

**Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Sunday Said Iran May Join Talks on the Normalization of Relations Between Ankara and Damascus In Which Moscow Is Taking Part**

# IRAN NEWS

**Azerbaijan's Embassy in Tehran Has Suspended its work, the Country's Deputy Foreign Minister Khalaf Khalafov Said, Adding That Five Embassy Employees are Staying to Protect the Embassy's Property**

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## Tehran, Moscow Substitute to SWIFT Links Over 800 Banks

TEHRAN (PressTV) - As many as 700 Russian banks and 106 non-Russian banks from 13 countries can exchange financial messages with Iranian banks, the deputy governor of the Central Bank of Iran (CBI) says.

The central banks of Iran and Russia signed a deal to connect their national interbank communication and transfer systems to help boost trade and ease two-way bank transactions.

"Under the deal, the national banking messaging systems of the two countries were connected, making it possible for all member banks of the national banking messaging system of Iran to exchange banking messages with all banks in Russia," Mohsen Karimi told Fars news agency.

The system allows financial institutions in the two countries to open letters of credit or process money orders and bank guarantees. This means they do not need the SWIFT international messaging system for payments, Karimi said.

"By connecting the national messaging systems of Iranian and Russian banks, about 700 Russian banks can exchange financial messages with Iranian banks. Apart from these Russian banks, 106 non-Russian banks from 13 other countries can connect with this messaging system and have financial exchanges with Iranian banks." [See Page 7](#)

## Economic Growth Prerequisite of Eliminating Poverty



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN – Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei said that eliminating poverty, livelihood and welfare problems cannot be met without economic growth.

During the meeting with a group of entrepreneurs and manufacturers and knowledge-based companies on Monday in the Imam Khomeini Hussainiyah, Ayatollah Khamenei said, "If we want to eliminate poverty and increase welfare in the country, it won't happen unless economic growth in the country met."

The Leader also urged executive bodies in the country to support the development of private enterprises.

Emphasizing that Iran's position in the region and the world should be maintained through economic growth, he said, "The advancement of a country is largely related to its economic status. When a country's currency becomes weak, its economic potential decreases, and its prestige and position in the world decrease. We need economic growth in order to maintain the country's position in the region and in the world."

Meanwhile the Leader announced that the bright future of the country is in need of rapid and continuous economic growth. The Leader explained the reasons and requirements for economic growth while referring to the Seventh Development Plan which prioritizes economic growth along with justice. He emphasized, "economic growth is absolutely crucial in order to solve the tangible problems associated with people's livelihood and the difficulties experienced in households."

He expressed his satisfaction with the spirit, optimism and tangible endeavors of those who are active in the fields of manufacturing and entrepreneurship. "As I have said many times before, due to the country's God-given resources, its geographical, international, political position, and especially its human resources, the country's talent and growth capacity are very high and exceptional in certain fields. For this reason, the future of the nation and the prospects of Iran's progress are much brighter than the current predictions," the Leader added.

Referring to this year's slogan titled, "Production: Knowledge-Based and Job-Creating", the Leader stated, "the exhibition that I visited two days ago, showed that relatively good endeavors have been made in line with this year's slogan. The official indicators of the first half of 1401 [2022 AD] mainly indicate movement and growth."

Ayatollah Khamenei also addressed government officials present at the assembly while referring to points raised by some participants at the beginning of the meeting. "In order to follow up on these issues and resolve the complaints and expectations of those active in the economic field, form a committee under their supervision and solve their problems by continuously following up their case. By doing this, the country's economy will also grow," he stated.

The Leader of the Islamic Revolution pointed out the direct relationship between economic growth and Iran's position in the world. He further stated, "The advancement of a country's position is largely related to its economic situation. When a country's currency depreciates, its economic possibilities diminish. It becomes less credible in today's world. We need to experience economic growth in order to maintain the country's position in the world."

In another part of his speech, Ayatollah Khamenei emphasized the need for rapid, continuous growth in the country. He also outlined the reasons why Iran fell behind in certain economic fields in the last decade. Certain managerial weaknesses, issues such as sanctions and the country's focus on the nuclear issue, and as a result, the conditioning of the economy, were among some of the important reasons for Iran's economic lag in the previous decade.

## Ukraine Envoy Summoned Over Drone Attack in Isfahan

IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Iran's Foreign Ministry has summoned the Ukrainian envoy over controversial remarks made by the senior adviser to Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky on a recent foiled drone attack in the central Iranian city of Isfahan.

In a statement early on Sunday, the Iranian Defense Ministry announced that its air defense units had fended off a drone attack on a military workshop in Isfahan.

The ministry said one of the workshop complexes had come under attack from a number of Micro Aerial Vehicles (MAVs), but the complex's air defenses successfully repelled the attack.

The ministry underscored that the unsuccessful attack did not cause any loss of life and only led to minor damage to the roof of a workshop. The complex, it added, continues its ordinary operations following the attack.

In reaction to the report, the senior adviser to Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky, Mykhailo Podolyak, took to Twitter Sunday to express his joy over the attack. He said that "Ukraine did warn you." [See Page 7](#)

## Israel Behind Foiled Drone Attack on Iran's Defense Facility

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Israel was behind a Saturday night drone attack in the central city of Isfahan which was repelled by Iran's air defense units, according to The Wall Street Journal.

Citing unnamed American officials and people familiar with the operation, the US-based daily said in a report that "Israel carried out the drone attack on an Iranian military center for research and development midnight Saturday."

The paper added that the attack targeted "what some sources said was Material and Energy Laboratory of Isfahan with 'small drones'."

The report claimed that the drones targeted a munitions factory next to a facility belonging to the Iran Space Research Center, which is under US sanctions for its work on ballistic missiles.

It underlined that the strike was the first to have been conducted by Israel since prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu returned to power last month. The report also pointed out that the failed drone attack came amid talks between Tel Aviv and Washington on new ways to "counter" Tehran.

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## Tehran Lambasts German Chancellor Interventionist Remarks

TEHRAN (MNA) - Referring to the recent interventionist remarks made by the German chancellor about Iran, the Iranian foreign ministry spokesman said that Olaf Scholz once again showed that he is still standing on the wrong side of history.

"The Chancellor of Germany, in a clumsy and biased simulation, once again showed that he is still standing on the wrong side of history," Nasser Kanaani said.

What correctly indicates a historical similarity is the rise of extremism and modern ambition in Germany, the result of which is nothing but the promotion of violence and hatred, he added.

The senior Iranian diplomat went on to say that today, some parties are trying to use the power through human rights projects to present a positive image of themselves and even pretend to be a pioneer in this regard (defending human rights).

Kanaani also called on the German human rights claimants to pay attention to the recent crimes of the Zionist regime in Jenin and slammed the fact that German authorities were silent in the face of such barbaric crimes carried out by Zionists against Palestinians. [See Page 7](#)

## Bin Salman Wants Face-to-Face Meeting Between Saudi, Iran

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iraqi Foreign Minister Fouad Hussein says Saudi Arabia's crown prince Mohammed bin Salman has urged senior Iraqi authorities to arrange a face-to-face meeting between the top diplomats of Riyadh and Tehran, amid a diplomatic process between the two neighbors aimed at mending strained ties.

Hussein told Iraq's Kurdish-language Rudaw television news network on Sunday evening that "Mohammed bin Salman has demanded senior Iraqi officials set up the meeting between Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud and his Iranian counterpart Hossein Amir-Abdollahian [in the Iraqi capital city of Baghdad]. We are busy organizing the event, and the timing will be announced later on."

The Iraqi foreign minister noted that Saudi and Iranian delegates have already held five rounds of security-level meetings in Baghdad.

The confidential negotiations will be publicized through Iraq's mediation, and Iranian and Saudi foreign ministers will meet in public, Hussein explained. [See Page 7](#)

## Iranian Daily Oil Production Increases 140,000 Barrels

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Figures by the U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA) in a report entitled "Annual Energy Outlook 2022 (AEO2022)" show that Iran's average oil production in 2022 was 2.54 million barrels per day, according to which, in 2022, Iran's total oil production has increased by 140,000 barrels per day compared to the previous year.

The U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA) in a report entitled "Annual Energy Outlook 2022 (AEO2022)" announced the production of 2,580,000 barrels of Iranian crude oil in the last month of 2022.

Accordingly, Iran's oil production in December 2022 has increased by 20,000 barrels compared to the previous month and by 130,000 barrels compared to the same period in 2021.

In November 2022, Iran produced more than 2,560,000 barrels of oil per day and in December 2021 more than 2,450,000 barrels of oil per day.

