

**Health Ministry Announced on Tuesday That the Number of Deaths From the Coronavirus Pandemic in Iran Increased to **144,788** With **Five** More Iranians Killed by the Virus Over the Past 24 Hours**

# IRAN NEWS

**Average Blood Donation Rate Per Thousand People in Upper-Middle Income States Is 16.4 and the Amount in the Eastern Mediterranean Stands at 14.4 While The Rate in Iran Is Twice as Much as Regional Statistics**

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DOMESTIC

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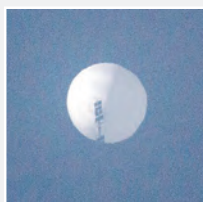


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SPORTS

**Mahomes Leads Chiefs to Super Bowl Win Over Eagles**



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## Iran to Build 2 More Oil Tankers For Venezuela Deal

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Venezuela plans to contract the construction of two more oil tankers by an Iranian shipyard which has already built and delivered two Aframax vessels to the South American country, a report says.

Under an existing construction agreement, Venezuela's state-run energy firm PDVSA will order Iran Marine Industrial Company (SADRA) to build the two Aframax tankers at the company's Bushehr shipyard, Reuters reported.

The two new tankers, to be named India Urquia and India Mara, will cost \$33.77 million each, the news agency said, citing an internal PDVSA document detailing the proposed agreement.

PDVSA has increasingly availed itself of the privilege of blossoming relationship between Iran and Venezuela to rebuild its fleet with the help of Iranian companies.

Its maritime operations have suffered from a long-standing lack of capital amid US sanctions that have made it difficult to obtain insurance and operate in international waters.

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## Iran Export to U.S. Rise Nine-Fold in 2022

TEHRAN (MNA) - The value of Iran's export to the U.S. increased by nine-fold in 2022, IRNA reported citing the latest statistics released by the American Statistical Association (ASA).

According to the ASA data, the Islamic Republic exported \$11.2 million worth of goods to the U.S. in the past year, registering a nine-fold increase compared to 2021. Iran exported commodities valued at only \$1.2 million to the U.S. in 2021.

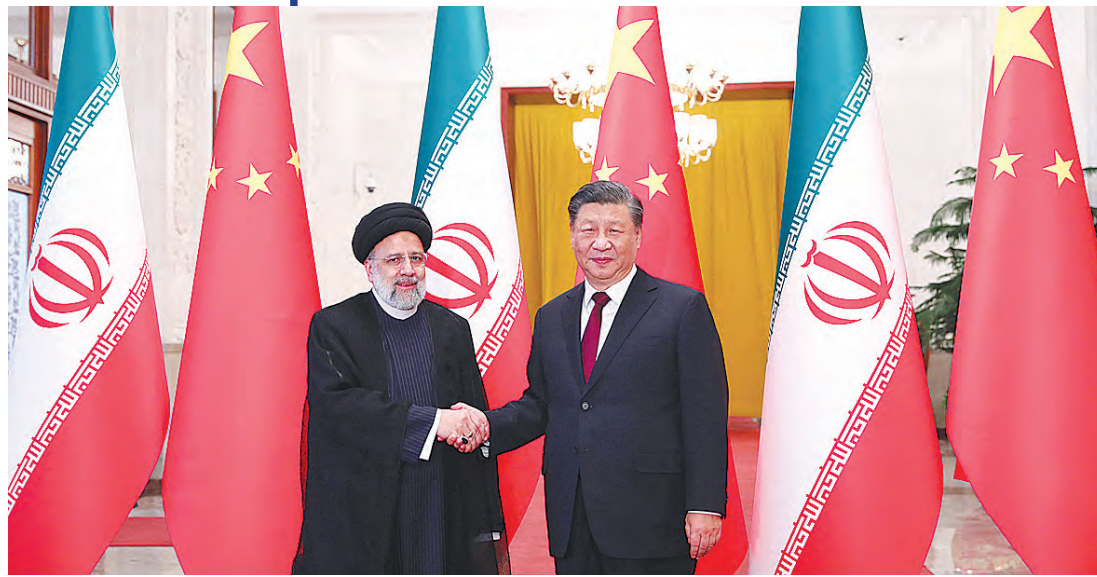
The value of trade between Iran and the U.S. rose to \$56.7 million in 2022, 40 percent more than the figure for the previous year, based on the ASA data.

According to the mentioned data, the trade between the two countries stood at \$40.5 million in 2021.

The ASA data shows that the value of U.S. export to Iran also increased 16 percent to \$45.5 million in the January-December 2022 period, from \$39.3 million in the previous year.

Iran was ranked 175th among U.S. export destinations in 2021 and 172nd among the country's top import sources.

## Iran, China Sign 20 Cooperation Documents



IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Iran and China signed 20 documents and memoranda of understanding to further expand cooperation in various fields.

The documents were signed by senior officials of the two countries in the presence of Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi and his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping in Beijing on Tuesday.

According to the documents, Tehran and Beijing will improve cooperation in different sectors, including crisis management, tourism, communication and information technology, the environment, international trade, intellectual property, agriculture, exports, healthcare, media, sports and cultural heritage.

Earlier in the day, President Raisi received an official welcome from his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping after arriving on a state visit to China.

During the official ceremony, the national anthems of the two countries were played and the two presidents reviewed a guard of honor. A 21-gun salute was performed in Raisi's honor.

China's President Xi Jinping in the meeting called for the early and proper resolution of the Iran nuclear issue while expressing his support for the Islamic Republic in safeguarding its rights and interests.

China will continue to "participate constructively" in talks to resume negotiations on implementing the Iran nuclear agreement, Xi told Raisi in talks in Beijing.

Xi and Raisi pledged to forge a stronger alliance when they last met in person on the sidelines of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization summit in the Uzbek city of Samarkand in September.

Meanwhile President Raisi in meeting with Chinese PM Li Keqiang described the comprehensive strategic partnership document between the Islamic Republic of Iran and China as a symbol of the will of the two countries to develop relations and emphasized the necessity of the efforts of the two countries to fully implement it.

Referring to the background of historical and valuable cooperation between the two great civilizations of Iran and China, as well as the important agreements between the two countries in various economic and commercial fields, the President emphasized on developing Iran-China relations as much as possible.

