Bradley fighting vehicles from the United States.

Experts are nevertheless convinced the Leopards can make a difference.

If Kyiv receives about 100 of them, the effect would be "significant", according to the Britain-based International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS).



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South Korean Exports Fall 2.7% in Jan 1-20 Period

SEOUL (Dispatches) - South Korea's exports for the first 20 days of January fell 2.7% from a year earlier, but the pace of drop was slower than that recorded in December, customs data showed.

In December, South Korean exports fell 9.0% on-year during the first 20 days and declined 9.6% for the full month, as global demand cooled after a wave of aggressive policy tightening to contain inflation.

For the first 20 days of January, exports to China fell 24.4%, whereas shipments to the United States rose 18.1%, the Korea Customs Service data showed. Imports over Jan. 1-20 rose by 9.3% on-year, bringing South Korea's trade deficit to \$10.26 billion over the period.



Turkey Set to Unveil Most Inclusive Debt Restructuring Package Ever

ANKARA (Dispatches) - Turkish citizens are set to be offered the most comprehensive restructuring package yet, reports said, allowing them to restructure various types of debt, from water bills to insurance premiums.

The reports by broadcaster NTV and other Turkish media outlets come as Turkey heads for parliamentary and presidential elections, which President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan indicated could be held on May 14 after he said the date should be brought forward from June 18.

The government tripled the minimum wage in the past year, raised state salaries and hiked pensions for millions to ease the economic pressure on households, driven by stubborn inflation.

Consumer prices in Turkey have moderated over the last two months after hitting a 24-year high in October and inflation in December decelerated at its steepest pace in more than a quarter century.

Annual inflation fell to 64.27% last month from the 84.39% reported in November. The decline was driven mainly by the so-called favorable base effect and marked a second straight fall after inflation hit a peak of 85.5% in October. The decline is expected to become more pronounced in the first quarter of this year and is expected to drop to as low as 40% by mid-2023.

The minimum wage has been increased by 55% for 2023 and Erdoğan also announced a measure that would allow more than 2 million people to retire early. He said the minimum wage may be hiked again throughout the year if necessary.

The new debt restructuring package will be the "most inclusive in the history of the republic," NTV reported, without citing a source, adding that it will be discussed at a Cabinet meeting on Monday.

The package will cover debt before Dec. 31, 2022, including tax debt, insurance premiums, legal and administrative fines, student housing loans, motorized vehicle tax, traffic tickets, unpaid road tolls, customs fines and others, NTV said.

It said those who are indebted to municipalities or have unpaid water bills or student loans would also be included in the package.

Large parts of the interest on the principal loans and interest due to delayed payment will be erased, and people will have the option to pay upfront or use a payment plan.

Those who pay upfront could have 90% of their debt erased, while debt under a certain amount may be erased altogether, NTV added.

It said that the package is expected to become law by mid-February at the latest.

The government has endorsed low interest rates to boost exports, production and investment and create new jobs as part of an economic program, eventually aimed at lowering inflation by flipping the country's chronic current account deficit to a surplus.

Last year, the country's central bank slashed its benchmark policy rate by 5 percentage points to 9%, citing the signs of economic slowdown. It held the key policy rate unchanged in its first meeting of the year on Thursday.

Erdoğan says high rates cause inflation and has said the government's new economic model is expected to yield results in the new year.

Foreign Tourists Key to Japan's Economic Recovery From Pandemic

TOKYO (Dispatches) - Overseas tourists will likely play a key role in the future health of the Japanese economy, which has lagged other major nations in recovering from the effects of the coronavirus pandemic.

Moves are already afoot in the tourism industry to make up lost ground. A number of luxury hotels are slated to open to accommodate wealthy foreign tourists.

In April this year, Bulgari Hotel Tokyo — an affiliate of the Italian luxury jewelry brand — will open on the 39th-45th floors of Tokyo Midtown Yaesu, a high-rise building near Tokyo Station. The hotel is expected to be one of the most expensive accommodations in the nation and will target wealthy individuals from Japan and abroad.

Mitsui Fudosan Co., which operates the building, has seen its hotel-related income recover to about 90% of the pre-pandemic level. "Travel demand from Europe and the United States has been tremendous," said company president Masanobu Komoda. "It's more than enough to compensate for the decline in business travel."

