

Describing IRGC as a Pillar of Iranian National Power, the Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Said That the Iranian Force Has Disrupted the U.S. Domineering Strategies in the Region

IRAN NEWS

Health Ministry Announced on Wednesday That the Number of Deaths From the Coronavirus Pandemic in Iran Increased to **144,744** With **3** More Iranians Killed By the Virus Over the Past 24 Hours

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IAEA Chief to Visit Iran To Discuss NPT

TEHRAN (MNA) – IAEA Director General Rafael Grossi announced that he is slated to visit Iran in February to assess the situation regarding nuclear non-proliferation and resume the political dialogue.

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Director General Rafael Grossi said on Tuesday he was going to visit Iran in February to assess the situation regarding nuclear non-proliferation and resume the political dialogue, Sputnik reported.

"I believe I might be back in Tehran on this and on the other issues I described to you, in February perhaps, for much needed political dialogue... with Iran. And then, I hope to be making some progress," he told the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the European Parliament.

Iran had enough enriched uranium to create a nuclear bomb, Grossi also said, adding that however, it did not mean that the weapon already existed, he also added.

Such comments come as Tehran has always proved that its nuclear program is completely peaceful, asserting that it is not after acquiring nuclear weapons at all.

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Jobless Rate Down 0.7% y/y In December Quarter

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's unemployment rate declined 0.7% in the quarter to late December last year compared to same quarter in 2021, according to figures by the Statistical Center of Iran (SCI).

SCI figures covered in a report by the Tasnim news agency showed that labor participation rate in Iran had increased by 0.1% year on year in the December quarter to reach 41%.

The total number of people in employment in Iran rose by 535,000 in the October-December quarter last year to a total of 24.07 million, showed the figures.

Iran's services sector accounted for 51.1% of Iran's total employment in the three months to December 21 last year, followed by manufacturing at 34.6% and agriculture at 14.3%, said the SCI.

The Iranian government's statistics agency said youth jobless rate, which covers people aged 15 to 24, was 19.2% in the December quarter last year, down 4.4% against the same quarter in 2021.

Jobless rate among the Iranian population aged 18 to 35 fell by 1.3% year on year in the October-December quarter of 2022 to reach 14.8%, said the agency.

\$500m Worth of Contracts Awarded to Revive Oil Wells



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Iran's state oil company the NIOC has awarded some \$500 million worth of contracts to domestic companies to revive low-production oil wells in the country.

CEO of the National Iranian Oil Company Mohsen Khojasteh Mehr said that around 750 low-production oil wells across Iran will be revived under the contracts signed with dozens of small Iranian companies earlier in the day.

Khojasteh Mehr said reviving the low-production oil wells will help the NIOC to boost its output by nearly 230,000 barrels per day (bpd) or around 83 million barrels per year.

He said each company will be assigned to restoration works on a maximum of five low-production oil wells as part of the contracts signed on Tuesday.

The announcement comes two months after the NIOC denied rumors that it will use the services of Russian and Chinese companies to revive low-production or inactive oil wells in Iran.

Authorities said at the time that Iran's PetroPark, an Oil Ministry company responsible for innovation and technology projects, will supervise and coordinate works by domestic startups and small companies on low-production oil wells.

Oil Ministry figures show reviving a low-production oil well costs around \$1 million, around 90% cheaper than developing a new oil well.

The project is part of NIOC's efforts to boost its daily output and exports of crude oil despite US sanctions that have targeted both Iran's oil sales and its investment in development of new oilfields.

Khojasteh Mehr said Iran seeks to reach a daily oil output target of 5.7 million bpd by 2028. That comes as NIOC's current output figure is at around 2.6 million bpd, down from more than 3.8 million bpd reported by the company before the US imposed its sanctions on Iran in 2018.

He also said that measures are being taken to prevent the pressure drops in the South Pars gas field.

Aimed at the continuation of gas production in the South Pars gas field, plans are being designed for maintaining production capacity, drilling new wells, and increasing the pressure, Khojasteh Mehr said.

In this regard, the production of 2 compressors has progressed by 84% in the land sector and by 30% in the sea sector, he added.

The National Iranian Oil Company is seriously following up on the issue, according to him.

Iran Ranks 2nd, 3rd in Gas, Oil Reserves in World

TEHRAN (IRNA) - The United States Department of Energy has introduced the Islamic Republic of Iran as the world's third-largest oil and second-largest natural gas reserves holder.

The US Energy Information Administration (EIA) affiliated with the Department of Energy mentioned in its latest report on global oil and gas reserves that the total oil reserves of Iran were estimated at 209 billion barrels at the end of 2021.

According to the official report, Iran was the fifth-largest crude oil producer in OPEC in 2021 and the third-largest natural gas producer in the world in 2020. It holds some of the world's largest deposits of proved oil and natural gas reserves, ranking as the world's third-largest oil and second-largest natural gas reserve holder in 2021. At the end of 2021, Iran accounted for 24% of oil reserves in the Middle East and 12% in the world.

Iran's oil reserves were more than the reserves of other countries except for Venezuela and Saudi Arabia.

Venezuela possesses 304 billion barrels of oil reserves to stand first oil holder, followed by Saudi Arabia with 262 billion barrels. Canada, Iraq, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Russia, the U.S., and Libya stand fourth to tenth holders of the largest oil reserves in the world.

Iran's estimated proved natural gas reserves were 1,203 trillion cubic feet (Tcf) as of December 2021, second only to Russia, according to Oil & Gas Journal. Iran holds 17% of the world's proven natural gas reserves and almost half of OPEC's reserves.

Iran was followed by Qatar, the US, Turkmenistan, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, China, Nigeria, and Venezuela, who stood fourth to tenth in terms of holding gas reserves.

Iran was the world's third-highest dry natural gas producer after the United States and Russia in 2021. Despite sanctions restricting investment and hindering Iran's natural gas development, dry natural gas production rose more than 60% between 2011 and 2021, expanding to nearly 8.8 Tcf.

ViewPoint

By: Hamid Reza Naghashian



West, Zionists Covet of Islam's Power

Islam since its first day of desecration of Holy Quran and leadership of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) has shown its power of penetration in the souls and hearts of man and in recent decades everyone can see apparently and feel the real power of this Divine religion in a way that the West and Zionists despite spending billions of dollars have failed to have such a power that Islam has in attracting people and in the upcoming years, one will see more about the power of Muslims and Muslim states like the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Since the victory of the Islamic Revolution in Iran, the West and above all the Zionist regime has tried to resort to any plot and means to insult Islam and undermine the perfection of this Divine religion and every now and then, we see plots from those countries against Muslimss and Muslim nations.

We have not forgotten that after the victory of the Islamic Revolution in Iran, the Indian-born English author Salman Rushdie started desecration of Islam that at that time the Leader of the Islamic Revolution the Late Imam Khomeini issued a verdict against this apostate author and called for his head.

Since than such desecrations have continued whenever the Zionists and Westerners feel that the power of Islam is increasing and Muslim nations are turning into a strong bloc against them.

The French satirical weekly magazine Charlie Hebdo is one of the leaders in insulting Islamic belief and Muslims despite all threats or violent reactions. Charlie Hebdo has a long history of jabs at Muslims. No one can deny that the magazine belongs to the hegemonic paradigm – a paradigm that portrays Muslims as the permanent "other".

No one can deny that the magazine editors were a target of a terrorist attack. But the same editors were and continue to be part of a discursive community that sees Muslims as an alien body within the normative framework.

Charlie Hebdo is not the only tool for insulting Islam and Muslims because Scandinavian countries like Denmark and Sweden have also turned into havens for anti-Islam activities and every couple of years we see some insulting acts in those countries against Islam and Muslims, and recently Sweden has been the venue for atrocities against Islam which has angered Muslims.

A Danish-Swedish extremist politician in the Swedish capital city of Stockholm over the weekend burned the Holy Quran in protest to Turkey's tough stance against Sweden for harboring terrorists which act against Turkey.

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Baghdad Trying to Improve Tehran-Riyadh Relations

TEHRAN (MNA) – Saying that Iraq has become a meeting place for the parties with different views, Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammad Shia al-Sudani stressed that Baghdad will try to improve relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia.

The Iraqi prime minister made the remarks before departing for France on Wednesday.

Stressing that Iraq believes that the stability of the region will be achieved by removing tensions, al-Sudani added that Baghdad will try to bring the views of Tehran and Riyadh closer.

"We believe that dialogue is the only way to reach agreements between the two countries (of Iran and Saudi Arabia)," he stressed.

Iran and Saudi Arabia are holding talks at the security level after a period of diplomatic ties cut. Four rounds of Tehran-Riyadh negotiations were held last year and the fifth round was held several months ago in the Iraqi capital of Baghdad.

So far, five rounds of dialogue between Iran and Saudi Arabia have been held in Baghdad, hosted by Iraq, and several months ago, the former Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhimi made trips to Saudi Arabia and Iran in this regard.

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Enemies' All Efforts in Vain to Disable Iran

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Deputy Commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Rear Admiral Ali Fadavi, downgraded enemies' efforts to disable the country, saying that they were unsuccessful and defeated once again.

Like the previous 44 years, the enemies were defeated despite all their efforts to make use of the recent turmoil in Iran to disable the country, Fadavi said at a local ceremony at Imam Hossein University in northeast Tehran on Wednesday.

The enemies did not stop their hostility toward the Islamic Republic even for a single day over the past four decades, he underlined.

Iran, Uzbekistan Look to Strengthen Transport Cooperation

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN – Iran and Uzbekistan intend to increase the effectiveness of cooperation in the transport sector.

The matter was discussed at the meeting between President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev with Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian at the sidelines of the 26th meeting of the Council of Ministers of the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) in Uzbekistan.