According to this report, OPEC oil production in December 2022 was about 28,930,000 barrels per day, which has increased by 190,000 barrels per day compared to the previous month. [See Page 7](#)

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## Iran Strongly Condemn Terroristic Attack in Pakistan

TEHRAN (IRNA) - The Iranian Embassy in Pakistan strongly condemned the explosion at a mosque in Peshawar that resulted in the martyrdom of 28 worshippers.

At least 28 people were killed and some 150 people injured after a blast inside a mosque in Pakistan's Peshawar on Monday. The Iranian Embassy in Islamabad issued a statement condemning the terrorist attack at the Peshawar city mosque and offered condolences to the families of the martyrs.

The statement added that the Embassy of Iran wishes health to the wounded while expressing sympathy for the people and government of Pakistan.

## President Says State Assets Sales Will Boost Productivity

TEHRAN (PressTV) - President Ebrahim Raisi has defended his government's massive plan to sale some \$90 billion worth of state assets as a way of boosting productivity in the country.

Addressing a Cabinet session, Raisi said that selling state assets and properties will enable the government to speed up its plans to diversify the Iranian economy and to boost production and manufacturing activity in the country.

Responding to criticisms raised about the plan in the Iranian media in recent days, he said state assets sales will be in line with laws and regulations adopted in recent years by high-ranking state authorities.

"The purpose (of the plan) to make state assets productive is to make the optimum use of the unused and unutilized assets of government departments to boost manufacturing and to accelerate the country's progress," said the Iranian president.



Opposition media have criticized the plan to sell more than 40,000 trillion rials worth of assets, properties and estates owned by the government through a seven-member committee whose members have been granted legal immunity.

The plan was announced earlier this week by a member of the Iranian parliament who said that proceeds of the sales will be used to secure financial resources needed by the government to carry out its infrastructure projects.

Raisi said the government will try to take a lesson from past privatization experiments in Iran to make a success out of the state assets sales scheme.

## Preliminary Data Point to Israel Involvement in Isfahan Attack

TEHRAN (MNA) - Arab-language broadcaster reported on Monday, citing an Iranian official that the preliminary data point to Israel's involvement in the recent Isfahan attack.

According to the Iranian official, drones that attacked the military workshop in the central city of Isfahan could have been launched from the territory of Iran, close to the attack site.

The investigation will continue, the source added.

According to the official, the attack was not successful and the "words of Israeli officials are just propaganda designed to cover up the failure."

The source told Al Jazeera that "Israel knows very well that it will receive a response, as happened in the past."

Washington has denied involvement in the attack because it knows it was a failure, the official said.

The Iranian Defense Ministry announced that its air defense units have repelled a drone attack on a military workshop in the central city of Isfahan.

Iran's foreign minister Hossein Amirabdollahian condemned a "cowardly drone attack." Tehran also said it would not halt its progress on a "peaceful nuclear program."

## Iran to Give Harsh Response If IRGC Blacklisted by EU

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's foreign minister has reiterated the country's unstinting support for the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC), warning of a "harsh" response to the European Parliament's call to blacklist the elite force as a terrorist group.

Hossein Amirabdollahian made the remarks in a Sunday meeting with four members of the Iranian Parliament, who were recently targeted by the European Union's sanctions.

Amirabdollahian vehemently condemned the move, saying Europe's decision showed that it lacks an "accurate understanding" of the state of affairs in Iran and even the mindset of Iranians living abroad.

The European Union's move "shows that your actions have been effective in defending Iran's national interests," he said. "For this reason, they took such a decision."

Earlier this month, the European Parliament passed an amendment calling on the EU and its member states to include the IRGC on their terror list. It also passed another resolution calling for more sanctions against Iranian individuals and entities and putting the IRGC on the EU terrorist list over alleged human rights violations during the recent riots.

"We clearly stated that if the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps, which is a part of the governing body of the Islamic Republic of Iran and our official military, is falsely called a terrorist, Iran's reaction and response will be harsh," Amirabdollahian said.

He said European authorities are fully aware of their vulnerabilities and, therefore, came to the conclusion that they should implement a plan B, which was to add a number of Iranian officials to their sanctions list.

## Iran Oil Sales Increasing Despite Stepped-Up West's Pressures

TEHRAN (MNA) - Government Spokesman said that oil sales are increasing despite the increased sanctions by the western countries which aim to force Iran to make concessions in talks.

Speaking to Lebanese Al-Mayadeen TV correspondent in Tehran, Ali Bahadri Jahromi said that the problems in the country are getting resolved, and the economy is recovering.

He noted that the enemy out of anger sought to stop Iran's progress by fomenting the recent riots in the country.

He elaborated more saying that the Western countries were angered to see that Iran was still making progress and was overcoming the problems and neutralizing the sanctions, adding that the main centers from where the riots were guided were not in the region but rather it was in the Western countries.

He noted that the main room from where the riots were guided was in European countries while the enemies also had operation rooms in the region and cohorts that carried out their orders inside Iran.

The spokesman added the enemies failed in achieving all their goals despite the fact they used all their means.

Jahromi also noted that the riots were aimed at forcing Iran to give in to pressures and their excessive demands in the nuclear talks.

Meanwhile, the spokesman vowed that Iran will not negotiate while it is in a weak position to make concessions to the enemies.

He continued to note that despite all pressures, the sales of Iran's oil are increasing much to the enemy's chagrin.

## Tehran to Push Baghdad to Try Perpetrators of Martyr Soleimani's Assassination

TEHRAN (PressTV) - A senior Iranian Judiciary official has arrived in Iraq's capital to follow up on the murder case of Iran's top anti-terror commander General Qassem Soleimani, saying Tehran will push Baghdad for the trial of perpetrators of the assassination.

The judiciary delegation, led by Kazem Gharibabadi, the Judiciary chief's deputy for international affairs and secretary of the country's High Council for Human Rights, arrived in Baghdad on Monday.

Speaking in an interview with al-Alam television network upon his arrival at the Baghdad airport, Kazem Gharibabadi said pushing for the acceleration of the legal process for the case of the assassination of General Soleimani tops the agenda of the visit.

"We hope that an indictment will be presented to the court in Iraq as soon as possible so that the perpetrators are brought to justice," he said.

General Soleimani, commander of the Quds Force of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC), and his Iraqi trenchmate Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, the

second-in-command of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Units (PMU), were martyred along with their companions in a US drone strike on January 3, 2020.

The strike near Baghdad International Airport was authorized by then-US president Donald Trump.

The two prominent anti-terror commanders were tremendously respected and admired across the region for their instrumental role in fighting and decimating the Daesh Takfiri terrorist group in the region, particularly in Iraq and Syria.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Gharibabadi said the delegation will also discuss counter-terror operations with the Iraqi officials, noting that "Both Iran and Iraq have suffered a lot because of the actions of the terrorist groups."

"It is necessary to maintain close cooperation, at the level of national courts as well as international and human rights forums, in order to confront terrorists and terrorist groups."

He added that Iran will discuss the issue of the presence of "some fugitives in certain areas in Iraq."

## Iran to Never Pose Threat to Neighboring Countries

TEHRAN (MNA) - Saying that Iran is after lasting peace and friendly relations with neighbors, the Iranian parliament speaker asserted that the country will never be a threat to Islamic and neighboring countries.

Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf met with the Chairman of Oman's Consultative Assembly Khalid bin Hilal bin Nasser Al-Maouli on the sidelines of the OIC meeting in Algeria.

Today, relations between Iranian and Omani businessmen through the ministers and governors of the central banks of the two countries are on a positive track, he said in this meeting.

Qalibaf also considered the relations between Iran and Oman as two neighboring countries as an example and model for relations with other countries.

Given the current regional and global developments, North-South Corridor plays a very important role in Iran-Oman ties, he said, adding that it can be effective in strengthening the economy of the two countries.

Saying that the Islamic Republic of Iran is after lasting peace and friendly relations with neighboring countries, he asserted that the country will never be a threat to Islamic and neighboring countries.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Qalibaf referred to Iran's progress in the fields of science, medicine, oil and gas, aerospace industries, and nuclear knowledge, expressing Iran's readiness to share these achievements with neighboring countries.

"We are friends and brothers to all countries. Except for the Zionist regime, we have no preconditions for establishing relations," he noted.

Qalibaf also met with the speaker of Algeria's People's National Assembly Ibrahim Boughali.

In this meeting, Qalibaf said, "The Leader of the Islamic Revolution places great emphasis on establishing relations between Iran and other Islamic countries, and this

is one of our definite and permanent policies."

Based on this policy, the Iranian government and parliament attach special importance to the country of Algeria and its people.