Orix Group, meanwhile, will open Karaku, a luxury ryokan Japanese-style inn with an open-air bath in each guest room, in Atami, Shizuoka Prefecture, by the end of the year. Another of the group's ryokan in Hakone, Kanagawa Prefecture, is doing well — despite overnight accommodation costing more than ¥100,000 during the peak season — with 20% of the guests hailing from overseas, according to the operator. "More and more foreign guests are looking forward to experiencing Japanese-style luxury," said Naruo Fujii, general manager of the Hakone ryokan.

Some 31.88 million people visited Japan in 2019, spending about ¥4.8 trillion, or about 1% of the nation's gross domestic product.



Setting Price Caps on Russian Refined Oil Products Complicated

DAKAR (Dispatches) - Western countries are working to structure price caps on Russian refined petroleum products to ensure continued flow of Russian diesel, but the markets are complicated and there is a chance things do not go to plan, Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said.

Group of Seven countries and Australia implemented a price cap on Russian oil Dec. 5, banning the use of Western-supplied maritime insurance, finance and other services for cargoes priced above \$60 per barrel.

They are now finalizing two separate price caps on Russian refined petroleum products, such as diesel and fuel oil, that are due to take effect on Feb. 5 along with a European Union ban on diesel imports, Yellen told reporters in Dakar, Senegal. One will cover high-value products typically sold at a premium to crude, while another will apply to low-value products like fuel oil, she said told reporters traveling with her in Africa.

Yellen said setting the new price caps had proven "more complicated" than for crude, given the range of different refined products and price structures, and the importance of ensuring continued supplies of Russian diesel to the market.

"It's more complicated, but we've been working hard to figure out how to achieve the same objectives," as with the broader cap on Russian crude, she said.

"You know, there's always the potential that things may not go according to plan but we've studied these markets very carefully and we believe that we're going to come out with a set of caps that will achieve the same things that we've achieved with crude so far," she said, adding that adjustments could still be made over time.

No One Ready to Give Funds to Pakistan

LAHORE (Dispatches) - Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Chairman Imran Khan said that struggle to uphold the rule of law is 'jihad'.

While addressing a rule of law conference, Khan urged the legal community to play their due role for rule of law and justice in the society. He accused Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif-led-government of 'deliberately generating crisis' in Pakistan. Pakistan never experienced a bigger economic crisis than the one it is experiencing right now, he added.

He said no economic expert can fill the gap of devaluation of the rupee except the investment of overseas Pakistanis. The IMF should extend loans only when its conditions would be met, he suggested. He, however, added that inflation would further rise in the country if the conditions of international lender are accepted.

"The prices of petrol and diesel will surge if the Pakistani currency is devalued against the US dollar," Khan said the world believed that Pakistan was heading towards a Sri Lanka-like situation. "No one is ready to give funds to Pakistan."

Until the 90s, Pakistan's economic indicators remained largely positive in the subcontinent, the PTI leader said, adding no one could have imagined that the 'country's economy could fall to such a level'.

Referring to the deepening economic crisis, Khan said the country's reserves had fallen to a historic low. "We do not have money to open the letters of credits (LCs)." He also criticized the PM for trying to get the friendship of Indian PM Modi who is involved in the oppression of innocent people in occupied Kashmir. "Name any other world leader who secured NRO after looting the country." He claimed Gen Musharraf gave them NRO-I and later ex-COAS Gen Bajwa gave them NRO-II.

Imran also blamed former army chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa for the enormous economic and political challenges facing the country, claiming crises started brewing the day his government was overthrown. "Notorious dacoits were brought to power under a conspiracy and given key posts in the country."

He also said amendments were made to NAB laws to end cases against the rulers. Discussing the role of 'deep state', Khan said there exist more powerful people than the government in Pakistan and was why he failed to get his FIR registered despite having the government in Punjab.

Khan once again criticised the state machinery for the brutal torture on PTI Senator Azam Khan Swati in front of his grandsons and granddaughters. He added that the senior lawmaker was humiliated just because of "one tweet".

Saudi Arabia Stays Top Crude Supplier to China in 2022

LONDON (Dispatches) - Russia remained China's second-largest source of crude oil in 2022, following repeat top supplier Saudi Arabia, as Chinese refiners snapped up low-cost Russian barrels while Western countries shunned them after the Ukraine crisis.