Considering the importance of multilateralism as a common axis in the international positions of the two countries, Raisi emphasized the importance of strengthening cooperation between Iran and China in international and regional organizations.

In this meeting, Chinese Prime Minister Li Keqiang referred to the long history of relations and close opinions of the two countries in the approach of multilateralism in the world, saying, "Constructive negotiations between the two countries are underway to develop relations on various issues".

The Chinese Prime Minister also described the comprehensive document of strategic partnership between the two countries, including the achievements of the agreements between the two countries, and emphasized Beijing's desire to fully implement it, as well as strengthen cooperation and coordination with Tehran in line with the continuation of the development of relations between the two countries.

Li Keqiang also referred to the important and influential role of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the region and emphasized the need for cooperation and coordination between the two countries to develop security in line with the interests of both countries.

## Iran Can Become One of Main Destinations for Armenian Tourists

YEREVAN (Dispatches) - Iran can become one of the main destinations for tourists from Armenia. Economist Suren Parsyan wrote about this in his article.

In particular, he wrote: "I was in Tehran on a one-week visit at the invitation of the Iranian side. This was my second trip to one of the largest countries in the Middle East, with which Armenia has a millennia history and land connection.

In Tehran, I had the opportunity to get acquainted with the history, culture, tourism, and other branches of the economy of Iran close up. During the visit, I had the honor of participating in the 16th International Tourism and Related Industries Exhibition held in Tehran on February 7-10, during which the provinces of the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) individually presented their attractions, hotel facilities, entertainment facilities, cultural heritage, customs, souvenirs, etc.

It is noteworthy that the signs and booklets of some Iranian companies representing Tabriz also contained Armenian information, clearly pointing out and highlighting the Armenian cultural heritage and diaspora of that region.

It should be noted that the Armenian cultural heritage in Iran is always under the care of the state, which further increases Iran's tourism potential and makes it even more interesting. It can become one of the best examples in the world of how it is possible to present and preserve Islamic and Christian cultural heritages side by side. The centers of Iranian culture and tourism are Shiraz, Qazvin, Tabriz, Kerman, Isfahan, Gom, Sanandaj, Khorasan, etc.

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## No World Power Dares To Take Slightest Action Against Iran

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The spokesman of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) has hailed Iran's deterrence power, saying world powers do not dare to act against the Islamic Republic in light of country's defense and military power.

During a ceremony in Kerman Province to celebrate the 44th anniversary of the Islamic Revolution, Brigadier General Ramezan Sharif hailed the endeavors made by Iranian youths in thwarting foreign threats.

"By God's grace, the wise measures of Leader of the Islamic Revolution [Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei], and the round-the-clock endeavors of your children, we have reached a level of defense and military power today that neither the Americans nor any other power dares to take the slightest action against the country, its nation, interests and devotees," he said.

Sharif noted that security is an essential need of every country throughout the world. Still, he made clear that Iran takes pride in the fact that it does not need malicious world powers to establish security within its borders.

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## Belarus Eyes Cooperation With Iran in Manufacturing Sector

MINSK (Dispatches) - Cooperation with Iran in the manufacturing sector has a great potential, Belarusian industry Minister Aleksandr Rogozhnik said during a meeting with Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Iran to Belarus Saeed Yari.

The parties discussed the topical issues on the bilateral agenda, including cooperation in the manufacturing sector.

Aleksandr Rogozhnik noted bilateral trade rose threefold in 2022 over 2021. The minister expressed confidence that cooperation with Iran in the manufacturing sector has a great potential.

For his part, the Iranian ambassador also praised the level of bilateral contacts. "Our countries have developed fruitful cooperation, which meets the interests of peoples. But we should not stop there. We need to move forward," Ambassador Saeed Yari said, stressing that the infrastructure for the accelerated development of relations is ready.

During the meeting, Aleksandr Rogozhnik and Ambassador Saeed Yari also discussed the program of the visit of an Iranian delegation headed by the deputy minister of industry to Belarus. The delegation is set to visit a number of enterprises in order to establish mutually beneficial cooperation.

The meeting was attended by the heads of the flagships of the Belarusian industry - MAZ, MTZ, BelAZ.

## Iran Exports to Iraq Rise Despite U.S. Pressure on Baghdad

TEHRAN (MNA) - Iran's exports to Iraq are growing despite US pressure on Baghdad to curb trade between the two neighbors.

Abdol-Amir Rabihavi, the business adviser of the Islamic Republic in Iraq, said that Iran's exports to Iraq will reach 10 billion dollars by the end of the current Iranian year in March.

For months, the U.S. has restricted Iraq's access to its own dollars, trying to stamp out the country's trade with Iran. Iraq is now feeling the crunch, with a drop in the value of its currency and public anger blowing back against the government.

The dinar's deterioration comes even though Iraq's foreign currency reserves are at an all-time high of around \$100 billion, pumped up by spiking global oil prices that have brought increasing revenues to the petroleum-rich nation.

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## Arresting Shahcheragh Elements Prevented 9 Similar Operations

TEHRAN (MNA) – An official with Iran’s intelligence ministry said that detaining elements behind Shahcheragh terrorist attack prevented nine similar incidents.

Following the terrorist crime in Shiraz’s Shahcheragh Shrine, 42 elements who backed the attack were detained, Kheyrandish said.

The step prevented the occurrence of nine similar attacks in the country, he further noted.

Over the past 8 years, about 200 bombing operations have been foiled in Iran, he underlined. He hailed Iran’s position in combating terrorism in the world, calling for much vigilance to this end.

On October 26, 2022, a terrorist armed with a machine gun opened fire on the pilgrims and evening prayer worshippers at the Shah Cheragh holy shrine in Shiraz, martyred 15 innocent people, including some women, children, and elderly folks, and seriously wounding dozens.

# Iran to Continue Its Growth Path Faster Than Before

*IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK*

**TEHRAN – Government Spokesman says that the implementation of the 25-year strategic agreement between Iran and China is on the agenda of President Seyed Ebrahim Raisi’s visit to Beijing.**

Raisi left Tehran for Beijing on Monday evening at the formal invitation of the President of China Xi Jinping.