## 41st Fajr Film Festival, More Significant

TEHRAN (IP) - The secretary of the 41st Fajr Film Festival, said in his presser that despite the problems in recent years, the secretariat received much more significant work compared to last year adding new vitality and spirit to the event.

Mojtaba Amini, the secretary of the 41st Fajr Film Festival, appeared behind the podium and at the beginning of his speech, talked about the Khoy earthquake incident, which happened the other day and paid tributes to the victims of the incident.

He further explained that, on the 12th of Bahman (February 1st, 2023), the annual celebration of Iranian cinema will begin.

He further added that despite the problems in recent years in the Islamic country including the COVID-19 pandemic and other issues and although the production process of the country's cinema works was delayed a bit, the secretariat was faced with a good film production package, and the 75 works that were registered in the group section

and the works that reached the secretariat were much more significant works compared to last year.

Amini stated that finally, 30 movies were available to be chosen 24 of which entered the contest. Elsewhere Amini pointed out: "This year, the cinema-loving audience of our country will face a special traffic of movies. We will have works from different climates and a new vitality and spirit will be seen in the cinema production line."

He also added: "Our humble view and policy is that the festival should be consistent with our Iranian Islamic lifestyle policy and we should not copy other festivals and implement them."

Amini further referred to Iran's artistic cultural background which is well-known and cannot be competed with anywhere in the world and can depict Iranian high art. He stated that the staff of the 41st Fajr Film Festival is moving forward within the framework of the Iranian Islamic lifestyle and Iranian authentic culture.

## VP Urges Speeding Up Rendering Service to Quake-Hit Khoy

TEHRAN (MNA) - First Vice President Mohammad Mokhber called for taking collective measures in a bid to help the quake-stricken Khoy.

Mokhber stressed the need for leveraging the groups volunteering to help the residents of the Khoy in northwestern Iran.

He called on the authorized officials in West Azarbaijan province to coordinate the requirements in this regard.

Earlier yesterday, the Iranian President called for speeding up supplying services to the quake-stricken areas in Khoy.

Ebrahim Raisi's emphasis comes after the 5.9-magnitude earthquake hit Khoy County in northwest Iran that left at least three people dead and over 800 others injured.

Raisi stressed the immediate reconstruction of the quake-affected regions amid the extreme weather condition.

The earthquake caused 20 to 50 percent damage to buildings in 70 villages, according to Governor of the West Azarbaijan Province.

## Iranian Aid Trucks Targeted On Iraqi-Syrian Border

TEHRAN (IFP) - A convoy of Iranian trucks carrying aid items, came under drone attacks in eastern Syria Sunday night shortly after it crossed into the country from Iraq. Sources told Al-Mayadeen three Iranian aid trucks loaded with flour and rice were hit in the ambush.

A convoy of trucks was attacked by drones at the al-Qaim crossing on the Syria-Iraq border on Sunday. According to reports, 25 vehicles had crossed the border before the raid.

The TV channel Al-Mayadeen reported that "three Iranian aid trucks loaded with flour and rice were targeted". "The convoy did not carry any weapons," according to the media outlet.

It was not immediately clear who was behind the attack. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights claimed ambulances rushed to the area to treat the injured.

Ten people have been killed by air strikes that hit a convoy of trucks carrying weapons into eastern Syria from Iraq, according to the group. The strikes killed seven "truck drivers and their assistants, all of them non-Syrians" on Sunday evening, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights claimed.



## PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	12:17
■ Evening (Maghreb)	17:49
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	05:38
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	07:04

10. (This will be) their cry therein: "Glory to Thee, O Allah." And "Peace" will be their greeting therein! and the close of their cry will be: "Praise be to Allah, the Cherisher and Sustainer of the worlds!"  
11. If Allah were to hasten for men the ill (they have earned) as they would fain hasten on the good, - then would their respite be settled at once. But We leave those who rest not their hope on their meeting with Us, in their trespasses, wandering in distraction to and fro.

Surah 10. Jonah (10 - 11)

## Iran Trade Center Activated in Armenia

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

**TEHRAN – Deputy Head of Iran Trade Promotion Organization on improving international businesses says that Iran's trade center has started its work in Yerevan, the capital of Armenia.**

Speaking in a conference on introducing services and capabilities of Iran's trade centers in the Central Asia and Russia, Mr. Ahmad Reza Alaei said that the number of active trade centers of Iran is around 43, adding that these centers are not limited to the CIS states and this question is raised why the trade centers are on the rise and what they look for.

He then pointed to the government's programs to develop exports of non-oil exports in 2026, adding that the government has defined the \$75b export mark and if we comparing this figure with the figure in 2022, we see the figure is increasing with appropriate trend.

He noted that CIS states account for three-fourths of Iran's \$75b exports mark and share of these countries is more than 50%. He added that in order this goal to be materialized, they prepared the roadmap for developing trade and some of the important custodians of this issue are ministries of trade and agriculture.

Alaei added that one of the tools of Iran Trade Promotion Organization is to improve the trade relations by using the knowledge of commercial attaches, and for this reason the number of foreign attaches has reached 18 so far as the figure was only



2 last year, and almost in one and half years, the number has increased considerably and the organization is determined to increase the number of commercial attaches in the prioritized states, expressing hope the number of commercial attaches would increase by to by the yearend.

He also said that commercial attache is the representative of the country and guides the government in the field of trade.

Alaei also said that Iran's trade center in Armenia has been activated and it has started its work, adding that the organization is to increase export incentives through these centers.

He said that the Trade Promotion Organization is determined to ease issuance of license for trade centers and to eliminate surplus formalities.

He reiterated that one of the tasks of these centers is to be active in the field of logistics and transportation.

## Goharzamin Co. Determined to Increase Concentrate Production



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

**TEHRAN – Manager of Processing Unit of Goharzamin Iron Ore Company announced new records in production of concentrate and iron ore fines in the last two months of Iranian calendar year.**

According to the public relations of Goharzamin Iron Ore Company, the manager of processing unit of the company Mr. Hossein Kamjoo pointed to the new records of the company in concentrate and iron ore fines production and said that God willing with the round-the-clock efforts of the personnel of the processing unit of the Goharzamin Company and Nazmavaran Company, at the end of the fiscal year, ending in month of Azar, the processing unit of Goharzamin Company could set a new record for concentrate and iron ore fines productions as the company produced 6,412,809 tons of concentrate and 9,664,767 tons of iron ore fines and it enjoyed 31% growth in concentrate production and 25% growth in iron ore fines production in 9 months this year comparing to the same period in the preceding year. He added that in last Iranian calendar month of Dey, the company for the third consecutive month this year set a new record for monthly production and it produced 607,454 tons of concentrate.

Kamjoo then noted that due to the importance of production, the processing unit intends to conduct some overhaul in its production line to increase its capability for producing 7m tons of concentrate and 10m tons in iron ore crushing.

## Tehran to Hos First Congress of Asia's Construction Activists on Feb. 23

IRAN MEWS ECONOMIC DESK

**TEHRAN – On February 23, the conference hall of IRIB in Tehran will host the first Asian congress of engineers, builders, manufacturers, and exporters of construction with emphasis on construction materials and engineers.**

Speaking in a press conference on Monday, the secretary of the congress and secretary of Construction Engineering Organization Mr. Omid Reza Riahi revealed more details on this important event I the field of construction in Asia.

He said that in line with materializing the policies of developing sustainable

economic development as well as boosting export-centered production and services and concurrent with Engineers Day, the first congress of engineers, builders, manufacturers, and exporters of construction will be held in Tehran on February 23 with presence of activists in the field of construction from more than 15 Asian countries like China, Qatar, Oman, Turkey, Armenia, Iraq, Syria, the UAE, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan.



Riahi said that the event is aimed at promoting talks and preparing international contracts in exports of products and modern technologies of construction industry as well as exporting technical and engineering exports and commercial insurances and international transportation laws.

He said that while Construction Engineering Organization is 26-year-old, some 604000 engineers in different fields are members of this organization.

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

Meanwhile in the presser, the CEO of International Sakht Bazar System Mr Hamed Amjadi speaking in the presser called the event as the biggest Asian gathering of construction industry, adding that potentials of the participating countries in the field of construction industry are to be displayed in this event.

Head of Facilities Management Society Mr Misaq Salmasi also said that they are after identifying ways for developing exports of technical and engineering services to the neighboring countries, adding that Iran can solve problems of those countries in construction and this issue is important in the current recession condition of the country and is important for the engineering community of the country.

