

Alexander Lukashenko, the President of Belarus, Congratulates His Iranian Counterpart on the 44th Anniversary of the Victory of The Islamic Revolution and Announced a Visit to Iran Soon

IRAN NEWS

Health Ministry Announced on Sunday That the Number of Deaths From the Coronavirus Pandemic in Iran Increased to **144,781** With **Two** More Iranians Killed by the Deadly Disease Over the Past 24 Hours

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President to Depart for Beijing on Monday Evening

TEHRA (IRNA) - President Ebrahim Raisi heading a high-ranking politico-economic delegation is to leave Tehran for Beijing on Monday evening. President Raisi's upcoming three-day tour will be upon the official invitation of his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping. During his stay, Raisi is to meet with President Xi. The two sides' delegations will sign cooperation documents. He will also attend the joint meeting of the Iranian and Chinese businessmen. Holding meeting with Iranian expatriates in China will be on the agenda of President Raisi's tour. China is the largest trading partner with Iran and according to the 10-month statistics of Iranian customs, the country has been the main destination of Iran's exports worth \$12.6b. Iran has also imported \$12.7b from China during this period.

Tehran Hopes to Mend Ties With Seoul

SEOUL (Dispatches)- Iranian Ambassador Saeed Badamchi Shabestari has called on the South Korean government and people to work toward better bilateral ties, stressing stagnant political and economic ties between the two countries in recent years. Speaking at a celebration event held for the 44th Islamic revolution on Thursday, the ambassador said he feels "regretful" over the current status of the bilateral relationship despite the countries' ties in modern history, as well as in ancient times, dating back about 1,000 years. He did not mention a recent tit-for-tat spat between Seoul and Tehran over South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol's comments on Iran as "the enemy" of the United Arab Emirates during his trip there last month. "For over four years, Korean friends have always told me that the reason they are reluctant to get close to Iran is that they fear the consequences of unfair sanctions and unilateral policies. Unfortunately, these concerns are having a negative impact on the friendly and historic relationship between Iran and South Korea," he said. "As the Iranian ambassador and a person with an interest and affection in strengthening the relationship between the two great nations, I take this opportunity, before my departure from Seoul, and on behalf of the Iranian government and the people, to ask the Korean government and the people for a helping hand (to mend ties with each other)." **See Page 7**

West Failed To Use Riots As Leverage In JCPOA Revival Talks

IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Iran's chief negotiator says the Western countries have failed to use the recent foreign-backed riots in the country as leverage in talks to revive the 2015 nuclear deal between Tehran and the world powers, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). Ali Bagheri Kani said in an interview with Lebanon's Arabic-language al-Manar television network that the West has made a "miscalculation" vis-à-vis the recent developments in Iran. "Regarding the developments and events inside Iran, [the Western states] may have made a miscalculation, but when they faced the realities, they found themselves empty-handed and had nothing to criticize at the negotiation table," he said. He added that, "There is no doubt that they plot to use various tools against the Islamic Republic ... in the negotiations..., but we have seen nothing that indicates they can exploit the recent developments in Iran and certainly they will not be able to do so." Elsewhere in his remarks, Bagheri Kani, who also serves as deputy foreign minister for political affairs, stressed that the negotiations, aimed at reviving the US-abandoned deal, are going on as the two sides are exchanging messages with each other. The negotiations continued at different places in the past year and a half, but they were in progress cohesively and continually, he said adding that now, the exchange of messages continues between the two sides. Referring to Qatar's mediating role, Bagheri Kani said, "We do not have a direct relationship with the US, and it is natural that the exchange of messages between us and the Americans takes place through an intermediary, which is sometimes a European or a non-European country. We had the exchange of messages and it still exists." The talks to revive the 2015 deal kicked off in the Austrian capital city of Vienna in April 2021, with the intention of removing anti-Iran sanctions and examining the US's seriousness in rejoining the JCPOA. The discussions, however, have been at a standstill since August 2022 due to Washington's insistence on its hard-nosed position of not removing all the sanctions that were slapped on Tehran by the previous US administration. The senior diplomat further said that one of the basic red lines of the Islamic Republic is the issue of guarantees by which the opposite side adheres to its obligations. "The Islamic Republic has declared that it sees no obstacles to finalize the agreement even in the short term, within a framework that observes its red lines and interests," he added. Bagheri Kani further said that so far five rounds of talks have been held between Iran and Saudi Arabia and that the discussions are advancing. "It is natural that in order to get the views of Tehran and Riyadh closer, the two sides need consultation, dialogue, and time." Regarding the possibility of the Zionist regime using regional countries against the Islamic Republic, he said that Tel Aviv makes strategic mistakes. "The Zionists' plot to confront the Islamic Republic is not a new thing, but experience has shown that the Zionists make strategic mistakes. The costs they pay in the confrontation with the Islamic Republic are definitely more than what they think they can achieve." The top diplomat also emphasized that the source of any threat against Iran will definitely be targeted. "The Zionist regime will never cause concern for the Islamic Republic, and the leaders of this regime know very well that if they dream of attacking Iran, they must be sure that they will not wake up from that dream." Concerning relations with Moscow and Kiev, especially after Russia's operation in Ukraine, Bagheri Kani said that Iran will continue its relations with both countries. However, he noted, the Islamic Republic "has officially declared that it is neutral towards this war and will not help any side in the war and has not done so until now."

Iran Ready to Meet Pakistan Energy Needs

LAHORE (Dispatches) - Iran has suggested devising a barter mechanism on the basis of local currencies to facilitate trade with Pakistan. Because of lack of banking channels, custom tariff and non-tariff obstacles have made trade between the businesses of both countries very difficult, Consul General of Iran Mehran Movahed Far told a ceremony held to mark 44th anniversary of Islamic revolution in Iran. He urged Islamabad to take steps for increasing legal trade with Tehran and promoting linkages between financial and credit institutions in the two countries. He suggested a barter system on the basis of local currencies saying Iran was already successfully operating such a system with China, Russia and other countries. He said despite sanctions Iran was ready to meet energy needs of Pakistan. Movahedfar suggested that both Iran and Pakistan should devise a barter mechanism on the basis of local currencies to facilitate bilateral trade. **See Page 7**

ViewPoint

By: Hamid Reza Naghashian

44 Years of Resistance

Sometimes intentionally I closet for one or two days and have a look back at the past newspapers and with turning each page, a greater surprise swims in my mind, in fact, not only all of infidels, through these years, have been unable to defeat us but also we have had achievements and successes many times more than the volume of their enmities against us, and resistance against infidelity, arrogance and atheism is only one of those achievements. History pages are full of encounters of oppressor with oppressed and arrogant with mujahid (crusader). In Islamic Iran, resistance is part of its culture and historical identity of Iranian nation. Iranians through their history have always defended their national and religious identity and the outcome of the defense has been an honorable life of a great nation in the historical ups and downs. In the current condition, the most rational and logical strategy of Islamic Iran against the excessive demanding enemies is to choose the path of resistance and this strategy is one of the tested path with successful results in the history of Islam and it is the long journey of historical life of us. With reviewing history of Islam, signs show us that Islam has a historic doppelganger, named resistance. Since the early days of Mabaath, the Prophet of Islam (PBUH) put resistance against pagans at the top of his activities based on the Divine orders and in response to the offers of the rich and wealthy men of his time who thought Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) claimed prophecy just for the worldly fame and position, he frankly states that if they if they put the Sun in his right hand and the Moon in his left on condition that he abandons this course he would not abandon it and consequently all Muslims with reliance on the Prophet even in the hardest time and under torture and economic pressure in Shaab Abi Taleb did not retreat from resistance and the outcome of this resistance was the sweet fruit of victory of Muslims over infidels and pagans that history is a crystal clear proof for this bright and genuine truth. Resistance of the Prophet Mouhammad's (PBUH) Household against tyranny and oppression of rulers of his time has continued through the whole lives of them and we can clearly witness the climax of sacrifice and resistance through the history of the mankind in the Battle of Ashura which is not only a lesson of freedom and resistance for the followers of the Household but also a human lesson for all men who cannot tolerate life with humiliation as it is against free men's dignity and this freedom is liberty which takes man to the highest level of humanity, and in fact when the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution says "We neither tyrannize nor tolerate tyranny, and even we do not compromise with tyranny and we defend the oppressed." His remarks are the translation of a quotation from Imam Hussein (AS) which is "Never to Humiliation". This sentence is so sweet and pleasant that I would like to repeat it many times that in Islamic Iran, resistance has become some part of its culture and historical identity. Iranians through their history have always defended their national and religious identity and its outcome is the honorable life of a great nation in the historical ups and downs and passage of time in the world in a way that today Islamic Iran owns one of the most noble civilizations of the world that since the pre-historic eras have continued its life discretely under the name of Iran and Iranian and in the decisive periods, history has connected Iranian nation to the today's era with a chain with the strategic depth in the identity, national culture and religion. Today also Iranian nation is experiencing one of its decisive eras and as the Supreme Leader has said, Iranians like their brilliant history have taken the path of resistance with a strong logic against the excessive demands of enemies. Historical experiences and review of the similar events show that excessive demands of enemies have no limit and as long as we do not force them to give in through resistance and hitting the final blow for disappointing them, they will not stop threats and excessive demands. **See Page 7**

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Iran, Iraq FMs Hold Phone Talk

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian and his Iraqi counterpart Fouad Hussein held a phone conversation on Saturday, discussing various issues.

The two top diplomats discussed Tehran-Baghdad relations. They also exchanged views on the 2015 Iran nuclear deal and steps related to removing sanctions in place against the country.

The Iraqi foreign minister invited Amirabdollahian to visit Baghdad.

Support for MKO Shows Insatiable U.S. Appetite For Destroying Iran

IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian says a recently-introduced U.S. Congress resolution that supports the terrorist Mujahedin-e-Khalq Organization (MKO) once again revealed Washington's "insatiable appetite" for employing terrorism for the purpose of destroying Iran.

In a post on his Twitter account on Saturday, Amirabdollahian said the "worthless" resolution in support of the anti-Iran MKO terror cult indicated the US plan to promote Daesh-modeled terrorism in a bid to destroy Iran.

"The U.S. Congress' worthless resolution in support of Monafeghin terror cult demonstrates, just once more, their insatiable appetite for instrumentalizing terrorism and DAESH modeled scenarios- that wrecked Syria and Iraq - for destroying Iran,"



the top Iranian diplomat tweeted.

The bipartisan resolution was introduced to the House by Rep. Tom McClintock on February 7 and has 164 other cosponsors. It has been referred to the House Committee on Foreign Affairs.

Backing foreign-backed riots in Iran, the resolution expresses support for what it calls the "Iranian people's desire for a democratic, secular, and nonnuclear Republic of Iran." It also levels baseless accusations against Iran for what it describes as "state-sponsored terrorism" and violation of human rights.

In a post on his Twitter account on Friday, Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Nasser Kanaani denounced the US Congress resolution, saying that the measure demonstrates deep ties between the United States and terrorism.

Making Assets Productive, Way to Remove Investment Impasse

TEHRAN (IP) - Economy Minister said that making the government's assets productive is a perfect way to remove any impasse for investment in the country.