Before his departure for Beijing, Raisi said that Iran and China have extensive relations, but they need yet to utilize the capacities of the two countries to elevate the ties, especially in the economic area.

Noting that President Raisi’s visit to China was his 10th trip abroad, the Spokesman for Iran’s Government Ali Bahadori Jahromi said that the last visit of an Iranian President to China dates back to 20 years.

Speaking at his weekly press conference on Tuesday, the government spokesman stated that the president’s visit to China implied a clear message that those who sought the isolation of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the international arena should notice.

“This shows that Iran will continue its growth path faster than before,” Bahadori Jahromi stressed.

Iran is China’s great trading partner, and its exchanges with China are the largest, he added. He said that along with the Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei’s amnesty, the government has prepared a unifying package that is going to be unveiled soon.

Bahadori Jahromi said that along with Ayatollah Khamenei’s amnesty, the government has prepared a package for ease of Iranian expatriates to return to Iran, and that the package will be unveiled soon.

In order to pave the ground for implementing and operationalizing Ayatollah Khamenei’s amnesty,



‘the Unifying package’ has been offered and prepared by Iran’s government so that those Iranian expatriates who have got the conditions could return to Iran.

He further explained that the package will be communicated to the relevant ministers.

The spokesman stated that providing banking facilities to manufacturing companies in order to support Iranian goods leads to an increase in employment rate, especially in the industry field.

In response to the question regarding the approval of a decree in the government to provide banking facilities to production complexes as well as the provision of support for the Iranian goods, Bahadori Jahromi said that with the support of the government, the employment rate reached an unprecedented record.

He clarified that financial support and banking facilities are available to both guilds and small industries as well as new investments.

Based on the plan, the institutions or guarantee funds are granted permission to operate within a certain framework so that they can help the private sector’s economic enterprises, especially small and medium enterprises.

Also, in line with the implementation of the knowledge-based production surge law and the active approach of the Ministry of Finance for facilitating knowledge-based activities in the country by using the knowledge-based ecosystem in the customs, tax, and finance sectors, the cabinet of ministers have so far adopted a regulation for supporting the knowledge-based and job-creating production.

## Iran-China Great Step Toward Expanding Cooperation

BEIJING (IP) - The Chairman of the Iran-China Joint Chamber of Commerce announced the details of the Iranian President’s visit to China after a three-year pause due to the corona pandemic.

Touching upon President Seyed Ebrahi Raisi, Mr. Majid Reza Harirchi said that it is the first formal trade delegation in the world that goes to China after three years of corona restrictions.

Harirchi expressed hope the agreements signed between the two sides in the past few weeks, would achieve good results during the visit of the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran to China.

With regard to the 25-year Comprehensive Agreement between Iran and China, he said that the document of cooperation encompasses political, economic, military, tourism, sports, and other fields which would be addressed in the trip, yet the economic and environmental issues would be more focused on.

## Iran, Malaysia Call for Further Boosting Trade Cooperation

TEHRAN (MNA) – The Islamic Republic of Iran and Malaysia stressed further strengthening bilateral relations in the trade field.

Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Kuala Lumpur Ali Asghar Mohammadi met and held talks with Malaysia’s Deputy Minister of International Trade and Industry Liew Chin Tong.

During the meeting, a vast range of issues was discussed and both sides exchanged views on adopting innovative ways for banking exchanges.

The two countries also called for leveraging the potential of knowledge-based companies.

The Iranian side, for his part, stressed the importance of setting up a direct flight from Tehran - Kuala Lumpur to enhance the tourism industry and the transferring of goods and passengers.

## Iran, Zimbabwe Seek Closer Agriculture Ties



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran and Zimbabwe plan to boost their cooperation in the agriculture sector amid Iran’s efforts to increase its presence in export markets in Africa.

Iran’s agriculture minister Javad Sadatinejad said after a meeting with his Zimbabwean counterpart Anxious Jongwe Masuka in Tehran on Monday that the two had discussed a wide range of projects to boost bilateral agriculture ties.

Sadatinejad said Iranian companies can engage in contract farming in Zimbabwe while providing technical support to the African country’s farming sector.

He said Iran is ready to offer its technology on farming mechanization and on pesticides and fertilizers to Zimbabwe, a country that heavily relies on agriculture to meet its economic demands.

The minister said Iran and Zimbabwe had also discussed a potential swap mechanism under which Iran can supply up to \$100 million worth of urea per year to Zimbabwe in return for importing sugar from the African country.

“Despite the good political relations between the two countries, the size of economic ties does not match the existing capacities,” said Sadatinejad.

He said that Zimbabwe can also use Iranian trade capacities for re-exporting of its agriculture products to a market of 300 million people in the region.

Masuka, for his part, said Zimbabwe plans to import tractors from Iran to respond to an unmet demand of up to 20,000 in his country.

The official, who leads Zimbabwe’s Ministry of Lands, Agriculture, Water and Rural Resettlement, said his country would need Iran’s assistance on modernization of the agricultural machinery, on fishery and on agricultural chemicals.

## Iran Seeks Direct Shipping Line to Kazakhstan

TEHRAN - Director of Ports and Maritime Organization of Iran (PMO) Ali Akbar Safaei has called for the launch of a direct shipping line to Kazakhstan amid efforts to boost trade between the two Caspian Sea countries.

Ali Akbar Safaei, also a deputy transportation minister, said on Tuesday that the PMO will support the activities of Kazakh investors in ports in north and south of Iran.

He made the remarks in a meeting with Kazakh Ambassador to Tehran Askhat Orazbay. Iran’s ambassador to Kazakhstan Majid Samadzadeh also attended the meeting via video conference.



Safaei said in the meeting that Iran and Kazakhstan need to develop a joint maritime trade plan in light of recent regional developments which have led to efforts by Russia to expand its trade ties with countries in the Persian Gulf.

For his part, the Kazakh ambassador said that companies from his country have plans for investment in Iranian ports.

Orazbay insisted that Kazakhstan seeks to expand its trade and economic relations with regional countries through the Iranian ports.