Meanwhile a member of board of directors of Tehran Construction Engineering Organization Mr. Gholamreza Khosh Gofar highlighted the tasks of this organization and said that there are over 70,000 engineers with work permits in reengineering but the country is in recession and it has surplus engineers and this event can present capabilities of Iranian engineers and construction activists to Asia and the world.

## Iran Holds Iran-Geo Expo on Latest Geomatics Advances

**TEHRAN (PressTV) - Geomatics is not a well-known term among the public, but it's actually the driving force behind many of the daily activities in modern life.**

The second Iran-Geo Exhibition offers a quick glance into the rapidly growing sector and Iran's latest products in the field. Geomatics has its traces in almost all economic sectors, from mining to oil and gas. It's used for air navigation services, archaeological excavation, climate change and environmental monitoring, disaster risk reduction, and estimation of crop yields.

Over the past decade, an increasing number of tech firms in Iran have expressed interest in the field. As the organizer of the tech event, the Iranian defense ministry says it is planning to encourage more companies to operate in geomatics to turn the strategic field into a viable source of income for the country.

## For the first time, Isfahan Refinery was introduced as the country's most profitable listed refining company

According to the CEO of Isfahan Petrorefinery Holding, Isfahan Refinery was introduced as the most profitable listed refining company in the country for the first time. Isfahan Petropalaysh Holding's public and international relations are reported. Dr. Mohsen Qadiri mentioned the profitability of Isfahan Refinery as a publicly traded company. He said: While expressing my satisfaction, I must remind that we have managed to earn 26 thousand billion tomans in net profit in the 9 months of .2022



He went on to say that the profit per share in this period increased by 173% when compared to the same period in the previous fiscal year. With this rate of growth, Isfahan Refinery has risen to .first place among publicly traded oil and refining companies. According to the CEO of Isfahan Petropalaysh Holding, the decreasing trend in the difference between the price of crude oil and the price of oil products (Crack Spread) has resulted in losses for refining companies. Bandar Abbas Oil Refinery, Lavan Oil Refinery, and Tabriz Oil Refinery are among these companies. They have lost money when comparing this year's third-quarter performance to last year's third-quarter performance. Unlike these companies, Isfahan Oil Refining Company increased its gross profit by 40% during this time. He went on to say that this year's efficiency of Isfahan Oil Refining Company in comparison to initial capital was the best in the last 14 .years

All of these accomplishments, according to Dr. Qadiri, are the result of the efforts of the personnel, particularly the board of directors, .managers, and heads of the Isfahan Oil Refining Company

## Students Can Visit MAPNA Group Factories

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

**TEHRAN – On the eve of the anniversary of the victory of the Islamic Revolution, Ten-Day Dawn Festivities, MAPNA Group has facilitated visit of its industrial plants for students of high schools and universities.**



According to reports, from February 1 and beginning of the Ten-Day Dawn Festivities, some of industrial plants of MAPNA in Alborz Province will host high school students and students of universities.

It is worth noting that those students who are interested in visiting the industrial plants of MAPNA Group can register, and representatives of schools or universities will get special forms for applying for the visit of their schools from the plants.

Students during their visits can get acquainted with the latest home-made achievements of MAPNA Group in the fields of power plant, oil and gas as well as rail transportation and they can also get acquainted with productions like advanced turbines, transformers and locomotives.

Promoting indigenized knowhow, displaying the national industrial capability, creating a realistic approach regarding self-esteem and self-reliance in the big industries as well as building bases of hope towards a bright future of knowledge and industry of Iran for the future-makers children of the country are the main reasons for such a move for students by MAPNA Group.

Those who are interested can log in [www.mapnagroup.com](http://www.mapnagroup.com) for getting more information

## Maldives President Solih Wins Presidential Primary

MALE (Dispatches) - Maldives President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih won the ruling Maldivian Democratic Party's (MDP) presidential primary election, the first time an incumbent has faced a primary challenge, according to preliminary results.

But his challenger, former President Mohamed Nasheed has not accepted the results reported by the party. An official from his campaign said on Saturday the results were questionable, as voter tallies in some ballot stations did not match total eligible voters. Nasheed's supporters and representatives have alleged voter fraud and vote rigging in the contentious election in the archipelago off India and Sri Lanka.



## Dozens Killed in Pakistan Bus, Boat Accidents

ISLAMABAD (Dispatches) - A bus plunged off a bridge on Sunday, killing 41 people, while 10 children died when a boat capsized in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province.

The bus crashed into a ravine in a remote location in the southwestern province of Balochistan. At the crash site, north of the city of Bela in the Lasbela district, senior administration official Hamza Anjum said "the dead bodies...are beyond recognition".

Anjum said 40 corpses were retrieved from the wreck alongside three injured people, one of whom died shortly after. The remaining two survivors were in "serious" condition.



## Scholz Denounces Bidding War Over Jets for Ukraine



BERLIN (Dispatches) - Chancellor Olaf Scholz has again pushed back against demands in Germany and from Ukrainian officials for fighter jets to repel Russia's invasion, urging Western nations not to join a "bidding war" for sophisticated weapons.

Last week, Germany announced it will deliver its Leopard 2 battle tanks to Ukraine after weeks of pressure from NATO and European Union allies.

"The fact we've only just made a decision [on sending tanks] and already the next debate [fighter jets] is firing up in Germany - that just seems frivolous and undermines people's trust in government decisions," said Scholz in an interview with the German newspaper Tagesspiegel on Sunday.

"I can only advise against entering a bidding war over weapons systems."

Ukraine's Deputy Foreign Minister Andriy Melnyk has pressed Germany for dozens of its Tornado combat aircraft, and urged the international community to join a "fighter jet coalition" for his country.

Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy again asked Western nations to provide his country with more high-end weapons systems in his daily address on Saturday. Zelenskyy specifically mentioned the Army Tactical Missile System (ATACMS). "There can be no taboo in the supply of weapons to protect against Russian terror," said Ukraine's leader.

Russia last week condemned the delivery of NATO battle tanks to Ukraine, calling it "direct and growing" evidence of United States and European involvement in the war.

The German leader also said he will continue to phone Russian President Vladimir Putin, stressing the importance of maintaining an open channel of communication in order to find an end to Russia's war on Ukraine.

Scholz said the tone of the conversations was "not impolite, but our perspectives are of course completely different".

"And I will continue to phone Putin - because we have to keep talking to each other," he said.

The last phone call to Putin was at the start of December. The Russian leader said at the time that the German and Western line on Ukraine was "destructive" and called on Berlin to rethink its approach.

The conversations, Scholz said, were often about "concrete issues" such as prisoner exchanges, Ukrainian grain exports, and the fate of the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant.

"For me it's important that the conversations keep coming back to the main point: how does the world get out of this terrible situation? The condition for that is clear: the withdrawal of Russian troops," Scholz said in the interview.

No 'escalation'

Scholz also warned that NATO should not be dragged into a war with Moscow.

"A German chancellor who takes his oath of office seriously must do everything to ensure that Russia's war against Ukraine does not turn into a war between Russia and NATO," he stressed, adding he will not "allow such an escalation".

The Leopard 2 announcement, followed shortly afterwards by a US pledge of M1 Abrams tanks to Kyiv, infuriated the Kremlin.

"For now, there are no agreed talks [with Scholz] in the schedule. Putin has been and remains open to contacts," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov was quoted as saying by RIA Novosti.

## Tunisia's Parliamentary Run-Off Sees Same Low Voter Turnout

TUNIS (Dispatches) - Tunisia's parliamentary run-off election looked set to replicate the low turnout of December's first round, with voter participation at just 7.7 percent by the afternoon.

The newly configured and much less powerful parliament is a central element of a political system President Kais Saied introduced last year after a July 2021 power grab that granted the presidency nearly total sway.

In the first round of voting for the parliament in December only 11% of the electorate took part, according to official data. Early turnout figures released by the electoral commission on Sunday showed little improvement. Electoral commission figures indicated 7.7% turnout by 3pm, only slightly higher than the 7.2% registered by the same time in December's vote.

"I'm not interested in elections that do not concern me," said Nejib Sahli, 40, passing a polling station in the Hay Ettahrir district of Tunis early on Sunday. Independent electoral observers, including the local Mourakiboun group, have questioned official turnout figures, accusing authorities in many districts of withholding data they rely on to monitor the election's integrity.

"This strikes strongly at the transparency of the election and any numbers provided by the authorities," said Mourakiboun head Slim Bouzid.

Opposition groups are mostly boycotting the election but remain divided among themselves on how to move forwards.

Saied has said his actions were both legal and necessary to save Tunisia from years of corruption and economic decline at the hands of a self-interested political elite.

Though his new constitution passed in a referendum last year, only 30% of voters took part.