During the meeting, the sides talked about the development of transport and logistics cooperation, in particular, the efficient use of the ports of Chabahar and Bandar Abbas.

The parties emphasized the importance of agreements reached during the official visit of the Iranian President to Uzbekistan in September 2022, which laid a solid foundation for the further development of multifaceted cooperation between the two countries.

Uzbekistan's President and Iranian FM also noted the intensification of contacts, the growth of mutual trade, as well as the strengthening of cooperation between leading enterprises of both countries.

Following the talks, the sides agreed on the schedule of upcoming events and exchanged of views on current international topics.

Meanwhile Mirziyoyev praised Iran's progress in the areas of science and industry



despite all the sanctions in place against the Islamic Republic, saying Uzbekistan should benefit from Iran's valuable experience in the fields of technology, industry and knowledge-based firms.

Mirziyoyev added that the issue of Afghanistan is a common concern of its neighbors, announcing that the foreign ministers of Afghanistan's neighbors will soon hold a meeting in Tashkent for the exchanges of views on the situation in the country.

Amirabdollahian also pointed to the key issues on the agenda of both countries, including a visit by the Uzbek president to Iran, the second session of the Joint Security Cooperation Commission in Tehran and the 15th session of the Joint Economic Cooperation Commission of Iran and Uzbekistan.

He also called for the expansion of economic and trade ties between the two countries.

The Iranian foreign minister stressed the need for signing of a preferred trade agreement aimed at promoting bilateral ties as well as activating the 18 documents signed between the two states during a visit by Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi to Samarkand, Uzbekistan, where he joined a session of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) Heads of State Council.

Transit Can Earn \$12b for Iran

TEHRAN (IP) - Major General Yahya Rahim-Safavi, the military advisor to the leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei said in Alborz province that workers and employers are on the front line of the economic war, calling them the pioneers of the battlefield, and economic progress.

"They are the pioneers of the country overcoming economic problems of the country," he added.

While criticizing wheat imports, Rahim-Safavi said: "Iran needs 11 to 13 million tons of wheat annually, we produce 5 to 7 million tons and import the rest, and this is not good."

He further added: "We don't only have oil and gas, Iran is a land where there are many minerals and if we can manage it properly, the problem will be solved."

"The enemy seeks to disappoint the workers and slow down the wheels of the economy. We can make the country the best in the West Asian region," Rahim-Safavi said, adding: "With the support of the government, we can export and transit goods from north to south and east to west, and we can earn 12 billion dollars a year."

Referring to Iran's capacities in trade interactions with its neighbors, including Iraq and Afghanistan, he also said: "Russia alone exports 222 billion dollars, and if we can transit 100 million tons of Russian goods through Iran, Iran will have a good income."

Former IRGC commander added: "If someone thinks that economic problems are only caused by sanctions and the reason for sanctions is resistance against the enemy, it is an unforgivable mistake. We must become strong and be able to overcome problems."

"We must secure our interests and national security in a tense world. We have to interact with the world, problems can be solved through interaction," added the top military advisor to the Leader of the Islamic Revolution.

Iran Spends About 1b a Year to Fight Narcotics

TEHRA (IRNA) - The secretary general of Iran Headquarters for Campaign against Drug Trafficking stressed the importance of international support for fighting narcotics, saying that the Islamic Republic of Iran spends 700 million to one billion dollars annually in this regard.

According to the international bodies' reports, about 92% of drug discoveries are made by the Islamic Republic, and it is entirely alone in this regard, Eskandar Momeni told IRNA.

A significant cost in the field of combating narcotics includes blocking the border, countering smuggling, identifying and monitoring the transit of drugs, reduction of demand, provision of treatment, decreasing the harm, as well as rehabilitation, which has not

received any help from international organizations until today, he added.

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime opened its office in Tehran in 1999, and since then, Iran has established good cooperation with the United Nations in the field of fighting drugs, he noted.

Despite approving Iran's actions, the United Nations has been dependent on donor countries, which are mainly Western and European states, in the financial field.

He stressed the fact that the most important problem in the process of Iran's fight against narcotics is its proximity to Afghanistan, the largest producer of narcotics, and recently a major producer of Methamphetamine.

VP Vows Pursuing Hirmand Water Rights Through Int'l Bodies

ZAHEDAN (IRNA) - First Vice President Mohammad Mokhber said that the current administrative government in the country is serious in its efforts to pursue Iran's water rights from the Helmand (Hirmand) River through negotiations with Afghanistan and through legal actions in international institutions.

Speaking in a meeting with Sistan and Baluchestan provincial officials on Wednesday, Mokhber said that the government would follow up on all decisions adopted during his trip to the province.

Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi ordered Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian earlier this week to pursue the issue of Iran's water rights from Hirmand which he described as vital for the welfare of people in Sistan Baluchestan.

Amirabdollahian said later that Iran would not give up a single drop of its historic water rights in border regions.

Leaving NPT and Expulsion of IAEA Inspectors on the Table

TEHRAN (IFP) - An Iranian lawmaker has said the Islamic republic of Iran has put on the table leaving the nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty, NPT, and expelling the UN atomic watchdog's inspectors from the country as a response to the recent draft resolution of the European parliament against the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC).

In a tweet, Mehdi Saadati said a bill has been introduced to this effect and its goal is to safeguard Iran's Constitution and the interests of the Iranian people.

The European lawmakers last week voted unanimously for blacklisting the IRGC as a terrorist organization.

Over 12 Israel-Linked Terrorist Teams Arrested

TEHRAN (MNA) – More than 12 terrorist teams affiliated with the Israeli regime were detained in Iran, Iranian minister of intelligence Hojjatolislam Seyyed Esmaeil Khatib said on Tuesday night.

The terrorist teams, who were detained by intelligence forces in a short period of time, were planning to take revenge for their recent failures (in creating insecurity in Iran) by conducting operations, according to Khatib.

Saying that the enemies' conspiracies have made the Iranian nation know them better, Khatib stressed that the country has successfully passed the recent sedition with the help of the guidance of the Leader of the Islamic Revolution and the unity of the Iranian people.

Addressing the enemies who intend to get close to Iran's neighboring countries, the Iranian intelligence minister stressed that Iran will decisively confront the enemies when it comes to the country's security and national interests.

On January 10th, news sources reported that Iran's intelligence forces managed to identify and detain 13 members of 2 Mossad spying teams across the country. That was the second major intelligence and operational failure of the Zionist regime in less than 6 months.

Various types of operating equipment were also seized from them, the statement added.

Oil Minister Elaborates on Gas Distribution in Country

TEHRAN (IP) - Oil Minister talks about the solutions to energy problems in some parts of the country.

On the sidelines of the cabinet session on Wednesday, January 25, 2023, Javad Owji referred to gas cuts in the northern part of Iran from such countries as Turkmenistan and said that the challenge was handled with the management of internal energy resources.

Owji also told reporters about his trip to the southeastern province, Sistan and Baluchestan, to address the fuel energy in the province.

He talked about the energy projects in the province, including the addition of CNG stations and 56 fuel tankers to the relevant fleet, and the laying of a 320 km pipeline from Kerman province to Zahedan of Sistan and Baluchestan.

He added that the government provided free equipment to those who wanted to set up the very gas stations.

The oil minister said that when the current administration took power the gas pipelines in the southeastern province covered 18 percent of the region and now it reached to over 80 percent.

Still, he recommended people manage their gas consumption, noting that those who had moderated consumption would not have an increase in gas price.

Iran Among Top Global Producers of Radiopharmaceuticals

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Vice President and Head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) Mohammad Eslami says the country is currently among the top five global producers of radiopharmaceuticals.

Making a statement to reporters on the sidelines of a Wednesday Cabinet meeting about Iran's export of radiopharmaceuticals, Eslami said that scientists in the AEOI have made considerable efforts to turn Iran into one of the prominent producers and distributors of radiopharmaceuticals in the world.

He said Iran resumed exports of radiopharmaceuticals, which are mostly used for cancer treatment, to nine countries around the world after an easing of the COVID-19 pandemic last year.

The top official added that radiopharmaceuticals manufactured in Iran are more effective in comparison with other international brands, adding that researchers in the country will continue with efforts to further improve the effectiveness of the drugs.

Zarghami Considers Cancelling Visas for 50 States



TEHRAN (IRNA) - Minister of Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Ezzatollah Zarghami said on Wednesday that Iran is planning a visa waiver program for 50 states in the world unilaterally.

Speaking about measures taken by Iran to enhance the tourism area, Zarghami stated that the country is advancing a visa waiver program for 5 groups from various states in a unilateral manner.

He added that Iran's Ministry of Tourism divided the countries of the world into five groups and "we believe" that a collective alliance should be formed to cancel visas with a large number of countries.

Pointing to the existing problems in the unilateral visa waiver program, Zarghami rejected the criticisms that the visa cancellation needs to be bilateral.

Iran's Friends Restrict Relations Due to U.S. Sanctions

TEHRAN (ILNA) - A member of the Tehran Chamber of Commerce says that the scope of US sanctions has been extended to friendly countries, including China, the UAE, and Iraq.

Mehrad Ebad said that these countries have limited their commercial dealings with Iran.

Previously, some Iranian officials had confirmed that an important part of the country's exports rely on hidden middlemen and barter, including the exchange of oil with goods, which increases the cost of imports and reduces the profit of exports.

Ebad also stated that currently exports from Iran to Europe have reached their lowest level and the largest volume of Iranian exports to Europe, especially Eastern Europe, is carried out through Turkey.

The European Union has not yet published the trade volume for 2022 with Iran, but in 2021, it had about 900 million euros of imports from Iran, which was less than a tenth of the amount before the U.S. imposed sanctions in 2018. Also, the European Union's exports to Iran have decreased by a third and declining to 3.9 billion euros.