He said Kazakhstan is seeking to implement transportation projects in Iran as part of its strategic policy to access international waters.

*IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK*

## Iran Among 1st States to Aid Quake-Hit Turkey

TABRIZ (IRNA)- Turkish Consul General Çetin Taner to the Iranian city Tabriz, East Azarbaijan Province, said that the Iranian government was among the first states who rushed to aid quake-hit people in Turkey.

Taner made the remarks in a meeting with Abedin Khorram, East Azarbaijan province governor general, in Tabriz on Monday night, appreciating the Islamic Republic for sending humanitarian aids to his earthquake-stricken country.

The Turkish diplomat noted that the Iranian government has stood by Turkey just like all other hard times, and that some rescue groups from the Red Crescent Society of Tehran and Tabriz were dispatched to quake-hit areas in Turkey.

He went on to say that unfortunately more than 13 million people have been affected by the disaster, and over 30,000 people lost their lives.

Khorram, for his part, expressed sympathy and condolences to the Turkish people and government for the deaths of thousands of people in southern Turkey.

The Iranian governor general, accompanied by some other officials, paid a visit to Turkey’s consulate in Tabriz, expressing readiness of the province’s pharmaceutical companies to supply medicine and medical equipment to the quake-hit areas.

## Attack on Azerbaijani Embassy Under Investigation

TEHRAN (MNA) – Iran’s Prosecutor-General has said that the aspects of the attack on the Azerbaijani embassy are under investigation.

Mohammad Jafar Montazeri held a phone conversation with his Azeri counterpart on the incident that took place in Azerbaijan Embassy in late January.

From the very beginning of the incident, the Islamic Republic of Iran has investigated and pursued its various aspects through diplomacy and bilateral cooperation, the official said.

The Attorney General also called for the interaction of judicial cooperation between the two friendly and neighboring countries.

He expressed hope that, as in the past, judicial and

political cooperation would lead to the development of a deep bond between the two nations.

The Azerbaijani foreign ministry has said in a statement that the head of the embassy’s security team was killed while two other members of the team were injured in the assault.

Immediately after the incident, Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian said that the incident in Azerbaijan Embassy was not a terrorist attack as the personal incentives of the attacker were involved in committing the crime.

The Iranian foreign ministry has strongly condemned the attack and offered condolences to the Azerbaijan Republic.

## Tehran, Moscow May Declare Visa-Free Regime in 2023

TEHRAN (MNA) – Moscow and Tehran may agree on introduction of visa-free regime in 2023, Iranian envoy to Moscow Kazem Jalali said during a press conference Monday, adding that Iran is currently waiting for Moscow’s response on this issue.

“Such perspective exists,” he said, answering a question from TASS, whether the two countries may agree to a visa-free regime this year.

“We as the Islamic Republic of Iran agree to cancel visas between the two countries. And we have even made steps on this issue on our side. We are waiting for Russian officials’ opinions. Should Russia, just like we did, state its readiness, we could have declared a visa-free regime within a short time span,” the Iranian diplomat noted.

Jalali underscored that Iran has conveyed this information to the Russian side.

“If Russia makes such a decision at the highest level, we will be able to declare a visa-free regime in the upcoming months in 2023,” the envoy added. “The Islamic Republic of Iran not only agrees, but it is working on this issue.”

Tehran also offered Moscow to begin this process by withdrawing visas for businessmen and drivers, “who play an important role in the development of trade.”

## Gov’t Bans Import Of iPhone 14 Mobile Phones

*IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK*

TEHRAN – The government will ban the import of Apple’s iPhone 14 and higher models to the country for an indefinite period, from February 20, 2023, as was reflected in the letter addressed to the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA) by Iran’s Ministry of Industry, Mine and Trade.

The mentioned mobile phone models have been removed from the list of permitted devices imported into Iran by citizens and by mail.

“iPhone 14 and higher model mobile phones will no longer be registered in Iran and related instructions will be announced at the crossing points of the country,” said the letter.

Meanwhile, Iran imported mobile phones worth \$2.28 billion during the first 10 months of the current Iranian year (March 21, 2022, through January 20, 2023). Mobile phone imports accounted for 4.72 percent of Iran’s total imports value.

In general, Iran imported 31 million tons of goods worth \$48.5 billion within the first 10 months of the current Iranian year (March 21, 2022, through January 20, 2023). This is an increase of 16.8 percent in value, while a decrease of 6 percent in volume compared to the same period last Iranian year.





## PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	12:18
■ Evening (Maghreb)	18:04
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	05:26
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	06:50

29. "Enough is Allah for a witness between us and you: we certainly knew nothing of your worship of us!"  
30. There will every soul prove (the fruits of) the deeds it sent before:  
they will be brought back to Allah their rightful Lord, and their invented falsehoods will leave them in the lurch.  
Surah 10. Jonah ( 29 - 30 )

# Conference Reviews Iran-EAEU Trade Opportunities

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

**TEHRAN – Tehran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (TCCIMA) hosted a conference on the trade opportunities of Iran and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) on Monday during which trade-related issues in areas like agriculture and foodstuff were discussed.**

The conference was attended by private sector representatives along with TCCIMA officials including TCCIMA Head Masoud Khansari, and Head of TCCIMA Agriculture Committee Kaveh Zargarani; Eurasian Economic Commission (EEC) Minister in charge of Integration and Macroeconomics Sergei Glazyev also attended the meeting through an online video message.

Speaking at the opening ceremony of the conference, Khansari underlined Eurasia's special geopolitical position, saying that the Eurasian region has its own unique characteristics and is considered the connecting point between Asia and Europe.

"Iran's trade with the Eurasian Economic Union was more than five billion dollars in 2022, which has grown significantly, and we hope that this trend will continue in the future," the TCCIMA head added.

The official stressed that free trade with the Eurasian Economic Union has created an opportunity to neutralize Western sanctions.

"Creating unified regulations in transportation, money transfer, and quarantine standards are some of the items that the Iranian private sector is seeking from its membership in this union," he said.

Elsewhere in the event, Zargarani addressed the conference and spoke about the requirements for the development of trade with the Eurasian Economic Union.