A Reuters journalist at one polling station in the Ettadamon district of Tunis said no voters attended during the 20 minutes he spent there.

A deepening economic crisis that has caused shortages of some foods and medicines, and led the government to seek an international bailout, has added to widespread disillusionment with politics.

"We don't want elections. We want milk and sugar and cooking oil," said Hasna, a woman shopping in Ettadamon on Sunday.



## North Korea Denies Arming Russia's Wagner Group

SEOUL (Dispatches) - North Korea has denied providing arms to Russia after the United States accused Pyongyang of supplying rockets and missiles to the Russian Wagner Group and helping bolster Moscow's forces in Ukraine.

A senior North Korean official, in a statement on Sunday, slammed the US allegations as a "groundless rumor" aimed at justifying Washington's own military aid to Ukraine.

The US had designated Wagner as a "transnational criminal organisation" earlier this month, citing the private military group's alleged weapons dealings with North Korea - something that is prohibited by United Nations Security Council resolutions.

The White House also showed what it said were US intelligence photographs of Russian rail cars entering North Korea, picking up a load of infantry rockets and missiles, and returning to Russia.

But the director general of the North Korean Department of US Affairs, Kwon Jong Gun, rejected the accusations on Sunday, warning that the US will face a "really undesirable result" if it persists in spreading the "self-made rumour".

"Trying to tarnish the image of [North Korea] by fabricating a non-existent thing is a grave provocation that can never be allowed and that cannot but trigger its reaction," Kwon Jong Gun said. He added that the US move was "a foolish attempt to justify its offer of weapons to Ukraine".

Earlier this week, US President Joe Biden promised 31 Abrams tanks, one of the US army's most powerful and sophisticated weapons, to help Kyiv fight off Moscow's invasion. The move drew a rebuke Friday from Kim Yo Jong, the powerful sister of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, who accused Washington of "further crossing the red line" by sending the tanks into Ukraine.

Kwon Jong Gun reiterated Pyongyang's concerns over the tank transfer on Sunday, calling it an "unethical crime" aimed at perpetuating an unstable international situation.

## Russia Rules out Talks With Japan On Fishing Near Disputed Islands

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russia said it will not hold annual talks with Japan on renewing a pact that allows Japanese fishermen to operate near disputed islands, saying Japan has taken anti-Russian measures.

The islands, off the northern Japanese island of Hokkaido, are known in Russia as the Kurils and in Japan as the Northern Territories and have been at the core of decades of tension between the neighbours.

"In the context of the anti-Russian measures taken by the Japanese government ... the Russian side informed Tokyo that it could not agree on the holding of intergovernmental consultations on the implementation of this agreement," the RIA state news agency reported, citing Russia's foreign ministry.

Japan, a major U.S. ally, imposed sanctions on dozens of Russian individuals and organisations soon after Russia launched its invasion of Ukraine on Feb. 24 last year.

On Friday, it tightened sanctions on Russia in

response to Russian air attacks on Ukrainian cities.

Russia in June suspended the 1998 agreement that allowed Japanese boats to fish near the islands and Japan's chief cabinet secretary on Monday told a news conference that Japan would demand that Russia engages in the annual talks so this year's fishing operations could begin.

But the Russian ministry said there would be no improvement in ties unless Japan showed "respect".

"To return to a normal dialogue, the Japanese neighbours should show elementary respect for our country, a desire to improve bilateral relations," the ministry said, according to the RIA news agency.

Reuters could not reach Japanese foreign ministry officials for comment outside regular business hours.

Russia and Japan have not formally ended World War Two hostilities because of their standoff over the islands, seized by the Soviet Union at the end of the war.



## New Czech President Expected To Foster EU, Ukraine Ties

PRAGUE (Dispatches) - Newly-elected Czech president Petr Pavel, a former NATO general, will promote close ties with the European Union and offer firm support for Ukraine in the face of the Russian invasion, analysts said.

The 61-year-old war hero beat billionaire populist Andrej Babis to win Saturday's presidential election.

A former chief of NATO's military committee, he will replace outspoken, divisive incumbent Milos Zeman who had fostered closer ties with Moscow and Beijing before making a U-turn when Russia invaded Ukraine last year.

Analysts told AFP that Pavel's experience in military diplomacy would be a clear asset as he held a very different presidency than his predecessor.

"We know that his contacts at NATO, as well as with peers from NATO member states... are very strong, and foreign policy will be his domain," said Pavel Havlicek, a scientist at the Association for International Affairs in Prague.

"I think he will be a proficient president if we realise the war in Ukraine is one of the key problems Europe is facing," Havlicek told AFP.

Pavel was a member of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia in the 1980s and began a rapid rise through army ranks until communism fell in 1989.

After Czechoslovakia split into the Czech Republic and Slovakia in 1993, Pavel became an advocate of EU and NATO membership.

During campaigning he argued there was still "no better alternative".

He also called for more aid to Ukraine, which was invaded by Russia in February last year.

"He is very much in favor of Ukraine, he has repeatedly voiced his support, and he's very critical towards Russia," said Jiri Pehe, a political analyst at New York University Prague.

"His stance will entail strong support to Ukraine without any conditions," Pehe told AFP.

European leaders have welcomed Pavel's win, which follows the Czech Republic's 2022 EU presidency.



## Poor Literacy Linked to Worse Mental Health Worldwide



LONDON (Dispatches) - Poor literacy skills or being illiterate is associated with an increased risk of developing anxiety and depression, researchers say. Additionally, poor literacy is also linked to increased feelings of loneliness.

People with poor literacy battle more mental health problems worldwide, according to new research from the University of East Anglia.

A new study published today is the first to look at the global picture of literacy and mental health. Fourteen percent of the world's population still has little or no literacy—and the study finds that they are more likely to suffer mental health issues such as loneliness, depression, and anxiety.

The team, from UEA's Department of Clinical Psychology and Psychological Therapies (CPPT), say their findings disproportionately affect women, who account for two thirds of the world's illiterate.

Dr. Bonnie Teague from UEA's Norwich Medical School, said, "Despite rising literacy rates over the past 50 years, there are still an estimated 773 million adults globally who can't read or write. Literacy rates are lower in developing countries and those with a history of conflict, and women are disproportionately affected."

"We know that people with better literacy tend to have better social outcomes in terms of things like finding employment, being paid well, and being able to afford better food and housing. Not being able to read or write holds a person back throughout their life and they often become trapped in poverty or more likely to commit crime."

"We also know that lower literacy is related to poorer health, chronic diseases and shorter life expectancy."

"There has been some research examining the potential association between literacy and mental health but this is the first study looking at the issue on a global scale."

"What we found is a significant association between literacy and mental health outcomes across multiple countries." Image is in the public domain

The team reviewed data from 19 studies that measured both literacy and mental health. These studies took place across nine different countries (U.S., China, Nepal, Thailand, Iran, India, Ghana, Pakistan, and Brazil) and involved almost two million participants.

Dr. Lucy Hunn completed this systematic review as part of her Doctorate in clinical psychology training at UEA. She said, "We used information relating to mental health and literacy to assess the global reported relationship between these two factors."

"What we found is a significant association between literacy and mental health outcomes across multiple countries."

"People with lower literacy had greater mental health difficulties such as anxiety and depression."

"We can't say for sure that poor literacy causes poor mental health, but there is a strong association."

"There may be multiple factors impacting on mental health which also impact literacy—such as poverty or living in an area with a history of conflict. However, what the data does show is that even in these places, you still see worse mental health for those without literacy skills."

"This work highlights the importance of mental health services being aware of and supporting literacy," she added.

Fourteen percent of the global population has little or no literacy. Literacy skills impact on daily functioning and have been shown to impact on social outcomes. Whilst there has been research examining the potential association between literacy and mental health outcomes in specific populations, there has been no systematic review of this literature to date.

## Vaccine Misinformation Spawns Pure Blood Movement



LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - Vaccine skeptics blocking transfusions for life-saving surgeries, Facebook groups inciting violence against doctors and a global search for unvaccinated donors — Covid-19 misinformation has bred a so-called "pure blood" movement.

The movement spins anti-vaccine narratives focused on unfounded claims that receiving blood from people inoculated against the coronavirus "contaminates" the body.

Some have advocated for blood banks that draw from "pure" unvaccinated people, while medics in North America say they have fielded requests from people demanding transfusions from donors who have not received the jab.

In closed social media groups, vaccine sceptics — who brand themselves as "pure bloods" — promote violence against doctors administering coronavirus jabs alongside false claims of mass deaths of vaccinated people.

