

Health Ministry Announced on Saturday That the Number of Deaths From the Coronavirus Pandemic in Iran Stayed Unchanged at **144,744** With Another **Zero** Death Day Over the Past 24 Hours

IRAN NEWS

Deputy Economy Minister Says That \$5.95b of Foreign Investment Has Been Attracted During the 13th Government, Which Shows a 250% Growth Compared With the Last Year of the Former Government

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Iran Flotilla Sailing in Latin America's Western Waters

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Second-in-Command of the Islamic Republic of Iran Navy, Rear Admiral Hamzeh Ali Kaviani, says the country's 86th flotilla of warships is now sailing along the western shores of Latin America, and is going to berth at Brazil's southeastern port city of Rio de Janeiro within the next few days.

Addressing a ceremony in the northern Iranian city of Chalous on Saturday, Kaviani stressed that Iran's military might is increasing day by day despite all the pressures that have been applied against the Islamic Republic over the past 43 years.

He added that most of the military hardware required by the country's Armed Forces is now manufactured domestically.

He stated that the Iranian Navy's 86th flotilla, comprised of Dena and Makran warships, has raised the Iranian flag in the western waters of Latin America.

Kaviani added that the Iranian Navy's flotillas also have a strong presence in the northern tip of the Indian Ocean.

Dena is a Mowj-class warship that joined the Iranian Navy in June 2021. The military vessel is reportedly equipped with anti-ship cruise missiles, torpedoes and naval cannons.

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FM Denies Terrorism Behind Azerbaijan Embassy Attack

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian has condemned the Friday armed attack on Azerbaijan's embassy in Tehran, saying the enemies should not be allowed to take advantage of the incident, which he said was not an act of terrorism.

"We should not allow this incident to have any adverse consequence on ties between the two countries," Amirabdollahian said in a phone conversation with Azerbaijan Foreign Minister Jeyhun Bayramov.

The Iranian foreign minister expressed his sympathy with Bayramov over the attack, which killed the head of the security service of the embassy and wounded two embassy guards earlier in the day.

He said the two countries' security bodies can probe the incident in close cooperation to clarify its various aspects.

Later on Friday, Amirabdollahian visited those wounded at a hospital in Tehran.

After his visit, he held a joint press conference with the Azeri ambassador, during which he said Iran's intelligence and security organizations believe the attack was not a "terrorist and organized operation," but rather, it was carried out with personal motives.

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Russians Are Top Foreign Investors in Iran



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Deputy Minister and Head of Organization for Investment Economic and Technical Assistance of Iran says Russians have been the biggest foreign investors in the country as they have invested \$2.7b and mainly in two oil projects in Iran.

Speaking in a press conference, Ali Fekri touched upon the performance the Organization for Investment Economic and Technical Assistance of Iran in the past 15 months and said that one of the most important actions of the government in this period has been reforming its statistical system and after its reform, only the approved attracted investments which are implemented are registered in the statistical system and it is not supposed to announce the claim of investment on the paper without its implementation.

He said that from now on, the interest and willing to investment in Iran is not included in the statistics system of the organization. Fekri went on to say that the amount of the approved foreign investment in the country has been \$10.2b.

He noted that Russians have been so far the top foreign investors in Iran with \$2.7b investment and it is because of their investment in two oil projects in Iran.

He noted that in the past 15 months and after Russian investors, the UAE, Turkey, China and Afghanistan have been the second to fifth foreign investors in Iran.

Fekri noted that due to the current condition of the country, the amount of investment has entered the country via forex shops.

He also criticized the amount of investment of the Chinese in Iran and said that China has only invested some \$185m in Iran in the same period which is not satisfactory considering talks and meeting, adding that the Chinese investment in Iran has been the same level of small and medium investments done by the neighboring countries and it has been mostly in the transportation and transit sectors.

Fekri also reiterated that major investors from the UAE are not actually Emirati nationals and they are from other nationals and most of their investments have been in Iran's mining and industry sectors.

He then pointed to the incentives for foreign investors and said that each foreign investor can take three cars to the country and they are also awarded with 3 to 5 years of residence permit.

He noted that currently credit risk of the country is 7 and it means Iran is among the risky countries for foreign investment but one should notice that attracting foreign investor has no direct relation with the ranking of credit risk but it is effective, reiterating that the amount of risk shows itself in the rate of insurance for the projects, adding that despite these risks there are some European and U.S. investors in the country.

Fekri went on to say that Iran has signed good agreement with Russia and Russia has not arrived here to go and both sides have side the agreement that both sides will benefit but despite the agreement, there is possibility for withdrawal of any country from the agreements.

Palestinian Resistance Groups Laud East al-Quds Operation

BEIRUT (Dispatches) - Palestinian resistance groups have hailed the retaliatory operation near a synagogue in an illegal Israeli settlement in the occupied East al-Quds, describing it as a 'direct response' to the deadliest Israeli military raid in the occupied West Bank in years.

Hamas said in a statement that Friday's attack was "a natural response to the Jenin massacre, the desecration of the blessed al-Aqsa Mosque compound, and escalating Israeli crimes and aggression against our nation. It conveys the message to the occupying regime that Palestinians' willpower cannot be undermined, their determination is steady, and their resistance is intensifying despite all the pains and sacrifices they are going through."

"Our people will continue to strike the enemy's sites, barracks, and settlements. Resistance will remain the viable option of our people until full liberation of our land, sacred sites and restoration of all our legitimate rights. The qualitative operation took place at the illegal settlement of Nabi Yacov built on lands belonging to the Palestinian village of Beit Hanina," the statement added.

A Palestinian man killed at least seven people and wounded 10 others at a synagogue on the outskirts of al-Quds on Friday, a day after a deadly Israeli raid in the Jenin refugee camp in the occupied West Bank. Nine Palestinians were killed, including an elderly woman.

A 22-year-old Palestinian man also was shot by Israeli forces in the town of al-Ram, north of al-Quds, on Thursday. In the Jenin raid, which Palestinians have described as a "massacre", at least 20 others were wounded with live ammunition. Four of them were in critical condition.

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ViewPoint Quran Desecration Not Allowed

In recent days, Muslims worldwide once again have shown the power of Islam and belief in Islamic values as they are gradually and strongly showing strong reaction against desecration to the Holy Quran and Islam, and this is what Muslims in the world need and this will not let the offenders continue their atrocities and insults against Islam and Muslims in the future because of possible reactions and protests.

People held monumental rallies across several Muslim countries throughout the world, condemning instances of desecration of the Holy Qur'an in Europe. In Bangladesh's capital of Dhaka, Muslims gathered outside a mosque after Friday prayers to voice outrage over acts of blasphemy targeting the Muslim holy book by extremist European figures, AFP reported.

The rally came after a notorious Swedish-Danish extremist, Rasmus Paludan, received permission from Sweden's government to burn the holy book in front of the Turkish Embassy in Stockholm less than a week ago. Paludan was being protected by the Swedish police while committing the sacrilege.

The incident was followed by Edwin Wagensveld, who heads the Dutch chapter of the German anti-Islam group Pegida's tearing pages out of the divine book during a one-man protest at The Hague.

Also on Friday, Iranians rallied across the country, including in the capital Tehran, to condemn the acts of blasphemy. They denounced the heinous incidents as acts of incitement and a serious provocation of the feelings of more than two billion Muslims worldwide, calling on European authorities to put an end to hostility towards Islam.

In Afghanistan too, angry Muslims marched in the capital Kabul and other major cities across the country, voicing outrage over the anti-Islam acts.

Bahrain bore witness to similar protests, with protesters marching in the capital Manama despite heightened security measures.

Senior figures have also vehemently condemned the acts of profanity throughout the world's Muslim countries, including Iran, Pakistan, Turkey, and the United Arab Emirates.

Like other parts of the Muslim world, tempers are running high in Pakistan over the repeated Islamophobic incidents by some European countries in recent days. Outraged Pakistanis took to the streets of the capital Islamabad after Friday prayers to condemn the west for what they call its "malicious anti-Islamic Agenda".

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Iran, S. Arabia to Hold Meeting In Baghdad Within Weeks

TEHRAN (MNA) - Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani expressed hope that a new meeting involving Saudi Arabia and Iran will take place in Baghdad "in the coming weeks".

Al-Sudani made the remarks in an interview with FRANCE 24, saying that the two countries were "keen to resume these meetings under our (Iraqi) auspices."

"Any tension between the US and Iran, any tension between the regional countries, will reflect on Iraq negatively," Sudani noted.

Elsewhere in his remarks, the Iraqi Prime Minister said "Iraq does not need combat troops."

Iraq needs cooperation with all countries involved in the fight against terrorism, he also said.

Iraq's Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani has paid a visit to France to sign a set of agreements with the European country in the energy and public transportation sectors.



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Iranian Scientist Receives 2023 Benjamin Franklin Medal

TEHRAN (IP) - An Iranian scientist has been awarded the 2023 Benjamin Franklin Medal for his achievements in electronic engineering. University of Pennsylvania scientist Nader Engheta received the medal in electronic engineering for his work on novel materials that interact with electromagnetic waves in unprecedented ways, with broad applications in ultrafast computing and communication technologies, The Franklin Institute announced.

The Benjamin Franklin Medal is the oldest comprehensive science and technology Award, which is being awarded to researchers and scientists due to their achievements. Big names such as theoretical physicist Albert Einstein, American inventor Nikola Tesla, Polish-French physicist Marie Curie, inventor Orville Wright, and inventor Alexander Graham Bell had won the award.

Raisi Orders Full Probe Into Bitter Azerbaijan Embassy Attack

TEHRAN (PressTV) - President Ebrahim Raisi has ordered a thorough investigation into an attack on Azerbaijan's embassy in Tehran, where the head of the security service of the embassy was killed and two guards were injured.

"We condemn the attack at the entrance of the embassy of our brotherly neighbor, the Republic of Azerbaijan," Mohammad Jamshidi, a political aide to the Iranian president, said in a post on his Twitter account on Friday.

He said President Raisi "ordered a full investigation" into the issue and "expressed condolences to the gov't, people & family of the murdered diplomat & prayed for the recovery of the injured."

Tehran police chief Brigadier General Hossein Rahimi said on Friday the gunman, who entered the Azerbaijani embassy this morning and started shooting with a firearm, was arrested.

"In the initial investigation, the attacker stated that his motivation was personal and



family problems," Gen. Rahimi said, adding the man is an Iranian national married to an Azerbaijani woman.

Following the shooting, Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian and Interior Minister Ahmad Vahidi discussed the deadly incident over the phone.