China's crude oil imports from Russia jumped 8% in 2022 from a year earlier to 86.25 million tonnes, equivalent to 1.72 million barrels per day (bpd), data from the General Administration of Customs showed.

Russian crude has been trading in widening discounts to global oil benchmarks following Western sanctions over its invasion of Ukraine, which the Kremlin has called a "special operation".

China, which refused to condemn the attack, cranked up procurement of Russian barrels and has largely ignored the sanctions imposed by Western nations on seaborne Russian crude from Dec. 5.

In December, it brought in 6.47 million tons of crude oil from Russia, or 1.52 million bpd, compared to 1.7 million bpd in the same period in 2021.

China's state-backed refiners have wound down the purchase of Russian oil since November, but the independent refineries have continued buying from intermediary traders who arrange shipping and insurance, shielding them from the risk of secondary sanctions.

Saudi Arabia shipped a total of 87.49 million tons of crude to China in 2022, equivalent to 1.75 million bpd, customs data showed, on par with the level in 2021.

China's state-backed oil refiners largely fulfilled their term contracts with Saudi in 2022 despite the sluggish domestic demand.

Saudi Arabia is expected to remain a key, if not the dominant, crude exporter to China after President Xi Jinping's visit to Riyadh in December, where he told Gulf leaders that China would work to buy oil in Chinese yuan, rather than U.S. dollars.



Customs data also showed that crude imports from Malaysia almost doubled in 2022 to 35.68 million tons. The Southeast Asian country is a transfer point for sanctioned shipments originating from Iran and Venezuela.

No Venezuelan crude imports were recorded by Chinese customs throughout 2022 and a total of 780,392 tons of crude oil from Iran arrived in China.

China is Iran's biggest oil buyer, but most Iranian exports are rebranded as crude from other countries to evade U.S. sanctions.

Vortexa, a ship tracking specialist, assessed that China's December imports of Iranian oil rose to a record of 1.2 million bpd, up 130% from a year earlier.

Crude shipments from the United States reached 7.89 million tons in 2022, down 31% year-on-year.

India First Nation to Assure IMF of Efforts To Aid Sri Lanka Recovery



NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - Last Monday, India became the first country to hand-over its letter of support for financing and debt restructuring of Sri Lanka to the International Monetary Fund in a sign of its continued support for the island nation's economic recovery. In 2022, India provided \$4.5 billion in assistance to Colombo to tide over its dire economic situation.

While China is expected to hand over its letter of support to IMF on Sunday, New Delhi handed over its support letter to IMF on January 16, four days before External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar landed in Colombo to meet Sri Lanka's political leadership on January 20. During his meetings with Sri Lankan leaders including President Ranil Wickremesinghe, Jaishankar made it clear that India stands with its neighbour at a time of need and is prepared to go the extra mile if the need arises. The minister said his visit to Sri Lanka was a demonstration of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's neighborhood-first policy.

In the letter of support to IMF, addressed to IMF Managing Director Ms. Kristalina Georgieva, India's finance ministry acknowledged Sri Lanka's deeply unsustainable debt situation, the country's engagement with creditors to restore debt sustainability, and confirmed its strong support to Colombo's prospective extended finance facility supported program. New Delhi has made it clear that it is committed to supporting Sri Lanka with financing/debt relief consistent with restoring that country's public debt sustainability under the IMF supported program and ensuring that the program is fully financed as projected by the Bretton Woods Institution. The Modi government has conveyed that this financing/debt relief will be provided by the Export Import Bank of India.

Despite the fact that Sri Lanka's economic crisis is partly due to white elephant infrastructure port and airport projects financed by high interest loans from Chinese banks, India has come out first in supporting Colombo, which is battling both economic and political turmoil.

Iran Plans to Host Two International Naval Drills

TEHRAN (MNA) – The Iranian army navy commander said that the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) will be held in Iran’s waters in the next Iranian year, adding that the country plans to hold a search and rescue drill in the Caspian Sea too.

Speaking in an interview with the national Iranian TV, Rear Admiral Shahram Irani said, “For the year 1402 (beginning on March 21, 2023), we

owe an exercise to IONS that we must hold, and this exercise will be held with the participation of the Indian Ocean’s littoral states. We are looking to be able to hold a rescue exercise with the Caspian Sea littoral countries as well.”