Attended by Ehsan Khandouzi - Minister of Economic and Finance Affairs - the system for making the government's assets productive, at pga.ipo.ir, was unveiled on Feb.12, 2023.

Khandouzi noted: In the description section, each asset is visible. Regulations and a comprehensive map of the plan are placed on the site. The resolution related to the heads of the three power branches is also placed in the resolution section.

He also explained that multiple processes related to the making-assets-productive plan have been placed in one tab of the site. The information related to the property of the Ministries of Education and Agriculture, separated by province, is placed in this section, the minister said. The plan of the process is currently completed in Tehran city and can be seen on pga.ipo.ir.

Kabul of Particular Importance In Tehran's Foreign Policy

TEHRAN (MNA) - Iran Ambassador to Kabul Hassan Kazemi Qomi said on Sunday that the importance of Iran's relations with Afghanistan has doubled in the 13th Iranian government compared to the past.

Kazemi Qomi made the remarks during a celebration of the 44th anniversary of the Islamic Revolution victory in Kabul, Afghanistan on Sunday.

Referring to the significant place of Afghanistan in Iran's foreign policy, he highlighted that the importance of Iran's relations with Afghanistan has doubled in the 13th government under President Raisi.

He noted that Iran is ready to cooperate with the current governing body of Afghanistan to counter terrorist groups and establish stability and security.

The Iranian diplomat said that Iran's relations with Afghanistan are beyond political borders.

ATA Airlines Rejects Rumors of Explosion During Najaf-Tehran Flight

TEHRAN (IFP) - Iran's ATA Airlines offers an apology and an explanation over a problem that delayed a Najaf-Tehran flight, dismissing rumors about an explosion prior to take-off or the plane's deviation from the runway.

Reports said on Thursday that Ata Airlines Flight 6644, which was supposed to depart from the Iraqi city of Najaf to Mashhad, in northeastern Iran, at 20:00, was diverted from the runway before take-off due to a technical glitch.

There were also reports of a blast at the site.

ATA Airlines, however, rejected the rumors in a statement and said the pilot decided to stop the flight after receiving an error concerning a discharge of nitrogen from the front tires.

The problem caused vibrations in the plane, prompting the pilot to stop the flight on the runway based on the instruction, according to the statement.

In order to ensure the flight's safety, it added, the plane was handed over to the maintenance specialists of ATA Airlines at the airport, and the passengers and the flight crew were settled in a hotel while the issue was being taken care of.

"The rumors about the explosion and diversion to the runway are dismissed. The health [of the passengers] and flight safety are the main priority of ATA Airlines and we apologize for the unwanted delay," it added.

Judiciary Rejects Reports On Exacting Commitments From Freed Inmates

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Judiciary rejects reports about the alleged exaction of various commitments from the inmates, who were recently pardoned as part of an amnesty offered by Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei.

The Judiciary's Media Center made the remarks in a statement on Friday after the emergence of some reports on certain social media outlets as well as throughout cyberspace alleging that the inmates had been freed after they made some commitments.

It rejected the reports as inexact and erroneous, saying such allegations had been circulated in order to try to tarnish the sanctity of the amnesty that had been offered by the Leader as well as the joyful social atmosphere that followed the issuance of the decree.

Less than a week ago, Ayatollah Khamenei either pardoned or commuted the sentences of a large number of Iranian prisoners, who had been arrested during the recent foreign-backed riots in the country, agreeing to a request forwarded by Iran's Judiciary Chief Gholamhossein Mohseni-Ejei.

The Leader issued the approval on the occasion of the 44th anniversary of the glorious victory of Iran's Islamic Revolution, which put an end to the rule of the United States-backed Pahlavi regime in the country in 1979, and the birth anniversary of the first Shia Imam, Imam Ali (AS).

Further down the statement, the Judiciary clarified that the only commitment that had been asked of the prisoners to make was for them to give a voluntary pledge not to repeat the crimes they had committed.

Airbus A320 Returns to Iran's Fleet After 11 Years of Grounding

TEHRAN (PressTV) -An Airbus A320 has returned to the Iranian aviation fleet after 11 years of grounding thanks to a domestic overhaul program that took one year and offered some 2,300 repair tasks.

A Saturday report by the IRIB News said that the aircraft had carried out a successful test flight earlier in the day between Tehran and Yazd in central Iran to become ready for official return to the Iranian civil aviation fleet.

The plane belongs to Qeshm Air, a private Iranian airline which flies to various destinations inside the country and in the region.

Qeshm Air CEO Ramin Hamzeh said the repaired aircraft will increase the airline's active seat capacity by 600 per day. He said the aircraft is also planned to carry out flights to foreign destinations, adding that four other repaired planes will be added to the airline's fleet by March.

Iran expanded its civilian aircraft repair and maintenance program in 2018 when the country's access to parts and services from abroad was barred because of US sanctions.

That comes as Iranian aviation companies currently offer overhaul and inspection services to foreign airlines.

Reports in September showed that nine Russian passenger planes were in Iran to receive maintenance.

41st Edition of Fajr Film Festival Comes to Close

TEHRAN (IFP) - The 41st edition of the prestigious Fajr International Film Festival (FIFF) comes to a close in the Iranian capital of Tehran. The seven-member jury announced the winners on Saturday, the final day of the event.

The Special Award for Best National Film went to Mohammad Hossein Latifi for "Strange."

Actress Pardis Pourabedini bagged the award for Best Leading Actress for her role in "Strange," while the prize for Best Leading Actor was won by Majid Salehi for his performance in "Number 10."

Alongside Salehi, prominent Iranian actor Ali Nasirian was also granted the Crystal Simorgh for "Seven Orange Blossoms."

Meanwhile, Mohammad Ali Bashe Ahangar secured the award for Best Director for his film, "Metropole Cinema."

Iran's annual Fajr International Film Festival, the country's most significant cinematic event, has been held in Tehran since 1982.

The festival is supervised by the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance. It takes place on the anniversary of the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

The event has been separated into a national festival in February, which is notable for premieres of the most important domestic movies, and an international one, held in April.

Pakistan Felicitates Iran on 44th Anniversary of Islamic Revolution

TEHRAN (IRNA) - President of Pakistan Arif Alvi, on behalf of the government and the people of Pakistan, felicitated Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei on the 44th anniversary of the Islamic Revolution.

According to a press release on Sunday by President Secretariat Press Wing, in his message to the leader of the Islamic Revolution, Alvi said that the fraternal relations between Pakistan and Iran were rooted in linguistic, cultural, and religious bonds. He also said that Pakistan remained committed to further strengthening of these ties across the entire gamut of bilateral relations.

Alvi also conveyed his best wishes for Ayatollah Khamenei's health and happiness and for the continued progress, prosperity, and well-being of the brotherly people of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Iran, Russia Discuss Ways to Develop Customs Cooperation

TEHRAN (MNA) - In a joint meeting in Tehran, the customs delegations of Iran and Russia discussed ways to develop educational cooperation between the customs of the two countries.

In line with the implementation of the memorandum of understanding on educational cooperation between the customs of Iran and Russia, the first meeting on the ways to benefit from the educational, scientific, and specialized customs and commercial potentials was held in Iran.

In this meeting, the two sides emphasized that the Iranian and Russian customs employees should benefit from the knowledge, skills, experiences, and facilities related to academic education. At the end of the two-day meeting, an agreement was signed between the Federal Customs Service of Russia and the Iran Customs Administration.

Water Supply on Iranian Parliament's Agenda

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The Spokesman of the Iranian Parliament's Integration Commission said that the water supply of the country is on the agenda with the priority of tropical and subtropical border projects, including Sistan and Baluchistan.

Rahim Zare said on Sunday that from 187,000 billion tomans, 45,000 billion tomans of bonds was allowed for the construction and completion of half-finished water supply and containment projects in the country.

Zare said the tropical and cold border and hydropower projects were prioritized in the plan for the affiliated companies to the Ministry of Energy.

The Integration Commission Spokesman made the remarks to the reporters in a press brief held on Sunday, Feb.12, 2023. Rahim Zare said: 10 thousand billion Tomans were allocated for the infrastructure of the agricultural sector in the budget plan.



Notice of tender for export sale
No. Z/1401/23
Golgohar Mining and Industrial Company

Hereby Golgohar Mining & Industrial Co. announces selling and export 140,000 metric tons of Pellet (%Fe:65.00) on basis of F.O.B at Barco Jetty Bandar Abbas - Iran. Interested bidders should find tender documents at Golgohar website: www.geg.ir. All bids on conformity to tender instructions must be submitted no later than 14:00 P.M. on 14. Feb.2023 to Golgohar complex in sirjan (50 km in shiraz road).

Bidders are invited to the transactions commission department of the seller with an introduction letter of interested buyer and personal identification of the representative. Tender results shall be announced at 10:00 A.M. on 15.Feb.2023 at the office of the Seller.

Analysis %		
Min	65.00	Fe
Ave	1.0	FeO
Max	0.05	P
Max	0.01	S
Max	3.5	SiO2
Max	0.7	Al2O3
Max	0.9	CaO
Max	2.5	MgO
Ave 250		CCS(kg/p)
Min 90		8-16 mm%
Ave 5		-6 mm%
Max 4.0		A.I%
Min 94		T.I%
19-24		Prososity%
Min 90		Reducibility%



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	12:18
■ Evening (Maghreb)	18:02
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	05:28
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	06:52

25. But Allah doth call to the Home of Peace:

He doth guide whom He pleaseth to a way that is straight.

26. To those who do right is a goodly (reward)- Yea, more (than in measure)!

No darkness nor shame shall cover their faces! they are companions of the garden;

they will abide therein (for aye)!

Surah 10. Jonah (25 - 26)

Tehran, Manila Urged to Concentrate on Broadening Tourism Industry

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK



TEHRAN – Ambassador of the Philippines to Tehran Roberto G. Manalo in meeting with Deputy for International Affairs of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Mine and Agriculture (ICCIMA) Mr. Alireza Yavari called for concentration of Tehran and Manila on broadening tourism industry and providing its required infrastructures.

In the meeting, Mr. Yavari expressed the interest of Iran's tourism industry for cooperation with East Asian countries, adding that lack of cognition regarding the tourism attractions of the Philippines is one of the reasons that this country has been less welcomed by Iranian tourists.

He went on to say that boosting the knowledge and awareness of Iranians about the Philippines as well as introduction of tourist attractions will be a solution for it. He then announced readiness of the ICCIMA for hosting trade delegations from the Philippines or dispatching delegations to Manila for cooperation with the chamber of commerce of the Philippines. He also called for online meeting between the two chambers of commerce in order to prepare the ground for exchange of trade delegations.

Yavari reiterated it is possible to boost the trade exchange and investment between the two countries in the fields that are not under sanctions. He then noted that businessmen

of both countries are keen to cooperate and both sides can cooperate in the fields like foodstuff, agro, medicines and medical equipment and communications. He stressed that the can cooperate with Iran by getting required licenses from the OFAC.