Judicial and security measures are underway to clarify the exact causes of the incident.

Meanwhile, Azerbaijan's Foreign Ministry said it has summoned Iran's Ambassador to Baku Abbas Mousavi in connection with what it called a terrorist attack against the embassy. During the meeting, the ministry said it was brought to the attention of the Iranian ambassador that the armed attack is strongly condemned.

Leader Visits Exhibition of Iran Industry Achievements



TEHRAN (MNA) – The Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei visited an exhibition that showcased Iran's industrial achievements on Saturday morning.

The exhibition was held in the Imam Khomeini Hosseiniyeh on Saturday, showcasing Iran's achievements.

While visiting the exhibition, the Leader of the Islamic Revolution was briefed about the latest achievements of Iran in the field of Industry.

The exhibition features machinery, equipment, and products manufactured by various plants and factories in Iran.

Also, Iran's achievements in the various fields of mining, aerospace and satellite, automobile, agriculture and food, textile, railways, water management plans, information and communication technology, electricity industries, power plants, dam construction and etc. were showcased in this exhibition.

Iran's ministries of industries, energy, oil, and communications also attended the exhibition.

Iran, Afghanistan Discuss Economic Ties

TEHRAN (MNA) – Iran and Afghanistan local officials in a meeting on Saturday reviewed bilateral relations on economic issues.

Iran and Afghanistan local officials at a joint meeting of the Governor of Khorasan Razavi on the Dowqarun border in Taybad discussed various problems in economic issues.

The governor of Taybad Mehdi Davandeh said that cultural, religious, and linguistic commonalities between Iran and Afghanistan are the most important components that can lead to an increase in the level of cooperation between the two Muslim states.

The purpose of the meeting is to follow up on the issues raised in the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in the fifth joint economic meeting of Khorasan Razavi and Herat hosted by Afghanistan, he underlined.

The representative of the governor of Herat, for his part, highlighted that by following the objectives and plans, they are looking to minimize the various economic and traveling obstacles between Iran and Afghanistan.

Referring to the deep-rooted relations between the two sides, he stated that Iran and Afghanistan's cultural commonalities show their longstanding relationship.

Criminals Teach Lessons Human Rights

TEHRAN (IP) - The Director-General of the West Asian Office in Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs reacted to the anti-Iranian comments by the leader of the opposition in the Australian Senate.

In some comments, Simon Birmingham blamed Australia for the slow process of sanctioning Iran and said that the country could catch up with other Western countries in imposing sanctions on Iran.

In a tweet on Friday, Rasoul Mousavi referred to the crimes the Australian forces committed in Afghanistan and wrote: "The families of the victims of your war crimes have not yet calmed down; your officers in Afghanistan deliberately targeted civilians so that their soldiers could learn to fight and be adapted the color of blood."

He said: "War criminals teach lessons of human rights!"

The US troops also acknowledged that when it turned to carry the Afghan people taken captive, the Australian forces shot them dead under the pretext that there was not enough space in helicopters.

TPC Bolstering Ties With Russian Firms

TEHRAN (Shana) - The CEO of Tabriz Petrochemical Company (TPC) emphasized the necessity of increasing cooperation in a meeting with Russian petrochemical industry executives.

According to TPC, Siavash Derfashi met with the executives of several Russian companies active in the petrochemical industry on the sidelines of the Russian Plastics and Rubber Exhibition, and discussed areas of cooperation in the transfer of technical and educational experiences and cooperation in the transfer of technical knowhow and had negotiations with SIBUR.

SIBUR (PJSC SIBUR Holding) is a Russian petrochemicals company founded in 1995 and headquartered in Moscow. SIBUR is the largest integrated petrochemicals company in Russia and one of the fastest-growing companies in the global petrochemicals industry.

In the meeting between the TPC CEO and the executives of TERRALINK Company regarding the integrated systems and the transfer of experiences of the two companies, very good consultations were held and both sides emphasized on expanding cooperation and continuing negotiations during the exhibition and following up on previous agreements.

Navy to Unveil Maritime Combat Helicopters

TEHRAN (MNA) – The Iranian army navy commander said that a number of new maritime combat helicopters have been produced, which will be unveiled at the appropriate time.

Rear Admiral Irani referred to the significant importance of the country's maritime capacities, saying that the sea can be the centrepiece of the country's development.

There is a great opportunity for the development of the country by sea for Iran, he added.

Pointing to the pivotal role of the Makran coast in southern Iran, he described the coast as the gateway to reach the sea-based development and highlighted that to achieve a new Iranian-Islamic civilization, "we must use" the capacities of the sea.

Using the sea capacities is a geopolitical advantage for the Islamic Republic of Iran, he said, adding that the countries that do not have this capacity are experiencing geopolitical suffocation.

Referring to the establishment of the International Maritime Security Center in Konarak in Sistan and Baluchestan Province, Rear Admiral Irani noted that any movement at the surface of the sea can be monitored in this center and if a vessel is in an emergency, its information is quickly monitored in the center and the help would be sent quickly.

Pointing to the country's capabilities in the surface and subsurface equipment field, he underscored that they are trying to increase their tonnage capacity in surface area, while projects are moving forward in the subsurface area.

In response to the question about the production of a series of new maritime combat helicopters, he stated that a number of new naval combat helicopters had been produced and used, which will be unveiled at the appropriate time.

Iran, Iraq Stress Boosting Agriculture, Tourism Ties

ILAM (IP) - The governor of Ilam (western Iran) said that the existence of numerous capacities of agriculture and tourism in Iran and Iraq is a unique opportunity for expanding cooperation between the two countries.

"Hassan Bahram Nia" and "Wissam Aslan Al-Jubouri", governors of Iran's Ilam and Iraqi Babil provinces, signed a memorandum of understanding for the development of all-round relations, especially in the economic field.

Development of tourism and cultural relations, communication between chambers of commerce of two provinces, issuance of technical and engineering services, health tourism, agriculture, provision of equipment for irrigation networks under pressure and pumping systems, speeding up and facilitating the movement of Arbaeen pilgrims are among the issues raised in the agreement.

Ilam Governor Hasan Bahram Nia on Thursday in a meeting with Iraq's Babil Governor Wissam Aslan Al-Jubouri and on the sidelines of the signing ceremony of the bilateral cooperation agreement between Ilam and Babil provinces of Iraq called

Babil province as the cradle of history and civilization.

Bahram Nia said: "Babil province is full of economic capacities in various fields of agriculture, tourism and history, and due to the extraordinary capacities of the two provinces, this opportunity should be taken as advantage in order to develop trade relations and exports."

He added: "There are good capacities in Ilam province for dealings in economic, tourism, animal husbandry, industrial, health, and medical fields and we hope that these sorts of cooperation will lead to the development of both provinces in the form of a memorandum of understanding."

In the end, the Governor of Ilam, referring to the huge Arbaeen Congress, also stated: "Ilam province and Mehran border crossing, as the gate of the holy shrines, witness the traffic of Iranian and Iraqi pilgrims throughout the year, and this opportunity can be used to strengthen the religious sphere of the two provinces."

Weekly Commodities Trade Exceeds 2m Tons on IME



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Iran Mercantile Exchange (IME) last week witnessed trade of 2,082,446 tons of commodities and 2,623 vehicles with a total trading value of nearly \$808m on its physical market.

According to a report by the IME's International Affairs and PR, the exchange saw on its metals and minerals trading floor trade of 1,631,322 tons of commodities valued at more than \$540m.

On this floor the IME sold 895,287 tons of cement, 325,000 tons of iron ore, 322,180 tons of steel, 47,000 tons of sponge iron, 21,950 tons of zinc, 10,825 tons of aluminum, 9,330 tons of copper, 200 tons of molybdenum concentrate, 2 kg of gold bars and 2,623 vehicles.

Furthermore, the IME witnessed on both domestic and export rings of its oil and petrochemical trading floor 448,507 tons of commodities worth nearly \$264m.

Commodities traded on this floor included 146,890 tons of bitumen, 99,000 tons of vacuum bottom, 111,231 tons of polymeric products, 45,500 tons of lube cut, 41,083 tons of chemicals, 900 tons of sulfur, 3,892 tons of base oil and 500 tons of petroleum products.

The IME also traded within the same week 2,616 tons of commodities on its side market.

Iran's Nominal Power Generation Capacity Exceeds 90,000 MW

TEHRAN (MNA) - With the inauguration of a new thermal power plant in southwestern Iran, the nominal capacity of the country's power plants has exceeded 90,000 megawatts (MW), an official with the country's Thermal Power Plants Holding Company (TPPH) announced.

According to Mohammad Ramezani, the deputy head of the company's projects development department, the mentioned power plant which has been constructed with €250 million of investment in Khuzestan Province, is comprised of a 307-MW gas unit and a 144-MW steam unit, IRNA reported.

Most of Iran's power generation capacity is supplied by thermal power plants. Currently, combined cycle power plants account for the biggest share of the country's total power generation capacity followed by gas power plants.

The total capacity of the country's thermal power plants stands at over 72,000 MW, according to Ramezani.

Increasing the country's power generation capacity and preventing blackouts during peak consumption periods have been among the Iranian Energy Ministry's top priorities since the current government administration took office in 2021.

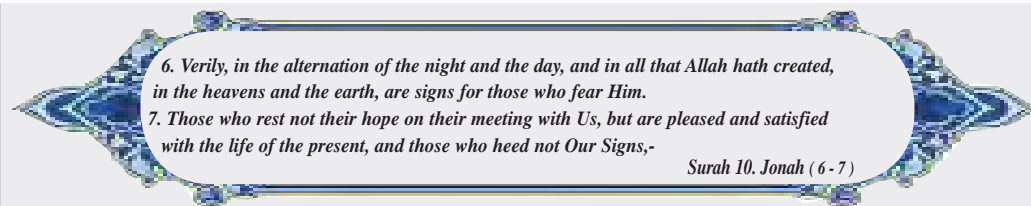
In August 2021, Energy Minister Ali-Akbar Mehrabian announced that his ministry was planning to boost the country's power generation capacity by 35,000 MW over the next four years.