Ebad went on to say that large European companies abide by the U.S. sanctions and do not easily communicate with Iran, "but small and medium-sized companies from Germany and Italy continue to cooperate with Iran."

If Europe's restrictions increase, "we will face a serious challenge in meeting our needs, especially in the field of technology in the oil and gas sector," he underlined, referring to fresh European sanction being imposed on Iran for its human rights violations and supply of drones to Russia.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	12:16
■ Evening (Maghreb)	17:44
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	05:41
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	07:08

4. To Him will be your return- of all of you. The promise of Allah is true and sure. It is He Who beginneth the process of creation, and repeateth it, that He may reward with justice those who believe and work righteousness; but those who reject Him will have draughts of boiling fluids, and a penalty grievous, because they did reject Him.

Surah 10. Jonah (4)

Tehran, Tokyo Mull Finding Mechanisms To Broaden Trade

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Head of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Mine and Agriculture (ICCIMA) Mr. Gholam-Hossein Shafei in meeting with senior advisor to Japan Chamber of Commerce and Industry Ms. Yuri Konno on Tuesday said that the trade ties between Iran and Japan have become pale because of sanctions, adding that both sides are working to find suitable ways to broaden their trade ties.

Ms. Konno visited ICCIMA to talk with Shafei on ways for boosting trade ties. In the meeting, Shafei pointed to closeness of customs and culture of Iran and Japan as well as interests of Iranian managers to get inspiration and use Japanese management as their role model and noted that in the past years and in the trade between Iran and Japan, there has been the least trade dispute between the both sides and this bespeaks of healthy trade ties between the two countries.

He then pointed to the sharp drop in trade between the two states in recent years because of sanctions and stated that both sides are trying hard to find suitable mechanisms to broaden their trade relations.

Shafei said that Japan's position in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations



(ASEAN) and Iran's position in the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) are good grounds for enhancing trade ties between the two countries in regional level, adding that there are many grounds for cooperation between Iran and Japan like in the fields of vehicle, electrical apparatus, ship building, mining and agriculture.

He then pointed to two main characteristics of the Japanese and said that the Japanese have created a good balance in relation between human and machine as well as healthy relation between environment and technology.

He then pointed to formation of the Joint Iran-Japan Committee and said that soon this committee will turn into the Iran-Japan Joint Chamber of Commerce and ICCIMA is ready for exchange of trade delegation with Japan for bring bringing closer both sides for economic cooperation.

Then Ms. Konno, for her part, said that she believes trade cooperation between countries can guarantee peace and stability and this should be one of the major duties of the chambers of commerce.

She expressed hope that in the near future they can see boost in cooperation between Tehran and Japan.

Chadormalu Co. Ranks First in Productivity

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Chadormalu Mining and Industrial Company ranked first in productivity and finished 10th among top 500 companies of the country during the Conference on Top 500 Companies if Iran.

According to reports, Chadormalu Company after scoring highest points in evaluation of the company was selected as the company number one of the country in terms of productivity in the exploration, extraction and related services category.

Meanwhile the company ranked fifth in the evaluation in terms of value and on the whole the company finished 10th among the top 500 companies of the country in terms of value added.

It is worth noting this ranking and conference is held annually by Iran's Industrial Management Institute where the top and leading companies of the country are announced based on their influence on the national economy and are honored.

LSEZ Wins 3-Star Pioneers of Productivity Award



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Lamerd Special Economic Zone (LSEZ) during the 9th Productivity of Mines and Mineral Industries Award won the 3-star Pioneers of Productivity Award.

According to the report, the 9th Productivity of Mines and Mineral Industries Award was held in presence of the head of IMIDRO and officials of National Productivity Organization and senior officials of mining and mining industries companies in Tehran.

In the even LSEZ was announced as one of the top award winners and it won the 3-star productivity of mines and mineral industries award. The announcement and award came after the secretariat of the event evaluated all factors of the zone award.

The Productivity and Mining Industries Award has been set of by the National Productivity Organization 10 years ago and this year was its 9th edition.

The secretariat of the awards after reevaluating the performance of the entries names the winners of the awards.

The event is aimed at promoting the productivity of the companies, organizations or any other entity.

Furniture Exports Exceed \$100m in 9 Months

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iranian furniture manufacturers have exported over \$100 million worth of their products in the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21-December 22, 2022), according to the secretary of Iran Wood Industries Employers Association.

Ali Moghanlou said the country's export of furniture in the mentioned nine months has been more than the total annual exports in the previous year, IRNA reported.

Speaking at a press conference on the sidelines of the 20th Exhibition of Home and Office Furniture, Decoration and Interior Design, Machineries, Equipment and Accessories (MEDEX 2023), Moghanlou noted that chipboards, MDA and HDF boards, and all kinds of sofas and furniture were the top exported items in the mentioned period.

"We have very good producers in the country who have defined good development plans and with the quality development of products, more export opportunities can be presented for this industry," he said.

Also in the press conference, Hossein Norouzi, the secretary of the Iran Furniture Manufacturers and Exporters Union said this industry accounts for eight percent of the country's total employment.

"Until 10 years ago, more than 500 million dollars of furniture was imported into the country annually, but with the help of unions and associations and the cooperation with the Industry Ministry in this area domestic production surged and imports decreased," Norouzi said.

Earlier this year, Head of Iran Furniture Manufacturers and Exporters Union Hassan Ahmadian said the country has the potential to export \$600 million worth of furniture annually.

Tehran to Host Biggest Gathering of Construction Industry of Asia

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Tehran will host the biggest and most specialized international gathering of constructors, producers and exporters of construction industry in March.

The CEO of Facilities Management Society and secretary of the First Congress of Builders, Manufacturers and Exporters of Construction Industry Mr. Misaq Salmasi announced the news and said that in line with materializing policies of the sustainable economic development of Islamic Iran in the world as well as boosting and reinforcing the export-centered production and services of construction industry, and concurrent with honoring Engineer Day, the first Asian gathering of activists of the construction industry will gather in Tehran in the congress which will open on February 23 at the Conference Hall of IRIB.

More than 11 Asian countries are to attend this event. China, Qatar, Oman, Turkey and Armenia are major Asian participants in the event.



Salmasi added that the event will touch different issues related to the construction industry like preparing talks and international contracts for export of modern products and technologies of construction industry, exporting technical and engineering services, trade insurances and international transportation laws in broadening international trade, export-centered production as well as attracting foreign investment and introducing knowledge-based achievements of the construction industry.

He reiterated that this international event will be held with collaboration of Trade Promotion Organization, Small Industries and Industrial Parks Organization, Tehran Construction Engineering Organization, Facilities Management Society, Technology Trade Center, International Market Construction System, Association of Mass Builders of Tehran, and National Mass Constructors Association and university centers as well as international economic activists and domestic experts and state officials.

Iran Agro Export to Russia Hits \$283m

TEHRAN (MNA) – The export of Iran's agricultural products to Russia has hit \$283 million, a parliamentarian said.

Mohammad Javad Askari, who is also the Chairman of the Commission on Agriculture, Water, and Natural Resources of the Iranian Parliament, said that the export volume of Iran-Russia has been \$283 million in the first nine months of the Iranian calendar year [starting on March 22, 2022].

The amount of imported products from Russia accounts for nearly \$701 million, he pointed out.

The lawmaker described the status of the Iranian-Russian trade exchanges as appropriate.

Askari went on to say that 85 percent of Iran-Russia economic exchanges are related to the agriculture sector.

Shoes and Bags Exports at \$80m in 10 Months

QOM (IRNA) - Chairman of Iran's Trade Promotion Organization (TPO) Ali Reza Peymanpak says the country has exported some \$80 million worth of bags and shoes in more than 10 months that has passed since the start of current calendar year in late March 2022.

Peymanpak said that Iranian manufacturers have the opportunity to enter a \$10 billion bags and shoes market in Asia and Africa.

He made the comments on the sidelines of Iran's 6th Exhibition on Shoe, Sandal and Related Industries which is being held in the central city of Qom from January 24 to 27 with the presence of some 301 companies and 400 businesses from Iran and other countries.

The TPO chief also underlined that his organization has some robust plans to facilitate the presence of Iranian shoe manufacturing companies in international markets.

The official said Iranian brands will also be represented in a shoes and bags exhibition in Moscow in late February.

Peymanpak said that Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs is also planning to pave the way for the participation of Iranian shoe brands in upcoming exhibitions in Africa.

He said Iranian footwear and shoe brands can compete with foreign rivals from China and other countries in terms of quality and price.



NICICO Honored as Leading Activist in Iran Economy

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – In a ceremony for honoring the leading economic activists of the country which was held in presence of First Vice President Mohammad Mokhber and Minister of Economy Ehsan Khandouzi, the CEO of National Iranian Copper Industries Company (NICICO) was honored as one of the leading economic activists of the country which was chosen by the portal of "Taraz" (Balance) of Economy Minister.

According to reports, Economy Minister Khandouzi awarded the CEO of NICICO Dr. Ali Rostami with plaque of appreciation.

In the ceremony, First Vice President Mokhber pointed to the vast mining capacities of the country and said that according to the existing reports, worth production of one million tons of cathode copper the country will earn over \$10b of profits per year but unfortunately so far 75% of copper reserves have been discovered and Iran ranks sixth in the world in terms of its copper reserves but the country ranks 17th in production.

He said that the government is focused on investment in different sectors, adding that in the mining and industry sector some 65 projects worth of \$18.5b have been defined and some of them are underway.

Somr 200 selected companies from the private sector had been invited to this ceremony where the top 10 companies of the country were announced and honored.



Bulgaria Gears for Its Fifth Election in Two Years

SOFIA (Dispatches) - Bulgarian President Rumen Radev said he would set April 2 as the date for the country's fifth parliamentary election within two years after inconclusive October polls failed to produce a working government.