"Over the past years, although effective measures have been taken to improve the level of economic relations with the five member countries of the Eurasian Union, Iran's trade with these five countries has been mainly focused on Russia and then Kazakhstan," he noted.



Zargarani further pointed to the infrastructure problems that hinder the further increase of commercial cooperation between the two sides, and continued: "The transportation infrastructure, especially in the Caspian Sea, faces many shortcomings; The result is that despite the production of about 150 million tons of cereal in Russia and the import of about 17-18 million tons of such products by Iran, the volume of cereal trade between Iran and Russia is less than three million tons."

The official also underlined the lack of a direct channel for financial transfers as another major obstacle in the way of the development of relations between Iran and Russia and said: "Now that Russia has joined the club of sanctioned countries, establishing a direct banking line between Iran and Russia will be very effective in developing economic relations. In other words, establishing a simple financial transaction between two countries and then extending it to other member countries of the Eurasian Union is one of the demands of the Iranian private sector."

In the final part of the opening ceremony, Sergei Glazyev also made a speech about the consequences of sanctions for the global food supply-chain.

"The embargo imposed by the United States and the European Union on food suppliers not only creates problems for the sanctioned countries but also causes hunger and malnutrition for millions of people in other parts of the world," Glazyev said in his video message.

After years of negotiations, Iran and the EAEU finalized a free trade agreement (FTA) in late January, announcing that the FTA is going to be put in effect by mid-Iranian calendar year 1402 (late September this year).

This FTA is expected to have a significant positive effect on the volume of trade between the two sides.

Iran and EAEU had reached a preferential trade agreement in 2018 based on which about 862 commodity items are currently subject to preferential tariffs. The agreement came into effect on October 27, 2019.

The value of trade between Iran and the EAEU members reached \$5.643 billion during the previous Iranian calendar year 1400 (ended on March 20, 2022), registering a 66-percent rise compared to the figure for the preceding year.

## Pakboom 5 Vessel Launched



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Pakboom 5 (Clean Land 5) Vessel which is designed for collecting the oil pollution was launched concurrent with the Ten-Day-Dawn festivities due to endeavors and doubled efforts of engineers and workers of Iran Shipbuilding and Offshore Industries Complex Co (ISOICO).

The CEO of ISOICO Mr. Salman Zarrabi said that three out of this type of vessels have been delivered to the employer between 2021 and 2018 which have left ISOICO for Imam Khomeini, Shahid Rajaei and Khorramshahr ports to conduct the assigned missions.

He added that Pakboom 5 after the launch is to go to Bushehr Port and to take the charge of cleaning the region from oil pollutions.

This vessel has 43 meters length, 10 meters of width and 3 meters of height and it is to control the oil waste because of its installed rollers and transfer the waste into the reservoirs.

Rabi noted that one of the international maritime requirements is to collect oil pollutions from the waters of the coasts under the control of the country, adding that ISOICO has so far manufactured 4 barges with capacity of collecting 500 tons of oil pollution water upon the order of Ports and Maritime Organization.

## Exhibition of Supporting Domestic Production In Petrochemical Industry Symbol of Progress

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – The CEO of Persian Gulf Petrochemical Industries Company (PGPICO) says holding the event for supporting the home-made in the petrochemical industry is



the symbol of progress in the petrochemical industry and called on knowledge-based and Iranian companies to participate and invest in seven petrochemical parks.

Speaking in the inaugural ceremony of the fourth exhibition and specialized conference on supporting the home-made and knowledge-based economy in the petrochemical, refining and petro refining industry, Dr. Ali Askari hailed the massive presence of Iranian nation in the February 11 rallies marking the victory of the Islamic Revolution and said it was a lesson to ill-wishers who had vicious plots against the country.

He added that the Islamic Revolution was a turning point in the history of Iranian nation, noting that the Islamic Republic took the control of a backward and destroyed country and today holding of this exhibition is the sign of progress of the country in petrochemical industry.

He said that PGPICO is the flag-bearer progress of the petrochemical industry of the country and emphasized that the group in cooperation and interaction with strong holdings of the country seeks development and more progress of the value creating petrochemical industry.

Askari said that the support of his holding from the home-made is an important step for thwarting the sanctions. He also termed PGPICO the flag-bearer of knowledge-based economy and said that he is proud that the group also seeks knowledge-based economy as well as reinforcing the knowledge-based companies.

He then hailed the organizers of the past three editions of the event and said that in the first edition of the exhibition MoUs worth of 730b tomans were signed and it is expected to increase to 13,000b tomans this year and expressed hope the figure would increase more in the next edition.

Askari then said that production of PGPICO was 22m tons last year and noted that the production has seen 4% growth this year and the production has hit 21m tons in 10 months, adding that the holding has five important projects which will be ready for inauguration by the end of the current year (mid-March), reiterating that with inauguration of those projects, the production capacity of the holding will increase considerably.

## Imam Khomeini Relief Committee, Judiciary Officials Hail HOSCO

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – In a conference on social and judiciary support from the needy persons and ceremony for honoring the elite orphans, benefactors and social workers which was held in presence of the Judiciary and Imam Khomeini Relief Committee officials, the CEO of Hormozgan Steel Company (HOSCO) Mr. Ataollah Maroufkhani was honored as the exemplary benefactor.

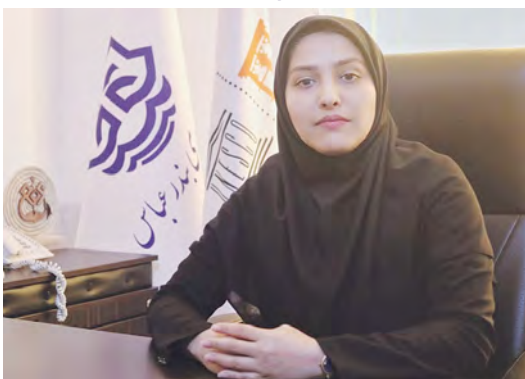


Judiciary Chief Hojjatolislam Gholam-Hossein Ejei, Prosecutor General Hojjatolislam Mohammad Jafar Montazeri, Head of Board of Trustees of Imam Khomeini Relief Committee Ayatollah Mohsen Kazerooni and Head of the committee Seyed Morteza Bakhtiari were present in this event which was simultaneously held online with participation of other provinces.