The mentioned figure would be achieved through the construction of thermal power plants with 15,000 MW of capacity, and renewable power plants with a capacity of 10,000 MW by the public and private sectors, as well as the construction of new power plants with 10,000 megawatts capacity by large industries.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	12:17
■ Evening (Maghreb)	17:47
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	05:39
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	07:06



Eurasia-Iran Accord Can Transform Economic Situation

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

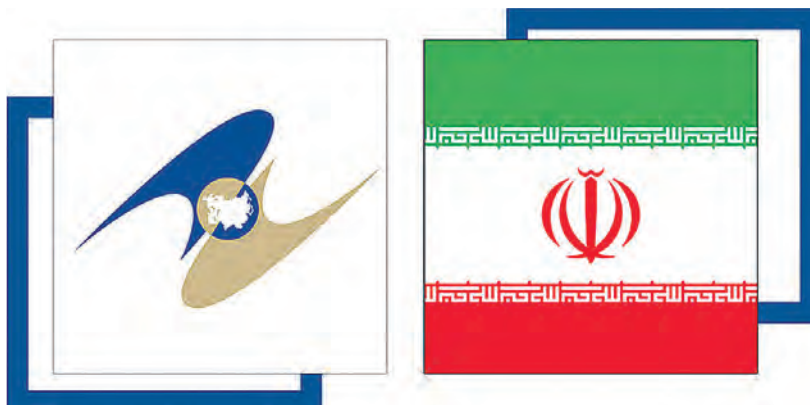
TEHRAN - The chairman of the Iran-Russia Chamber of Commerce, Industries, and Mines has underscored that the enforcement of the free trade agreement between Eurasia and Iran can transfigure the economic situation significantly.

Hadi Tizhoosh-Taban said that the implementation of such agreements would affect trade and the economy and that the proper utilization of the grave opportunity can end up in an upsurge and transformation in different sectors of the Islamic Republic.

The Iranian producers produce different products in industrial and agricultural sectors, which are required by the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), on the other hand, the imported commodities from the member states of the union include raw materials needed for the production sector, Tizhoosh-Taban argued.

Preparing grounds for the implementation of the agreement, including financial exchanges, infrastructure, and logistics, can pave the way for the improvement of the economic situation in Iran, he said.

The official also called for paving the ground for creating mechanisms to use the Iranian rial and the Russian ruble in mutual trade in order to facilitate exchanges and get rid of illegal sanctions.



As to the insufficient progress in creating infrastructure for the Russia-Iran trade, he noted that the development of trade infrastructure can help attract foreign investments, which can transform construction projects and improve the economy.

Last week Minister of Trade of the Eurasian Economic Commission Andrey Slepnev said that the Eurasian Economic Union is to sign a free trade agreement with Iran soon.

Speaking to Russian media, Slepnev said that the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) has held important negotiations with Iran to solve some issues regarding the free trade agreement.

He added that lifting almost all customs duties in Iran's mutual trade with Eurasian member states, especially Russia, was on the agenda of these talks.

Meanwhile, the Eurasian Economic Commission (EEC) in a statement announced that last week, during the negotiations in Tehran, a memorandum was signed for the future agreement between the two parties.

Iran and the EAEU have agreed on most of the main issues to finalize the negotiations on the free trade area agreement as well as mutual access to the market, except for certain types of agricultural products.

According to the statement, trade turnover between Eurasia and Iran has increased by 74% in 2021 and the figure experienced 25% growth in the first 10 months of 2022.

Managers of Khatam-al Anbiya Visit MAPNA Industrial Group



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Some of senior managers and officials of Khatam-al Anbiya Construction Headquarters paid a visit to MAPNA Industrial Group to get acquainted with the latest developments and capabilities of this group.

According to reports, some of senior officials of Khatam-al Anbiya on Monday visited MAPNA Group which is active and capable in the fields of engineering, construction and developing thermal power plants, renewable energy power plants, installations for simultaneous production of electricity and heat, installations for simultaneous production of electricity and water desalination, engineering, executive and developing oil and gas projects both onshore and offshore as well as offering services in using, repair and maintenance of the mentioned industries.

It is worth noting that MAPNA Group stands for Iran Power Plant Projects Management Company which was established on August 13, 1993 with the objective of establishing a group for managing the power plant projects in those years.

Gov't Spokesman Reports 5% Raise in GDP

PISHVA (IRNA) - The spokesman for the Iranian Government has announced that Iran has seen an increase of over five percent in the gross domestic product (GDP).

Ali Bahadori-Jahromi made the announcement at a meeting held in a county 45 km southeast of Tehran on Friday evening.

Criticizing the enemies for mounting a 44-year media war against the Islamic Republic, Bahadori-Jahromi said the country has been successful in scientific, technological, defense, medical and military areas despite the propaganda and the plots.

He went on to say that the Iranian nation has remained strong despite all pressures and sanctions imposed against the country over the past four decades.

Elsewhere, he hailed Iran's achievement in producing COVID vaccines; the achievement which led the country to be independent of foreign products.

Since its outbreak in December 2019, the deadly coronavirus has killed more than 6,750,000 worldwide.

The number of the dead in Iran is 144,744.

3rd Train of SP Phase 14 Refinery Goes Operational

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – The third train of the South Pars phase 14 refinery has gone operational, according to the operator of the phase 14 development project, Mohammad-Mehdi Tavasoli-Pour.

Tavasoli-Pour told Shana on Saturday that the fourth and last train of the refinery is also scheduled to be put into operation by the end of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20).

The first train of the phase 14 refinery went operational in mid-March 2022 and the second train was inaugurated in late November last year.

Phase 14 development is aimed at producing 56.6 million cubic meters per day of rich gas, 75,000 barrels/day of gas condensate and 400 tons/day of sulfur, and 1 million tons/year of liquefied petroleum gas and one million tons/year of ethane to be fed to petrochemical plants.

South Pars Phase 14 Refinery can be considered the final refinery to be completed in the South Pars complex. Before the construction of this refinery, 12 refineries received gas from the offshore platforms of



the field and processed it.

However, after the inauguration of four offshore platforms of phase 14, the need to create more refining capacity in this complex was felt more day by day. Accordingly, the 13th government has put it on the agenda to complete the South Pars Phase 14 refinery by the end of the current Iranian calendar year and make it fully operational.

South Pars gas field, which Iran shares with Qatar in the Persian Gulf water, is divided into 24 standard phases of development in the first stage. Most of the phases are fully operational at the moment.

The huge offshore field covers an area of 9,700 square kilometers, 3,700 square kilometers of which are in Iran's territorial waters in the Persian Gulf. The remaining 6,000 square kilometers, called North Dome, are situated in Qatar's territorial waters.

The field is estimated to contain a significant amount of natural gas, accounting for about eight percent of the world's reserves, and approximately 18 billion barrels of condensate.

Iran to Rank 14th in Auto Manufacturing by Spring

TEHRAN (IRNA) - An official with the Ministry of Industry, Mining and Trade said on Friday that Iran ranked 19th in terms of car production in the world last year, which due to production growth could be promoted to 14th by the end of the current Iranian year (March 21, 2023).

Automobile manufacturing in Iran reached 1,050,000 in the first 10 months of the current Iranian calendar year (ending on March 21), the director general of Iran's Industry, Mining and Trade Ministry's Automotive Industry, Abdollah Tavakoli Lahijani, said.

Tavakoli Lahijani added the figure showed a 30 percent increase, as compared to the same period of time in the past year.

Iran Ranks 3rd in World in Number of Apiaries

TEHRAN (MNA) - Iran ranks third in the world in the number of apiaries, according to the chairman of the Animal Science Research Institute of Iran (ASRI).

Mokhtar Mohajer also said that Iran's rank in honey production is changing and moving between fourth and sixth place in the world.

Based on the data recently released by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), Iran is the third-largest producer of honey in the world.

The chairman of the Animal Science Research Institute has said that the amount of honey production in the country should be increased by three to four kilograms per colony.

Mohajer said, "According to the Seventh National Development Plan (2022-2026), the amount of honey production should be increased by at least three to four kilograms per colony according to the diversity of plants and the area of pastures that we have in the country".

He announced that 112,000 tons of honey, 8,300 kilograms of royal jelly, 406 tons of pollen, 2,536 tons of beeswax, 247 tons of propolis, and 3,917 grams of bee venom are produced annually in the country.

Currently, there are about 11.8 million bee colonies in 109,759 apiaries in the country, he added.

Pointing out that Iran ranks third in the world in the number of apiaries, he said 87,932 people are working in apiaries in the country, and the output of these apiaries is honey and its by-products.

Executive Operation for Building 1000MW Solar Power Plant Starts in Isfahan

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

ISFAHAN – The ceremony for starting the executive operation for construction of a 1000MW solar power plant in Isfahan Province was held.

Addressing the ceremony, the CEO of Esfahan Regional Electrical Company (EREC) Mr. Rasoul Mousarezaei said that appropriate infrastructures have been prepared in Isfahan Province in the past years and there are some plans in the pipeline for developing these infrastructures, adding that of course in Isfahan it needs more infrastructures to develop the current grid and power plants.

He noted that one of the projects is the Mobarakeh Steel 1000-megawatt solar power plant project which has progressed well and in the near future, the first phase of it will come on stream while today due to the fuel shortage, some parts of power plants of the province are idle and in order to get out of the current problem, they should move in direction of producing energy through using clean energies.

Mousarezaei noted that Iran has done a good job in investment in power plant construction and Mobarakeh Steel Company by investing in the field of solar power plant will help the country to double its solar power plants.

He reiterated that currently Isfahan accounts for 10% of national power

plant capacity which includes some small and big power plants, adding that less than 5% of the wind power plant capacity

of the country is in Isfahan Province and he expressed hope Isfahan Province could develop considerably in this field.

Then the CEO of Mobarakeh Steel Company Mr. Yasser Tayyebnia touched upon major actions of the company in the past year and said that Mobarakeh Steel Company has so far spent over 40,000b tomans in the field of energy consumption as well as observing environmental issues.



Spain Jails Letter Bomb Suspect To Avoid Flight to Russia

MADRID (Dispatches) - The pensioner who allegedly sent letter bombs to Spain's prime minister and the Ukrainian embassy was placed in pre-trial detention on grounds he could flee to "Russian territory".

The 74-year-old, arrested on Wednesday at his home near the northern town of Burgos, appeared before a judge at the Audiencia Nacional, Spain's top criminal court, facing one charge of terrorism, court documents showed.

He is accused of having sent six letter bombs to targets including Spanish ministers and embassies to push Madrid into halting support for Kyiv in the fight against Russia's invasion.



DR Congo Rebels Take Eastern Town

GOMA (Dispatches) - Rebels from the M23 group in Democratic Republic of Congo seized a town from the army as they continued to advance in the country's troubled east, the military said.

DRC's army confirmed the withdrawal, calling it a tactical move to protect civilians in the face of renewed unrest provoked by the rebel fighters' reinvigorated offensive.