He stated that the private sector of Iran has announced its interest for the meeting of the joint economic cooperation commission of Iran and the Philippines.

Then the Ambassador of the Philippines Mr. Manalo, for his part emphasized east travel between the two countries for boosting the level of trade relation and tourism and blamed lack of direct flight between Tehran and Manila for colorless presence of the businessmen of the Philippines in Iran and failure in boosting tourism.

He admitted that despite signing agreements for launching direct flights between the two countries, lack of passengers and profit has been the main reason for failure in the launch of direct flight.

Manalo then said that smart cities are being formed in his country and it is a good opportunity for investment by Iranian traders. He added that in 2003, Tehran and Manila reached an agreement to set up a joint trade council, and emphasized proper using of the agreements and MoUs which have been signed between the two countries in the past and said that soon a trade form will be held at the Embassy of the Philippines in Tehran with cooperation of the Chamber of Commerce of the Philippines which is aimed at easing trade and making Iranian traders acquainted with the potentials and capacities of his country for investment.

He also blamed the internet problem and lack of access to fast internet as the reason for the drop in the online requests for getting visas for Iranians.

Container Transport Kicks Off In the Caspian Sea



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – On the eve of the anniversary of the victory of the Islamic Revolution and for the first time in the history of maritime transportation in the Caspian Sea, the container transport began by the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Line Group (IRISL) and it is on the rise.

According to reports, on the occasion of the anniversary of the victory of the Islamic Republic of Iran, IRISL in a report announced some of its achievements.

According to this report, the capacity of this fleet has increased from 525,000 tons to 5m tons in 44 years and it shows 10-fold rise in the capacity of the fleet. By the way, the group now possesses 138 different types of vessels which are unique in the world and it has made the group as the biggest fleet in the Middle East.

It is worth noting that by arrival of the new generation of ships and mega size ones in the last decade, the container capacity of the fleet has reach the considerable figure of 157,000 TEU and it has helped the group to run 14 in the world in terms of container shipping.

This fleet is run fully by Iranians who have been trained at the educational institute of the group while in the early days of the Islamic Revolution major part of seafarers of the group was foreigners.

The fleet of the group in the strategic region of the Caspian Sea functions as the biggest fleet of the region and its capacity has recently been increased from 95,000 tons to 130,000 tons and for the first time in the history of marine transportation in the Caspian Sea, the container transportation has started by the IRISL and it is on the rise.

The group also with \$10m investment in Salianka Port of Russia has taken the control of this port which is a unique achievement in pre and pro revolution era.

South Azadegan Oilfield Development Accelerated

TEHRAN (MNA) - South Azadegan oilfield is located 80 kilometers west of Ahvaz (the capital city of Iran's southwestern Khuzestan province), near the Iraqi border.

The oil reserves in this field are estimated to be around 25.34 billion barrels, and the recoverable oil is estimated to be around 1.7 billion barrels, taking into account the recovery factor of 6.6 percent.

The development process of the South Azadegan oilfield is done in the form of two development phases, that according to the targeting, the production in this field is supposed to reach 600,000 barrels per day.

South Azadegan is one of the five major oilfields Iran shares with Iraq at the western part of Iran's Karoun region, known as West Karoun fields. West Karoun holds great importance for the country's oil industry since according to the latest studies, its in-situ deposit is estimated to be 67 billion barrels containing both light and heavy crude oils, and therefore it could have a big impact on Iran's oil output increases in the future.

The head managers of ISODA Tourism & Travel Services company said:

Exclusive tourism licenses is in control of ISODA agent.



issuing of international certificates for abroad travels, holding exclusive airline and foreign branches are. ISODA's development plans The head of ISODA company said: ISODA is one of the most active companies in Qom province, which has different exclusive certificates in the fields of medical tourism, issuing cruise and plane tickets, as well as transit and issuing international radar certificates, attracting different ways of traveling such as flight, train and bus. Nowadays, profitable development is of great importance and the title of sustainability is focused in economic development and growth plans Tourism industry, which is one of the pillars of sustainable development, can be used for economic growth, which is a kind of green industry, and in this period of time, when pollution and water scarcity have become an extreme issue, the development of tourism is considered vital. It is necessary to consider it in planning. We asked Javad Gholami, who is one of the successful activists in Iran's tourism field, and we talked with him about his endeavors in this area, challenges and successful points. He has more than twenty years of experience in tourism and other fields, today he has been able to become the head of many companies. It is a collection that has a lot to say in the field of tourism in Iran He plays a beneficial role as the best tourism office in the province Javad Gholami, has a powerful background in the field of tourism, and he argues: I entered the field of tourism and and I turn the candle, 1378 worked in travel agencies since from both side from a fresh employee and continued this activity professionally by passing various courses. The head of ISODA company services continued: ISODA is one of the most active tourism companies in the province, which has various exclusive licenses in the fields of medical tourism, issuance of cruise and plane tickets, and cooperation with RADAR Automobile Center. Attracting tourists by flight, rail, and sea is one of the important programs of this company He said: According to the General Administration of Cultural Heritage report, Tourism and Handicrafts of Qom province, AISODA is the most active tourism agent in the people and indirect 17 province with direct employment for people. This tourism activist also argued 50 employment for that in the field of tourism and therapeutic tourism, we had comers from countries such as Germany, Italy, Russia, France, Canada, and the United States, and said: the most incoming of therapeutic tourism was for us. However, due to the sanctions and side effects of that, this numbers decreased. Acting as the only direct executor of the honors of high schools in Qom province Referring to the pilgrimage activities of the AISODA group, he said: We are the only agency that directly implements religious rituals in the province, and we have guaranteed five hotels in Iraq of hotels and accommodation centers %70 Reservation of in Qom under the supervision of ISODA He said: In addition to Qom, there are tourist and travel offices under the supervision of ISODA in different provinces such as Tehran, Alborz, Lorestan, Qazvin, Hamadan, Semnan, Shahrood and 10 Central, and we also have an active agency in Tehran with top brands. The country is competing. Organizing desert tours for foreign tourists Gholami continued: In Iraq, ISODA is one of the most reliable and well-known agencies, and we are in a way exclusive, and we follow up on zero to one hundred tasks in internationalizing certificates and issuing car exit permits, and within two

hours, families can drive their own cars. travel to other countries by themselves. He stated: License planes and



transit of heavy vehicles for import and export are also done through ISODA, and in the past few years, dear compatriots from Bandar Abbas, Zahedan provinces and neighboring cities of Qom, such as Kashan and Arak, visited us. The CEO of ISODA Tourism and Travel Services office said: During the pandemic period, we were the only agency that was allowed to work, and after the Corona virus, we organized one- to two-day tours, which were well received, as well as an astronomy group from Italy for desert travel and stargazing. They stayed for three day Nowruz tours for Iraqi-20 nights. we also design tourists. Gholami stated: If the cruel sanctions are lifted, Iran is one of the countries that has a high potential for tourism, considering the cheapness of the trip, foreign tourists will welcome the trip to Iran. Referring to the coincidence of Nowruz and Ramadan this year, he said: day accommodation plan in-10 This year, we have a day tours-20 Qom and Mashhad, and we are looking for for Iraqi pilgrims in these two cities, as well as internally to attract tourists. Domestically, we have a plan by rail. Improving the country's economy by attracting health tourists Gholami further said: One of the things we are focusing on is therapeutic tourism, which has made us have the highest number of tourists in this field. The CEO of ISODA Tourism and Travel Services Office stated that we had input from countries such as Germany, Italy, Russia, France, Canada, and the United States in the field of tourism and therapeutic tourism, and said: The largest input for us was therapeutic tourism; However, due to the restriction of sanctions and the problem of obtaining visas after returning to the country of origin, we saw a decrease in arrivals. He said: In medical tourism, the destinations of most travelers are Tabriz, Shiraz, Tehran, and Qom day stay, it has generated 20-15 provinces, and due to the good foreign exchange for the country. Communication with hospitals abroad to said about attracting tourists for treatment: We ha marketing due to travel to different countries and several employees are present in different countries and we are in contact with hospitals and considering that some treatments and surgeries are performed in Iran at a lower price. Tourist attraction is provided. Gholami continued: Liver, lung, eye diseases, pediatric specialists and cosmetic surgeries are among the goals of therapeutic tourism. This tourism activist continued: To provide services in the field of medical tourism, we have a contract with special hospitals and hotels that are suitable for patients to stay, and a tourism program and domestic trips are planned for them on the sidelines of treatment. He said: In order to facilitate the affairs of tourists who travel to Iran for treatment, we have a smart tourism plan in our future work so that people can see all the details such as hotels, hospitals and vehicles in the country of origin and before traveling and can choose that the development of this work will help to expand tourist attraction, although the further development of this project needs capital. Tourism is more profitable than the oil and gas industry Referring to the restrictions and challenges facing the field of foreign tourism, Gholami said: Some foreign tourists tend to travel by foreign flights, and the restrictions caused by the embargo and the heavy costs have caused chains to be broken, the embargo hurts tourism more than any other industry. And this can be measured by comparing statistics. The CEO of ISODA emphasized: tourism is more profitable than the oil and gas attract medical tourists. He

industry, and the world understands this well and is trying to limit the chain, because some tourists are interested in investing in



the country. Lack of hotels is one of the challenges of tourism in Qom. Referring to the limitations of tourism in Qom, he said: lack of quality hotels is one of our challenges and we don't even have a five-star hotel, the number of four-star hotels is limited and the price is higher than the capital city, which has caused tourists to travel between Qom and Tehran. prefer and we don't stay more than one night, in fact, due to weak infrastructure, tourists go to other provinces. This tourism activist continued: We had several meetings for Nowruz and hotel reservations, but unfortunately, the accommodation units are either full or have high prices, and the lack of beds and accommodation space is a serious problem for domestic and foreign tourists, and this is a kind of counter-advertisement. He said: Of course, in the new period of cultural heritage management, the weaknesses have been greatly reduced, and with the clear vision that exists, good ideas have been designed to attract investors and supporters, and we have several projects that have made good progress. Serious need for bank facilities for tourism development Gholami stated that it is not enough to attract investors, he said: In addition to investors, we also need bank facilities, and there is a serious weakness in this field, we ourselves did not succeed in obtaining bank facilities for development projects despite having investors, and the project did not proceed. This lack bothers us. Gholami said: Previously, we had active branches in America and Kish island, but both were inactive due to sanctions and Pandemic of Covid. Having an investor can enable the license of foreign branches, which helps to earn currency and multiply entrepreneurship, because Isoda is a well-known brand and a certain audience uses it for travel. The activity of unlicensed people has become a counter-advertisement for tourism He said about unauthorized tours: With the support of associations, there have been good inspections and actions, but unfortunately Chahar Mardan Street has become a headquarters where unauthorized and unlicensed people sell train and plane tickets and accommodation centers at several times the price, and when travelers If he cancels the trip for any reason, he cannot get his fee by returning the ticket, because it was bought illegally, and this creation of dissatisfaction is the biggest counter-advertisement for Qom. In this matter, the involvement of the prosecutor's office and the police force is required. Yes, an activist in the field of tourism, continued: Another issue that has cost us a lot is that some of the employees of the tourism offices, who were unemployed during the Corona period, are living illegally in their homes today without paying taxes, rent or any other expenses. They attract travelers and there is no supervision on this, like the activity and provision of tourism services on internet sites such as Wall, and some of them may be fraud. Establishing a dedicated airline is one of ISODA's development plans Referring to the participation in the tourism exhibition, Gholami said: Considering the good and useful record of attending the exhibition last year, we will be present this year with full hands and we have invited some Iraqi investors for support and our goal is to attract some investors for development. And the plans are half finished. The heads of ISODA agent said: Providing an exclusive airline for ISODA agent is one of our development goals, also accommodate peoples and pilgrims in apartment of Qom and Mashhad is one of the plans for which we are seeking to attract investors. Talking to Russia about the establishment of ISODA branch: Russia has been consulted for the activation of the agency and there is an investor, and we hope to activate the branch in this country as the 1st step, then establishing in Hamburg city in Germany is our next goal

BMI Announces Its Support To Etko Organization



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Caretaker of Bank Melli Iran (BMI) Mr. Abolfazl Najarzadeh during his visit to the exhibition on the capabilities of Etko Organization hailed the performance of the organization and said that the organization has taken effective steps in the field of food security and therefore BMI will support it.