Radev has to dissolve the parliament after the Socialists became the third political party to refuse to form a regular government in a deadlocked parliament.

Bulgaria, European Union's poorest and one of its most corrupt member states, has been rocked by political instability since anti-graft protests in 2020. It has been governed by caretaker governments, appointed by Radev for much of the past two years in the absence of a stable elected coalition.



Turkey Cancels Trilateral Sweden-Finland Meet

ANKARA (Dispatches) - Turkey has cancelled indefinitely a trilateral mechanism meeting with Sweden and Finland scheduled for February after a weekend protest in Stockholm that drew condemnation from Ankara, state broadcaster TRT reported.

The meeting that was to take place in Brussels in February was postponed at Ankara's request, TRT said citing Turkish diplomatic sources. Erdogan's spokesman said earlier this month that NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg was to also attend.

A source at the Turkish presidency said Turkey had not cancelled the meeting, but postponed it. The source did not specify when the meeting was postponed to.



Ukraine Says It Has Enough Energy for Winter



KYIV (Dispatches) - Ukraine has enough coal and gas reserves for the remaining winter months despite Russian attacks on its energy infrastructure, Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal has said.

Shmyhal said the situation in the energy sector remains difficult but under control after a months-long Russian campaign of drone and missile attacks on critical infrastructure that damaged approximately 40 percent of the energy system.

"For now, all Russia's attempts to plunge Ukraine into darkness have failed," Shmyhal told a government meeting. "We have enough reserves to continue and end the heating season in normal mode. About 11 billion cubic meters of gas are stored in gas storages and nearly 1.2 million tonnes of coal are in storages."

Shmyhal added that the government had approved a decision to allow the state oil and gas company, Naftogaz, to receive a 189 million euro (\$205m) grant from the European Bank for Reconstruction and development.

Despite a warmer-than-usual December and January, Ukraine's regions are experiencing power blackouts due to an energy deficit.

But Shmyhal said the country has continued to work with partners to speed up repair works, recover distribution facilities, and implement new energy efficiency programs.

Russia launched an aerial campaign of missile and drone attacks targeting Ukraine's power infrastructure to increase the pressure on Kyiv over the winter after Ukrainian forces made a series of battlefield gains.

Ukraine has condemned the aerial attacks as "war crimes". Russia has consistently denied attacking civilian targets.

At a meeting of Ukraine's allies last week, pledges were made to send air defence systems and other weapons to bolster Kyiv's capabilities to repel the Russian attacks.

But Ukraine continues to ask Western countries to ramp up weapons deliveries, including battle tanks that it seeks for a potential new offensive against Russian forces in the coming months.

Kyiv has pleaded for months for Western tanks, which it says it needs to give its forces the firepower and mobility to break through Russian defensive lines and recapture occupied territory.

As Russia's monthslong aerial campaign has continued, Ukrainian and Western military officials have said Moscow faces a shortage of arms after firing thousands of artillery shells and missiles at Ukraine since it invaded 11 months ago.

Speaking on Monday, former Russian President Dmitry Medvedev said Russian weapons stocks were enough to continue fighting in Ukraine.

Deputy head of Russia's Security Council and chairman of the United Russia party Dmitry Medvedev visits the Kalashnikov Group plant in Izhevsk, Russia [Ekaterina Shtukina/Sputnik/Pool via Reuters]

California Reels From Back-to-Back Shootings That Killed 18



HALF MOON BAY (Dispatches) - A deadly rampage by a 67-year-old suspect in Northern California was likely an act of workplace violence, authorities said on Tuesday, offering fresh details about the second in back-to-back mass shootings that killed 18 people and horrified the nation.

The two shootings within three days have left the state of California reeling as investigators worked to identify the 11 people killed on Saturday at a Los Angeles-area dance hall and the seven killed on Monday in the seaside town of Half Moon Bay near San Francisco.

Authorities were trying to determine motives for both shootings. Officials said preliminary evidence indicated that the massacre in Half Moon Bay appeared to be a case of workplace violence, and that the gunman had used a legally-owned weapon.

The suspects in both attacks are men of retirement age, much older than typical perpetrators of deadly mass shootings that have become routine in the United States. On Monday, a gunman in Half Moon Bay opened fire on employees at Mountain Mushroom Farm, where he had previously worked, and Concord Farms, about a mile away.

The accused gunman, identified as Chunli Zhao, 67, was taken into custody later after he was found sitting in his vehicle, parked outside a sheriff's station. Authorities said they believe he had come to surrender.

He killed seven and wounded one, and all of his victims were Hispanic and Asian Americans, San Mateo County Sheriff Christina Corpus told reporters on Tuesday.

"All of the evidence we have points to this being the instance of workplace violence," Corpus said.

The district attorney was expected to file charges against Zhao on Wednesday morning, ahead of his scheduled court appearance in Redwood City.

President Joe Biden said in a statement on Tuesday that he had been briefed on the Half Moon Bay shooting and had directed his administration to support local authorities.

"Even as we await further details on these shootings, we know the scourge of gun violence across America requires stronger action," he said, calling on Congress to reintroduce a federal assault weapons ban.

Germany to Send Leopard Tanks to Kyiv

BERLIN (Dispatches) - German Chancellor Olaf Scholz has decided to send Leopard 2 battle tanks to Ukraine and allow other countries such as Poland to do so while the United States may supply Abrams tanks, two sources familiar with the matter told Reuters.

A government spokesperson, the foreign ministry and the defense ministry declined to comment.

The decision concerns at least one company of Leopard 2 A6 tanks that will be provided out of Bundeswehr stocks, said Spiegel magazine, which first reported the news. One company usually comprises 14 tanks.

"Today the Chancellor made a decision that no one took lightly. The fact that Germany will support Ukraine with the Leopard tank is a strong sign of solidarity," Christian Duerr, parliamentary leader of the co-governing Free Democrats (FDP) was quoted as saying by t-online news portal.

"The #Leopard's freed!" Katrin Goering-Eckardt, vice president of the Bundestag, tweeted, sharing a link of media report on the news.

Other allies, in Scandinavia for example, intend to go along with Germany in supplying their Leopard tanks to Kyiv, the magazine reported.

In the longer term, more tanks could be restored to be fit for use, according to the magazine.

U.S. officials told Reuters that Washington may soon drop its opposition to sending Abrams tanks to Ukraine, in a move intended to encourage Germany to follow.

The Pentagon declined to comment on any coming announcements on the Abrams. It also declined to comment on whether Germany might green light deliveries of the Leopards.

Defence "Secretary (Lloyd) Austin did have very productive

conversations with his German counterpart when he was in Germany" for meetings last week, Brigadier General Patrick Ryder told a news conference.

Russia's Army Plans May Consider NATO Expansion

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - The new Russian general in charge of operations in Ukraine has said military reforms will respond to NATO's possible expansion and the "collective West", which he accused of waging a hybrid war against Moscow.

In his first public comments, Valery Gerasimov, chief of Russia's military general staff, admitted problems with mobilizing troops and broader challenges in the conflict that began 11 months ago.

"The system of mobilisation training in our country was not fully adapted to the new modern economic relations," Gerasimov told the news website Argumenty i Fakty, in remarks published late on Monday.

"So I had to fix everything on the go."

Military reforms announced mid-January could be adjusted to respond to security threats, he warned.

"Today, such [security] threats include the aspirations of the North Atlantic Alliance to expand to Finland and Sweden, as well as the use of Ukraine as a tool for waging a hybrid war against our country," he said.

Finland and Sweden applied to join NATO last year, in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Plans also call for two additional military districts in Moscow and Leningrad and three motorised rifle

divisions as part of combined arms formations in Kherson and Zaporizhia - regions Russia claims it "annexed" in September after referendums denounced on the international stage as meaningless.

Russia's defense ministry has faced increasing criticism for battlefield losses and Moscow's failure to secure victory in a campaign the Kremlin had expected to take just a short time.

But Gerasimov said modern Russia has never seen such "intensity of military hostilities", forcing it to carry out offensive operations to stabilise the situation.

"Our country and its armed forces are today acting against the entire collective West," he said.

Western allies are supporting Ukraine in its efforts to defeat Russian forces by supplying weapons, ammunition and humanitarian support.

But as the war reaches its anniversary, the goals of Russia's "special military operation" have shifted.

What began as an operation to "denazify" and "demilitarise" Ukraine is now referred to as a defence against Western hostility and a unipolar world.

"The main goal of this work is to ensure guaranteed protection of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of our country," Gerasimov said.



Classified Documents Discovered at Ex-Vice President Pence's Home



WASHINGTON (Dispatches) -

Classified documents have been recovered at the home of former Vice President Mike Pence in Indiana, the latest in a string of revelations that have drawn attention to how United States politicians at the highest level handle sensitive materials.

In recent months, current US President Joe Biden and former President Donald Trump, under whom Pence served, have both been involved in investigations regarding their handling of classified materials. Pence's lawyer, Greg Jacob, revealed on Tuesday that the former vice president and Indiana governor had been cooperating with the FBI to turn over the classified materials.

Jacob issued a letter to the US National Archives last week acknowledging the presence of classified materials at Pence's residence in Indiana, saying that the former vice president had been "unaware" of their existence.

Pence "understands the high importance of protecting sensitive and classified information and stands ready and willing to cooperate fully with the National Archives and any appropriate inquiry," Jacob said in the letter.

"The additional records appear to be a small number of documents bearing classified markings that were inadvertently boxed and transported to the personal home of the former Vice President at the end of the last Administration," he explained.

Pence had previously told The Associated Press news agency that he had not taken any classified materials when he left office in January 2021. "Not to my knowledge," he said.

The revelation came within weeks of classified documents being discovered at the Delaware residence of President Biden, as well as at Biden's offices at the Penn Biden Center, a Washington, DC think tank, found in November. Those documents date back to Biden's time as vice president, under Democrat Barack Obama.