The rebels took control of Kitshanga late Thursday after capturing several villages on the road linking the town of about 60,000 people to the provincial capital Goma. The city of more than one million people, located just on the Rwandan border, was already cut off from the north after rebels took National Highway 2 during their offensive in October and November.



Ukraine Says Fighting Fierce After Tank Pledges



KYIV (Dispatches) - Ukraine battled Russian troops trying to pierce its lines in the east and northeast before Kyiv takes delivery of tanks from its Western allies, saying the fighting showed it needed more weapons to repel the invaders.

Kyiv said fierce battles were under way, a day after at least 11 people were killed in missile and drone strikes which were widely seen in Ukraine as a response to the promises by important allies to send it tanks.

After weeks of wrangling, Germany and the United States this week said they would send Ukraine dozens of modern tanks to help push back Russian forces, opening the way for other countries to follow suit.

Poland gave Ukraine a further boost on Friday by promising an additional 60 tanks on top of 14 German-made Leopard 2 tanks it had already pledged.

Both sides in the war are expected to launch spring offensives, though Washington has advised Ukraine to wait until the latest weapons are in place and training has been provided - a process expected to take several months.

Moscow accused U.S. President Joe Biden of prolonging the war by arming Kyiv. Ukraine says the only way to end the war is for allies to give it the weapons to win it.

"This evil, this Russian aggression can and should be stopped only with adequate weapons. The terrorist state will not understand anything else," President Volodymyr Zelenskiy said in his nightly television address on Thursday.

Ukrainian officials reported fierce battles in the northeast and east of the country, scene of some of the heaviest combat since Russia's invasion on Feb. 24 last year.

"Fierce fighting continues along the front lines," said Oleh Synehubov, governor of the northeastern region of Kharkiv, adding that Ukrainian forces were holding out.

Millions of Ukrainians faced electricity shortages after Thursday's missile and drone strikes, the latest to target energy facilities and deprive people of heat, light and water.

Russian air attacks hit five high-voltage substations in the central, southern and south-west regions on Thursday, Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal said. Ukraine will need an additional \$17 billion in financing this year for energy repairs, de-mining and to rebuild infrastructure, he added.

Russia has been targeting Ukraine's energy infrastructure with intense air strikes far from the front about weekly since October. Kyiv says the attacks serve no military purpose and aim to harm civilians, a war crime. Moscow says the strikes are intended to reduce Ukraine's ability to fight.

The latest strikes focused on "facilities that operate Ukraine's defense industrial complex and transport system," it said. "The goals of the massive attack have been reached. All the assigned targets have been neutralized."

After Ukraine recaptured land in the second half of 2022, front lines have been largely frozen for more than two months, with Russia trying to gain ground in the east and protect a corridor of land it has seized in southern Ukraine.

Oleksandr Musiyenko, head of the Military and Strategic Research Centre of Ukraine, said Russia was sending in more reinforcements, mainly conscripts, to block Ukrainian advances.

"But they do not have the level of artillery and tank support they had on Feb. 24," Musiyenko told Ukrainian television.

Haiti Police Block Streets To Protest Officer Killings

PORT-AU-PRINCE (Dispatches) - Haitian police officers blocked streets and forced their way into the country's main airport to protest the recent killing of officers by armed gangs expanding their grip on the Caribbean nation.

Protesters in civilian clothes who identified themselves as police first attacked Prime Minister Ariel Henry's official residence, according to a Reuters witness, and then flooded the airport as Henry was arriving from a trip to Argentina.

Henry was temporarily stuck in the airport, but returned to his residence in Port-au-Prince later on Thursday, followed by police protesters. A Reuters witness heard heavy gunfire near his home.

Haiti's National Police and the Prime Minister's Office did not immediately respond to requests for comment. Roads around Port-au-Prince and in several cities to the north were blocked by protesters.

A group of U.S. government officials were visiting Haiti at the time, and a U.S. State Department spokesperson said all Washington's personnel were accounted for and they had moved some meetings as a precaution. Haitian human rights group



RNDDH said in a statement that 78 police officers had been killed since Henry came to power in July 2021, averaging five each month, saying the prime minister and the head of the national police Frantz Elbe were "responsible for each of the 78 lives lost during their reign."

"History will remember they did nothing to protect and preserve the lives of these agents who chose to serve their country," it added.

Late on Thursday, The Bahamas' foreign ministry said the country's prime minister had ordered all Bahamians, including its diplomatic personnel, to leave Haiti as soon as security conditions permit.

Haitian police had earlier in the day stopped the neighboring country's local charge d'affaires and taken their vehicle and weapons, it added, saying all its diplomats were safe, as well as five citizens who had been trapped around the airport.

Last week, four police officers near the capital were killed by the Vitelhomme gang, while shootouts on Wednesday with the Savien gang in the town of Liancourt left another seven officers dead, according to Haiti's National Police and local media reports.

Palestinian Anger Spreads After Deadly Israel Raid

JENIN (Dispatches) - Before carrying out one of the deadliest West Bank raids in recent memory, Israeli soldiers reportedly snuck into Jenin refugee camp hiding in the back of a milk truck.

The operation, which Israel said targeted Islamists planning an attack, killed nine people and for Palestinians recalled the bloodshed of the second intifada or uprising between 2000 and 2005, when Jenin was plagued by fighting.

Analysts have warned of more violence to come, after the deadliest year in the West Bank since the UN started tracking the death toll in the occupied territory in 2005.

According to Jihad Abu Kamal, a Jenin resident and self-described member of the Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades armed group, a dairy truck enters Jenin refugee camp at the same time every morning to deliver milk.

"They tried to surprise us with it," the 35-year-old told AFP, referring to multiple accounts from witnesses who said Israeli forces entered undercover in the back of the vehicle.

A local armed group released video purportedly showing the truck used by the Israelis.

Israel has said the target of the raid was a group of Islamic Jihad fighters hiding in a house near a hospital, some of whom shot at troops during the raid.

Among those killed, according to Palestinian officials, was a 61-year-old woman named Majeda Obeid.

Her daughter, Kefiyat Obeid, told AFP that after morning prayers her mother looked out her window as gunfire rang through the street when she was shot in the neck.

The Israeli army has said it was looking into reports of additional casualties beyond "armed suspects."

Israeli forces withdrew from the camp before midday.

When the fighting ended, 23-year-old Fadi Sabbarini said he ran into the targeted house to see if he could help.

Greek Gov't Shrugs Off Wiretap Scandal Vote

ATHENS (AFP)—Greece's government easily survived a no-confidence vote called by the opposition over a long-running wiretap scandal in which top officials were targeted by state intelligence for months.

The censure motion was defeated by 156 votes to 143 in the 300-seat chamber, parliament vice chairman Haralambos Athanassiou said. Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis had welcomed the vote as an opportunity to promote his government's record ahead of elections in spring.

Leftist former premier Alexis Tsipras called for the no-confidence vote on Wednesday, branding Mitsotakis the "mastermind and leader" behind a "criminal network" that had wiretapped officials' phones. He identified Greece's former energy minister, army chief and former national security adviser as being among the officials.

Tsipras said the chairman of the Hellenic Authority for Communication Security and Privacy (ADAE), Christos Rammos, had informed him the officials had been under surveillance by state intelligence agency EYP.

Tsipras said Mitsotakis, whose office has oversight over EYP, had "consciously lied" for six months and had "thrown the entire weight of his authority" behind preventing the truth from coming out.

But Mitsotakis insisted the wiretaps had been approved by a prosecutor at EYP and were thus legal.

"The (monitoring) was legal, we need to clarify this," the prime minister said.

"This case is under investigation in depth... everything will come to light in the end," he said.

The government has accused Tsipras of seeking to weaponise the ADAE, noting that Rammos was appointed to the post by Tsipras's leftist government just before elections in 2019.

The scandal broke in July when Nikos Androulakis, MEP and leader of the Greek socialist party (Pasok-Kinal), took legal action against an attempt to infiltrate his mobile phone using spyware known as Predator.

After the revelation, Mitsotakis admitted that state intelligence had also monitored Androulakis, without disclosing the reason, but denied that authorities had used the Predator malware. The government has also strongly denied reports that dozens of prominent Greeks were under surveillance via Predator, including former premier Antonis Samaras, several serving cabinet ministers, military chiefs, media owners and journalists.

Mitsotakis has called the reports "conspiracy theories" and "fairy tales... without a shred of evidence".

In August, the Greek intelligence service chief, as well as a close aide and nephew to the prime minister, both resigned over the socialist leader's surveillance.

The use of spyware, which many governments and law enforcement agencies argue is necessary to fight crime and terrorism, has become controversial over concerns the technology could be used against political opponents.



Tunisia Votes Again for a Parliament Stripped of Power by President

TUNIS (Dispatches) - Tunisians are to vote again on Sunday in elections for a parliament stripped of its powers, the final pillar of President Kais Saied's remake of politics in the birthplace of the Arab Spring.

The second-round vote comes as the North African country grapples with a grave economic crisis and deep political divisions over Saied's July 2021 power grab.

Some 262 candidates, including just 34 women, are running for 131 seats in an election whose first round last month saw just 11.2 percent of registered voters take part.

That was the lowest turnout of any national vote since the 2011 revolt that overthrew dictator Zine El Abidine Ben Ali and triggered copycat uprisings across the Arab world. The final round comes 18 months after Saied sacked the government and suspended parliament, later moving to seize control of the judiciary and pushing through a constitution last July that gave his office almost unlimited executive power.

Youssef Cherif, the director of Columbia Global Centers in Tunis, said Tunisians had a "lack of interest" in politics.

"This parliament will have very little legitimacy, and the president, who is all-powerful thanks to the 2022 constitution, will be able to control it as he sees fit," he said.

Lawyer and political expert Hamadi Redissi said the new assembly would "not have to approve the government, nor can it censor it without a two-thirds majority" of both parliament and a council of regional representatives, whose make-up has yet to be defined.

The legislature will have almost zero power to hold the president to account. As during the first round, most political parties -- which have been sidelined by a system that bans candidates from declaring allegiance to a political grouping -- called for a boycott.

On the streets of Tunis, campaigning has been muted, with few posters on the walls and few well-known candidates.

And despite Saied's break with the traditional political class, many Tunisians are sceptical of all politicians.

"I don't feel I can trust anyone, so I'm not going to vote," said carpenter Ridha. The electoral board has organized televised debates to try to spark interest among those voters who supported Saied's bid for the presidency in 2019.