While visiting the achievements of the organization in different fields, Mr. Najarzadeh hailed all staff and researchers of the Etko Organization and stressed that most of economic officials of the country should visit the exhibition.

He went on to say that Etko Organization has proved it has taken effective steps in the food security and Bank Melli Iran will support it. He said that the chain of value from A to Z is available in this event which is appreciable. He also stressed that the developmental approach of Etko Organization in different fields and for the progress of the Islamic Iran is also appreciable.

He added that in the upcoming months, a joint MoU will be signed between BMI and Etko Organization for helping and providing financial support.

He said that the bank supports production and can support the production chain after the verification of its need by the Agriculture Ministry.

The exhibition on the capabilities of Etko Organization will run by the end of the current Iranian calendar year (mid-March).

Tunisian Activist and Influential Businessman



TUNIS (Dispatches) - Tunisian police arrested powerful businessman Kamel Eltaief, a former confidant of ousted president Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, as well as political activist Khayam Turki, their lawyers said.

Eltaief, 68, was arrested at his home in the capital Tunis, lawyer Nizar Ayed said without providing further details.

Many Tunisians -- especially supporters of the Islamist-inspired movement Ennahdha -- saw Eltaief as a symbol of past corruption in the North African nation.

The influential power-broker was involved in the 1987 coup that forced former president Habib Bourguiba from power on medical grounds, and was long considered a crony of his successor Ben Ali.

Turkey-Armenia Gate Opens For First Time in Decades

ISTANBUL (Dispatches) - A border gate between long-feuding Turkey and Armenia has been opened for the first time in 35 years to allow aid for victims of the devastating earthquakes in southern Turkey, state-owned Anadolu news agency and a diplomat said.

Turkey's special envoy for Armenia, Serdar Kilic, tweeted photos of trucks passing through the Alican checkpoint at the Turkish side of the Aras river separating the two countries.

"I will always remember the generous aid sent by the people of Armenia to help alleviate the sufferings of our people in the earthquake stricken region in Turkey," Kilic said, thanking Armenian officials.



Nationwide Protests Against Macron Pension Reform Continue



PARIS (Dispatches) - Police were out in force across France on Saturday as protesters held a sometimes restive fourth round of nationwide demonstrations against President Emmanuel Macron's plans to reform the country's pension system.

Hundreds of thousands of people were expected in the course of the day to march in Paris, Nice, Marseille, Toulouse, Nantes and other cities in hopes keeping up the pressure on the government to back down.

The demonstrations drew young people and others opposed to the pension proposals who weren't able to attend the previous three days of action, all held on weekdays.

This time, though, rail worker strikes did not accompany the demonstrations, allowing trains and the Paris Metro to run Saturday. However, an unexpected strike by air traffic controllers meant that up to half of flights to and from Paris' second largest airport, Orly, were canceled Saturday afternoon.

In Paris, some workers and students who wanted to voice opposition attended the protests for the first time, owing to heavy weekday workloads.

"We often hear that we should be too young to care, but with rising inflation, soaring electricity price, this reform will impact our families," Elisa Haddad, 18, said. "It is my first demonstration because I couldn't attend with uni. It is important that the voice of (France's) parents and students is heard."

French lawmakers began a rowdy debate earlier this week on the pension bill to raise the minimum retirement age for a full state pension from 62 to 64. It's the flagship legislation of Macron's second term.

Saturday's protests featured flashes of unrest -- one fire was lit on a central Parisian boulevard as police dispersed crowds with tear gas. Paris police said they arrested one person for possession of a firearm and detained several others for vandalism.

Some demonstrators walked as families through the French capital's Place de la Republique and carried emotional banners. "I don't want my parents to die at work," read one, held by a teenage boy.

The protests are a crucial test both for Macron and his opponents. The government has insisted it's determined to push through Macron's election pledge to reform France's generous pension system. Among the 38 member nations of Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, France has the population that spends the most years in retirement.

The president has called the reforms "indispensable" for ensuring the long-term survival of the country's pension system and noted that workers in neighboring countries retire years later.

Despite opinion polls consistently showing growing opposition to the reform and his own popularity shrinking, Macron insisted that he's living up to a key campaign pledge he made when he swept to power in 2017 and before his April 2022 reelection.

His government is now facing a harsh political battle in parliament that could span weeks or months.

Strong popular resentment will strengthen efforts by labor unions and left-wing legislators to try to block the bill.

Rescuers Toil on in Rubble of Turkey and Syria

ANTAKYA (Dispatches) - Rescuers in Turkey pulled more people from the rubble, five days after the country's most devastating earthquake since 1939, but hopes were fading in Turkey and Syria that many more survivors would be found.

In Kahramanmaraş, close to the quake's epicentre in southern Turkey, there were fewer visible rescue operations amid the smashed concrete mounds of fallen houses and apartment blocks, while ever more trucks rumbled through the streets shipping out debris.

The death toll kept growing - exceeding 25,250 across southern Turkey and northwest Syria. Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan, facing questions over earthquake planning and response time, has said authorities should have reacted faster.

Erdogan promised to start work on rebuilding cities "within weeks", saying hundreds of thousands of buildings were now uninhabitable, while issuing stern warnings against any people involved in looting in the quake zone.

In the Turkish city of Antakya, several residents and rescue workers said they had seen looting.



Albanian Opposition Rallies to Demand Prime Minister's Departure

TIRANA (Dispatches) - Thousands demonstrated in Tirana calling for the resignation of Prime Minister Edi Rama over corruption claims and blaming him for rising poverty in Albania.

The opposition, which staged the rally, also accused Rama of having "secret links" with a former FBI executive who they believe influenced the US State Department to sanction one of the prime minister's political rivals.

"Edi Rama committed a hostile act corrupting a former FBI official in order to eliminate the opposition," right-wing opposition leader and former Prime Minister Sali Berisha told the crowd as they chanted "Rama, go away".

Retired FBI special agent Charles McGonigal was arrested in January for alleged murky dealings with foreign actors, including concealing \$225,000 in cash received from an ex-employee of the Albanian secret service.

According to the indictment, the agent also "maintained an ongoing relationship with Prime Minister of Albania".

The opposition believes Rama had the agent in his pocket and "financed political lobbying" against Berisha.

The Balkan nation's first democratically elected president after the fall of communism, Berisha was banned from entering the United States in 2021 over "corrupt acts while he was prime minister".

Rama rubbished the accusations as "extreme defamations", and claimed the investigation against the former FBI agent "has nothing to do" with him or the Albanian government.

With 1,000 police officers deployed to maintain order, the rally went off peacefully although a group of some 10 demonstrators threw smoke grenades towards the heavily-guarded government building.

Berisha's Democratic Party organised the protest alongside the party led by former president Ilir Meta, who recently joined forces in a bid to remove the prime minister.

Five Million May Be Homeless in Syria After Quake

GENEVA (Dispatches) - More than five million Syrians may be homeless after Monday's devastating earthquakes that struck the country and its neighbour Turkey, according to a United Nations official.

"As many as 5.3 million people in Syria may have been left homeless by the earthquake," Sivanka Dhanapala, the Syria representative of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) said. "That is a huge number and comes to a population already suffering mass displacement."

"For Syria, this is a crisis within a crisis," he added, "We've had economic shocks, COVID and are now in the depths of winter, with blizzards raging in the affected areas."

Survivors of the magnitude 7.8 and 7.6 quakes have flocked to camps set up for people displaced by nearly 12 years of war from other parts of Syria. Many lost their homes or are too scared to return to damaged buildings.

Some 24,000 people have already died across Turkey and Syria because of the quake - more than 3,300 of those in Syria.

Dhanapala said the UNHCR has been "rushing aid" to the badly affected parts of Syria, but "it's been very, very difficult".

"There are 6.8 million people already internally displaced in the country. And this was before the earthquake."

Meanwhile, a second UN aid convoy of 14 trucks

has crossed into rebel-held areas of Syria - after an initial six vehicles went in on Thursday.

The Syrian government has said it will allow aid deliveries to rebel-held areas outside of its control, in cooperation with the UN and humanitarian organisations.

"The full scale of the devastation in Syria is only beginning to come to light," said Al Jazeera's Kristen Saloomey, reporting from the UN in New York.

Although more aid convoys are getting through the one authorised border point into the hardest-hit areas, our correspondent said critics argue it is too little, too late.

"The majority of [people made homeless from the quake are] in areas the Syrian government doesn't control, where people had already been uprooted by years of war," she said.

On Friday the UN also released another \$25m in emergency funding for Syria, bringing the total so far to \$50m, Saloomey said, "but an assessment team is now on the ground and the needs are expected to well exceed that".

The conflict in Syria started in 2011 with the brutal repression of peaceful protests, and escalated to pull in foreign powers and armed groups.

Nearly half a million people have been killed, and the conflict has forced about half of the country's pre-war population from their homes, with many seeking refuge in Turkey.



Pro-Western Recean Set To Succeed Moldova's PM

CHISINAU (Dispatches) - Moldova's president tapped her defense and security adviser, pro-Western economist Dorin Recean, to succeed Prime Minister Natalia Gavrilita who unexpectedly resigned Friday, 18 months into a tenure sorely tested by the war in neighboring Ukraine.

President Maia Sandu told a news conference that members of Gavrilita's ruling Party of Action and Solidarity, or PAS, accepted her choice of Recean as the new prime minister.

Recean, 48, who served as interior minister between 2012-2015, will have 15 days to form a new government to present to Parliament for a confidence vote. PAS has a majority in Parliament.

"I know that we need unity and a lot of work to get through the difficult period we are facing. The difficulties of 2022 postponed some of our plans, but they did not stop us," President Sandu said, adding that in 2023 she wants to focus on revamping key areas such as Moldova's economy and justice sector.

Since Russia invaded Ukraine nearly a year ago, Moldova, a former Soviet republic of about 2.6 million people, has sought to forge closer ties with its Western partners. Last June, it was granted European Union candidate status, the same day as Ukraine.