In the conference, Hormozgan Steel Company was honored with presenting plaque of appreciation as the exemplary benefactor. The company as one of the exemplary enterprises in observing its social responsibilities has taken over the custodian of 10,000 orphans which are under the shelter of the committee.

Head of Innovation and Modern Technologies Office of Bandar Abbas Municipality Announces:

## Presence of Innovative Artists of Bandar Abbas Global City in National Handicrafts Exhibition



handicraftsmen in the exhibitions at the national level is considered like a business trip to other countries that are present in the exhibition because in addition to local visitors, other countries that are present in the exhibition can also be one of the trade partners. It should be mentioned that the 36th National Handicrafts Exhibition was held in presence of the Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts and participation of Qatar, Iraq, Japan, Indonesia, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Russia, Venezuela, Oman, UAE, Syria, Turkey, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Lebanon, Algeria, China, Georgia on February 7-10 at the Tehran Permanent Fairground where the creative and top artists and artisans of Bandar Abbas put on display their exotic hand-made work arts to the public in four pavilions of this exhibition in the field of braid sewing, mat weaving, marine handicrafts and traditional embroideries.



The head of the innovation and modern technologies office Bandar Abbas Municipality with announcing the news of participation of innovative artists of Bandar Abbas in the national handicrafts exhibition stipulated that handicrafts are of great cultural and economic importance that he first of them leads to the preservation of heritage, skill and the advancement of art, in the latter, we have seen employment, high added value, use of low capital and export potential. According to the public relations of Innovation and Modern Technologies Office of Bandar Abbas Municipality, Ms. Somayyeh Samsampour touched upon this and said: «Handicrafts industry has this potential to increase employment and rich revenues of the country. She termed the exhibition industry a multifaceted phenomenon whose scope of influence on international exchanges and economic development of countries is very important and effective. According to her, high employment potential, low investment and high added value are among the valuable advantages of handicraft, which make handicrafts one of the desirable sectors in the process of economic growth and development of any developing country. She further said that in the age of globalization and concurrent with the merge of world economies, goods become more commercialized, and therefore artisans and artists, by attending exhibitions such as the National Handicrafts Exhibition, will have a very valuable opportunity to put on display and have access to the audience of other countries to put on display their art works. According to the head of the Innovation and Modern Technologies Office of Bandar Abbas Municipality, the presence of artists and



## Moldovan President Warns of Russian Plot to Topple Leadership

CHISINAU (Dispatches) - Moldova's president accused Russia of planning to use foreign saboteurs to bring down her tiny country's leadership, stop it joining the European Union and use it in the war against Ukraine.

President Maia Sandu made her comments after Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said last week his country had uncovered a Russian intelligence plan "for the destruction of Moldova", and days after the country's government resigned.

Sandu, whose country borders Ukraine, has repeatedly expressed concern about Moscow's intentions towards the former Soviet republic and about the presence of Russian troops in the breakaway Transdnistria region.



## Shahabuddin Chuppu Declared Next Bangladesh President-Elect

DHAKA (Dispatches) - Mohammad Shahabuddin Chuppu, 74, has been declared as the next president-elect of Bangladesh by the country's Election Commission after no other candidate was put forward.

Speaking to reporters in the capital, Dhaka, Election Commissioner Kazi Habibur Awal said the ruling Awami League (AL) party's nominee was elected unopposed as the 22nd president.

The nomination process for the presidential election ended on Sunday.

With 302 members, the AL party has the majority in the 350-seat national parliament, and no other party had the numbers to nominate a presidential candidate.



## Flying Object Mystery Deepens As Beijing Accuses Washington



WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - Questions about three unidentified flying objects downed by US Air Force jets over North America in three days intensified, while Beijing and Washington traded accusations over using high-tech balloons to spy on each other.

Puzzlement, fear and in some political quarters growing anger reigned as demands mounted for President Joe Biden's administration to explain not just the origin of the objects but their purpose, potential threat, and number.

It's not clear whether the three latest unidentified flying objects -- shot down Friday over Alaska, Saturday over Canada, Sunday over Michigan's Lake Huron -- have any connection to a much bigger white balloon that was shot down over the Atlantic on February 4.

The US military, which tracked that balloon as it crossed much of the country, says it was a sophisticated, high-altitude Chinese spying device -- one of a fleet of such craft allegedly floating around the globe. Recovery teams are scouring the seabed to pull up the debris for analysis.

China insists that the balloon, which was big enough to be visible to ordinary Americans from the ground, was merely blown off course while collecting weather data. Chinese authorities also admitted that a balloon spotted over Latin America was one of theirs -- in this case a civilian device for flight tests.

On Monday, Beijing sought to turn the tables by accusing Washington of deploying more than 10 balloons into Chinese airspace over the last year.

"It's not uncommon as well for the United States to illegally enter the airspace of other countries," foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin said during a briefing. The alleged flights were made "without any approval from Chinese authorities."

At the White House, National Security Council spokeswoman Adrienne Watson quickly called China's allegations "false" and said that China's high-altitude spying program has violated airspace of "40 countries across five continents."

The State Department said China was "scrambling to do damage control" and that the communist government "has failed to offer any credible explanations for its intrusion into our airspace."

Over the weekend, Chinese state-affiliated media reported that an unidentified flying object had been spotted off the country's east coast and that the military was preparing to shoot it down.

Beijing on Monday declined to comment on that report, referring journalists to the defense ministry, which did not respond to requests for comment from AFP.

In Washington, the extraordinary events are fueling already intense suspicion about China across both the Democratic and Republican parties -- a trend likely to grow as the 2024 presidential election approaches.

The diplomatic fallout has already been substantial, with Secretary of State Antony Blinken abruptly canceling a rare visit to Beijing.

Republican lawmakers Monday piled pressure on the White House to give answers about the scope and nature of the threat. "How many more unidentified objects in US airspace before the Biden Administration gives us some -- ANY -- answers?" tweeted Republican Representative Mark Green.

## Russia Bombards Ukraine's Bakhmut

KYIV (dispatches) - The eastern Ukrainian city of Bakhmut endured heavy artillery fire in what the NATO chief said appeared to be the start of a major new Russian offensive as the first anniversary of the war neared.