Link Between Dental Health and Migraines

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Migraines are thought of as severe headaches, but they are more than that — they are a common neurological disease. However, the fact that poor oral health can be a cause of frequent migraine attacks is often overlooked. Cavities, pulp infections, bone loss owing to periodontal disease, dental abscesses, impacted teeth, cysts, and tumors can contribute to chronic and recurring migraine episodes.

Key takeaways:

- *Oral disease-associated migraine attacks account for a significant proportion of patients visiting neurology clinics worldwide.
- *Dentists often consider oral diseases as a cause or an exacerbating factor for headaches. For example, a toothache can irritate the trigeminal nerve, resulting in a migraine headache.
- *Severe and chronic migraine attacks are often related to hidden oral diseases, which can be challenging to identify. Dentists are best equipped to diagnose such cases.

- *A detailed dental history, plus head, neck, and oral examination, panoramic and/or periapical dental X-rays, and pulp vitality testing, can help determine the contributing factor.

While bad oral health can induce headaches and migraines, prompt measures to correct potential dental problems can help you get rid of the migraine attacks. Read on to learn about the oral causes of migraine and how to manage them.

Headaches and toothaches are both transmitted through the 5th cranial nerve — the trigeminal nerve. Its principal role is to innervate the face and jaws- split into three major branches.

Oral and dental diseases trigger two branches of the trigeminal nerves — maxillary (V2) and mandibular (V3). In addition, chronic abscesses result in local inflammation, necrotic tissue, the release of pain mediators, and local tissue hypoxia. These inflammatory processes impact the trigeminal and vascular systems — and aggravate an episodic migraine into a chronic migraine.

Once the migraine becomes chronic, the response to medicines becomes less effective. Therefore, the key strategy is to prevent the development of chronic migraine by strictly controlling all potential dental risk factors — such as an infected tooth or a dental abscess.

According to the American Migraine Association, some oral and dental diseases can aggravate migraines:

- *Loose, missing, or misplaced teeth. They make jaw muscles work harder to align teeth, swallow, and even keep the mouth closed. This might result in chronic muscular inflammation, which can cause migraines or headaches.

- *Bruxism. Teeth grinding and jaw clenching can lead to muscle and gum irritation, producing migraines and headaches. Symptoms include morning headaches, tight jaw muscles, cracked or damaged teeth, severe tooth pain, and migraines.

- *Bad bite. While stress is frequently associated with tooth grinding, a bad bite — teeth that are not correctly aligned — can also result in teeth grinding and thus, migraine.

- *Damaged wisdom teeth. They are the last and hindmost adult teeth to erupt. Impacted wisdom teeth can cause discomfort, damage to other teeth, and other dental issues resulting in long-term headaches. However, most people find relief from having their wisdom teeth pulled out.

- *Temporomandibular disorders (TMDs). It affects jaw joints and muscles, which can produce chronic pain, thus, can induce migraines. Common symptoms include tender jaw muscles, severe migraines, earaches, toothaches, and clicking or popping sounds. Research reveals that addressing such underlying oral health issues helps in relieving migraines. For example, studies show that 35% of migraine sufferers have at least one TMD symptom and simultaneously report having TMD pain and migraines.

- *Chronic periodontitis (CP). It is associated with gingival tissue destruction, alveolar bone loss, and even tooth loss, has been linked to a higher risk of migraine.

- *Other common dental issues. That includes misaligned teeth, tooth decay, or gum disease, which might cause toothaches. In turn, a severe toothache might set off a migraine or headache. Regular examinations and cleanings, following through on prescribed treatment and practicing excellent oral hygiene help to reduce your risk of toothaches.

Updated COVID-19 Booster Shots Cut Risk of Symptomatic Infection From XBB.1.5



LONDON (Dispatches) - Gloved hands hold a Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine booster shot, administered in Freeport, New York on November 30, 2021. The CDC has characterized current COVID-19 booster shots as at least 40% effective.

The updated COVID-19 booster shots are at least 40% effective against symptomatic infection from omicron subvariants XBB.1.5 and XBB among fully vaccinated adults within three months of the shot's administration, according to preliminary estimates from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The CDC characterized the study as the first estimate of the updated booster shot's efficacy against symptomatic infection with XBB.1.5, which has been called the most transmissible subvariant yet and is the only strain that is increasing in prevalence in the U.S. Researchers produced preliminary estimates from national pharmacy testing conducted from the start of December through mid-January.

Efficacy varied by age range, with people ages 18-49 seeing the highest level at 49% and people ages 50-64 seeing the lowest at 40%. Americans 65 years and older saw 43% vaccine efficacy against symptomatic infection with XBB.1.5 and XBB.

"Findings from this analysis of national pharmacy testing data show that a bivalent mRNA booster dose provided added protection against symptomatic XBB/XBB.1.5 infection for at least the first 3 months after vaccination in persons who had previously received 2, 3, or 4 monovalent vaccine doses," the authors wrote. "All persons should stay up to date with recommended COVID-19 vaccines, including receiving a bivalent booster dose when eligible."

XBB.1.5 was responsible for 49% of new coronavirus infections last week, according to CDC estimates. That's up from 37% of cases the week before, when the strain surpassed BQ.1.1 to become the top strain circulating in the U.S.

The World Health Organization previously warned that the strain "may contribute to increases in case incidence globally." In the U.S., however, COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations are on the decline. And despite a booster campaign push in the fall by the Biden administration, many Americans don't seem eager to get the updated shot. Just 15% of Americans have gotten the booster, according to CDC data.

A recent survey found that the most common reason given for not getting the updated COVID-19 booster shot among vaccinated people was a lack of knowledge about eligibility for it.

The Food and Drug Administration wants to simplify the complicated booster process in the hopes that it will increase uptake of the shot. Earlier this week it proposed that booster shots are updated to match circulating strains each year and an annual shot for most Americans is offered in the fall. The FDA's committee of vaccine experts is scheduled to discuss the idea on Thursday.



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Germany Firmly Rejects New EU Common Debt

BERLIN (Dispatches) - Germany's finance ministry firmly rejected proposals on new European Union joint debt, saying such a move, backed by France and European Council President Charles Michel, was not needed and would send a wrong signal to markets.

"In times of rising interest rates and high inflation, the European Union must send out signals for fiscal stability, not for debt instruments," the ministry said in a statement.

According to the ministry, issuing debt in this context would lead to a loss of confidence in international financial markets and would counteract the European Central Bank's monetary policy tightening, which aims to tame inflation.



Global 2023 Economic View Downgraded, At Odds With Market Optimism

BENGALURU (Dispatches) - Global economic growth is forecast to barely clear 2% this year, according to a Reuters poll of economists who said the greater risk was a further downgrade to their view, at odds with widespread optimism in markets since the start of the year.

Falling energy prices, a slowdown in inflation in most economies from multi-decade highs, an unexpectedly resilient euro zone economy and China's economic reopening have led traders to speculate the downturn will be milder.

That has driven MSCI's all-country world index of shares up nearly 20% from October lows, hitting a five-month closing high on Wednesday, despite the greater risk central banks keep interest rates higher for longer rather than cut them.

But economists as a whole were much less upbeat, paring back growth forecasts for this year and next from 2.3% and 3.0%, respectively, in an October 2022 poll to 2.1% and 2.8%. Their much dour mood flew in the face of some notable upgrades by banks in recent weeks.

However, some of Wall Street's biggest names have thrown cold water on expectations the U.S. economy will scrape through 2023 without a recession.

The 2023 growth forecast is well behind an International Monetary Fund forecast of 2.7% that was issued in October and is due to be updated next week. The latest Reuters polls of more than 500 economists covering 45 economies were taken Jan. 5-25.

More than two-thirds of respondents, 130 of 195, said the greater risk to their world growth outlook was that it would be even slower than what they currently expect.

Much will depend on how much success the world's major central banks can claim from roughly a year's worth of historically aggressive interest rate hikes that are not over yet. The full impact of rate hikes can take a year or more to show up in economies.

"The market continues to price for a dream scenario of inflation having peaked, then coming down sharply, but not overshooting to the downside," said market strategists at Rabobank, based on relatively good news in data released in the first weeks of this year.

"However... the range of scenarios ahead is truly broad, and yet the market seems to have settled for a happy median that seems the least likely to transpire."

Consensus gross domestic product growth forecasts for 2023 for more than 80% of economies surveyed were downgraded from the October poll.

Inflation predictions for this year in nearly 80% of economies surveyed, 35 of 45, were upgraded from the October poll, suggesting the bias was for global central banks to maintain a tighter monetary policy for an extended period of time.

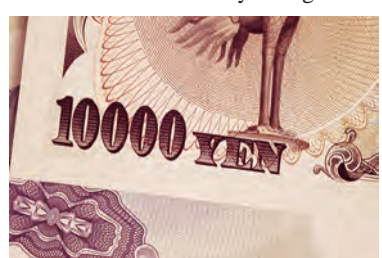
At the same time, unemployment rates were not expected to climb much from relatively low levels.

That, alongside six of the eight major central banks not being expected to hit their inflation targets this year, suggests speculation over lower rates could be premature.

Nearly all major central banks were expected to hold interest rates steady through the end of this year, a conclusion also at odds with rate futures, which expect easing in the fourth quarter.

IMF Urges BOJ to Let Long-Term Yields Rise, Be Ready to Raise Rates

TOKYO (Dispatches) - The Bank of Japan should let government bond yields move more flexibly and be ready to raise short-term interest rates swiftly if "significant" upside risks to inflation materialize, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) said.



In a proposal after an annual policy consultation with Japan, the IMF said the central bank's ultra-loose monetary policy remains appropriate as inflation is likely to fall back below its 2% target by the end of 2024 unless wages rise significantly.

But with upside risks to inflation becoming more prominent in the world's third-biggest economy, the IMF said, the Bank of Japan (BOJ) should give long-term yields freer rein, such as by raising its 10-year bond yield target or widening the range it tolerates.

"We don't see this as really changing the (BOJ's) accommodative stance. It's more to balance some of the impact on the real economy against the impact on financial markets," IMF Japan Mission Chief Ranil Salgado said.

"It also makes it easier to begin the transition towards an eventual raising of the short-term rate," he told Reuters, adding the BOJ could consider steps to enhance flexibility in bond yields even before its inflation target is durably met.

With Japan's core consumer inflation at a 41-year high 4%, double the BOJ's target, markets have been betting the central bank will phase out its aggressive stimulus after dovish Governor Haruhiko Kuroda retires in April.