On January 12, US Attorney General Merrick Garland appointed a special counsel, Robert Hur, to investigate Biden's handling of the documents. The White House has said it will cooperate with the investigation and Richard Sauber, special counsel to the president, has described the volume of documents involved as a "small number".

A 13-hour search of Biden's Delaware home on January 20th unearthed more documents with classified markings including some dating back to his time as a US senator.

Earth's Inner Core May Have Started Spinning Other Way

PARIS (Dispatches) - Far below our feet, a giant may have started moving against us.

Earth's inner core, a hot iron ball the size of Pluto, has stopped spinning in the same direction as the rest of the planet and might even be rotating the other way, research suggested on Monday.

Roughly 5,000 kilometres (3,100 miles) below the surface we live on, this "planet within the planet" can spin independently because it floats in the liquid metal outer core.

Exactly how the inner core rotates has been a matter of debate between scientists -- and the latest research is expected to prove controversial.

What little is known about the inner core comes from measuring the tiny differences in seismic waves -- created by earthquakes or sometimes nuclear explosions -- as they pass through the middle of the Earth. Seeking to track the inner core's movements, new research published in the journal Nature Geoscience analysed seismic waves from repeating earthquakes over the last six decades.

The study's authors, Xiaodong Song and Yi Yang of China's Peking University, said they found that the inner core's rotation "came to near halt around 2009 and then turned in an opposite direction".

"We believe the inner core rotates, relative to the Earth's surface, back and forth, like a swing," they told AFP. "One cycle of the swing is about seven decades", meaning it changes direction roughly every 35 years, they added.

They said it previously changed direction in the early 1970s, and predicted the next about-face would be in the mid-2040s.

The researchers said this rotation roughly lines up with changes in what is called the "length of day" -- small variations in the exact time it takes Earth to rotate on its axis.

So far there is little to indicate that what the inner core does has much effect on surface dwellers.

But the researchers said they believed there were physical links between all Earth's layers, from the inner core to the surface.

"We hope our study can motivate some researchers to build and test models which treat the whole Earth as an integrated dynamic system," they said.

Experts not involved in the study expressed caution about its findings, pointing to several other theories and warning that many mysteries remain about the centre of the Earth.

"This is a very careful study by excellent scientists putting in a lot of data," said John Vidale, a seismologist at the University of Southern California.

"(But) none of the models explain all the data very well in my opinion," he added.

Vidale published research last year suggesting that the inner core oscillates far more quickly, changing direction every six years or so. His work was based on seismic waves from two nuclear explosions in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

That timeframe is around the point when Monday's research says the inner core last changed direction -- which Vidale called "kind of a coincidence".

Another theory -- which Vidale said has some good evidence supporting it -- is that the inner core only moved significantly between 2001 to 2013 and has stayed put since.

Hrvoje Tkalčić, a geophysicist at the Australian National University, has published research suggesting that the inner core's cycle is every 20 to 30 years, rather than the 70 proposed in the latest study. "These mathematical models are most likely all incorrect because they explain the observed data but are not required by the data," Tkalčić said.



Scientists Use Laser To Guide Lightning Bolt for First Time

PARIS (Dispatches) - Scientists said they have used a laser beam to guide lightning for the first time, hoping the technique will help protect against deadly bolts -- and one day maybe even trigger them.

Lightning strikes between 40-120 times a second worldwide, killing more than 4,000 people and causing billions of dollars worth of damage every year.

Yet the main protection against these bolts from above is still the humble lightning rod, which was first conceived by American polymath Benjamin Franklin in 1749. A team of scientists from six research institutions have been working for years to use the same idea but replace the simple metal pole with a far more sophisticated and precise laser.

Now, in a study published in the journal Nature Photonics, they describe using a laser beam -- shot from the top of a Swiss mountain -- to guide a lightning bolt for more than 50 metres.

"We wanted to give the first demonstration that the laser can have an influence on lightning -- and it is simplest to guide it," said Aurelien Houard, a physicist at the applied optics laboratory of the ENSTA Paris institute and the study's lead author.

But for future applications "it would be even better if we could trigger lightning," Houard told AFP. Lightning is a discharge of static electricity that has built up in storm clouds, or between clouds and the ground. The laser beam creates plasma, in which charged ions and electrons heat the air.

The air becomes "partially conductive, and therefore a path preferred by the lightning," Houard said. When scientists previously tested this theory in New Mexico in 2004, their laser did not grab the lightning.

That laser failed because it did not emit enough pulses per second for lightning, which brews in milliseconds, Houard said.

He added that it was also difficult to "predict where the lightning was going to fall".

For the latest experiment, the scientists left little to chance.

They lugged a car-sized laser -- which can fire up to a thousand pulses of light a second -- up the 2,500-metre peak of Santis mountain in northeastern Switzerland.

The peak is home to a communications tower that is struck by lightning around 100 times year.

After two years building the powerful laser, it took several weeks to move it in pieces via a cable car. Finally, a helicopter had to drop off the large containers that would house the telescope.

The telescope focused the laser beam to maximum intensity at a spot around 150 metres in the air -- just above the top of the 124-metre tower.

The beam has a diameter of 20 centimetres at the beginning, but narrows to just a few centimetres at the top. During a storm in the summer of 2021, the scientists were able to photograph their beam driving a lightning bolt for 50 around metres.

Three other strikes were also guided, interferometric measurements showed.

Most lightning builds up from precursors inside clouds, but some can come up from the ground if the electric field is strong enough.

"The current and power of a lightning bolt really becomes clear once the ground is connected with the cloud," Houard said.

The laser guides one of these precursors, making it "much faster than the others -- and straighter," he said. "It will then be the first to connect with the cloud before it lights up."

This means that, in theory, this technique could be used not just to drive lightning away, but to trigger it in the first place.



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ECB Rates Have to Rise Significantly at Steady Pace

FRANKFURT (Dispatches) - The European Central Bank will keep raising interest rates quickly to slow inflation which remains far too high, ECB President Christine Lagarde said, largely repeating the bank's most recent policy guidance.

"We have made it clear that ECB interest rates will still have to rise significantly at a steady pace to reach levels that are sufficiently restrictive, and stay at those levels for as long as necessary," Lagarde said in a speech. "In other words, we will stay the course to ensure the timely return of inflation to our target," she added. ECB rates have to rise significantly at steady pace, Lagarde says



Hopes Grow That Eurozone Will Dodge Recession

BRUSSELS (Dispatches) - Europe's economy grew in January for the first time since June, a closely watched survey showed today, raising hopes that the eurozone will avoid a recession this winter.

Europe has benefited from lower inflation, improved supply chains and the recent reopening of China's Covid-scarred economy, leading to increased optimism for 2023.

The outlook for the single currency area is significantly brighter than it was a few months ago, when panic set in over the impact of Russia's war in Ukraine on Europe's economy.

The S&P Global Flash Eurozone purchasing managers' index (PMI) rose to 50.2 in January from 49.3 in December. A figure higher than 50 indicates growth.

"This was the third successive increase and, as such, provides more evidence that the region has so far avoided the sharp downturn that we and many others had predicted," Andrew Kenningham, chief Europe economist at Capital Economics, said in a note.

Almost all experts warned last year that the eurozone would enter a recession — two consecutive quarters in which the economy shrinks — in the final three months of 2022 and the first quarter of 2023.

Those fears are receding, but Europe still faces challenges ahead. Demand for goods and services continued to weaken, industrial orders fell in January — although less sharply than in December — and the impact of more interest rates hikes could still be felt.

European Central Bank chief Christine Lagarde showed no signs of moving away from more rate hikes, insisting they must continue rising at a "steady pace" in order to avoid inflation becoming entrenched. Inflation in the single currency area remains high at 9.2 per cent, but has fallen for two months in a row, boosted by the slowdown in the rate of energy price rises.

Last week Lagarde said she expected the eurozone economy to fare "a lot better" than initially feared, with expectations of "a small contraction" instead of a recession.

"The survey undoubtedly brings welcome good news to suggest that any downturn is likely to be far less severe than previously feared and that a recession may well be avoided altogether," said Chris Williamson, S&P's chief business economist.

The economy has been helped by concerns easing over the impact of soaring energy bills, thanks to mild winter weather and generous government support on the continent.

But Williamson warned that the region was "by no means out of the woods yet".

The EU's economy commissioner Paolo Gentiloni last week said there was an expectation of "subdued growth" for the rest of 2023.

"The war in Ukraine of course continues to cloud the outlook. And while high storage levels and lower demand have helped to bring energy prices down, the crisis is certainly not over," Gentiloni added.

UK Borrowing Balloons on Energy Support

LONDON (Dispatches) - The UK government's debt almost tripled last month as it subsidizes gas and electricity bills to protect Britons from high energy costs following producer Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Public sector net borrowing hit £27.4 billion (US\$33.9 billion) in December, up £16.7 billion from a year earlier, the Office for National Statistics said in a statement today.

That was the highest monthly December figure since comparable records began in 1993, and was far greater than expectations of £17 billion.

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's energy support schemes for businesses and individuals added almost £7 billion to borrowing. Interest payments soared to £17.3 billion, which was the second highest month on record and followed £8.7 billion a year earlier.

The Bank of England has embarked upon a series of aggressive interest rate hikes to cool sky-high inflation, but this has also ramped up the cost of state borrowing.

The BoE in December hiked its interest rate by half a point to 3.5 per cent, the highest level in 14 years. It began tightening monetary policy in December 2021, when the key rate stood at a record-low 0.1 per cent. UK annual inflation slowed to 10.5 per cent in December, but remains close to historically high levels, fuelling a cost-of-living crisis and mass strikes by tens of thousands of public and private-sector workers.