Recean said he would "proceed immediately" with setting up a new government and that his main focus will be to introduce "order and discipline" in Moldova's institutions, breathe new life into the economy and ensure peace and stability.

Following her resignation, Gavrilita, a 41-year-old economist appointed prime minister in August 2021, told a news conference that her government "would have been able to move forward more and faster" had it garnered the same support and trust domestically as it did from other European countries.

Gavrilita's premiership was marked by a long string of problems. These include an acute energy crisis after Moscow dramatically reduced supplies to Moldova and skyrocketing inflation in the wake of the war in Ukraine. Compounding that has been missiles from the war that have traversed its skies and missile debris that has been discovered on its territory.



How Does COVID-19 Affect the Heart?

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Studies have shown that people who have been infected with COVID-19 are at a higher risk for several cardiovascular issues than the uninfected.

The evidence is clear: COVID-19 infection is risky for the heart. Nearly three years into the pandemic, study after study has shown that while COVID-19 initially sparked concerns about the lungs, attention is overdue for the heart.

"I think we need to start conceptualizing and thinking of COVID as a risk factor for heart disease," says Ziyad Al-Aly, a clinical epidemiologist at Washington University in St. Louis.

It's an important trend to understand as more than 100 million Americans have had COVID-19 – a number that continues to grow each day with no signs of ceasing.

A recent analysis from the American Heart Association found that deaths related to heart disease rose significantly during 2020, the first year of the pandemic. The number of Americans who died from cardiovascular disease jumped from 874,613 deaths in 2019 to 928,741 in 2020 – topping the previous high of 910,000 recorded in 2003.

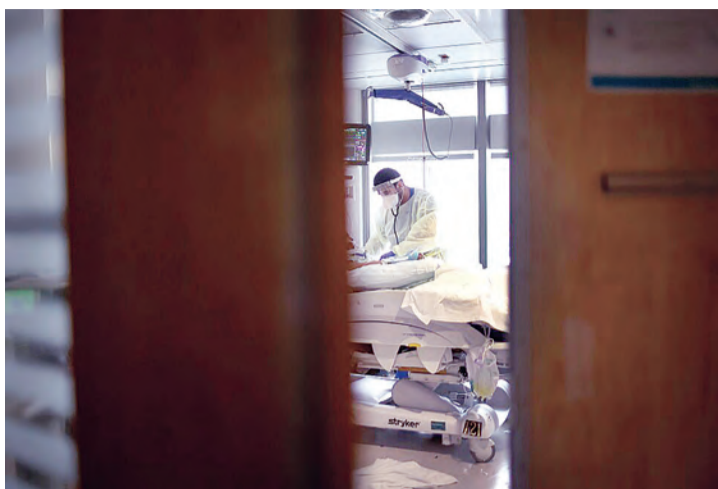
Perhaps more notable was that the age-adjusted mortality rate, which accounts for changes in the number of older adults in the population from year to year, increased in 2020 for the first time in a decade.

"COVID-19 has both direct and indirect impacts on cardiovascular health," Michelle Albert, the American Heart Association's volunteer president, said in a statement. "As we learned, the virus is associated with new clotting and inflammation. We also know that many people who had new or existing heart disease and stroke symptoms were reluctant to seek medical care, particularly in the early days of the pandemic."

The pattern has been documented by other groups as well. The Smidt Heart Institute at Cedars-Sinai found in an analysis that deaths from heart attacks rose significantly during COVID-19 surges. The trend was prominent across all age groups but most significant among individuals ages 25-44, which is an age group that is not typically considered at high risk for a heart attack.

"There is something very different about how this virus affects the cardiac risks," Susan Cheng of the Smidt Heart Institute said in a statement about the study. "The difference is likely due to a combination of stress and inflammation, arising from predisposing factors and the way this virus biologically interacts with the cardiovascular system."

Another recent study out of the United Kingdom found that individuals infected with COVID-19 had a greater likelihood of several cardiovascular conditions compared with uninfected participants in both the short term and long term, including



myocardial infarction, coronary heart disease, heart failure and deep vein thrombosis. The authors suggested that the findings mean that COVID-19 patients should be monitored for at least a year after recovery from infection to diagnose cardiovascular problems.

COVID-19 can affect the heart even if a person's coronavirus infection is mild. Research from Al-Aly that was published last year found that individuals who were reinfected were twice as likely to die and three times more likely to be hospitalized than those who were infected once. They were also three times more likely to suffer from heart problems.

"However we sliced it with weighted analyses by age and race and sex and prior medical conditions, the risk was everywhere, meaning it really almost did not spare anyone," Al-Aly says.

Government estimates show that the majority of the U.S. has been infected with the coronavirus. It's significantly higher than the official number given that infections can be asymptomatic and the results from at-home tests aren't automatically reported. The high number means more attention needs to shift to those who are getting infected a second, third or fourth time as many experts believe COVID-19 will continue circulating for years to come.

"Reinfection is more and more becoming the norm because most of the people in the U.S. have had it at least once," Al-Aly says.

That's why he plans to continue the study to look beyond the one-year mark. He hypothesizes that at some point – he suggests maybe the fifth, sixth or seventh COVID-19 infection – any infection after that point will possibly be just like a cold.

"We expect that ultimately, the risk maybe will flatten with time," Al-Aly says.

Research on COVID-19's effect on the heart is expanding, but researchers agree that more attention is needed. A preprint study published on medRxiv last month performed a systematic review of more than 100 studies examining COVID-19 and long-term cardiac symptoms. The high-quality studies that they identified estimated 4% of COVID-19 survivors reported chest pain and nearly 3% reported heart arrhythmia. The authors emphasized that while those percentages seem small, they equate to a lot of people.

"Accumulating evidence shows that long-term cardiac symptoms of COVID-19 are common and can last for months and even beyond one year," authors wrote in the study.

It's rare for COVID-19 to directly infect the heart muscle. The virus typically causes issues in other parts of the body that can cause heart damage.

"Even if the virus is not specifically impacting your heart, it could be impacting your lungs or another organ that's requiring the heart now to work harder to compensate for that," says Jayne Morgan, a cardiologist and the executive director of health and community education at Piedmont Healthcare in Atlanta.

Much attention has specifically been paid to myocarditis – a condition in which the heart becomes inflamed that is typically a response to a viral infection. Inflammation of the heart can reduce its ability to pump blood to the rest of the body. Most cases are self-resolving and go away within two weeks. But the rare cases that last longer than two weeks are considered chronic and can significantly weaken the heart, leading to heart failure and death.

"When we talk about myocarditis, it can be very, very serious or it can be self-limiting," Morgan says. "So it's almost the same game of Russian roulette that you're playing with getting COVID. You can get a very mild form or you can die from it. You just take the risk, so getting multiple infections and getting reinfected and reinfected only increases your risk of finally getting the bullet in the chamber."

Myocarditis has also been a frequent topic among COVID-19 vaccine skeptics, who have seized on a link between the mRNA shots from Pfizer and Moderna and myocarditis. Recently, skeptics were quick to incorrectly blame the collapse of Buffalo Bills safety Damar Hamlin on the vaccine as he suffered cardiac arrest during a game in January.

And in Florida, the surgeon general last year recommended against the use of mRNA COVID-19 vaccines in men ages 18-39, saying that the "benefit of vaccination is likely outweighed by this abnormally high risk of cardiac-related death among men in this age group." The decision was slammed by many health officials.



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Moody's Cuts Ukraine Debt Rating But Outlook Stable

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - Moody's said yesterday it has downgraded Ukraine's debt rating over a protracted war with Russia, but shifted its outlook from negative to stable.

The ratings agency cut the grade a notch to Ca from Caa3, a rating that suggests a near-default state — close to a year since Russia's invasion. The downgrade is "driven by the effects of the war with Russia that are likely to pose long-lasting challenges to Ukraine's economy and public finances," said Moody's Investors Service in a statement.

"These challenges increase risks to government debt sustainability, making a debt restructuring with significant losses for private-sector creditors very likely," it added.



UK Skirts Recession With Zero Fourth-Quarter Growth

LONDON (Dispatches) - Britain's economy avoided recession after flatlining in the last three months of 2022, but finance minister Jeremy Hunt warned today it was "not out of the woods yet" over surging inflation.

Gross domestic product registered zero growth in the fourth quarter, in line with expectations after shrinking 0.3 per cent in the previous three months, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) said in a statement.

The economy expanded by 4.1 per cent last year overall, shrugging off decades-high inflation, after growth of 7.4 per cent in 2021, the ONS added. Sky-high consumer prices have sparked a cost-of-living crisis and widespread industrial action across Britain.

"We are not out of the woods yet, particularly when it comes to inflation," Hunt said, but also noted that "our economy is more resilient than many feared".

The technical definition of a recession is two straight quarters of negative growth.

The UK economy shrank by 0.5 per cent in December, but this was offset by growth in the prior two months.

"In December public services were hit by fewer (hospital) operations and ... visits (to see doctors), partly due to the impact of strikes, as well as notably lower school attendance," said ONS economic statistics director Darren Morgan.

"Meanwhile, the break in Premier League football for the World Cup and postal strikes also caused a slowdown."

Bank of England governor Andrew Bailey expressed concern yesterday over persistent high inflation even if the rate of price increases shows signs of cooling. The remarks to a cross-party committee of MPs boosted the pound on raised expectations of more hikes to British interest rates, analysts said.

"We are concerned about persistence (of high inflation). This is why we (again) raised interest rates," Bailey told the Treasury Committee.

At its most recent regular monetary policy meeting a week ago, the BoE hiked its interest rate for a 10th time in a row as global authorities race to combat runaway inflation.

The central bank lifted UK borrowing costs by a half-point to four per cent, the highest level since late 2008, or height of the global financial crisis.

That ramped up mortgage and other loan repayments, weighing heavily on economic activity and worsening the cost-of-living crisis.

UK inflation slowed to 10.5 per cent in December — still around 40-year highs and more than five times the BoE's official target-level of two per cent.

Central banks the world over are seeking to cool high energy and food prices, fuelled by Russia's invasion of Ukraine one year ago, by hiking interest rates.

Sweden's central bank yesterday announced a half-point rate increase to three per cent, the highest level since 2008.

The BoE had meanwhile predicted last week that the UK economy would shrink in every quarter this year.

"We suspect the drags from high inflation and high interest rates will trigger a recession this year," cautioned Capital Economics analyst Paul Dales.

Early Info Shows Protests Affecting Peru's Growth, Inflation

LIMA (Dispatches) - Peru's economy and inflation have likely been hit by the ongoing social upheaval that has rocked the Andean nation since December, early indications suggest, the head of the central bank's economic studies unit, Adrian Armas, said.

Protests over the removal and arrest of former President Pedro Castillo in December have snarled Peru, with clashes between demonstrators and security forces leaving dozens dead. It is the worst violence in Peru in two decades and threatens to destabilize one of region's most reliable economies.

"As we know, recent events are affecting infrastructure on the one hand and transportation on the other, which has an impact on prices because the supply chain is being affected," Armas said.