Unlike central banks worldwide that have aggressively raised interest rates, the BOJ has stuck with an ultra-low rate policy, called yield curve control (YCC), that applies a negative interest rate to some short-term funds and targets the 10-year yield around zero.

The global lender's proposals contrast with those it made last year, when it urged the central bank to maintain ultra-loose policy to support Japan's recovery from the damage of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Given the two-sided risks to inflation, more flexibility in long-term yields would help to avoid abrupt changes later. This would help better manage inflation risks and also help address the side-effects of prolonged easing," the IMF said in a statement issued after the policy consultation.

The IMF said the BOJ could also consider options such as targeting a shorter-term yield or the pace of its bond buying. Such steps, it said, would help mitigate the side effects of prolonged easing, such as distortions in the yield curve caused by the BOJ's massive government bond purchases.

If inflation risks heighten significantly, the BOJ must withdraw monetary support more forcefully, such as by raising short-term rates "much earlier and above the neutral rate" to anchor inflation back towards its 2% target, it said.

A hike in short-term rates, however, is unlikely in the near-term and can be considered only when there is clear evidence that wages will keep rising and help the BOJ durably achieve its inflation target, Salgado said in the interview.

U.S. Economy Grows Strongly in Q4

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - The U.S. economy maintained a strong pace of growth in the fourth quarter as consumers boosted spending on goods, but momentum appears to have slowed considerably towards the end of the year, with higher interest rates eroding demand.

Gross domestic product increased at a 2.9% annualized rate last quarter, the Commerce Department said in its advance fourth-quarter GDP growth estimate on Thursday. The economy grew at a 3.2% pace in the third quarter. Economists polled by Reuters had forecast GDP rising at a 2.6% rate.

That could be the last quarter of solid growth before the lagged effects of the Federal Reserve's fastest monetary policy tightening cycle since the 1980s kick in. Most economists expect a recession by the second half of the year, though mild compared to previous downturns.

Retail sales have weakened sharply over the last two months and manufacturing looks to have joined the housing market in recession. While the labor market remains strong, business sentiment continues to sour, which could eventually hurt hiring.

Robust second-half growth erased the 1.1% contraction in the first six months of the year. For all for 2022, the economy expanded 2.1%, down from the 5.9% logged in 2021. The Fed last year raised its policy rate by 425 basis points from near zero to a 4.25%-4.50% range, the highest since late 2007.

Consumer spending, which accounts for more than two-thirds of U.S. economic activity, was the main driver of growth, mostly reflecting a surge in goods spending at the start of the quarter. Spending has been underpinned by labor market resilience as well as excess savings accumulated during the COVID-19 pandemic.

But demand for long-lasting manufactured goods, which are mostly bought on credit, has fizzled and some households, especially lower income, have depleted their savings. Business spending also lost some luster as the fourth quarter ended.

Despite the clear signs of a weak handover to 2023, some economists are cautiously optimistic that the economy will skirt an outright recession, but rather suffer a rolling downturn, where sectors decline in turn rather than all at once.

They argue that monetary policy now acts with a shorter lag than was previously the case because of advances in technology and the U.S. central bank's transparency, which they said resulted in financial markets and the real economy acting in anticipation of rate hikes.

Residential investment suffered its seventh straight quarterly decline, the longest such streak since the collapse of the housing bubble triggered the Great Recession, but there are signs the housing market could be stabilizing.

Mortgage rates have been trending lower as the Fed slows the pace of its rate hikes.



Italy, EU Close to Deal to Revive GACS Bad Loan Scheme

ROME (Dispatches) - Italy is close to clinching a deal with European Union competition authorities to reintroduce a scheme under which the state provides guarantees to help banks offload bad loans, four people close to the matter said.

Rome has been working to renew the "GACS" scheme, which expired in June, while also tightening the terms under which the state provides guarantees to investors who buy bad bank loans repackaged as securities.

Discussions with Brussels are at a very advanced stage and the terms have been for the most part agreed, the four sources briefed on the matter told Reuters.

The EU vets such measures to ensure compliance with the bloc's state aid rules.

Initially expected to be finalized by the end of 2022, the talks have progressed more slowly than anticipated, leaving banks unable to tap the scheme for their year-end bad loan clean-up deals. The renewal comes as the banking industry braces for a surge in corporate defaults as borrowers wrestle with rising interest rates.

Rome has changed the scheme to make it less generous for banks and to increase protection for taxpayers, reducing the chances they will be left out of pocket.

Under the new terms agreed with the EU, the scheme would cover 80% instead of 100% of the least risky tranche in bad debt securitisation deals, the sources said.

The Treasury had also considered hiking a credit rating threshold needed for the senior tranche to qualify for the GACS guarantees, but is instead leaving it unchanged, one of the sources said.

Pakistani Rupee Plummets as Markets Adjust to Removal of Unofficial Controls

KARACHI (Dispatches) - The Pakistani rupee fell 9.6% against the dollar, central bank data showed - the biggest one-day drop in over two decades - in a slump that may persuade the International Monetary Fund to resume lending to the country.

The drop comes a day after foreign exchange companies removed a cap on the exchange rate, a key demand of the IMF as part of a program of economic reforms it has agreed on with the cash-strapped South Asian nation.

The currency's official value closed at 255.4 rupees against the dollar versus 230.9 on Wednesday, the central bank said.

Facing an increasingly acute balance of payments crisis, Pakistan is desperate to secure external financing, with less than three weeks worth of import cover in its foreign exchange reserves.

Pakistan secured a \$6 billion IMF bailout in 2019. It was topped up with another \$1 billion last year to help the country following devastating floods, but the IMF then suspended disbursements in November due to Pakistan's failure to make more progress on fiscal consolidation.

Aside from wanting the government to reduce its budget deficit, the IMF is pushing for it to move to a market-determined exchange rate regime.

The foreign exchange companies said on Wednesday that they had removed the cap for the sake of the country, because it was causing "artificial" distortions for the economy.

Wednesday's move by foreign currency dealers, whose open market rates are different from the rate notified by the central bank, had a cascade effect on official exchange rates on Thursday.

The drop in the official rate was the biggest since 1999 in both absolute and percentage terms, according to JS Global, a Pakistani brokerage house.

In the open market, the rupee weakened from 243 rupees to the dollar to 262, a drop of about 7%, having lost 1.2% the previous day, according to the Exchange Companies Association of Pakistan (ECAP) trade data.

"We requested the central bank to increase the interbank (rate) to help combat the black market," ECAP President Malik Bostan told Reuters.

The State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) did not immediately respond to a Reuters request for comment. Aside from moving towards a market-determined exchange rate, Islamabad has also announced it will take fiscal measures recommended by the IMF.

Turkish Central Bank Maintains Yearend Inflation Forecast at 22.3%



ANKARA (Dispatches) - The Central Bank of the Republic of Turkey (CBRT) kept the country's yearend inflation forecasts for both 2023 and 2024.

Consumer prices are projected to rise 22.3% this year and 8.8% next year, the bank's governor told a news conference marking the release of the bank's first quarterly inflation report in 2023.

Noting that the bank sees the inflation forecasts as an intermediate target, Şahap Kavcıoğlu referred to the bank's emphasis on Turkish liras over foreign currency, saying: "We will continue to use all the tools of our "liraization" strategy to support an inflation path consistent with our forecasts."

The bank also said it expected the slowing trend in global economic activity to continue this year, and that the recent moderate course of commodity prices, led by energy, will remain in place in the upcoming period.

The bank also maintained its food inflation estimate of 22% for 2023, and 11.5% for 2024, in line with the previous forecast.

Seeking to stabilize the national currency, the monetary authority last year unveiled the liraization strategy, which it says is its integrated policy framework. It repeated it had no exchange rate target level and would not buy or sell hard currencies to direct the lira.

The Turkish lira deposit ratio rose from 35.6% in January to 55.1% at the end of 2022.

The figure is aimed to hit 60% in the first half of this year, as laid out by the country's monetary policy and liraization strategy for 2023.

Kavcıoğlu also noted that the bank anticipates that improvements in pricing behavior and inflation expectations will continue in the upcoming period, thanks to decisions made within the framework of the bank's policies.

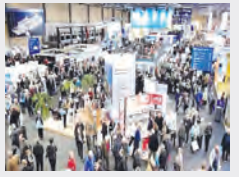
Annual inflation in Turkey showed a sharp fall in December and came in below expectations, mainly because of a favorable so-called base effect and after hitting a 24-year high in October.

Iran's Solo Exhibition to Be Held in Ashgabat in February

TEHRAN (IRNA) - An exclusive exhibition of Iran will be held in Ashgabat, the capital of Turkmenistan, in February, Iran's Ambassador to Turkmenistan announced.

Abbas Arbab Kholes said that Iran's solo exhibition will be held at Turkmenistan's Ashgabat on February 15-17, 2023, in cooperation with Mashhad International Exhibition and Iran's Embassy in Turkmenistan.

He added that this solo exhibition will showcase Iranian products in the fields of construction equipment, steel products, home appliances, foodstuffs, sanitary equipment and detergents, industrial equipment and machinery. Iran's Ambassador to Turkmenistan pointed out that this exhibition will be held in Ashgabat in line with Iran-Kazakhstan Joint Economic Committee meeting.



How the U.S. Got to Yes on Abrams Tanks

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - They are expensive and hard to maintain. They run on jet fuel. And they are difficult to operate.

The U.S. Pentagon presented its best arguments, publicly and privately, against sending Abrams - its most advanced battle tanks - to Ukraine.

But President Joe Biden ultimately decided to approve the delivery of 31 tanks on Wednesday, which senior U.S. officials said came from the need to maintain unity among allies backing Ukraine.

Biden's decision capped a week of failed diplomatic efforts to get Germany to send its main Leopard battle tank to Ukraine without a comparable move from Washington.

The reversal ended a rare public division in the alliance that Washington officials feared Moscow could exploit.

Since the start of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Biden and European allies have sought to present an image of harmonious support for Ukraine despite occasional disagreements.

The billions of dollars worth of Western weaponry funneled into the country, Western allies said, were tangible signs that Russian President Vladimir Putin had failed to divide the West as he pressed his nearly year-old invasion.

But the split over German tanks undermined those efforts, raising questions about whether the West would fall short in providing the heavy armor that Kyiv says it needs to mount a spring counteroffensive.

U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin arrived in Berlin last Wednesday to convince Germany's new defense minister Boris Pistorius that Germany should at the very least allow countries like Poland to re-export their Leopard tanks to Ukraine.