Taking the hysteria to the next level was the recent high-profile case of a New Zealand couple, who sought to block life-saving heart surgery of their infant on the grounds that any blood transfused could have come from a vaccinated donor.

Their stance prompted a New Zealand court to take temporary custody of the baby to allow the procedure, but the case became a cause celebre among vaccine skeptics around the world.

"Cases like this spread like wildfire on both fringe and mainstream news sites and then social media, providing attention for anti-vaccine conspiracy theories," Katrine Wallace, an epidemiologist and assistant professor at the University of Illinois Chicago, told AFP.

"There is absolutely no science behind these conspiracies. If you give blood from a vaccinated donor to an unvaccinated person, the person receiving the transfusion does not become vaccinated."

George Della Pietra, a Swiss naturopath founded Safe Blood Donation, a global mediation service that falsely labels mRNA coronavirus vaccines a "health threat" and seeks to connect unvaccinated blood donors with recipients.

The Zurich-based nonprofit offers to obtain "fresh or canned" unvaccinated blood for its patrons, according to Safe Blood's website, which says it has a presence across western Europe, the United States, Canada, Australia, Asia and Africa.

AFP's email to Pietra requesting comment elicited a reply from Safe Blood's media director.

"There are a large number of scientists and doctors who not only have great concerns about the Covid vaccines, but are convinced that they also enter the body via the blood through the back door, so to speak, and remain there," wrote Clinton Ohlers, the media director, quoting from the website.

That directly contradicts scientific assertions.

"Blood donations from individuals who have received a Covid-19 vaccine are safe for transfusion," Jessa Merrill, from the American Red Cross, told AFP.

"Similar to other vaccines... the Covid-19 vaccine is designed to generate an immune response to help protect an individual from illness, but vaccine components themselves are not found within the bloodstream."

Safe Blood's members are required to pay an initial joining fee of 50 euros (\$54), followed by 20 euros each subsequent year, according to its website.

"The 'safe blood' movement is absolutely based 100 percent in anti-vaccine misinformation," said Wallace. "As with all anti-vaccine misinformation, appealing to people's fears is sadly profitable."



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## Chevron Annual Profit Hits Record

HOUSTON (Dispatches) - Chevron Corp posted a record \$36.5 billion profit for 2022 that was more than double year-earlier earnings, but the bottom line fell shy of Wall Street estimates, undercut by asset writedowns and rising costs.

The second largest U.S. oil producer's adjusted net profit for 2022 exceeded its previous record set in 2011 by about \$10 billion. Still, higher expenses and weaker oil and fuel profits left fourth-quarter earnings 6.6% below Wall Street's forecast, according to Refinitiv data.

Its results kick off what promises to be nosebleed level earnings for global energy suppliers. High prices from strong demand and shortages since Russia's invasion of Ukraine position Western energy firms to show a combined \$200 billion profit for the year, according to analysts.

This season's earnings have already put energy stocks at the top of industry returns as more companies lift their payouts to shareholders. The record shareholder payouts could stir fresh calls for windfall taxes.



## Eni Signs \$8b Libya Gas Deal As PM Meloni Visits Tripoli

ROME (Dispatches) - Italian energy company Eni and Libya's National Oil Corporation (NOC) signed an \$8 billion gas production deal on Saturday aimed at boosting energy supplies to Europe despite the insecurity and political chaos in the North African country.

The deal, signed during a visit to Tripoli by Italy's Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, aims to increase gas output for the Libyan domestic market as well as exports, through the development of two offshore gas fields.

Output will begin in 2026 and reach a plateau of 750 million cubic feet per day, Eni said in a statement.

"This agreement will enable important investments in Libya's energy sector, contributing to local development and job creation while strengthening Eni's role as a leading operator in the country," said its chief executive, Claudio Descalzi.

Meloni met Libya's Prime Minister Abdulhamid al-Dbeibah, head of the internationally recognised Government of National Unity (GNU) in Tripoli for talks that also focused on migration across the Mediterranean.

At a joint news conference with Descalzi, the NOC chief, Farhat Bengdara, said the gas deal had a duration of 25 years and called it the most important new investment in Libya's energy sector for a quarter of a century.

European countries have increasingly sought to replace Russian gas with energy supplies from North Africa and elsewhere over the past year because of the war in Ukraine.

Italy has already taken a lead in sourcing gas from Algeria, building a new strategic partnership there that includes investment to help state energy company Sonatrach reverse years of declining output.

However, agreements struck in Tripoli may be undermined by Libya's internal conflict, which has divided the country between rival factions who vie for control of government and dispute each other's claims to political legitimacy.

Underscoring the uncertainty, Dbeibah's own Oil Minister Mohamed Oun has rejected any deal that NOC might strike with Italy, saying in a video on the ministry website that such agreements should be made by the ministry.

Eni's Descalzi said the agreement will also entail a carbon capture facility and solar power.

NOC chief Bengdara was appointed last year by Dbeibah, whose own interim government was installed in 2021 through a U.N.-backed process.

The eastern-based parliament and factions that support it said early last year that the government was no longer legitimate, rejecting both the appointment of Bengdara and deals that Tripoli has struck with foreign states.

Chaos in Libya since the 2011 NATO-backed uprising that ousted autocrat Muammar Gaddafi has left much of the country in the hands of armed factions.

In statements to the press Dbeibah and Meloni said they had also discussed illegal migration from Libya to Italy, a subject that Rome's right-wing leader had made central to her political campaigning during her rise to power.

Italy will support Libya by providing new search and rescue ships, Dbeibah said.

## Sanctions Aggravated Economic Crisis in Venezuela

CARACAS (Dispatches) - The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (DDHH), Volker Türk, assured here that it is evident that the unilateral coercive measures imposed on Venezuela in 2017 aggravated the economic crisis in the country.

When presenting to the press this Saturday the balance of three days of work with the different actors in society, the official pointed out that his Office once again recommended that the Member States (in reference to the United States) suspend or lift the sanctions, which "have a detrimental effect on human rights".

We ask this with respect to the unilateral coercive measures imposed on other countries as well, he stressed.

Türk commented that, in dialogue with people, including UN actors and agencies, he was able to verify the impact of punitive measures on the difficult acquisition of basic products such as medicines, especially among the most vulnerable segments of the population.

According to data provided by the Venezuelan government, in recent years the United States and its allies imposed 928 unilateral coercive measures on the Bolivarian Republic, with multi-million dollar economic losses, which had a criminal impact on society and the economy.

The High Commissioner stated that he had listened to the positions of the parties involved in the dialogue table in Mexico and reiterated his Office's support for the talks to continue.



I urged them, he remarked, to listen to each other and engage in meaningful dialogue "to find a common vision for the future."

Türk did not deny the pitfalls along the way, saying that "engagement and positive dialogue" can forge a path around obstacles. In this regard, he indicated that his Office is ready and available to build bridges between State institutions and the opposition, and offer "our perspective and experience in the field of human rights," as well as guarantee that the discourse is depoliticized and not manipulated.

The UN representative expressed the strong appreciation of the people with whom he spoke about the work of his Office in Caracas, which began its work after the visit of Michelle Bachelet in 2019.

I am encouraged by the government's decision to extend the team's presence in Venezuela for another two years so that they can continue their work to promote the human rights agenda in the country, he emphasized.

## China Aims to Boost Consumption and Imports

BEIJING (Dispatches) - China's cabinet said it would promote a consumption recovery as the major driver of the economy and boost imports, state broadcaster CCTV reported, at a time of cooling global demand as major economies teeter on the brink of recession.

At a meeting chaired by Premier Li Keqiang, China's state council - which functions as the cabinet - also vowed to speed up the rollout of foreign investment projects, maintain a stable yuan, ease cross-border travel and help companies to participate in domestic and overseas trade shows.

The cabinet also reaffirmed its support for the private sector and digital platform economy, which have taken a knock from a series of regulatory crackdowns in recent years.

It also discussed measures to support farmers to start spring planting, including subsidies for soybean sowing, CCTV reported. During the week-long Lunar New Year holiday that ended on Friday, consumption increased 12.2% from the same period last year, the tax authority said on Saturday, reflecting a rebound after the relaxing of some of the world's tightest COVID-19 curbs.

Analysts at Japanese brokerage Nomura said in a research note that consumption of in-person services had recovered notably, as seen in the rebound of trips made and tourism earnings.

But they said households were likely to be moderate in releasing pent-up demand.

Chinese exports shrank sharply in December as global demand cooled, but a more modest decline in imports led economic analysts to forecast a slow recovery in domestic demand in the coming months.

## Turkish, Russian Delegations Discuss Creating Gas Hub

ANKARA (Dispatches) - Turkish and Russian experts discussed details regarding the creation of a gas hub in Turkey, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Oleg Syromolotov said.