The protests' final impact would depend on how long they continued, he said, but warned that if they persisted, it would be "very difficult" for companies to recoup their losses this year.

Armas' comments come a day after the central bank maintained its benchmark interest rate at 7.75%, making it the first time since the second half of 2021 that the bank did not hike its rate. Inflation surged well ahead of the bank's target range to 8.66% in January, near the quarter-century high it reached last year.

On Thursday, the International Monetary Fund called inflation Peru's most immediate policy challenge, in a statement following a staff visit to the country.

Armas highlighted that inflation was seen to be on a "downward" trend, with January's figures slightly better than expected.

A presentation accompanying the press conference by Armas underscored that Thursday's decision to keep rates on hold "does not necessarily imply the end of the cycle of interest rate increases." Future adjustments in the key rate will depend on new inflation, including the macroeconomic effects of the social unrest, said the presentation.

The bank now forecasts inflation for early 2024 to reach 4.62%, above the previous forecast of 4.3%.



ECB Urged to Avoid Unnecessary Rise in Real Interest Rates

ROME (Dispatches) - The European Central Bank (ECB) must avoid pushing real interest rates too high, given the level of private and public debt in the euro area, a top Italian policymaker said.

ECB Governing Council member Ignazio Visco, who is also the Bank of Italy's governor, added he did not believe a recession was inevitable in order to reduce inflation.

The ECB has raised interest rates by 3 percentage points since July and promised a 50 basis-point hike for March.

"Today, disinflation is obviously needed, but given the levels of private and public debts that prevail in the euro area, we must be careful to avoid engineering an unnecessary and excessive rise in real interest rates," Visco told the Warwick Economics Summit.

"Indeed, I am convinced that the credibility of our actions is preserved not by flexing our muscles in the face of inflation, but by continually showing wisdom and balance."

The ECB has kept its options open about subsequent steps after March, raising doubts among investors about the extent of further increases.

Investors and economists have focused on a peak in the deposit rate of between 3.25% and 3.5%, which suggests just one or two moves after the March hike and an end by mid-year.

Politicians in Italy have expressed concerns about the impact of rising interest rates given the country's huge debts. Visco said ECB rates must continue to rise "in a progressive but measured way, on the basis of the incoming data and their use in the assessment of the inflation outlook".

Oil Rises as Russia Cuts Output After Western Price Cap

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Oil contracts rebounded after Russia announced it would slash its crude output in response to a Western price cap that was imposed on exports after Moscow's invasion of Ukraine.

Brent, the international benchmark, and its US counterpart WTI, which had been down earlier in the day, jumped more than two per cent after Russian deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak said production would be cut by 500,000 barrels per day, or five per cent of output, in March.

"Crude prices reacted positively to the news, considering that so far Russian oil production has been relatively resilient," said UBS analyst Giovanni Staunovo.

"The move ... aims to improve oil revenues by narrowing the discount of Russian oil to Brent."

An EU-wide ban on Russia oil products — like diesel, gasoline and jet fuel — came into effect Sunday alongside a Group of Seven (G7) price cap on the same items.

That expanded on the EU embargo on seaborne oil deliveries introduced two months ago — when it also established with G7 partners a US\$60-dollar-per-barrel cap for Russian exports.

Oil, already bolstered by the reopening of top consumer China after lengthy pandemic restrictions, rebounded further on the news from Novak, who in charge of Moscow's energy policy.

Russia is part of a 23-nation alliance with the OPEC crude cartel that already agreed in October to reduce output by two million barrels per day until the end of this year.

Elsewhere, Wall Street extended losses at the opening bell, but both the Dow and S&P 500 finished higher, lifted in part by a surge in petroleum-linked shares like Chevron and oil services company Halliburton.

Briefing.com analyst Patrick O'Hare said investors are in "wait and see" mode ahead of next week's consumer price index report, which will influence the outlook for future Fed interest rate hikes.

Having spent January optimistic that the days of central bank tightening would soon come to an end, traders have been brought back down to earth this month as they contemplate borrowing costs going higher and staying there longer than previously expected.

Government data showed Britain registered zero growth in the final quarter of last year, in line with expectations after shrinking 0.3 per cent in the previous three months, according to the Office for National Statistics.

Crucial \$1.1b IMF Deal Eludes Pakistan for Now, Talks Continue

KARACHI (Dispatches) - Pakistan and the International Monetary Fund are to resume talks online next week they said, after ten days of face-to-face discussions in Islamabad on how to keep the country afloat ended without a deal.

With the nuclear-armed nation in the grip of a full-blown economic crisis, the IMF talks are aimed at unlocking at least \$1.1 billion of stalled funding as part of a \$6.5 billion bailout signed in 2019.

Finance Minister Ishaq Dar told reporters Pakistan had agreed with the IMF on the conditions to release the funds, which have been delayed since last December.

Talks would resume virtually on Monday, he added, citing "routine procedures" for the delay. "We will implement whatever has been agreed upon between our teams," Dar said.

In a statement, Pakistan IMF Mission Chief Nathan Porter confirmed talks were continuing and that considerable progress had already been made. The hold-up though sent the price of the country's government bonds tumbling again.

Pakistan is in dire need of a successful outcome. The \$350-billion economy is still reeling from devastating floods last year, and the government estimates rebuilding efforts will cost \$16 billion.

The heavily-indebted nation only has enough foreign reserves to cover less than three weeks of crucial imports. The longer it takes for the IMF tranche to be paid out, the higher the risk of default, analysts say, especially with elections also looming.

Last week, Prime Minister Shabbaz Sharif called Pakistan's economic situation "unimaginable." "Ideally, Pakistan should have reached a staff level agreement at the end of the IMF mission," Khaqan Najeeb, a former finance ministry adviser, told Reuters.

The so-called staff-level agreement, which then needs to be approved by the IMF's head office in Washington, must be reached before the funds are disbursed.

In addition to the stalled tranche, another \$1.4 billion remains of the \$6.5 billion bailout programme, which is due to end in June.

Experts said Pakistan needs the payout as soon as possible. "If this drags on for, say, longer than a month, things get more difficult as our forex reserves have reached a critical level," former central bank Deputy Governor Murtaza Syed told Reuters.

The conditions set by the IMF include a return to a market-based exchange rate and higher fuel prices, measures that Pakistan recently implemented and that have already sent inflation to a record high - 27.5% year on year in January - and created shortages in some imported goods.

Dar said Pakistan had also agreed with the IMF to introduce fiscal measures, including new taxes.

Adani Crisis Deepens With Moody's Downgrades and Index Weighting Cuts



NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - Moody's downgraded the ratings outlook for some Adani Group companies, while MSCI said it would cut the weightings of some in its stock indexes, the latest blows for the Indian conglomerate plunged into crisis by a short-seller's report.

New York-based short-seller Hindenburg Research accused the Adani Group in a Jan. 24 report of stock manipulation and improper use of offshore tax havens that it said obscured the extent of Adani family stock ownership in group firms.

The conglomerate, which has denied any wrongdoing, has since seen \$110 billion wiped off the value of its seven listed firms.

The crisis has put the spotlight on 60-year-old billionaire founder Gautam Adani, who was forced to shelve a \$2.5 billion stock offering amid the market meltdown.

It has also sparked worries of financial contagion in India and protests in parliament where lawmakers have demanded an investigation.

High-frequency data from the Institute of International Finance showed equity outflows in India pile up to \$2.6 billion since the Hindenburg allegations through Thursday, more than half of the \$4.27 billion outflow so far this year.

On Friday, Moody's downgraded its ratings outlook to negative from stable for Adani Green Energy; the Adani Green Energy Restricted Group, which represents some of its other units; and two subsidiaries of Adani Transmission.

"These rating actions follow the significant and rapid decline in the market equity values of the Adani Group companies following the recent release of a report from a short-seller highlighting governance concerns in the group," Moody's said.

Parvizkhan Border Terminal's Exports Exceed \$720m

TEHRAN (IRNA) - According to Qasem Matlabi, a local customs official, a total of 1.9 million tons of goods worth \$724 million were exported from Parvizkhan Border Terminal located in the western Kermanshah Province to Iraq during the first 10 months of the current Iranian year (March 21, 2022-Jan. 20).

The exports included fruit and vegetable, dairy products, cakes and cookies,

metal and plastic goods, tiles and ceramics, and construction materials.

Matlabi said between 600 and 700 trucks carry Iranian goods to Iraq through Parvizkhan on a daily basis.

Parvizkhan shares 186 kilometers of borders with Iraq.

Last fiscal year (March 2021-22), exports from this border terminal reached 2.53 million tons worth \$1.02 billion.



China Crude Demand Rising, But Costly Saudi Oil Is Less Desirable

LAUNCESTON (Dispatches) - The surprise increase in the price of Saudi Arabian crude oil for March-loading cargoes is being viewed by the market as a bullish signal that Chinese demand is ramping up as the world's biggest importer reopens and stimulates its economy.

There are certainly increasing signs of revival in China's fuel demand, with passenger flights and road traffic rising strongly and indications that the country's huge refining sector is accelerating processing rates.

It seems quite possible that China will be importing more crude in coming months, but the question for Saudi Aramco and the broader oil-trading community is whether they will be buying relatively expensive Saudi oil, or whether Chinese refiners will successfully source cheaper alternatives.

Aramco, the state-controlled oil producer, raised the official selling price (OSP) of its flagship Arab Light blend for Asian customers for March cargoes by 20 cents a barrel to a premium of \$2.00 over the regional benchmark Oman/Dubai quotes.

The increase defied refiners' expectations for a 30 cent a barrel cut to the OSP for March-loading cargoes, amid signs that actual physical demand in China was lagging behind the bullish view.

If China's physical demand does accelerate from March, it may prove Aramco made the correct call in raising its OSP.

But it also makes it more likely that Saudi oil will become less sought after by refiners, not only in China but also in the rest of Asia, the continent that takes about two-thirds of the kingdom's exports.

Saudi crude is sold under long-term contracts that typically allow for variations in the volumes sought by refiners, or offered by Aramco.

This allows Saudi Arabia to restrict exports if it aims to boost global prices, but it also allows refiners to take smaller volumes if they see demand for refined products slipping, or if refining margins make processing crude uneconomic.

Let's assume the bullish China story is valid and refiners want to boost arrivals in April and May, which is when March-loading cargoes from Saudi Arabia would arrive at Chinese ports.

By raising its OSP for March-loading cargoes, Aramco has ensured that its crude will be relatively more expensive than other grades.

This provides an incentive for Chinese refiners to maximize volumes from other producers that offer spot cargoes.

These include West African producers such as Angola and Nigeria, the United States and Brazil, but most importantly, from Russia.

China has already been buying increasing volumes from Russia, so much so that Russia has displaced Saudi Arabia as China's top supplier in several recent months.

This is because Russian crude is now being offered at steep discounts as European and other buyers such as Japan end imports as part of efforts to punish Moscow for its Feb. 24 invasion of Ukraine.

China imported 2.03 million barrels per day (bpd) from Russia in January, according to Refinitiv Oil Research data, up from 1.52 million bpd in December.