"The secretary will be pressing the Germans on this," one senior U.S. defense official said at the time.

The trip, which included a day-long meeting at Ramstein air base in Germany, failed to achieve a breakthrough and left U.S. officials frustrated.

In Washington, senior U.S. officials had privately expressed consternation at Germany's attempts to tie the Abrams tanks to delivery of the Leopards.

One senior administration official, speaking on condition of anonymity, told reporters that U.S. officials did not think the Abrams tanks were a net positive for Ukraine because they are difficult to operate and maintain.

But Germany did not want to go it alone, the official said, prompting the Americans to wonder whether there was deeper reason in Berlin having to do with the symbolism of German tanks rolling in Eastern Europe for a country still scarred from starting World War Two.

At the same time, U.S. officials were trying to answer the clamor from Ukraine for tanks while impressing on the Ukrainians that there are limits to assistance in the long haul.

The Germans refused to budge. As Austin landed in Berlin, German officials told reporters that Berlin would allow German-made tanks to be sent to Ukraine if the United States agreed to send its own tanks.

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz had stressed that stipulation several times behind closed doors. He also discussed the issue in multiple phone conversations with Biden this month, senior Biden administration officials said.



That led to media coverage of divisions between the United States and Germany that raised eyebrows back in Washington, where officials thought they had been clear against sending Abrams tanks to Ukraine. U.S. officials argued that American contributions to the Ukraine war effort had been substantial with Bradley Fighting Vehicles, air defense systems, millions of artillery rounds and other potent weaponry. Each Abrams tank costs more than \$10 million, including training and sustainment.

"The headline is not about whether we've come to agreement or not with Germany on tanks. The headline is the United States has provided \$5 billion of security assistance to Ukraine in the last month," one senior official said last Friday. In public, the United States took the high road, insisting it was Berlin's sovereign decision to make.

But at one point during Austin's trip, Washington asked Berlin to stop publicly tying Germany's approval of the Leopard tanks to the Biden administration sending Abrams tanks.

The American pressure appeared to have worked, at least for a while. Pistorius, the German defense minister, told a TV interview on Thursday that he did not know of any requirement that Ukraine receive U.S. and German tanks simultaneously.

Last Friday, a German government spokesperson even said the delivery of Leopard battle tanks to Ukraine was never tied to the United States making a similar move.

But back in Washington, officials were looking for "creative solutions." However, the issue came to a surprise close on Wednesday when Biden announced his approval alongside a similar German announcement.

The compromise appears to have been a decision to send Abrams not now, but sometime down the road - months from now.

Despite the uncertain timeline, Ukraine has welcomed the decisions. "It's an important step on the path to victory," Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskiy tweeted on Wednesday.

Canada Expected to Buck Trend of Big Investment Banking Layoffs



TORONTO (Dispatches) - Some of Canada's top investment banks plan to maintain staffing levels to meet client expectations for the same level of coverage through the ups and downs of business cycles, head hunters and industry executives said.

U.S. investment banks, including Goldman Sachs, began cutting over 3,000 employees on Jan. 11 citing a challenging macroeconomic environment, raising fears Canadian banks may follow suit. Like their global peers, many Canadian investment banks had staffed up during the pandemic only to see dealmaking slow last year.

At Royal Bank of Canada, the country's biggest lender, for instance, headcount at its capital markets division jumped by 71% over the two years ending Oct. 31, 2022 to 6,887 employees.

But in the meantime Canadian dealmaking fell 39.7% last year to \$89.7 billion. That is more than the 36% drop in global deal values to \$3.8 trillion following a stellar 2021, according to data from Dealogic.

Yet, Canadian banks have not announced layoffs and some even say they may increase headcount, though dealmaking in the new year is down nearly 50% to \$3.2 billion from a year ago, according to Dealogic.

"Right now there is a sense that there isn't a need for cuts in the system," Dominique Fortier, partner at recruitment firm Heidrick and Struggles Toronto office, told Reuters.

"When there was an upswing in 2021, it happened so quickly that there was no corresponding increase in hiring and so I don't see that we'll have the same decrease in terms of headcount coming."

Toronto Dominion Bank, which last year agreed to buy New York-based boutique investment bank Cowen Inc., expects to continue to grow its global investment banking business as it work towards closing the deal, a spokesperson said.

Erdogan Thrusts NATO Expansion Issue Into Turkey's Tense Election Campaign

ANKARA (Dispatches) - Two provocative incidents in Stockholm this month have energized Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan ahead of tight elections and dimmed Sweden and Finland's hopes of joining NATO before the summer, diplomats, analysts and opposition politicians say.

Erdogan was quick to thrust the issue of NATO expansion into domestic politics after a copy of the Muslim holy book, the Koran, was burned at the weekend, and an effigy of the Turkish leader was strung from a lamppost a week earlier.

The incidents, while not illegal in Sweden, hobbled Stockholm's effort to win Ankara's support for its bid to join U.S.-led NATO, which Sweden made last May alongside

Finland in the face of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

For Erdogan, it was an opportunity to rally support and distract from a cost-of-living crisis weighing on voters' minds, analysts said, with polls showing he could lose to some presidential challengers in the May 14 vote.

Facing his biggest political test in two decades in power, he took a stance that has proven effective before - criticizing perceived Islamophobia in Europe and support for "members of terrorist organizations and enemies of Islam" in Sweden.

Leaders of the opposition alliance looking to topple Erdogan and his Islamist-rooted AK Party scrambled this week to fall in line with his view, and even take a harder line.

Palestinian Resistance Groups...

FROM PAGE 1

The Islamic Jihad resistance movement also praised the East al-Quds operation, saying in a statement that it "came at the right time and place to avenge the blood of martyrs in the Jenin camp and the West Bank. It was a natural and legitimate response to the crimes of the occupying regime, and violation of our sanctities."

"The operation sent the strong message to the Israeli regime that the resistance front is fully prepare; it will not take long for our people to retaliate, and that the Tel Aviv regime's heinous crimes will not go unpunished at all," it said in a statement.

Moreover, the al-Quds Brigades, which is the military wing of the Islamic Jihad movement, stated that such operations express "the unity among different strata of the Palestinian society, the strong willpower of the Palestinian nation, and total rejection of the Israeli occupation."

It added that the East al-Quds operation is "a natural and clear response to the presence of Israeli forces on the land of Palestine, and their brutal practices against Palestinian people in Jenin, Nablus, Gaza, al-Quds and elsewhere."

Additionally, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) paid tribute to the heroic resistance fighters, stressing that the East al-Quds operation is the embodiment of the willpower of the Palestinian nation in confronting the Israeli occupation.

The Popular Resistance Committees (PRC) stated that the operation at the illegal settlement of Nabi Yacov represents a practical and effective response to the crimes of the Israeli regime in Jenin camp and elsewhere across the Palestinian territories.

Iran Flotilla Sailing...

FROM PAGE 1

Makran is a forward base ship weighing 121,000 tons. The warship can carry five helicopters and is employed for providing logistical support for the combat warships.

The 86th flotilla is expected to break the record for the distance an Iranian flotilla has sailed in international waters. It set sail from the south of Iran in early autumn with the purpose of circumnavigating the world. Its trip to Brazil appears to be part of a mission to the Panama Canal. Last year, the 75th flotilla, including Sahand and Makran warships, set a new record of navigation for 250,000 kilometers after a trip to Saint Petersburg in Russia.

FM Denies Terrorism...

FROM PAGE 1

"Immediately after the incident, the president issued a firm order to follow up the incident legally and judicially, and to conduct legal and judicial follow-ups on each and every one of those who may have been negligent in this matter," he said.

Following the assault, Tehran police chief Brigadier General Hossein Rahimi said the gunman, who entered the Azerbaijani embassy and started shooting with a firearm, was arrested.

Quran Desecration...

FROM PAGE 1

Protesters chanted slogans and vented their anger against the silence of the west regarding repeated incidents of desecration of the holy Quran and the prophet Mohammad. Demonstrators also called on Muslim nations to boycott European goods over what they describe as the west's insolent behavior.

Demonstrators are demanding that the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, known as OIC, raise its voice against the growing intolerance against Islam and anti-Muslim acts across the globe.

The countrywide rallies came days after Pakistan denounced what it described as "the abhorrent act of desecration" of the Quran in Sweden and the Netherlands, saying such acts disrespect Muslims across the globe.

Condemnations continued to pour in from Muslim countries across the world. Yemen, Qatar along with other Islamic nations joined Iran, Pakistan, and Turkey to denounce the desecration.

Meanwhile tens of thousands of Iranians took to the streets in the Iranian capital Tehran and other cities to protest against the desecration of the Holy Quran in Europe.

Following the Friday prayers, worshipers gathered across Iran, marched in rallies, and chanted slogans, condemning the insult to the divine book.

The protesters expressed their anger towards the insult which European governments justify under the cloak of the freedom of speech but do not brook any questioning of the Holocaust, for example.

They said the heinous incident is an act of incitement and a serious provocation to the feelings of more than two billion Muslims worldwide. They called on European authorities to put an end to hostilities toward Islam.

On Monday, a Dutch politician tore apart a copy of the Holy Quran in the city of The Hague. It followed an incident in Sweden where a politician burned a copy of the Qur'an outside the Turkish embassy.

The politician committed the scandalous act after receiving permission from Swedish authorities who provided police guards to ensure nobody prevented it.

Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei said the sacrilegious act shows that the arrogant powers' attacks are aimed at Islam itself.

Referring to the recent insults, Tehran Friday Prayers Leader Ayatollah Kazem Seddiqi said they show the Western world is afraid of Islam and the Islamic Revolution.

"They are doing these things contrary to their own slogans that call for freedom," he said.

Unfortunately despite these protest rallies, deafening silence of the so-called rights advocates on desecration of the Holy Qur'an by a notorious Swedish extremist is something funny as the sacrilegious move is a clear example of hate-mongering against Muslims.

The deafening silence of the so-called champions of human rights vis-à-vis the desecration of the Holy Quran is a blatant illustration of incitement to hatred and the proliferation of violence against Muslims, this is what most officials have reiterated and such behaviors have nothing to do with the right to freedom of opinion.

In recent decades the Westerners and especially the Zionists have tried to insult and belittle Muslims in different ways and desecration is one way that they have resorted to it but each time Muslims have turned the table on the offenders and this time once again Muslims proved that the Holy Prophet (PBUH) and his Household as well as the Holy Quran are their redlines and they will not accept any insult to their redlines and will show their anger.