“Our other plan is to continue our presence in far seas and any point where the interests of the Islamic Republic of Iran are prioritized, and we must protect it,” the commander said.



Despite India's Economic Growth, Few Jobs and Meager Pay for Urban Youth

FARIDABAD (Dispatches) - Ravi Verma, hired by an electrical parts manufacturing firm early last year as India’s economy surged, was fired in November when the company lost several export orders. He has since remained unemployed, unable to pay back a 100,000 rupee (\$1,224) loan he took to buy a two-wheeler scooter.

Verma is among thousands of Indian workers who lost jobs as the global slowdown hit exports, while the re-entry of nearly 20 million workers into the job market after the pandemic has aggravated the problem.

The rising unemployment in India belies other indicators suggesting the economy is undergoing a healthy rebound from the COVID-19 pandemic. Instead, the surge in people looking for work, many of them rural migrants, raises concerns about consumption and longer term growth prospects.

“I have been looking for a job for two months,” Verma said, looking up from a Hindi language newspaper he was reading at a community center close to his one-room home in the industrial town of Faridabad in northern India.

“I face a risk of loan default if I don’t get a job soon.”

The urban unemployment rate swelled to 10.1% in December, although the total number of jobs in India touched a pre-pandemic level of 410 million, data compiled by Mumbai-based think-tank Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE) showed.

Urban unemployment spiked during the pandemic years, largely because of lockdowns, but before that it hovered between 6%-7%, according to CMIE data. Previously, it reached a high of 11.2% in August, 2016.

India’s rural and urban unemployment and labour participation rate in December 2022 India’s rural and urban unemployment and labour participation rate in December 2022

“Nearly 37 million workers were looking for work in December,” said Mahesh Vyas, managing director of CMIE, citing a rebound in labour force participation rate driven by the return of women workers and rural youth joining the labour market as fears of the pandemic eased.

That was the highest number of unemployed since June, 2021 at the height of the pandemic, he added.

Globally, India remains a “bright spot” amid growing fears of a recession in the United States and Europe, and the economy is projected to grow below 6% in the next financial year starting in April, down from estimated 7% growth in the current fiscal year.

But, hiring in export-dependent manufacturing sectors like engineering, textile and software has slowed as companies face a decline in overseas demand - reflected in falling exports of manufactured goods, down 12.2% year-on-year in December.

For Prime Minister Narendra Modi, unemployment is emerging as a major challenge along with high inflation, and could prove costly in state elections later this year and a general election in mid-2024, analysts said.

“The unemployment problem has become acute,” said Arun Kumar, an economist and a former professor at Delhi’s Jawaharlal Nehru University. He said small businesses - which employ nearly 90% of workers - were shutting down and growth was being led by large companies and services.

Hiring in IT, software, education and retail fell up to 28% in December from a year ago, data compiled by Naukri.com, India’s biggest recruitment consultancy, showed, though it remained resilient in insurance, banking and auto sectors.

The online platform said it saw a near 14% rise in job applicants to around 7.6 million in 2022 from a year earlier.

According to the latest government data, the number of workers joining firms with social security benefits fell for the third month in a row to 0.7 million in October, while the urban labour force participation rate rose to 47.9% in the September quarter, up 1% from a year earlier.



Many young workers say they prefer to wait for skilled jobs they have been trained for, instead of accepting badly paid menial jobs on offer.

This has pushed up unemployment in some states like Haryana, Rajasthan and Bihar to record levels.

In the northern state of Haryana - a manufacturing hub where global companies like Maruti Suzuki are located - the unemployment rate shot up to a historic high of 37.4% in December from around 20% before the pandemic.

“I need at least a 20,000 rupees salary after three years of a course in electronics,” said Anjali Yadav, a female student at a polytechnic college in Faridabad, which is in Haryana.

Factories and firms there were not ready to pay more than 10,000 to 12,000 rupees a month, said Mithlesh Kumar, a trade union leader.

Another job seeker, Uttam Shaili, 22, said that after a two-year course studying to be an electronics mechanic he would prefer to “stay at home” than accept a low paying job.

Economists said the worsening employment scenario could affect consumer demand, drag private investments and hurt growth prospects.