In an interview with the Russian state-run news agency TASS, Syromolotov named energy as "one of the most successful sectors of the Russian-Turkish cooperation," which is developing dynamically and is based on a mutually respectful dialogue.

President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan is a leader of "a different caliber" who pursues an independent policy that favors his people and does not take dictation from third countries, the senior diplomat said.

He further said that with joint efforts, the issues related to the construction of the gas hub would be resolved.

Russian President Vladimir Putin proposed Turkey as a base for gas supplies in October after the Nord Stream pipelines under the Baltic Sea were damaged in September by blasts. President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan says he agrees with the idea.

Türkiye is home to seven international natural gas pipelines, four LNG facilities, and floating storage regasification units (FSRU). In addition, it has the only regional organized natural gas market under its energy exchange market - Energy Exchange Istanbul (EXIST).

Regarding cybersecurity, Syromolotov claimed that the United States issued some "NATO draft rules for waging a cyber war" and "is trying to adapt international law."

According to him, the U.S. "actively recruits" hackers, trains Ukraine's "IT army," and engages its allies' information and communication potentials to attack Russia's IT infrastructure.

Washington also "increases capabilities for global espionage" despite being "caught" using the Pegasus and Graphite spyware programs to hack personal communication devices and computers worldwide.

Syromolotov added that in 2022 Russia faced "an unprecedented" number of external cyberattacks, in total, over 50,000. Most of them were carried out from the territory of the U.S., NATO countries, and Ukraine, and targeted state structures.

The official voiced concern over the work of the Ukrainian information platforms under the guidance of Microsoft and Amazon IT giants.

## Sri Lanka's Economic Growth In 2022 Stood At Minus 11%

COLOMBO (Dispatches) - During mid 2022 Sri Lanka faced the worst economic crisis which led to months long public protests leading to a political crisis

Sri Lanka's overall economic growth in 2022 was minus 11 per cent and it could be - 3.5 to - 4 per cent this year, President Ranil Wickremesinghe said on Saturday, as the island nation tried hard to overcome its worst economic crisis since independence.

Wickremesinghe, who also holds the finance ministry portfolio, said that 2022 overall economic growth was larger than the expected at - 8 per cent and in 2023 the growth rate could hover somewhere around - 3.5 per cent to - 4 per cent.

"The growth rate of the economy in 2022 was - 11 per cent. It could be - 3.5 to - 4 per cent this year," Wickremesinghe told a gathering in the north central district of Anuradhapura.

During mid 2022 Sri Lanka faced the worst economic crisis which led to months long public protests leading to a political crisis.

Shortages of essentials due to the forex crisis forced people onto the streets demanding the resignation of president Gotabaya Rajapaksa.

Last year in April, Sri Lanka declared its first-ever debt default in its history as the economic crisis triggered by forex shortages sparked public protests.

On Wednesday, Governor of Sri Lankan Central Bank Nandalal Weerasinghe told reporters that the overall negative growth in 2022 would be around 8 per cent.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) had projected the 2022 growth to be minus 8 per cent. Wickremesinghe criticised his predecessor's tax concessions offered in 2020.

He said that in 2019 around 1.6 million tax files existed which came to be drastically reduced to 400,000 files by December 2021.

"The decrease in government revenue due to this is the primary cause of the economic crisis," Wickremesinghe said.

Wickremesinghe said the current negotiations with the global lender IMF for the bail out of 2.9 billion was crucial.

"If the IMF program is disrupted in any way, no one can prevent the country from falling into a crisis again similar to May and June last year," he said.

Until Sri Lanka approached the IMF for the bail out, it was credit lines from India which helped Sri Lanka import its essentials.

India's economic assistance package totalled \$4 billion.

## Opium Production Rises In 33% Myanmar



GENEVA (Dispatches) - Opium production rose 33% in Myanmar, the first season after the military's violent takeover of the country, a U.N. report released Thursday. This jump signifies enhanced sophistication in farming practices, and points to an alarming interest in growing opium, the report said.

Since the 2021 military coup, Myanmar has been roiled by continued political instability, violence, and economic turmoil. Much of the country's population is poverty-stricken and relies on farming to make a living. Coupled with the collapse of the country's healthcare system after the COVID-19 pandemic and increased hunger and forced migration, the incentive is high for cash-strapped farmers to grow poppies.

Myanmar and its borders with Thailand and Laos - known collectively as the "Golden Triangle" - have long been one of the most significant drug trafficking points in the world. Myanmar's opiate economy estimated value ranges between US\$ 660 million to 2.0 billion, according to U.N. estimates.

"At the end of the day, opium cultivation is really about economics, and it cannot be resolved by destroying crops which only escalates vulnerabilities," said United Nations Office Drugs Control (UNODC) Regional Representative Jeremy Douglas in a statement on the U.N. website. "Without alternatives and economic stability, it is likely that opium cultivation and production will continue to expand."

In this season, farmers earned twice as much selling opium in 2022 as they did the previous year, the report found. Prices for a kilogram of opium increased 70% from \$166 to \$281, the report found.

Usually, opium poppy fields in Myanmar are small, poorly organized, and far from villages and roads, the report said. But this year's estimate indicates an average of 19.8 kilograms of opium per hectare of poppy, the highest-ever measured estimates in Myanmar, the report said. In Shan State, field size increased by more than 30 percent compared to 2021, the report said. Researchers at the UNODC used a combination of satellite imagery and fieldwork to gather the information.



## Leicester Agree Short-Term Deal for Tete

LONDON (Dispatches) - Leicester have bolstered their attacking options for a Premier League survival fight with the signing of Brazilian under-23 international Tete until the end of the season. The 22-year-old is contracted to Shakhtar Donetsk, but has been at Lyon since March 2022 under the FIFA ruling which allowed all foreign players to suspend their contracts in Ukraine following Russia's invasion. As it stands, he is due to return to Shakhtar on July 1. The winger scored six goals in 17 appearances for Lyon in Ligue 1 this season.

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## Newcastle Sign Everton Forward Anthony Gordon

LONDON (Dispatches) - Newcastle announced the signing of Everton forward Anthony Gordon on a long-term deal for a fee that could reportedly rise to £45 million (\$56 million). The 21-year-old winger is the first arrival of the January transfer window at St James' Park. "Since I heard of the interest, I was always convinced Newcastle were for me," Gordon told NUFC TV. "I think the fan base and the city really suits me as a person, the way the team are playing under the gaffer at the minute really suits me, and the club just look like they're heading in the right direction."

# Djokovic Claims 10th Australian Open, 22nd Grand Slam Titles



MELBOURNE (Dispatches) - An emotional Novak Djokovic beat Stefanos Tsitsipas to claim a 10th Australian Open title and equal Rafael Nadal's 22 Grand Slam crowns, a victory that returned him to world number one.

The Serb will return to world number one as he overcame a hamstring injury and off-court drama to sweep past the Greek third seed 6-3, 7-6 (7/4), 7-6 (7/5) on Rod Laver Arena.

The 35-year-old climbed to his player's box afterwards to embrace his mother and broke down in uncontrollable tears, collapsing to the ground sobbing.

His father Srdjan was again missing after he sparked controversy by posing with a fan carrying a Russian flag featuring Vladimir Putin's face following his son's quarter-final win.

The emphatic victory over Tsitsipas capped a remarkable return for Djokovic to Melbourne Park, having missed last year's tournament when he was deported over his Covid vaccination stance.

"I have to say this has been one of the most challenging tournaments I've ever played considering the circumstances, not playing last year, coming back this year," he said at the presentation, wearing a jacket with 22 emblazoned on it.

"I want to thank all the people that made me feel welcome, comfortable, to be in Melbourne. I try to pinch myself and really live through these moments, it's a long journey," he added.

"Only my team and family know what we have been through in the last four or five weeks and this is why I'd probably say this is the biggest victory in my life considering the circumstances."

There had been an air of inevitability about Djokovic triumphing once more.

After his three-year ban from Australia was lifted, Djokovic won the lead-up Adelaide International before reinforcing his stature as an all-time great in Melbourne. His dominant win drew him level with Nadal on a record 22 Slams, two clear of Roger Federer.

The Spanish great made a shock second-round exit with a hip injury, but is targeting a return for the clay-court season and another crack at the French Open, and with it a 23rd Slam title.

Nadal, though, is set to slide down the rankings when they are released on Monday, in contrast to Djokovic, who will dethrone Spanish teenager Carlos Alcaraz and return to the top for the first time since June. Tsitsipas will climb one place to three.