Ukrainian defenders, who have already held out there for months, were braced for new ground attacks, Ukrainian military officials said.

Positions in Bakhmut have been fortified and only people with a military role were being allowed in, a deputy battalion commander said. Any civilians who still wanted to leave the city would have to brave the incoming fire, he said.

Bakhmut is a prime objective for Russian President Vladimir Putin and its capture would give Russia a new foothold in the Donetsk region and a rare victory after several months of setbacks. Donetsk and Luhansk regions make up the Donbas, Ukraine's industrial heartland now partially occupied by Russia which wants full control.

"... The reality is we have seen the start (of a Russian offensive) already because we see now what Russia does



now - President Putin does now - is to send thousands and thousands more troops, accepting a very high rate of casualty," NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg told reporters in Brussels.

The Russian assault on Bakhmut has been spearheaded by mercenaries of the Wagner group, who have made small but steady gains. The renewed Russian bombardments made the situation there even more acute.

"The city, the city's suburbs, the entire perimeter, and essentially the entire Bakhmut direction and Kostyantynivka are under crazy, chaotic shelling," said Volodymyr Nazarenko, deputy commander of Ukraine's Svoboda battalion.

Nazarenko said that although no fighting was taking place in the city centre right now, the defenders were prepared to meet any assault.

"The city is a fortress, every position and every street there, almost every building, is a fortress," he said.

The Russian defense ministry said its troops had pushed forward a few kilometers along the frontlines, without specifying exactly where.

### Philippines Urges China to Prevent Any Provocative Act

MANILA (Dispatches) - China should restrain its forces to prevent them committing any "provocative act", the Philippine military said, after Manila accused China's coast guard of using a laser to try to disrupt a resupply mission to troops in the South China Sea.

The Philippine coast guard (PCG) said its vessel was assisting a navy mission to deliver food and supplies to troops on an atoll in the disputed waterway on Feb. 6 when a Chinese coast guard ship directed a "military-grade laser" at the ship, temporarily blinding its crew on the bridge.

"I think it's time for the Chinese government to restrain its forces so that it does not commit any provocative act that will endanger the lives of people," military spokesperson Medel Aguilar told reporters.

Aguilar quoted the Philippine defense chief as saying the Chinese action was "offensive" and unsafe.

The incident took place at the Second Thomas Shoal, 105 nautical miles (195 km) off the Philippine province of Palawan. The shoal is home to a small Philippine military contingent on board a rusty ship.

The 100-metre long (330-ft) World War Two ship was intentionally grounded on the shoal, known in the Philippines as Ayungin, in 1999 to reinforce Manila's sovereignty claims in the Spratly archipelago.

"The deliberate blocking of the Philippine government ships to deliver food and supplies to our military personnel ... is a blatant disregard for, and a clear violation of, Philippine sovereign rights," the PCG said in a statement.

China's foreign ministry said in response that its coast guard conducted actions according to the law.

"We urge the Philippines to avoid such actions, and the actions of China's staff are professional and restrained," China's foreign ministry spokesperson, Wang Wenbin, told a regular briefing.

The PCG did not elaborate on what a "military grade laser" was but images it supplied showed green light emanating from a Chinese vessel with bow number 5205.

## Turkey-Syria Quake Toll Passes 35,000

ANKARA (Dispatches) - Rescue teams began to wind down the search for survivors, a week after an earthquake devastated parts of Turkey and Syria leaving more than 35,000 dead and millions in dire need of aid.

While the focus switched to helping desperate survivors who lack food and shelter, stories continue to emerge of people found alive in the rubble seven days after the 7.8-magnitude tremor.

On Monday, a 12-year-old boy named Kaan was pulled from the debris in southern Hatay, 182 hours after the fifth-deadliest earthquake of the 21st century, Turkish media reported.

However, experts warn hopes of finding people alive are dimming.

The confirmed death toll stands at 35,224 as officials and medics said 31,643 people had died in Turkey and at least 3,581 in Syria.

The United Nations said it expects the toll to rise far higher. Survivors face a lack water and poor sanitation. In southern Adiyaman an outbreak of scabies -- a skin disease known to spread in crowded areas -- is affecting adults, while children are suffering from diarrhoea, local media reported.

Hatice Goz, a volunteer psychologist in Turkey's Hatay province, said she has been fielding "a barrage of calls" from frantic parents looking for missing children.

In Antakya, clean-up teams have been shifting

rubble and putting up basic toilets as the telephone network started to come back in parts of the town, an AFP reporter said.

The city was patrolled by police and soldiers deployed to prevent looting following several incidents over the weekend.

"Send any stuff you can because there are millions of people here and they all need to be fed," Turkish Interior Minister Suleyman Soylu appealed late on Sunday.

Aid packages, mainly clothes, were opened and spread across the streets in Hatay province, according to NTV. One video showed aid workers throwing clothes randomly into a crowd as people tried to grab whatever they could.

Soylu said rescue efforts had ended in seven parts of Kahramanmaraş, where authorities report that 30,000 tents have been set up, with tens of thousands of people sheltering in schools and sports halls.

Turkish Vice President Fuat Oktay late on Sunday said 108,000 buildings were damaged across the quake-hit zone with 1.2 million people being housed in student accommodation and 400,000 people evacuated from the affected region.

The economic cost of the disaster could be as much as \$84.1 billion, Turkish employers' association Turkonfed said in a report Monday.



## Meloni Triumphs in Regional Votes, Strengthens Grip on Power



ROME (Dispatches) - Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni and her coalition allies secured emphatic election wins in the two wealthiest regions of the country on Monday, strengthening the right's grip on power amid growing voter apathy.

Less than five months after sweeping to power at the national level, the conservative bloc took more than 55% of the vote in Lombardy, home to the financial capital Milan, and around 50% in Lazio, which is centered on Rome.

"This result consolidates the center-right and strengthens the work of the government," Meloni wrote on Twitter.

It was the first electoral test for Meloni since she won power last September and confirmed that she is still enjoying a strong honeymoon with voters, helped by a weak opposition that failed to present a unified front in either region.