The government believes the economy has already entered recession on fallout from rampant consumer price increases.

Pakistan Central Bank Raises Key Rate to Rein in High Inflation

KARACHI (Dispatches) - Pakistan's central bank raised its key interest rate by 100 basis points to 17% in a bid to rein in persistently high inflation, and it said achieving price stability was key to attaining sustainable economic growth in the future.

The increase, which matched the majority forecast of the economists and market watchers surveyed by Reuters, takes Pakistan's benchmark rate to its highest level since October 1997.

Policymakers are facing tough times in the \$350 billion economy, with high inflation and a sharp fall in reserves, which at \$4.6 billion, barely enough to cover three weeks' worth of imports.

"The committee found that the 1% increase was inevitable," the bank's governor Jameel Ahmad told a news conference.

In November, the State Bank of Pakistan's Monetary Policy Committee unexpectedly pushed up its key rate by 100 bps, meaning it has now raised it by a total of 725 bps since January 2022.

The country - struggling after last year's devastating nationwide floods - posted a 24.5% annual inflation rate in January.

The MPC said anchoring inflation expectations was vital to achieve its midterm inflation target of 5% to 7% by December 2024 and requires coordinated monetary and fiscal policy efforts, the bank said in a statement after the news conference.

"The committee noted that inflationary pressures are persisting and continue to be broad-based. If these remain unchecked, they could feed into higher inflation expectations over a longer-than-anticipated period," the bank said.

"The MPC stressed that it is critical to anchor inflation expectations and achieve the objective of price stability to support sustainable growth in the future."

Although some moderation was seen in inflation in November and December, it remains high and core inflation has been on a rising trend for the last 10 months, the central bank added.

"The SBP had failed to anticipate the sharp rise in inflation and is now playing catch up to satisfy the International Monetary Fund's concerns," said Yousuf Nazar, an economist and former strategist at Citigroup.

"More importantly the SBP is continuing with the policy of artificially maintaining an unrealistic exchange rate which has led the remittances to fall by an average of \$500 million per month since July," he added.

Russia Ramps Up January Oil Exports

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Urals and KEBCO crude oil loadings from Russia's Baltic ports of Primorsk and Ust-Luga are set to rise by 50% this month from December as sellers try to meet strong demand in Asia and benefit from rising global energy prices, traders said and Reuters calculations showed.

Around 70% of January cargoes of Urals oil are heading to India, according to traders' data and Reuters calculations. India has been a top buyer of the Russian grade for several months now, filling the void left by EU buyers.

In December India's oil imports jumped to a five-month record amid active buying of the Russian oil. China, which is seen as the second largest buyer of Urals in January, is also raising oil purchases in physical markets.

Oil prices rose by around 1% on Monday to a seven-week high as the market expected economic recovery in top oil importer China this year.

Supplies of oil from Russia and Kazakhstan via Primorsk and Ust-Luga will reach 7.1 million tons in January for the highest level since 2019, loading plans show.

On top of that, the ports will load 300,000 tons of crude to catch up after delays meant that December's export plan was not completed, Reuters sources said.

Russia loaded 4.7 million tons of Urals and KEBCO from Baltic ports in December, traders said and Refinitiv data showed.

Last year Kazakhstan changed the name of the oil it exports via Russian sea ports, from Urals to Kazakhstan Export Blend Crude Oil (KEBCO), dissociating it from oil originating in Russia to avoid sanction risks and issues with financing.

Sri Lanka Seen Holding Rates As Inflation Fight Continues



COLOMBO (Dispatches) - The Central Bank of Sri Lanka (CBSL) is widely expected to hold interest rates steady this week, having raised them last year to their highest in more than two decades in order to fight runaway inflation while seeking an International Monetary Fund bailout.

With Sri Lanka's economy in the throes of the worst crisis since independence from Britain in 1948, the government is waiting for financing assurances from China, its largest bilateral lender, that would help clinch the \$2.9 billion IMF package.

CBSL raised rates by a record 950 basis points last year. But, at its last policy meeting in November the central bank held the standing deposit facility rate and standing lending facility rate unchanged at 14.50% and 15.50%, respectively.

Thirteen out of 14 economists and analysts polled by Reuters expected CBSL to do the same again when it meets on Wednesday as any reduction in rates should wait until inflation falls further and the IMF money replenishes its currency reserves.

After hitting an annual peak of 68.9% in September with food inflation climbing to 93.7%, consumer inflation moderated to 57.2% in December. "The central bank will not cut policy interest rates till inflation comes down significantly but through moral suasion they are trying to narrow the gap between policy and market interest rates," said Murtaza Jafferjee, CEO of Colombo based JB Securities.

Interest rates on three-month government securities have eased to about 30% from a peak of around 32% earlier this month, analysts said.

The higher rates helped cool demand in the import-dependent economy and reduced demand for dollars.

Thai Central Bank to Raise Rates 25 bps, Tourism to Bolster Growth

BENGALURU (Dispatches) - Thailand's central bank is expected to raise interest rates by 25 basis points on Wednesday to curb elevated inflation and further hikes are likely even as China's reopening brightens the economic outlook, a Reuters poll found.

Unlike its neighbors in Malaysia and Indonesia, The Bank of Thailand (BOT) is expected to keep tightening policy for awhile longer. While price pressures in Southeast Asia's second-largest economy have been cooling, inflation in December was still 5.89%, well above the central bank's 1-3% target.

Twenty-one of 23 economists polled by Reuters expected the BOT to raise its benchmark one-day repurchase rate by 25 basis points (bps) to 1.50% on Jan. 25. The remaining two forecast no change.

"Given inflation is still high and you have upcoming demand-side pressures coming from the recovery of tourism...the BOT would like to continue normalizing rates in a gradual and measured manner," said Aris Dacanay, economist at HSBC.

"Because of mainland China reopening borders much earlier and much faster than a lot of people expected...we do expect Thailand to grow faster than trend. This gives the BOT room to continue hiking rates, to continue anchoring inflation expectations."

Thailand, one of Asia's popular tourist destinations, is expected to receive at least five million Chinese tourists and a total of 25 million foreign visitors this year, providing a much needed boost to its battered economy.

But that is still lower than the 40 million foreign tourist arrivals recorded in 2019.

The poll showed Thailand's economy is expected to expand 3.7% and 3.8% this year and next, respectively, in line with the government's projections. Nearly 70% of respondents, 15 of 22, expected another hike of 25 basis points to 1.75% by end-March. Six forecast rates at 1.50% then and one said it would still be at 1.25%.

The poll median showed the central bank would then raise borrowing costs by another 25 bps, taking it to 2.00% by end-September.

"Although inflation is set to ease this year amid high base effects, we expect both the headline and core prints to stay above the mid-point of the BOT's 1-3% target band in the coming quarters," noted Irene Cheung, senior Asia strategist at ANZ.

"The combination of improving growth prospects and still-elevated inflation gives the central bank room to continue reducing policy accommodation."

Poll medians showed inflation would average 2.8% this year and then fall to 1.9% in 2024.



SPGC Production Up 16m Cubic Meters

BUSHEHR (IRNA) - The Chief Executive Officer of South Pars Gas Company said that South Pars Gas Company (SPGC) has produced 16 million cubic meters more gas.

Speaking to reporters, Ahmad Bahoosh said that SPGC production commitment is about 560 million cubic meters per day, while currently 576 million cubic meters of sweet gas is produced every day.

Liquid gas (LPG), gas condensates, and feed for oil refineries including Persian Gulf Star Oil Company (P.G.S.O.C.) and downstream industries in the region including ethane, methane and other products are supplied by SPGC.



Chinese Turn to Traditional Remedies to Fight Covid

BEIJING (Dispatches) - As Covid-19 rips through China’s vast population, making millions sick and fuelling a shortage of drugs, many are turning to old-school traditional medicines to battle the aches and pains of the virus.

President Xi Jinping has promoted traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) since the start of the pandemic, while health officials have hailed its “important role” in fighting the coronavirus.

Encompassing a range of treatments from herbal remedies and massages to acupuncture and diets, TCM has been used for thousands of years to treat all manner of ailments.

Critics say it is pseudoscientific and ineffective in treating actual illness, and there is little peer-reviewed data to back claims of its efficacy.

But millions in China use it, often in conjunction with modern medicine to alleviate symptoms.

Beijing consultant Yu Lei, 38, had a fever after catching Covid, so he made a herbal tea with reputed anti-inflammatory properties featuring cassia twig — a kind of Chinese cinnamon — peony roots, liquorice, jujubes and ginger.

“In our family, we often use Chinese medicines,” he told AFP, adding that his fever subsided after drinking the brew.

According to followers like Yu, TCMs have fewer side effects and work slower to regulate the body, rather than Western medicines that “fight the symptoms but rarely the source of the illness”.

Beijing has urged local authorities to “actively and objectively publicise the role and efficacy of TCM brews in the treatment of Covid-19”.

However, Ben Cowling, chair of epidemiology at the University of Hong Kong’s School of Public Health, told AFP: “We don’t know whether these treatments are effective or not, because they haven’t been studied in clinical trials.”

“I wouldn’t rule out the possibility that some of them are effective, but I also wouldn’t rule out the possibility that some of them might even be harmful.”

The World Health Organisation only recommends Covid treatments that are based on chemical drugs. When contacted by AFP about TCM, the body said it advised countries to “gather reliable evidence and data on traditional medicine practices and products”.

Western medicine remains the preferred mode of care in China, but proponents of TCM say combining the two is effective in treating Covid-19.

Liu Qingquan, director of the Beijing Traditional Chinese Medicine Hospital, says they “complement each other and can solve fever, sore joints, fatigue, sore throat, cough and other symptoms”.

Experts have taken to television to praise TCM since the start of the pandemic, with one product in particular — Lianhua Qingwen — benefiting from intense promotion by authorities.