"Novak, I don't know what to say. It speaks for itself what you have achieved so far. It's all in the numbers. Congratulations," said the 24-year-old Tsitsipas, who is still yet to win a major. "I've had the privilege to play a lot of difficult, high-intensity matches, but I would like to say one more time Novak brings the best out in me."

"He's the greatest that has ever held a tennis racket, for sure."

Both men were back on a court that helped them rise to stardom. Djokovic won his first Grand Slam in 2008 on Rod Laver Arena while Tsitsipas burst on the scene in 2019 when he stunned defending champion Federer in the last 16.

With sizeable Greek and Serbian communities in Melbourne, and Rod Laver in attendance, there was a raucous atmosphere.

Djokovic came into the match with his confidence sky-high having won all nine of his previous Australian Open finals and with a 10-2 career advantage over the Greek. Moving freely with only minimal strapping on his troublesome left hamstring, he opened with a comfortable hold after being greeted by huge cheers.

Djokovic worked two break points on Tsitsipas's opening serve, to no avail, but kept probing and the Greek handed him a break for 3-1 with a careless double fault.



## Shiffrin Misses Chance To Equal All-Time Record

PRAGUE (Dispatches) - Mikaela Shiffrin missed out on the chance to equal the all-time record for World Cup wins when she finished 0.06 seconds behind Lena Duerr in the slalom in Spindleruv Mlyn.

The American won Saturday's first slalom at the Czech ski resort to move to 85 career wins, just one shy of Ingemar Stenmark's overall record of 86.

The 27-year-old was quickest on the opening run as she flew down the course in 44.66secs which was 0.67s quicker than second-placed Duerr.

The warning signals were there, though, when Shiffrin told German broadcaster ZDF after the first run: "I'm a little tired today, I'm trying to concentrate and save my strength".

Duerr responded with a sizzling second run of 45.58s, 0.05s behind Franziska Gritsch, for a combined time of 1min 30.91.

That was good enough to give the veteran German her eighth podium and her first win in a traditional discipline - Duerr's only previous World Cup victory came in the parallel slalom in Moscow in 2013.

"It took me a while (to win a classic World Cup race)," said the 31-year-old who made her World Cup debut in 2008.

## Germany Overcome Belgium to Win Hockey World Cup

NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - Germany came from 2-0 behind to overcome defending champions Belgium and win the hockey World Cup in a dramatic see-saw final ending in a sudden death shootout.

Belgium went ahead in the first quarter in Bhubaneswar, India with Florent Van Aubel collecting the ball after a deflection and smashing it powerfully into the backboard.

Moments later Tanguy Cosyns doubled Belgium's lead, collecting a neat cross in front of the German goal for an easy tap-in. Germany reviewed the goal decision but it stood.

Early in the second quarter Belgium's keeper Vincent Vanasch saved a penalty stroke but just before half-time Niklas Wellen got one back for Germany.

Germany then scored through Gonzalo Peillat to make it 2-2 and in the final period captain Mats Grambusch squeezed a shot between Vanasch's legs to go ahead 3-2.

But with under two minutes remaining, Belgium's Tom Boon equalised from a penalty corner, taking the game into a shootout. This went to sudden death and Germany won 5-4.

Belgium "is a world-class team... They have so much quality. We knew it would be a huge clash against them," Wellen, named player of the match, said afterwards.

"If you come back from two goals down three times in a row, it's not luck. It's our quality, it's our mentality. And we showed that again today," he said.

Belgium hockey's golden generation were hoping to win their second World Cup in a row, after cruising into the final despite having the tournament's oldest side.

Their passage to the final included a shootout victory over the Netherlands in the semi-finals and a 2-0 thumping of New Zealand in the quarters. On their way to the final Germany beat England and then Australia.



# Odermatt Completes Cortina Super-G Double

"It was the perfect race for me again. The confidence was very big again," said Odermatt, winner of Saturday's super-G. Austria's Daniel Hemetsberger took advantage of 21 skiers not finishing the run to take third place, 1.03sec behind Odermatt, for his first ever super-G podium.

ROME (Dispatches) - Marco Odermatt strengthened his bid for a second straight World Cup title after winning the super-G at Cortina d'Ampezzo as great rival Aleksander Aamodt Kilde crashed out.

Switzerland's Odermatt clocked a time of one minute, 25.13 seconds, 0.76sec ahead of local hero Dominik Paris, on a tricky course in the Italian Dolomites which caught out a clutch of skiers.

Confidence helps, and after yesterday the confidence was very big again," said Odermatt, winner of Saturday's super-G.

Austria's Daniel Hemetsberger took advantage of 21 skiers not finishing the run to take third place, 1.03sec behind Odermatt, for his first ever super-G podium.

One of those was reigning super-G champion Kilde, who lost control on the Delta turn and allowed Odermatt to gain 100 points on him in both the overall and discipline standings.

"I think my run was quite good, I don't know why. I had a clear plan, but the plan was thrown away after 20 seconds," said Hemetsberger.

Odermatt's eighth win of the season extended the gap between him and Kilde to 148 in the super-G ranking while he leads by 313 points in the hunt for the crystal globe.

He is clear favorite to claim the super-G title with only two races in the discipline remaining this season, in Aspen and Soldeu.

The 25-year-old looked like he had fully shaken off his knee injury in the last speed race of the season ahead of the World Championships in Courchevel and Meribel which start early next month.

"I will enjoy some time (off), recover the body, the mind and the knee, and be refreshed for the World Champs," added Odermatt.

## Brown Forces OT, Celtics Snap Skid

BOSTON (Dispatches) - Lakers guard Patrick Beverley grabbed a courtside camera in an effort to show referee Eric Lewis what everyone who'd watched the replay already knew: LeBron James was fouled on his missed layup at the end of regulation.

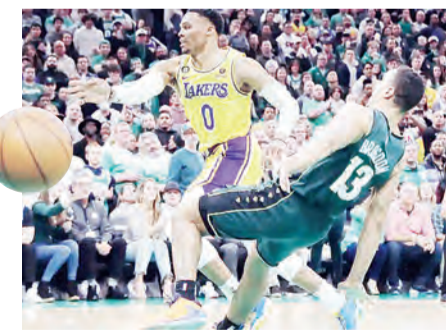
Instead of getting the call, Beverley drew a technical foul that gave Boston the lead to start overtime and the NBA-leading Celtics went on to beat Los Angeles 125-121.

"The best player on Earth can't get a call. It's amazing," Lakers coach Darvin Ham said. "As much as you try not to put it on the officiating, it's becoming increasingly difficult."

Jaylen Brown scored 37, completing a tying 3-point play with 4.1 seconds left in regulation and adding 11 more points in overtime to help the Celtics snap a three-game losing streak. Brown added nine rebounds, Jayson Tatum had 30 points and 11 rebounds, and Malcom Brogdon scored 15 of his 26 points in the second half of a seesaw game that had 19 lead changes — six in the fourth quarter — and 15 ties.

James had 41 points, nine rebounds and eight assists. But it was his missed layup at the end of regulation that enraged him on the court and left him simmering at his locker afterward.

"I don't understand. I don't understand what we're doing, and I watch basketball every single day," said James, who sat with a towel covering his head during overtime and barely looked up as he spoke from at his locker. "I watch games every single day and I don't see it happening to nobody else. It's just weird."



## Brighton Shock Liverpool In FA Cup

BRIGHTON (Dispatches) - Liverpool's disastrous season suffered another blow as the holders were dumped out of the FA Cup by a 2-1 defeat at Brighton.

Kaoru Mitoma's brilliant control and finish in stoppage time earned the Seagulls a place in the fifth round.

Liverpool had led at the Amex through Harvey Elliott, but have now won just once in their last six games.

Lewis Dunk levelled before the break for Brighton and they were well worthy of the victory given to them by a moment of magic from Mitoma.

The Japanese winger cushioned Pervis Estupinan's cross into his path, flicked the ball over Joe Gomez and fired high past Alisson Becker in the 92nd minute.

Liverpool are languishing in ninth in the Premier League, 21 points behind pacesetters Arsenal. Their FA Cup exit leaves the Champions League as their only remaining shot at a trophy this season.

Last season Jurgen Klopp's men were on the brink of a historic quadruple, which included their first FA Cup triumph in 16 years.

But Klopp is still searching for answers to halt their decline after a second defeat on the south coast in 15 days.

The German described Brighton's 3-0 win when the sides last met as the worst performance of his managerial career and took some heart from Liverpool at least putting up a fight this time.

"I am not over the moon about this performance but, again, the only thing that happened really is that we lost against a good side, who we lost to two weeks ago in a horrendous game," said Klopp "Today was much better."