This made Russia the top supplier to China, overtaking Saudi Arabia, with January imports of 1.77 million bpd from the kingdom.

It's likely that Chinese refiners will first turn to Russian crude if they are boosting imports, as will refiners in India, Asia's second-biggest oil importer.

Another factor to consider is that China's independent refiners may turn to importing fuel oil instead of crude, especially since Russian oil products were banned by European Union countries from Feb. 5.

While China is a net exporter of refined fuels, some refiners have the ability to process fuel oil into higher value products such as diesel and gasoline.

Already flows of Russian fuel oil to China have increased sharply, with data from commodity consultants Kpler showing China imported 3.89 million barrels from Russia in January, which was a record high.

This is set to be surpassed this month, with Kpler tracking seaborne arrivals of Russian fuel oil in China at 6.75 million barrels.

It appears that China is already buying more Russian crude and fuel oil.

The question then becomes if China's rising demand exceeds what it can source from Russia, where will it turn to next?

U.S. crude is currently cheaper than Middle East grades, which tend to price in tandem with moves in the Saudi OSPs.

There are already signs that China's appetite for U.S. oil is rising, with Kpler estimating March arrival at 23.61 million barrels, up from 6.76 million in February and 8.65 million in January.

China's imports from Brazil are estimated by Kpler at 24.1 million barrels for March, up from 21.06 million in February and the highest in two years.

The overall picture that emerges is that if Aramco expects a strong increase in China's crude demand, it must be expecting a fantastically strong outcome if it also expects to sell increased volumes of its own higher-priced oil.

44 Years of Resistance

FROM PAGE 1

In fact and based on the wisdom and prudence, resistance means one chooses a path that he thinks it is right. Considering these remarks of the Supreme Leader, the first logic for resistance is its being right. In fact, rightfulness of the root and inviolable principle



of the resistance of the prophets and the Households and all freedom-lovers of the world has been and is against the arrogant and oppressor systems.

The Holy Quran in the Chapter Al-Asr has put emphasis on patience and right which both are arms of resistance and leads man to escape damages. Accordingly, the Supreme Leader in his speech at the late Imam Khomeini Mausoleum with openness said that the doctrine of the Late Imam Khomeini has targeted with full strength the veins of domination of the West and the U.S., and described it a choice based on logical and scientific expression. He added, "The Late Imam chose the path of resistance because he did not choose it out of excitement and the reason behind this choice was a genuine, rational, logical and smart base and not out of excitement and there is a logical, scientific and religious backing for it."

A glance at the historical realities especially in recent years show that no country and nation has reached its goal through retreating against the arrogant systems and only resistance is the only way from preventing them to advance and the big mistake is that one thinks that he cannot stand against the bully of the arrogance and this is the biggest plague and indecisive-maker in choosing the path of resistance.

Tehran Hopes to...

FROM PAGE 1

He added, "As a supporter who made many efforts to strengthen ties between the two countries, I hope for more exchanges of cooperations in every field in the near future and that those assets can be properly transferred to future generations."

Meanwhile, at the ceremony, Korea-Iran Council Chairman and former lawmaker Chun Jung-bae highlighted the significance of Iran-Korea relations.

He recalled the love story of a Persian prince and Silla princess, mentioned in the epic poem "Kush-nama," that forged a 1,500-year blood bond between Iranians and Koreans.

"The ground becomes firmer after rain," Chun was referring to a Korean proverb, hoping that Iran-Korea bilateral relations would be strengthened after overcoming difficulties.

Iran Ready to...

FROM PAGE 1

He expressed these views while addressing a ceremony held to mark the 44th anniversary of Islamic revolution in Iran. Punjab Governor Balighur Rehman was chief guest.

He also said that because of lack of banking channels, custom tariff and non-tariff obstacles have made trade between the businesses of both countries difficult. He urged that government of Pakistan should take steps for increasing legal trade with Tehran and promoting linkages between financial institutions of both the countries.

He suggested that there should be a barter system on the basis of local currencies adding that Iran is already successfully operating such a system with China, Russia and other countries. He said despite sanctions Iran was ready to meet energy needs of Pakistan.

Rehman, who was chief guest at the event, hoped that governments of both the neighboring countries would be able to devise some trade system to the mutual benefit of their peoples.

Prominent among those present on the occasion were PML-N's Muhammad Mehdi, PML-Q's Chaudhry Shafay Hussain, PTI leader Senator Waleed Iqbal, retired Justice Nasira Javed Iqbal, Dr Amjad Abbas Magsi and film producer Syed Noor.

Climate Change May Have Toppled Hittite Empire



PARIS (Dispatches) - Three years of extreme drought may have brought about the collapse of the mighty Hittite Empire around 1200 BC, researchers have said, linking the plight of the fallen civilization to the modern world's climate crisis.

The Hittites dominated Anatolia in modern-day Turkey for nearly 500 years, even rivalling the power of the Egyptian Empire for a period.

They were one of several influential ancient civilizations in the Eastern Mediterranean and Near East which were all toppled or severely weakened at around the same time, bringing the curtain down on the Bronze Age.

The Hittites mysteriously abandoned their capital and religious center Hattusa around 1200 BC, when the royal line died out and written historical documents dried up.

The empire's centuries-old political and cultural structures ended "quite rapidly," Sturt Manning, an archaeologist at Cornell University in the United States and lead author of a new study, told AFP.

There are several theories for what was behind the "Late Bronze Age collapse", including attacks from naval raiders called the "Sea Peoples", epidemics and famines -- as well as a 300-year change to a drier, cooler climate.

But exactly what triggered the demise of these empires has remained unclear.

Now, for the Hittites at least, the answer may have come inscribed in the rings of ancient juniper wood.

The juniper comes from one of the world's oldest wooden structures, found at the Phrygian capital of Gordion in central Turkey as part of the excavation of a king's tomb in the 1950s.

By analyzing the rings of the juniper wood, the researchers were able to reconstruct climate conditions more than 3,000 years ago.

In semi-arid Central Anatolia, "the major threat to growth for most plants in the region is a lack of water," Manning said.

Narrower tree rings indicate drier years, when a lack of water meant the trees did not grow much.

Europe Shoots for the Moon With role in NASA Program

BREMEN (Dispatches) - European astronauts could walk on the Moon for the first time in the coming years, in exchange for the continent taking on a key role in an ambitious NASA space program.

The US space agency's Artemis program aims to return humans to the Moon for the first time since the historic Apollo missions, which ended in 1972.

For the first time, the European Space Agency (ESA) and European aerospace giant Airbus have been entrusted with supplying vital "service modules" (ESMs) for NASA's Orion spacecraft.

In exchange, Europe has three guaranteed seats on the mission's flights, probably from 2027, although discussions are ongoing to try to get earlier spots.

The role of the Europeans is vital -- they are providing "half of the spacecraft that will take people to the Moon and, of course, back to Earth safely," said Marc Steckling, Airbus's head of space exploration. The modules are critical to power the spacecraft, providing electricity from solar panels, and other vital supplies such as water and oxygen.

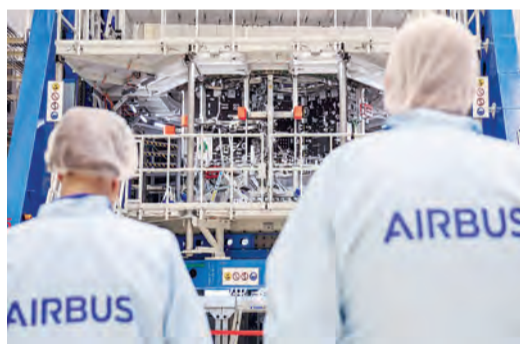
Cylinders measuring about four by four metres with about 22,000 parts and weighing about 12 tons, the modules are put together at Airbus's site in Bremen, northern Germany.

Once assembled and safety tests are completed, they are transferred to the Kennedy Space Center in Florida.

The ESMs can also provide manoeuvring capability, and could even carry additional cargo to a planned space station in orbit around the Moon, called Gateway.

The two-billion-euro (\$2.1 billion) project is running smoothly, and Airbus is on track to meet NASA's requirement of delivering one ESM a year, according to Steckling.

Supporters of the idea of sending humans back to the Moon say it could prove vital in scientific research.



Alexander Gerst, a German astronaut who has done two stints on the International Space Station, described the Moon as an "open history book".

"We can learn how Earth was actually formed and how it came into existence," he said.

A first Artemis mission wrapped up successfully in December, with an uncrewed Orion capsule returning safely

to Earth after a more than 25-day journey around the Moon.

The Artemis 2 mission, planned for 2024, will take a crew towards the Moon but still without landing on it.

Artemis 3, scheduled for 2025, will see a spacecraft land for the first time on the south pole of the Moon, where they hope to find water in the form of ice. The space agency thereafter aims to launch one mission per year.

As part of the Artemis missions, NASA is planning to send a woman and a person of colour to the Moon for the first time.

Only 12 people -- all of them white men -- have set foot on the Moon, and that was during the Apollo missions.

NASA hopes to establish a lasting human presence on the Moon, and later launch a years-long trip to Mars.

Philippe Berthe, European Space Agency project coordination manager for the modules, said the Moon had resources that could be exploited such as ice that could be used to make fuel, particularly at its south pole.

"The moon is a repository of history of the solar system since its creation, which has remained relatively untouched since there is no atmosphere, no erosion," he told AFP.

Whereas in the 1960s the space race was between the Soviet Union and Washington, China has now emerged as the United States' chief rival in the intergalactic arena with its own ambitious programme.

But such rivalry -- "a little bit of a scientific competition" -- isn't necessarily a bad thing, believes Gerst.

A Calorie-Restricted Diet May Slow Aging in Healthy Adults, Research Finds

LONDON (Dispatches) - Eating fewer calories appears to slow the pace of aging and increase longevity in healthy adults, according to a study published Thursday in the journal Nature Aging.

The study, which was funded by the National Institute on Aging, part of the National Institutes of Health, is the first-ever randomized controlled trial that looked at the long-term impact of calorie restriction.

It adds to an already large body of evidence that a calorie-restricted diet can provide substantial health benefits, including delayed aging, said the study's senior author, Dan Belsky, who is assistant professor of epidemiology at Columbia University's

Mailman School of Public Health in New York City.

"The main take-home of our study is that it is possible to slow the pace of biological aging and that it may be possible to achieve that slowing through modification of lifestyle and behavior," Belsky said.

In a phase 2 clinical trial, which ran for two years, 220 adults were randomized to cut their caloric intake by as much as 25% — 500 calories for people who generally consume 2,000 calories a day — or to make no changes to their diet. The participants had a body mass index, or BMI, ranging from 22 to 27.

Wang Fires Ahead At Singapore Classic

SINGAPORE (Dispatches) - South Korea's Wang Jeung-hun fired six birdies in seven holes in his back-nine to share the third-round lead with Spain's Alejandro Del Rey at the Singapore Classic.

Wang completed his country's mandatory military obligations in July last year and credited his mental toughness for putting together a commanding round, posting a six-under-par 66 at the Laguna National Golf Resort Club.