Many users are convinced of its usefulness, with some studies suggesting it can help alleviate symptoms. Capsules of the medicine were given to all Hong Kong residents when a Covid wave hit the city last year.

But some online critics in China charge that Lianhua Qingwen is no more effective than peaches in syrup — a staple comfort food for sore throats in China — and social media users have complained of being handed the TCM instead of ibuprofen or paracetamol.



Lan Jirui, a doctor of Chinese medicine in Beijing, told AFP: “It’s the same logic as Western medicine.

“If the drug is bought on the prescription of the doctor, it will probably be effective. If it is bought randomly from the pharmacy, then maybe not.”

Throughout the pandemic, TCM doctors and self-taught practitioners have taken to the internet to share recipes and health protocols.

Li Wen, a 68-year-old retired acupuncturist, has been pricking himself with needles to combat his flu-like condition. He also bought two Chinese medicines, including a bamboo-based anti-fever remedy.

“I supplement that with a nutritious diet of pears, turnips and ginger,” he told AFP. “Chinese medicines can be helpful to fight the virus, but cannot kill the virus,” he said. “But I remain cautious about Western drugs. Their side effects should not be overlooked.”

Hoping to treat a cough and sore throat, Danni, a 39-year-old Beijinger, has been taking Pei Pa Koa, a syrup derived from plant extracts.

“It’s not because I can’t find Western medicine,” she told AFP, “but because it’s effective and soothing.”

“I also make myself a hot soup of pears and hot water with lemon, to boost vitamin C and my immunity.”

Some people AFP spoke to were unconvinced.

“We young people know little about traditional medicine,” said Grace Hsia, a 30-year-old director. “We usually prefer Western medicines because they have immediate results.”

Li Na, a 36-year-old Beijing woman, said: “I took paracetamol for a fever and it worked very quickly.

“Chinese medicines are ineffective. People take them more to reassure themselves that they are taking something.”

Out of Nile, Into Tile: Young Egyptians Battle Plastic Plague

CAIRO (Dispatches) - Entrepreneurial young Egyptians are helping combat their country’s huge plastic waste problem by recycling junk-food wrappers, water bottles and similar garbage that usually ends up in landfills or the Nile.

At a factory on the outskirts of Cairo, run by their startup TileGreen, noisy machines gobble up huge amounts of plastic scraps of all colors, shred them and turn them into a thick liquid.

The sludge — made from all kinds of plastic, even single-use shopping bags — is then moulded into dark, compact bricks that are used as outdoor pavers for walkways and garages.

“They’re twice as strong as concrete,” boasts co-founder Khaled Raafat, 24, slamming one onto the floor for emphasis.

Each tile takes about “125 plastic bags out of the environment”, says his business partner Amr Shalan, 26, raising his voice above the din of the machines.

Raafat said the company uses even low-grade plastics and products “made of many different layers of plastic and aluminium that are nearly impossible to separate and recycle sustainably”.

Egypt, the Arab world’s most populous country, is also the biggest plastic polluter in the Middle East and Africa, according to a multinational study reported by Science magazine.

The country generates more than three million tonnes of plastic waste per year, much of which piles up in streets and illegal landfills or finds its way into the Nile and the Mediterranean Sea.

Microplastics in the water concentrate in marine life, threatening the health of people who consume seafood and fish caught in Africa’s mighty waterway — mirroring what has become a worldwide environmental scourge.

TileGreen, launched in 2021, aims to “recycle three billion to five billion plastic bags by 2025”, said Shalan.

The start-up last year started selling its outdoor tiles, of which it has produced some 40,000 so far, and plans to expand into other products usually made from cement.

Egypt, a country of 104 million, has pledged to more than halve its annual consumption of single-use plastics by 2030 and to build multiple new waste management plants.



Carbon Capture: How Does CO2 Removal Work?

PARIS (Dispatches) - With global temperatures still on the rise, even the most skeptical of scientists agree that carbon dioxide removal (CDR) is crucial to meet the Paris Agreement goal of capping global warming below two degrees Celsius.

A new global assessment published Thursday says limiting global warming at liveable levels will be impossible without massively scaling up CDR.

But even the most ardent promoters of carbon removal technology insist that slashing emissions remains the primary objective, even if the continued failure to do so has pushed CDR sharply higher on the climate agenda.

Methods range from conventional techniques like restoring or expanding CO2-absorbing forests and wetlands, to more novel technologies such as direct air capture.



to maintain significant emission levels for decades.

The first-ever State of Carbon Dioxide report concluded that CDR must extract between 450 billion and 1.1 trillion tonnes of CO2 over the remainder of the 21st century — the equivalent of 10 to 30 times annual CO2 emissions today.

And there is another reason.

The UN’s Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) makes it alarmingly clear that the 1.5C threshold will be breached in the coming decades no matter how aggressively greenhouse gases are drawn down.

CO2 lingers in the atmosphere for centuries, which means that the only way to bring Earth’s average surface temperature back under the wire by 2100 is to suck some of it out of the air.

Here AFP explains the essentials on CO2 removal:

What is CO2 Removal?

There are basically two ways to extract CO2 from thin air.

One is to boost nature’s capacity to absorb and stockpile carbon. Healing degraded forests, restoring mangroves, industrial-scale tree planting, boosting carbon uptake in rocks or the ocean — all fall under the hotly debated category of “nature-based solutions”.

The second way — called direct air capture — uses chemical processes to strip out CO2, then recycles it for industrial use or locks it away in porous rock formations, unused coal beds or saline aquifers.

A variation known as bioenergy with carbon capture and storage, or BECCS, combines elements from both approaches.

Wood pellets or other biomass is converted into biofuels or burned to drive turbines that generate electricity. The CO2 emitted is roughly cancelled out by the CO2 absorbed during plant growth. But when carbon dioxide in the power plant’s exhaust is syphoned off and stored underground, the process becomes a net-negative technology.

Do We Really Need it?

Yes, for a couple of reasons.

Even if the world begins drawing down carbon pollution by three, four or five percent each year — and that is a significant “if” — some sectors like cement and steel production, long-haul aviation and agriculture are expected

West, Zionists...

FROM PAGE 1

Pegida leader Wagensveld tore up the Quran during a one-man protest on Monday. A video posted on social media showed him walking on the torn pages of the holy book.



Turkey had earlier summoned Sweden’s ambassador on Sunday to condemn an anti-Islam demonstration planned by Rasmus Paludan, a notorious leader of a far-right political party in the country.

Paludan obtained permission to protest on Saturday in front of the Turkish embassy in the Swedish capital.

He had expressed his intention to burn copies of the Holy Qur’an. Paludan desecrated the holy book outside Stockholm Central Masjid last year. He attempted to burn another copy of the holy book, but local Muslims chased him off, with one nearly being run over in the process.

This move faced with a real backlash as millions of Muslims in the world poured into streets to protest this insulting move and even some people called for cutting ties with Sweden or taking a serious action against Sweden.

Reacting to this desecration, first in Turkey people protested and later the protests spread to other countries and the latest one was Yemenis who showed their anger against this rude and insulting act.

For many years and since Salman Rushdie’s the Satanic Verses controversy, the Islamic Republic of Iran has warned Muslim nations of conspiracy against Islam, and the West and the Zionist regime have tried to belittle and insult Islam in different ways and styles and Tehran has always called on Muslim nations to be united against these plots and Islamophobia, because the Zionists have resorted to Islamophobia to make a negative picture of Iran and Muslim states in order to take advantage of it.

So Muslims are better to put aside their differences and to be united against their enemy Number One which is Israel which commits any kind of crimes against Muslims and escape unpunished because of full support of arrogant countries.

Of course, Israel should not forget that its days are numbered and their collapse and destruction is inevitable but it is a matter of time and their collapse will be accelerated if the Muslims wake up and get united.

The Islamic Republic of Iran has turned into the leader of fight against Israel and it will give due responses to such desecration to Islam and Islamic values and insult to its Leader which was committed by Charlie Hebdo, the lackey of the Zionist regime and the West.

Those who insult Islam and Islamic personalities under the pretext of freedom of expression will see their due responses in different ways and they will not be able to escape.

For this reason the West and the Zionists covet of having the power of Islam which has penetrated in the souls and hearts of Muslims who are ready to sacrifice themselves to keep flag of Islam up and Islamic values alive.

IAEA Chief to...

FROM PAGE 1

The JCPOA was signed in 2015 between Iran and the five permanent members of the UN Security Council and Germany. Former US President Donald Trump illegally pulled out of the deal in 2018 while the current US President, Joe Biden, has signaled that he is ready to resurrect the agreement.

Russia, the UK, Germany, China, the US, and France have been in talks with Iran since April 2021 to reinstate the deal.

The talks to salvage the JCPOA kicked off in the Austrian capital of Vienna in April 2021, with the intention of examining Washington’s seriousness in rejoining the deal and removing anti-Iran sanctions.

Baghdad Trying to...

FROM PAGE 1

Recently, Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian said that Iran is ready to normalize ties with Saudi Arabia and reopen the embassies whenever Riyadh is ready.

Saying that Iran has always welcomed dialogue and cooperation with the countries of the region, the Iranian top diplomat cited, “Our talks with Saudi Arabia will continue on its previous path. On the path of official diplomacy, we are ready to return to normal relations and reopen embassies whenever the Saudi side is ready.”

Kane Equals Greaves' All-Time Spurs Scoring Record

LONDON (Dispatches) - Tottenham Hotspur striker Harry Kane scored against Fulham in the Premier League to equal the club's all-time scoring record of 266 goals held by the late Jimmy Greaves. The England forward fired a right-foot shot on the turn to give his side the lead on the stroke of halftime. Greaves played for Spurs from 1961 until 1970, while Kane made his debut for the north London club in August 2011. Kane's 266 goals have arrived in 415 appearances while Greaves scored 266 in 379 games for the north London club.