“The loss of jobs in IT and some manufacturing sectors has hit consumer sentiment, and would hit household spending and business investments,” said Sunil Sinha, an economist at India Ratings, the Indian arm of Fitch Ratings agency.

He said there was a growing fear of further job losses as companies face sluggish demand in the domestic and overseas markets.

Rahul Gandhi, the leader of the main opposition Congress party, has focused on unemployment, high prices and what he says are Modi’s divisive politics in a cross-country march on foot.

Gopal Krishna Agarwal, the economic affairs spokesman of Modi’s Bharatiya Janata Party said instead of offering “helicopter money” to unemployed youth, the Modi government has followed a policy of generating jobs by pushing economic growth and supporting manufacturing.

“The economy is on a recovery path and inflation has moderated,” he said. “The annual budget next month will continue the policy of stimulating the economy through incentives for more sectors.”

Critics said this may not work in the short term.

Incentives given to a few corporates are not creating enough jobs, said Kumar, the economist, adding the economy was in a “K-shaped” recovery - growth in big companies accompanied by a decline in the number of small firms and jobs.

One Nation...

FROM PAGE 1

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.”

If EU countries to label the IRGC as a terrorist organization because of its endeavors for fighting with Daesh and terrorism, they are better first to designate the U.S. and Israel which are the main terrorists in the world that have created and supported many terrorist groups like Daesh or have turned into a killing machine.

EU should know this fact that it is unable to create any crack in the Islamic Republic of Iran as the nation is united and fully supports the IRGC which serves as the guardian of the country and Islamic establishment, and neither EU nor the U.S. and Israel are unable to make people turn their back to the IRGC because they will know that aliens never wish happiness and success for the country and for this reason the IRGC is targeted by the enemies because it is a thorn in the eyes of the West and all these noises are just for weakening the Islamic Revolution which will never be materialized because the Islamic Republic is like a strong tree with a deep root and no wind like the West can shake it and EU is better to seek another plot than designating IRGC as terrorist organization.

Today is a decisive day in the relation between Iran and Europe and the ball is now on the court of EU to play whether it wants good ties with Tehran or they want to become enemies of Tehran.



General Outlines of...

FROM PAGE 1

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

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

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

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

Meanwhile addressing the lawmakers, President Raisi said that the IRGC plays a key role in combating the terrorists.

The President made the remarks in the Iranian parliament in reaction to the recent move by the European Union to designate the IRGC as a “terrorist” entity.

Any anti-IRGC moves are doomed to failure, he said. Like the IRGC, no armed forces have combatted the terrorists, he further noted.

Regional armies admit the reality, he said, noting that any measures against the IRGC, like the other miscalculations of Europe, are doomed to failure.

The region would witness a different situation if the IRGC and martyr Soleimani were not on the scene, he underlined.

Big Oil Comes in From the Cold on Energy Transition

DAVOS (Dispatches) - A different type of energy transition has taken place at this year’s World Economic Forum (WEF) meeting.

Unlike 2021’s COP26 climate conference in Glasgow, where oil and gas executives were personae non gratae, fossil fuel chiefs and renewable energy bosses sat cheek by jowl in Davos.

Activists like Greta Thunberg don’t like it. But some in the solar, wind and hydro industry are warming to the carbon crowd.

Tejpreet Chopra, who heads one of India’s clean energy firms Bharat Light and Power, was surprised to be invited to a side-event with more than 60 top oil and gas executives.

“The course of this transition will have to take a more inclusive approach until we all get to the finish line of where we all want to be,” he told Reuters.

This shift, partly triggered by the energy crunch after Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, has been front and centre in Davos, where United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres dedicated his speech to it.

As soaring prices drove up inflation, forced industries to shut production and hiked energy bills, European leaders reversed plans to cut down on investments in new fossil fuels.

OPEC Secretary General Haitham Al Ghais, who was in Davos this week, has warned that the sheer magnitude of economic growth means energy demand cannot be met by renewables alone.

That message, echoed by many in the industry, be it traditional fossil fuel producers or renewable energy throughout the past year, found a bullhorn at this year’s WEF.

“Certainly the war (in Ukraine) added a premium but the root cause is structural,” Joseph McMonigle, Secretary General of the International Energy Forum, told Reuters.

“We’ve tried to limit supply, whereas demand is not decreasing,” he added.



The Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), in its 2022 World Oil Outlook, estimated \$12.1 trillion would be needed to be invested to meet oil demand to 2045 to avert energy crises.

Thunberg’s was not the only voice at Davos with strong objections to the industry’s new mantra that the energy crisis justifies new oil investments.

International Energy Agency (IEA) chief Fatih Birol, in a meeting with Thunberg on the sidelines of WEF, said that new investments in oil fields would take years to become operational. They would be too late to allay the energy crunch, but would contribute to the climate crisis.

Like Birol, British opposition leader Keir Starmer said the oil and gas sector has a role to play in the energy transition.

“But not new investment, not new fields up in the North Sea, because we need to go towards net zero, we need to ensure that renewable energy is where we go next,” Starmer said.

A consensus appears to be building within the energy industry that demands to immediately drop oil and gas investments and leave it in the ground are counterproductive.

“Energy companies have to be part of the solution

here,” McMonigle said, adding: “These are big integrated companies that are really good at doing things, lots of engineers right?”

New technologies need the weight of big oil to be able to scale up solutions, McMonigle said.

Apart from expertise, oil firms are also awash with cash after a year of record high prices, giving them the means to fund more solar, wind and hydrogen projects.

But that does not assuage the fears of climate activists.

Some protesting in Davos expressed disappointment over the United Arab Emirates appointing the head of its oil company ADNOC and its climate envoy, as president of the COP28 summit that the Gulf OPEC producer is hosting this year.

The role involves overseeing negotiations among the nearly 200 countries that typically attend the annual talks, which at COP28 will be the first Global Stocktake since the landmark Paris Agreement of 2015.

“The climate crisis does threaten to destroy everything we know and we care about, and the only solution state leaders are finding is giving more power to those who brought us this crisis from the beginning,” said Nicola Siegrist president of the Young Socialist Party in Switzerland, who organised a protest that attracted a few hundred in Davos this week.

Jaber, who is the founding CEO of Abu Dhabi’s renewable energy firm Masdar and has overseen the UAE’s mandate to adopt renewables is not without green credentials.

His advocates say his appointment is a healthy change and that a more inclusive approach can help achieve climate targets the world is increasingly failing to reach.

“COP28 should be about what’s different this time. Otherwise its just a waste of money in a beautiful place,” Siemens Energy Chairman Joe Kaeser told the Reuters Global Markets Forum.

Moukoko Extends Contract With Borussia Dortmund

BERLIN (Dispatches) - Teenage striker sensation Youssoufa Moukoko has extended his contract with Bundesliga side Borussia Dortmund until 2026, the club announced.

Moukoko, was set to become a free agent in the summer of 2023 and German media reported that several of Europe's major clubs including Barcelona, Chelsea and Liverpool, along with Saudi-backed Newcastle, had indicated an interest in the youngster.

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Zhang Wishes WTA Could Return to China

MELBOURNE (Reuters) - Chinese number one Zhang Shuai hopes the WTA tour can return to her country this season as it opens up after abandoning the "zero-COVID" policy but said the Peng Shuai issue was out of her control.

Former WTA player Peng accused a senior Chinese government official of sexual assault in 2021 in a post on social media that was soon removed from the country's internet.

Djokovic Battles Past Dimitrov at Australian Open

MELBOURNE (Dispatches) - An ailing Novak Djokovic ground past Grigor Dimitrov and into the last 16 as the nine-time Australian Open champion edged closer to a record-equalling 22nd Grand Slam title.

The Serbian fourth seed came through a titanic 77-minute first set before taming the Bulgarian 7-6 (9/7), 6-3, 6-4 on Rod Laver Arena, needing treatment twice on his troublesome hamstring.

He will face home hope Alex de Minaur for a place in the quarter-finals after the 22nd seed equalled his best result at the tournament by breezing past Frenchman Benjamin Bonzi 7-6 (7/0), 6-2, 6-1.

Djokovic's win not only inched him nearer to equalling Rafael Nadal's 22-Slam record but also to a 10th title, which would see him return to world number one for the first time since June.

Victory put him into the last 16 for a 15th time, equalling Nadal in second place on the Open-era list for appearances in the Australian Open fourth round behind Roger Federer's 18.

"Every point, every game mattered," he said. "I think the turning point for both players was right from the blocks, very first game making an early break for me was important.