"I missed golf a lot when I had to be away from the game for 18 months. I was just shooting guns every day," said the 27-year-old.

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Scheffler Leads Rahm In Phoenix Open

PHOENIX (Dispatches) - Scottie Scheffler fired seven birdies in a seven-under-par 64 to take a two-shot clubhouse lead over Jon Rahm as the two chase Rory McIlroy's number one ranking at the Phoenix Open.

World number two Scheffler, the defending champion in Phoenix, had a 10-under-par total of 132 and Spain's third-ranked Rahm was his nearest rival in the clubhouse after a five-under-par 66 for 134.

Bucks Best Clippers For 10th Straight Win

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Giannis Antetokounmpo logged 35 points and eight rebounds and Brook Lopez added 22 points and 15 rebounds as the visiting Milwaukee Bucks extended their winning streak to a season-best 10 games with a 119-106 victory over the Los Angeles Clippers.

Jrue Holiday had 19 points and Jevon Carter added 13 as the Bucks won without Khristian Middleton (rest). Milwaukee has its first double-digit-game winning streak since earning 18 victories in a row during the 2019-20 season.

Brandon Boston Jr. scored 20 points and Paul George added 19 points and 11 rebounds for the Clippers. Los Angeles was without star Kawhi Leonard, who was on his own load-management rest after a previous knee injury.

Norman Powell had 16 points and Marcus Morris Sr. scored 15 for Los Angeles, which has lost two games in a row.

Mavericks 122, Kings 114

Despite the absence of Luka Doncic for the fourth straight game, Dallas exploded for 45 points in the first quarter and remained unbeaten in the Kyrie Irving era, downing host Sacramento.

The Western Conference playoff contenders meet again Saturday night, also in Sacramento. Playing his second game for Dallas since a trade from Brooklyn, Irving paced the Mavericks with 25 points while also contributing a game-high 10 assists. Seven Dallas players scored in double figures.

Shortly after finding out he'd been added to the All-Star team, the Kings' De'Aaron Fox had 33 points. However, he shot just 1-for-5 from 3-point range as the Kings were outscored 54-27 by the guests from beyond the arc. Domantas Sabonis put up 18 points, 11 rebounds and a team-high seven assists for the Kings.

Surgery Unlikely For Brown After Facial Fracture

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - The Boston Celtics are hopeful Jaylen Brown will not need surgery after suffering a facial fracture, team officials said.

Celtics president of basketball operations Brad Stevens said Brown was unlikely to face a lengthy layoff after injuring himself in a collision with team-mate Jayson Tatum.

"The latest with the Jaylen information is that it looks like no surgery," Stevens told reporters on Friday.

"We're going to see how he feels over the next few days -- he's already been fitted for a mask.

"But he's still feeling it, doesn't feel great. So we'll see how he feels when he starts moving around."

Brown suffered what the Celtics said was a maxillary facial fracture during Boston's win over Philadelphia on Wednesday.

Brown was injured after catching a stray elbow from Tatum as both players chased a rebound.

"We'll get together early in the week and figure out what's next," Stevens said.

"But it doesn't look it's going to be too long which is a good thing."

Brown is averaging career highs in points (27), rebounds (7.1) and field-goal percentage (.490) for the Celtics, who lead the Eastern Conference with the best record in the league.

Lee Hae-in Wins Four Continents Women's Title

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - Lee Hae-in surged from sixth place with a near-flawless free skate to win the women's title at the Four Continents figure skating championships in Colorado Springs.

Lee, 17, became the first South Korean woman to lift the title at the competition for non-European countries since Kim Yu-na in 2009. She edged compatriot Kim Ye-lim, who led after the short programme but was third in the free skate to finish second.

America's 15-year-old national champion Isabeau Levito, who was second after the short programme, withdrew shortly before the free skate because of illness.



eight rebounds and eight assists, while Isaiah Stewart had 15 points and 11 rebounds. Hamidou Diallo put up 14 points and Isaiah Livers chipped in 11 points and 10 rebounds for Detroit, which snapped a three-game losing streak.

Devonte' Graham poured in 31 points in his San Antonio debut. Graham was acquired from the New Orleans Pelicans just before the trade deadline on Thursday. Zach Collins had 29 points and 11 rebounds while Malaki Branham contributed 27 points and Keita Bates-Diop had 15 for the Spurs, who have lost 11 straight.

Heat 97, Rockets 95

Jimmy Butler dunked off a 35-foot in-bounds pass from Gabe Vincent with just 0.3 seconds left as host Miami defeated Houston.

Tyler Herro led Miami with 31 points, nine rebounds and eight assists. He had game highs in all three categories, making 11-of-20 from the floor. Bam Adebayo added 20 points and nine rebounds, and Butler scored 16 points as the Heat won their eighth straight home game.

Jabari Smith Jr. led Houston with 22 points and eight rebounds. Houston's Jalen Green had appeared to send the game to overtime with his baseline drive that tied the score 95-95 with 0.7 seconds left.

Celtics 127, Hornets 116

Although they were without Jaylen Brown (facial fracture), host Boston sank 25 3-pointers and defeated Charlotte for the fourth time this season.

Jayson Tatum made five 3-pointers, including the 1,000th of his career, and finished with a game-high 41 points. Tatum, 24, is the youngest player in NBA history to make 1,000 3-point field goals. Derrick White added a career-high eight 3-pointers and finished with 33 points. Center Robert Williams III had 16 rebounds for the Celtics, who attempted 55 3-pointers.



Lewandowski Has Brought Winning Mentality to Barca

BARCELONA (Dispatches) - Barcelona coach Xavi Hernandez hailed striker Robert Lewandowski for helping change the mindset at the club.

The Catalans are eight points clear of rivals Real Madrid at the top of La Liga and beat Los Blancos in Saudi Arabia to win the Spanish Super Cup in January.

Last season, Barcelona failed to win a trophy but the mood changed in the summer when the club brought in several players, including former Bayern Munich striker Lewandowski.

"Lewandowski is accustomed to winning titles with Bayern. He had brought us that winning mentality, that of a champion," Xavi told reporters.

"In his head, defeat is not an option." The 34-year-old Polish international has scored 23 goals in 26 games this season for Barca.

Barcelona can extend their lead on Madrid if they win at Villarreal on Sunday, before Carlo Ancelotti's side face Elche midweek, due to their participation in the Club World Cup.

"Each game is key and more so at this stage of the season," added Xavi.

"We are eight points clear, tomorrow we could make that 11."

Pistons 138, Spurs 131 (2OT)

Bojan Bogdanovic scored 32 points, rookie Jalen Duren added a career-high 30 points and 17 rebounds and host Detroit topped San Antonio in double overtime.

Detroit's Jaden Ivey supplied 17 points,

Flury Upstages Favorites to Win World Downhill Gold



MERIBEL (Dispatches) - Swiss outsider Jasmine Flury made the most of her early bib number to bag gold in the women's downhill at the World Ski Championships as hot favourite Sofia Goggia was disqualified.

Flury, starting second in brilliant sunshine and rapidly rising temperatures, clocked 1min 28.03sec down the Roc de Fer piste in the French resort of Meribel.

"It's amazing, unreal," said the 29-year-old Flury, who has one World Cup super-G victory to her name, from St Moritz in 2017, and just one other podium finish on the circuit, a second place in last month's Garmisch downhill.

"It still feels like a dream. I don't know what is happening and with Corinne (Suter) on the podium, I don't know, more than a dream has come true."

Austrian Nina Ortlieb, whose father Patrick won the world downhill title in 1996 as well as Olympic gold in Val d'Isere in 1992, claimed silver at 0.04sec, with Switzerland's reigning world and Olympic champion Suter taking bronze a further eight-hundredths adrift.

Ortlieb said her silver was "reward for all the hard work" after almost two years on the sidelines rehabbing from severe injury.

"I have more world championships to come, maybe one day I can also bring home a gold!" said Ortlieb.

There was no dream outing for Goggia, however, with all eyes on the Italian star who is the Olympic silver medallist having bagged gold in the 2018 Pyeongchang Games, and is currently leading this season's World Cup downhill standings having also won the downhill crystal globe in three of the last five seasons.

Goggia badly negotiated the last rolling pitch leading into the finish area and straddled a gate. She was left incredulous and stockstill after crossing the line, her team writhing with angst at seeing their star racer go out.

"I'm more than disappointed, I'm sorrowful, because no one will ever give me the chance to achieve a medal in the world championship and this hurts inside," Goggia said.

"I know sport is this way, sometimes you rank fourth and everyone expects you to win and it doesn't come. Life goes on, we're moving onto the next races, this doesn't change my beautiful career."

Racing after the death this week of former teammate Elena Fanchini after a long battle with cancer, the Italian team donned black armbands in her honor.

India's Spinners A Blessing After Crushing Test Win

NAGPUR (Dispatches) - India's Rohit Sharma said it was a "blessing" to lead his champion spinners after they spearheaded a crushing innings victory against Australia inside three days.

Spin twins Ravichandran Ashwin and Ravindra Jadeja combined to dismiss Australia for 91 inside one session of the third day's play in Nagpur as the hosts took a 1-0 lead in the four-match series.

Ashwin took five in the second innings and a match haul of eight wickets while the left-handed Jadeja grabbed five on his international return from a knee injury to bowl out Australia for 177 in the first innings.

Jadeja also scored 70 with the bat to be named man of the match.

Axar Patel took just one wicket but hit a match-winning 84 in India's 400 all out.

"It's like captaining Cummins, Hazlewood and Starc in Australia," Rohit said.

"When you have quality of Axar, Jadeja, and Ash, having played in India for so many years, playing on pitches like these, it's always a blessing," he added.

"The conditions are there, yes, but you need to exploit them as well and conditions are for both teams. They know which areas to hit, how to keep applying pressure."

Off-spinner Ashwin surpassed 450 Test wickets in the first innings and now has 457 in the bag. Rohit said Jadeja kept pressing him for a bowl in the second session to complete his own landmark of 250 Test wickets.



European Clubs Warned Against Reckless Spending on Player Wages

NYON (Dispatches) - UEFA President Aleksander Ceferin warned that many European clubs are "compromising their economic sustainability" due to ever-increasing player wages which have risen on average by 16 per cent compared to pre-pandemic levels.

Europe's football governing body released its Benchmarking report, a review of the European football finance landscape, which highlighted how the sport is returning to normality after the economic challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The report said revenue across nearly 150 clubs is up by an average of 4.6 per cent while sponsor and commercial revenue was 13 per cent higher than pre-pandemic levels after they missed out on €7 billion during the pandemic.

However, there was concern over operating costs going up by 11 per cent while finance costs have increased 18 per cent, with player wages being the main culprit.

"Despite the unprecedented turmoil of recent years, wages have continued to grow, rising on average by 16 per cent compared to pre-pandemic standards," Ceferin said.

"Top-division players' salaries, for example, have more than doubled during the past decade.

"And while this is not a negative trend per se, it is clear that many are compromising their economic sustainability in their reckless pursuit of success."

The report showed a 108 per cent increase in player wages over the last 10 years and they have continued to rise since 2019 despite the revenue decreases during the pandemic.