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Manchester City Sign Argentine Midfielder Perrone

LONDON (Dispatches) - Manchester City have signed Argentine midfielder Maximo Perrone from Velez Sarsfield on a contract until 2028, the Premier League club said. The 20-year-old scored three times and provided two assists after making his debut with the Buenos Aires-based team in March. Perrone is currently playing in the Under-20 South American championship and at City will join compatriot and World Cup winner Julian Alvarez, who arrived in Manchester last year.

Azarenka, Tsitsipas Surge Into Australian Open Semis

MELBOURNE (Dispatches) - Victoria Azarenka showed glimpses of the form that took her to the 2012 and 2013 Australian Open titles with a vintage display to reach the semi-finals, before Stefanos Tsitsipas continued his march towards a maiden Grand Slam title.

Twice Grand Slam winner Azarenka meets Wimbledon champion Elena Rybakina in the last four, but it was the end of the road for Sebastian Korda, whose dreams of emulating his famous father ended in pain and disappointment earlier in the day.

Having been beaten in the opening round by Jessica Pegula two years ago, Azarenka gained revenge by dismantling the in-form American third seed 6-4 6-1 to reach the semi-finals at Melbourne Park for the first time in a decade.

"We had so many rallies and I wanted to try to stay there, take opportunities because she was going to take everything if I don't try to win myself and I'm very proud that I executed my game plan really well," said Azarenka.

The 33-year-old from Belarus was aggression personified in the match but conceded that it was "nerve-racking" to play in front of Rod Laver, the Australian great after whom the main showcourt is named.

"I feel like you want to show your best tennis in front of the best and I hope I did that and you guys enjoyed watching me because I really tried my best," she added.

Former French Open runner-up Tsitsipas also showed some of his best form, sealing a 6-3 7-6(2) 6-4 win over Jiri Lehecka, and said he was happy to have all the answers to the questions the unheralded Czech posed.

F1 Accuses FIA Head of Commercial Interference

LONDON (Dispatches) - Liberty Media-owned Formula One has accused FIA president Mohammed Ben Sulayem of interfering with its commercial rights by publicly questioning a reported \$20 billion valuation of the sport.

Ben Sulayem, an Emirati elected in 2021 to the top job at Formula One's governing body, took to Twitter on Monday after Bloomberg reported Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund (PIF) explored a bid for more than that amount.

"As the custodians of motorsport, the FIA, as a non-profit organisation, is cautious about alleged inflated price tags of \$20bn being put on F1," Ben Sulayem said on his personal account.

"Any potential buyer is advised to apply common sense, consider the greater good of the sport and come with a clear, sustainable plan -- not just a lot of money."

He suggested the FIA had a duty to consider the possible negative impact on fans and promoters, who might have to pay more.

The comments followed his support this month for Michael Andretti's bid to enter an 11th team on the grid -- a move most existing teams are resistant to because of the dilution of revenues.

They also fuel the sense of an emerging turf war between the governing body and a commercial rights holder eager to grow an expanding and increasingly popular championship in new directions.

Sky Sports News reported that Formula One's legal head Sacha Woodward Hill and Liberty Media counterpart Renee Wilm had sent a joint letter to the FIA accusing the governing body of exceeding its remit.

The FIA ultimately owns the rights to the championship but signed them over to former supremo Bernie Ecclestone's Formula One Management in a 100-year deal in 2001 as part of a separation of commercial and regulatory activities.

"The FIA has given unequivocal undertakings that it will not do anything to prejudice the ownership, management and/or exploitation of those rights," Sky quoted Formula One's letter as saying. "We consider that those comments, made from the FIA president's official social media account, interfere with those rights in an unacceptable manner."



match but I found the solution in the end."

Korda tried in vain to find an answer and continue playing against Karen Khachanov but threw in the towel in their quarter-final match while trailing 7-6(5) 6-3 3-0 due to a wrist issue.

The retirement followed two medical timeouts and dashed the American's hopes of emulating his father Petr's 1998 Melbourne Park triumph.

Khachanov, who had also reached the last four of the 2022 U.S. Open, said it felt great to be back in a Grand Slam semi-final after reinventing himself.

"Obviously not the way you want to finish a match," said the 18th seed, who will face third seed Tsitsipas. "I think until a certain point, it was very competitive, very good battle."

"Sebastian beat one of my friends Daniil Medvedev in three sets and Hubert Hurkacz in five sets I guess, he was playing great tennis."

"I'm feeling really good, to be honest, really happy with my level and how I compete and I'm looking forward to the semi-finals here in Australia the first time."

Rybakina also booked her place in the semi-finals for the first time, the Kazakh 22nd seed beating Jelena Ostapenko 6-2 6-4 in a match that was played under the roof after a rain shower halted play.

"I'm super happy," said Rybakina. "Of course, I was nervous, particularly in the last game, but I'm happy that I managed my emotions. I played really well today."

Having started her campaign on one of the outer courts at this year's championship, Rybakina was every bit the star on Rod Laver Arena with a dominant display in which she sent down 11 aces to quell 2017 Roland Garros champion Ostapenko.

Santos Handed Poland Job Based on Success With Portugal



WARSAW (Dispatches) - Poland appointed Fernando Santos as their new coach based on his experience managing a national team and his track record of success, Polish FA president Cezary Kulesza said.

Santos, who led Portugal to success at Euro 2016 and the 2018-19 Nations League with Cristiano Ronaldo as captain, was unofficially announced on Monday when Kulesza shared a picture of himself with the 68-year-old on Twitter.

"We wanted a coach who already had experience in leading a national team, so that he would not have to learn on the job," Kulesza told a news conference.

"But above all, we wanted a successful coach. Such a coach was appointed today."

Santos is only the second Poland coach this century with prior international experience following Leo Beenhakker who managed the team in 2006-2009.

Before becoming Portugal manager in 2014, Santos had a four-year spell in Greece. At club level he has managed Porto, AEK Athens, Panathinaikos, Sporting and Benfica, among others.



Premier League Clubs Set New Record for January Spending

LONDON (Dispatches) - Premier League clubs have broken the record for transfer spending during the January window with a £440 million (\$542 million) spree, according to sports finance experts Deloitte.

By 1500 GMT on Tuesday, the gross spend by Premier League sides had surpassed the competition's previous high of £430 million in January 2018.

Funded by their new owners, Chelsea have fuelled the English top-flight's record-breaking January.

The Blues have spent around £180 million this month, with Ukraine winger Mykhailo Mudryk joining from Shakhtar Donetsk in a deal reportedly worth £88.5 million.

Chelsea also brought in David Fofana from Molde, Monaco's Benoit Badiashile from Monaco, Andrey Santos from Vasco da Gama and PSV Eindhoven's Noni Madueke.

Netherlands forward Cody Gakpo joined Liverpool from PSV for £44 million in another of the big January deals.

Shiffrin Claims Historic 83rd World Cup Ski Win

ROME (Dispatches) - Mikaela Shiffrin got the waiting over as she became the most successful woman in World Cup skiing history by claiming the 83rd victory of her illustrious career.

American star Shiffrin is now alone at the top of the world thanks to a thrilling giant slalom win in Kronplatz which moved her ahead of compatriot Lindsey Vonn and ever closer to the overall wins record of 86 held by Swedish icon Ingemar Stenmark.

"I don't think there are words to explain the feelings because during the day it's stressful, sometimes peaceful, sometimes nervous, sometimes excited," Shiffrin told Eurosport.

"And these days, with two runs and everything, they're long days, they're exhausting, but at the end of it there's so much excitement, there's too much excitement to feel (anything)."

At 27 years old Shiffrin is in position to blast past Stenmark and could even draw level with him before next month's World Championships in Courchevel and Meribel.

On Tuesday, Shiffrin was 0.13sec ahead of Swiss skier Lara Gut-Behrami after the first run.

Shiffrin was fastest in the second run to beat reigning giant slalom world champion Gut-Behrami by 0.45sec. Home hope Federica Brignone completed the podium some 1.43sec off the pace.

"I was a bit nervous for the second run but mostly I hate waiting," she later said through the US ski federation.

"Finally when it was time to go, everything went quiet and I just pushed as hard as I could every turn. It was pretty amazing to come to the finish and see that I was quite fast."

"It's still hard for me to believe that I have the mental focus again to be strong on the second run. It's something I don't take for granted."



India Top ODI Rankings After 3-0 Sweep of New Zealand

INDORE (Dispatches) - Blazing centuries from skipper Rohit Sharma and Shubman Gill powered India to a 3-0 series sweep of New Zealand and go top of the one-day international rankings.

The hosts hammered the Kiwis by 90 runs in the third match in Indore after Rohit (101) and Gill (112) put on 212 for the opening wicket to guide the hosts to 385-9 in Indore.

In reply, Devon Conway's 138 was in vain as India bowled out New Zealand for 295 in 41.2 overs for their second successive whitewash.

The victory takes India to the top of the ODI rankings ahead of World Cup holders England and New Zealand who slip from second to fourth behind Australia.

Qualification for the World Cup in India later in the year is unaffected, however, as the Kiwis have already qualified.

But Rohit, who recorded his first ODI century since January 2020, and Gill stood out in the highest opening partnership by any team against the Kiwis in the 50-over format, surpassing the 201-run stand of Virender Sehwag and Gautam Gambhir in 2009.

"In the last six games we've done most things right in ODIs," said Rohit, whose side whitewashed Sri Lanka in three matches before this.

"We're consistent in our approach with the bat and ball."

Fast bowler Shardul Thakur was named man of the match for his three wickets and crucial 25 runs batting down the order.

"Shardul has been doing it for a while," said Rohit. People call him magician in the squad and he came and delivered."