"Obviously, I didn't know how I'm going to feel physically, it was going up and down. "It was an incredible battle, three sets over three hours. Let's rest up and prepare for the next one."

Djokovic aggravated his hamstring during his run to a 92nd title at the Adelaide International this month and has been struggling with it since.

He came into the match without his usual off-day practice session to give his leg as much time as possible to recover.

With his left thigh again heavily strapped, the Serb broke immediately and consolidated to take an early grip on the first set.

He was cruising but appeared to feel the injury when moving for a shot at 5-3. He managed to earn three set points, which were saved, but was then broken when serving for the set at 5-4.

Agitated, he complained to the umpire about being given a time violation and was then forced to save two set points before an epic tiebreak.

He eventually got over the line on his fifth set point, having saved another one



from the Bulgarian 27th seed, after some intense tennis.

Djokovic took a medical timeout at the changeover and returned to dial up the pressure and take a break before comfortably seeing out the second set.

With Dimitrov flagging, he turned the screws further by breaking twice early in set three and, despite a mid-set wobble when the Bulgarian clawed back and then more treatment on his leg, he battled to the finish line.

Meanwhile home favorite Alex De Minaur stepped out of Nick Kyrgios's shadow and stormed into the last 16 of the Australian Open as fifth seed Aryna Sabalenka continued to bulldoze her way through the women's draw.

Czech fans at Melbourne Park savoured double delight as 17-year-old Linda Fruhvirtova burst into the spotlight by joining former world number one Karolina Pliskova in the fourth round.

Kyrgios's absence due to injury robbed the tournament of one of its biggest drawcards but Australian number two De Minaur ensured home fans will have someone to cheer in the second week as he steamrolled Frenchman Benjamin Bonzi 7-6(0) 6-2 6-1 in front of a heaving centre court crowd.

Sabalenka gave no quarter to former doubles partner Elise Mertens on Margaret Court Arena, beating the Belgian 26th seed 6-2 6-3 to continue her barnstorming start to the season.

The win set up an intriguing duel between the two players who won the season-opening tournaments in Adelaide, with 12th seed Belinda Bencic also through after beating Camila Giorgi 6-2 7-5 at Rod Laver Arena.

Sabalenka's emotions have often got the better of her but the big-hitting Belarusian said being "boring" was working for her.

Xavi in State of Shock Over Alves Accusations

BARCELONA (Dispatches) - Barcelona coach Xavi Hernandez said that he is in "a state of shock" after Dani Alves's arrest on sexual assault allegations.

The 39-year-old defender, sacked by his Mexican club Pumas after his arrest, is being held in custody without bail in Barcelona.

The charge of sexual assault in Spain can mean anything from unsolicited and unwanted sexual groping to rape.

While police declined to give details on the case, a source close to the investigation told AFP that Alves is accused by the woman of rape. She reiterated her accusation before the judge on Friday, the source added.

Alves, who played for Barcelona for eight seasons between 2008-2016, rejoined the Catalans for a short spell last season under his former team-mate Xavi.

"It is hard to speak about a situation like this, first of all," Xavi told a news conference on Saturday, the day before his team's clash with Getafe in La Liga.

"I think like everybody, I am surprised, taken aback, I am in a state of shock, knowing Dani.

"That's the first thing that comes to mind. And after that, because it's a matter for the law, and the law will run its course, we cannot get into it.

"Regarding Dani, I feel bad for him, I am surprised, given how Dani is, and how he has been when he was here with us.

"(I'm) surprised, taken aback, I can't say anything else."

Ireland Win to Level Zimbabwe ODI Series

HARARE (Dispatches) - Stephen Doheny made light of his lack of international experience to top score with 84 as Ireland beat Zimbabwe by 46 runs to level their one-day international series.

After losing the toss and been put in to bat, Ireland made 294-7 in Harare with Doheny and Harry Tector (75) the chief contributors.

In response, Zimbabwe never matched the tourists' run rate and despite half centuries from former England Test batsman Gary Ballance (52) and Innocent Kaia (51), they fell short.

India Defeat New Zealand to Clinch ODI Series



RAIPUR (Dispatches) - Skipper Rohit Sharma hailed India's seam bowlers after the hosts hammered New Zealand by eight wickets to clinch the series in the second one-day international.