Unfortunately some Western countries under the banner of freedom of expression promote and defend such insults but Muslims give no damn to what those countries and nations want because for them, insult is not freedom of expression as Muslims never insult other Divine religions because they have learned to respect Divine religions and their practitioners.

So the recent rise of Muslims against insult to the Holy Quran will be a good lesson to offenders to stop their insulting acts or pay their consequences like what Indian-born British author Salman Rushdie did and saw the consequence of its offence.

The current rise of Muslims against insult to the Holy Quran shows that Muslims may live in different areas and lands but they are united on their basic Islamic principles and will not let them be insulted by anyone under any reason and pretext. So insult against Islam, its sanctities and Holy Quran desecration are not allowed and offenders will get strong response by Muslims.



Ryder Stretches Lead To Three Strokes

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - American Sam Ryder defied gusting winds at Torrey Pines to fire a four-under par 68 and push his lead to three strokes in the US PGA Tour Farmers Insurance Open.

Ryder, who shared the overnight lead with England's Aaron Rai and fellow American Brent Grant, had five birdies on the South Course for a 12-under par total of 132 -- three strokes clear of playing partner Brendan Steele.

Steele, who started the day one off the lead, closed with back-to-back birdies in a two-under par 70 for a nine-under par total of 135.

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McIlroy, Reed Impress At Dubai Desert Classic

DUBAI (Dispatches) - Rory McIlroy enjoyed a spectacular finish to his opening round as further weather delays at the Dubai Desert Classic on Friday forced organizers to schedule a Monday finish.

Sweden's world amateur number one Ludvig Aberg and Ian Poulter shared the 18-hole lead after seven-under-par 65s.

Most of the field did not even have time to start their second rounds before darkness fell, although Poulter was joined at the top of the leaderboard on eight-under by Richard Bland after a few holes of round two.

Djokovic Reaches 10th Australian Open Final

MELBOURNE (Dispatches) - Novak Djokovic shrugged off controversy involving his father to reach a record-extending 10th Australian Open final and set up a blockbuster decider with Greek trailblazer Stefanos Tsitsipas and a battle for the world number one ranking.

Nine-times champion Djokovic kept his perfect semi-final record at Melbourne Park intact with a 7-5 6-1 6-2 win over outgunned American Tommy Paul at Rod Laver Arena where his father Srdjan was a conspicuous absentee.

Earlier on center court, Tsitsipas saw off Russian 18th seed Karen Khachanov 7-6(2) 6-4 6-7(6) 6-3 to become the first Greek to reach the title-decider in a city boasting the biggest Greek population outside the southern European nation.

Srdjan Djokovic created a distraction for his son ahead of the semi-final after a video emerged showing him posing with fans holding Russian flags, which were banned at Melbourne Park early in the tournament.

Amid criticism from local politicians and the Ukraine embassy, he declined to attend the semi-final, saying he wanted to prevent "disruption" for his son.

For all that, a man in the terraces held up a Ukraine flag when Djokovic served in his direction and put it away when he swapped ends.

Whether or not his father's absence was weighing on him, Djokovic was in a foul mood even as he raced to a 5-1 lead in the first set, repeatedly yelling at his players' box in Serbian.

He bickered with the chair umpire over the time taken to get a towel between points, drawing loud jeers from fans.

Sensing his chance, Paul raised the pressure with some outstanding tennis, breaking the Serb twice and levelling the match at 5-5 after edging Djokovic in a 30-shot rally.

FIFA Bans Four Uruguay Players Over World Cup Incidents

LAUSANNE (Dispatches) - Four Uruguay players, including Diego Godin and Edinson Cavani, have been suspended over incidents following the team's World Cup match against Ghana, FIFA announced.

The Uruguayan football federation has also been fined 50,000 Swiss francs (\$54,248) and handed a partial stadium closure for their next home match over the "discriminatory behavior of its supporters" and the "misconduct" of the players.

Uruguay were incensed by refereeing decisions during their 2-0 win over Ghana in their final group game in Qatar last December.

A three-goal win would have seen them qualify for the last 16 but they were knocked out in dramatic fashion.

Referee Daniel Siebert was hounded by players after the match, while Cavani punched the pitchside VAR monitor.

Defender Jose Maria Gimenez and goalkeeper Fernando Muslera have both been banned for four matches, fined 20,000 Swiss francs and given "community football service". Veterans Cavani and Godin were given one-match bans each, will have to perform the community service and were fined 15,000 Swiss francs.

2024 Copa America to Be Held in the United States

MIAMI (Dispatches) - South America's top national team competition, the Copa America, will be held in the United States in 2024 and feature 10 teams from South America's CONMEBOL and six teams from the CONCACAF region.

CONCACAF, the confederation for North and Central America and the Caribbean, said the tournament would be co-organized by both organizations.

The announcement is part of a series of new collaborations between the North and South American confederations including club and women's team joint competitions.

CONMEBOL president Alejandro Dominguez said the two organizations wanted to see "more and better competitions and for football and its values to grow and strengthen throughout the hemisphere. Without a doubt, both confederations believe in big, and we will work with this orientation".



team, these things wouldn't be possible."

Tsitsipas earlier savored a golden afternoon in warm sunshine as he won his first Australian Open semi-final on the fourth attempt.

The decider will be a re-match of the 2021 French Open final, which Djokovic won from two sets down to leave the Greek heartbroken.

The winner will take the number one ranking from Spain's Carlos Alcaraz.

"I'd like that number," said Tsitsipas.

"It's a cornerstone final... It's a childhood dream to be capturing the number one spot one day, I'm close.

"I've been wanting for many years now to put Greek tennis on the map, and me and Maria (Sakkari) have done an incredible job."

Tsitsipas can rely on a huge contingent of Greek fans to rival Djokovic's army of Serbian supporters.

They were in full voice as he traded breaks with Khachanov in a see-sawing opening set before he came alive in the tiebreak.

Tsitsipas was rattled by three foot-faults and two time violations on serve but steadied to take the second set.

A break down in the third, Khachanov showed great courage to fight back to 5-5 and take the tiebreak after Tsitsipas blew two match points.

Tsitsipas regrouped, though, and roared to 3-0 in the last set before closing it out in dominant fashion.

It was a bittersweet day for Indian tennis fans as Sania Mirza's bid for the mixed doubles title at her last Grand Slam was thwarted as she and Rohan Bopanna fell 7-6(2) 6-2 to Brazilian pair Luisa Stefani and Rafael Matos in the final.

Southgate Reveals Family Convinced Him to Stay

LONDON (Dispatches) - Gareth Southgate has revealed his family convinced him to stay on as England boss when he debated his future after the World Cup.

Southgate was unsettled by fierce criticism of England's woeful Nations League performances prior to the World Cup in Qatar.

The 52-year-old was still considering walking away following England's 2-1 defeat against France in the World Cup quarter-finals in December.

But Southgate spent a week thinking over his options before it was announced he would see out a contract that runs until December 2024.

"There was negativity about me being in charge and the last thing I wanted was for that to be the over-arching feeling going into a World Cup when you need the fans and everybody behind the team," he told ITV News on Thursday.

"You need that energy; you need that sense of togetherness. And if the debate was only going to be about finding flaws in what we were doing, in order that I go at the end, then that would have been very difficult for the team to perform at their best."

Southgate said the support of his family was key to his decision to extend an England reign that started in 2016.

"They left Doha saying you've got to give this one more go and try to get this trophy," he said.



James, Antetokounmpo Will Captain NBA All-Star Teams

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - Los Angeles Lakers superstar LeBron James and Milwaukee's Giannis Antetokounmpo will captain the NBA All-Star Game teams next month after final voting that saw Philadelphia star Joel Embiid fail to earn a starting spot.

James will tie Kareem Abdul-Jabbar -- the man he is on track to overtake as the NBA's all-time leading scorer -- for most All-Star Game appearances with 19.

The four-time NBA champion, who is averaging 29.9 points, 8.5 rebounds and 7.0 assists this season, has now served as a captain -- as the top vote-getter from his conference -- in each of the six years that the league has used the format of captains selecting their teams from among all the available players.

Antetokounmpo, the Bucks' two-time NBA Most Valuable Player, will be a captain for the third time in his career, having led a team in 2019 and 2020.

Joining James among starters selected from the Western Conference are New Orleans Pelicans forward Zion Williamson, Denver Nuggets center Nikola Jokic, Golden State Warriors guard Stephen Curry and Dallas Mavericks guard Luka Doncic.

Knicks Edge Celtics In OT Thriller, Doncic Hurt in Mavs Win

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - Julius Randle scored 37 points to lead the New York Knicks to a 120-117 overtime victory over the NBA-leading Boston Celtics as the Dallas Mavericks held off Phoenix despite an injury to star guard Luka Doncic.

Randle added nine rebounds and Jalen Brunson scored 29 points with four rebounds, seven assists and a crucial block as time expired as the Knicks thwarted Boston's comeback bid.

They handed the Celtics a third straight defeat on the heels of their nine-game winning streak. Boston's Jayson Tatum celebrated his selection as an All-Star starter with 35 points and 14 rebounds. Jaylen Brown scored 22 points with nine rebounds.

But Boston's star duo also combined for six key turnovers, and Brown missed two free throws with 7.6 seconds remaining to hurt Boston's cause.

"I'm a better basketball player than I played today," a dejected Brown said. "Those two missed free throws kind of embodied the whole game for me -- didn't get it going, didn't give my team enough energy to win."



Mirza Bows Out of Grand Slam Tennis

MELBOURNE (Dispatches) - Indian trailblazer Sania Mirza bowed out of Grand Slam tennis with defeat in the Australian Open mixed-doubles final playing alongside Rohan Bopanna -- her first playing partner 22 years ago.

The 36-year-old Mirza, regarded as her country's greatest women's tennis player, returned to Melbourne Park for one last hurrah and made it all the way to the decider.

But she and 42-year-old Bopanna were unable to get over the line, losing 7-6 (7/2), 6-2 to Brazilian pair Luisa Stefani and Rafael Matos.

Mirza was in tears in the post-match presentation ceremony.

"Rohan was my first-ever mixed-doubles partner at (aged) 14 and we won the nationals," said Mirza, a six-time Grand Slam champion, three in doubles and three in mixed.

"It was a long time ago, 22 years ago, and I couldn't think of a better person -- he's one of my best friends and best partners -- to finish my career here and to play the final.

"There's no better place for me, or person for me, to finish my Grand Slam career."

Mirza, who is married to former Pakistan cricket captain Shoaib Malik, has a young son Izzaan and said it was incredible to play in front of him in a major final.