Pace spearhead Mohammed Shami returned figures of 3-18 to help dismiss the Black Caps for 108 after India elected to bowl first in Raipur.

Rohit made 51 as India romped home in 20.1 overs to take an unassailable 2-0 lead in the three-match series.

And the captain said his bowlers had made an impression with their seam movement at home since the recent ODI sweep of Sri Lanka when Mohammed Siraj led the charge with nine wickets.

Kilde Wins Second Kitzbuehel Downhill

KITZBUHEL (Dispatches) - Norway's Aleksander Aamodt Kilde notched up the second World Cup downhill victory of his career in Kitzbuehel on Saturday in a massive morale booster going into next month's world championships.

In tricky, snowy conditions, the Norwegian clocked 1min 56.90sec to net 100,000 euros (\$108,000) in prize money, part of a 1m-euro pot on offer for three days of racing in the upmarket Tyrolean resort.

The result took Kilde to 225 points behind Switzerland's Marco Odermatt in the overall World Cup standings. The Swiss racer opted out Saturday after taking a bang to his knee in Friday's downhill, perhaps with an eye fixed on the February 6-19 world champs in Courchevel and Meribel.

"What a week!" said Kilde, adding that the weather conditions had been tough for the entire field. "To take advantage of skiing well: that's what you have to do when it's weather like this, and being confident and trust in your skiing, that's what you have to do in such weather.

"In Kitzbuehel, you need to send it or else it's going to be really dangerous.

"This is for sure one of my biggest victories, if not the one. I'm really proud of myself after a tough couple of days." France's Johan Clarey, the doyen of ski racing at the venerable age of 42, claimed second place for a third time in Kitzbuehel, in 1:57.57, to improve his own record as the oldest skier to make a World Cup podium.



Liverpool, Chelsea Play to a Goalless Draw

LIVERPOOL (Dispatches) - Liverpool and Chelsea continued their disappointing seasons as the injury-hit mid-table teams played out an uninspiring 0-0 draw at Anfield in the Premier League.

Chelsea thought they had raced into a third-minute lead when Kai Havertz fired home from close range after a corner, only for VAR to rule the German offside.

On Juergen Klopp's 1,000th game in management, Liverpool seemed shorn of confidence as they looked to avoid three straight league defeats, only creating half chances with new signing Cody Gakpo missing the best of them in the first half.

The visitors introduced big-money January signing Mykhailo Mudryk in the second half but, while he looked lively, the Ukrainian was unable to lift the Blues, who earned a point that leaves them 10th, level on 29 points with Liverpool in eighth.

Both sides are nine points off the top four with Chelsea having played 20 games to Liverpool's 19.

"I thought the performance was good," Chelsea boss Graham Potter told BT Sport. "I am happy with the team, the energy, what we tried to do.

"At Anfield, it is always tough. It is a clean sheet and a point, we move forward. Overall, a positive day, apart from the fact we wanted three points."

Klopp claimed Liverpool's 3-0 loss at Brighton & Hove Albion last time out was the worst of his Anfield tenure, but things did not get much better against Chelsea.



Juventus urged to Maintain Focus Amid Off-Field Turmoil

TURIN (Dispatches) - Juventus manager Massimiliano Allegri urged his team to "do their duty" on the pitch after the Serie A side were deducted 15 points by an Italian soccer court on Friday, leaving them marooned in mid-table.

The ruling, which deals a blow to the Turin club's reputation, is tougher than the nine-point deduction a soccer prosecutor had requested during a hearing investigating Juve's transfer dealings.

With 20 league games left to play this season, Juventus were third in Serie A with 37 points, 10 behind leaders Napoli. The points deduction pushes them down to 10th place, outside the qualifying spots for lucrative European competition.

Juve said it would appeal to the country's Sport Guarantee Board once the reasons for the ruling were published.

"After yesterday's events we have to regroup and think only of matters on the pitch," Allegri told reporters ahead of Serie A match at home to fifth-placed Atalanta.

"We don't have to think about starting again. The legal proceedings concern the company and there will be an appeal. The standings say that at the moment we have 22 points and we have to try to earn results and make up positions.

"We must continue to do our duty because the sentence is in two months' time and we must have no regrets when the verdict comes."

Allegri added that all was not lost for Juventus, pointing to the fact they are still alive in this season's European and domestic cup competitions.