However, the resounding victory was partially overshadowed by the fact that only 40% of people cast a ballot -- the lowest turnout ever recorded for Lazio and Lombardy, which together account for just over a quarter of the Italian population.

"It is unfortunate that the turnout was very, very low. We must try to rebuild the relationship between citizens and institutions," Fabio Rampelli, a senior member of Meloni's Brothers of Italy party, told RAI television.

While the right already controlled Lombardy, they grabbed Lazio from the centre-left, meaning conservatives now run 15 of Italy's 20 regions as well as central government, giving it a unique opportunity to shape domestic politics.

Brothers of Italy confirmed its position as the most popular party in the country, winning an estimated 33% backing in Lazio and 26% in Lombardy -- in line with the 2022 general election.

However, fears inside the coalition that support might crumble for Meloni's two main partners proved unfounded. Matteo Salvini's League strengthened its standing in its Lombardy heartlands while Silvio Berlusconi's Forza Italia easily outpaced centrist rivals who had courted its supporters.

The result offered no comfort to the centre-left camp, comprising the Democratic Party (PD), the 5-Star Movement and so-called Third Pole, which is riven by mutual loathing.



## Japan Rolls Out Humble And Lovable Delivery Robots

TOKYO (Dispatches) - "Excuse me, coming through," a four-wheeled robot chirps as it dodges pedestrians on a street outside Tokyo, part of an experiment businesses hope will tackle labour shortages and rural isolation.

From April, revised traffic laws will allow self-driving delivery robots to navigate streets across Japan.

Proponents hope the machines could eventually help elderly people in depopulated rural areas get access to goods, while also addressing a shortage of delivery workers in a country with chronic labour shortages.

There are challenges to overcome, acknowledges Hisashi Taniguchi, president of Tokyo-based robotics firm ZMP, including safety concerns.

"They are still newcomers in human society, so it's natural they're seen with a bit of discomfort," he told AFP.

The robots won't be operating entirely alone, with humans monitoring remotely and able to intervene.

Taniguchi said it's important the robots "are humble and lovable" to inspire confidence.

ZMP has partnered with behemoths such as Japan Post Holdings in its trials of delivery robots in Tokyo. Its "DeliRo" robot aims for a charming look, featuring big, expressive eyes that can be made teary in sadness if pedestrians block its way.

"Every kid around here knows its name," he said.

There is a serious purpose behind the cuteness.

Japan has one of the world's oldest populations, with nearly 30 per cent of its citizens aged over 65. Many live in depopulated rural areas that lack easy access to daily necessities.

Labour shortages in its cities and new rules limiting overtime for truck drivers also make it difficult for businesses to keep up with pandemic-fuelled e-commerce and delivery demands.

"The shortage of workers in transport will be a challenge in the future," said engineer Dai Fujikawa of electronics giant Panasonic, which is trialling delivery robots in Tokyo and nearby Fujisawa.

"I hope our robots will be used to take over where needed and help ease the labour crunch," he told AFP.

Similar robots are already in use in countries such as the United Kingdom and China but there are concerns in Japan about everything from collisions to theft.

Regulations set a maximum speed of six kilometres per hour, meaning the "chances of severe injury in the event of a collision are relatively small", said Yutaka Uchimura, a robotic engineering professor at Shibaura Institute of Technology (SIT).

But if a robot "moves off the sidewalk and collides with a car due to some discrepancy between the pre-installed location data and the actual environment, that would be extremely worrying", he said.

Panasonic says its "Hakobo" robot can judge autonomously when to turn as well as detect obstacles, such as construction and approaching bikes, and stop.

One person at the Fujisawa control centre simultaneously monitors four robots via cameras and is automatically alerted whenever their robotic charges are stuck or stopped by obstacles, Panasonic's Fujikawa said.

Humans will intervene in such cases, as well as in high-risk areas such as junctions. Hakobo is programmed to capture and send real-time images of traffic lights to operators and await instructions.

Test runs so far have ranged from delivering medicine and food to Fujisawa residents to peddling snacks in Tokyo with disarming patter such as: "Another cold day, isn't it? How about some hot drinks?"

"I think it's a great idea," passerby Naoko Kamimura said after buying cough drops from Hakobo on a Tokyo street.



## What We Know About Mysterious Objects Downed by U.S.

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - The downing of a huge Chinese balloon off the U.S. coast, followed by the shootdowns of two smaller objects over Alaska and Canada, has raised concerns about North American security -- and further strained relations with China.

The drama began in late January, when a giant Chinese balloon -- dubbed a spy craft by U.S. officials -- drifted for days through U.S. skies before being shot down February 4 by an F-22 jet off the South Carolina coast. China insisted the balloon was conducting weather research.

The Pentagon said it had a gondola the size of three buses and weighing more than a ton; that it was equipped with multiple antennas, and had solar panels large enough to power several intelligence-gathering sensors.

Then Friday, U.S. fighter jets downed another object off northern Alaska, the military said, adding it was "within US sovereign airspace over US territorial water." It lacked any system of propulsion or control, officials said.

On Saturday, a U.S. F-22 jet, acting on U.S. and Canadian orders, downed a "high-altitude airborne object" over Canada's central Yukon territory, about 100 miles (160 kilometers) from the U.S. border, saying it posed a threat to civilian flight. Canada described it as cylindrical and smaller than the initial balloon. Canadian Defense Minister Anita Anand would not speculate on whether it originated in China.

U.S. Senate majority leader Charles Schumer, who was briefed by the Biden administration following the latest incident, said Sunday that the two latter objects were likely balloons, "but much smaller than the first one," both flying at around 40,000 feet (12,200 meters).

Officials described the two new objects as about the size of a Volkswagen Beetle.

Military teams, working from planes, boats and minisubs are scouring the shallow waters off South Carolina, and military images showed the recovery of a large piece of balloon. The Federal Bureau of Investigation is taking custody of the debris for analysis.

Operations to recover the second object continue on sea ice near Deadhorse, Alaska. "Arctic weather conditions, including wind chill, snow and limited daylight, are a factor," the military said.

Recovery teams -- backed by a Canadian CP-140 patrol aircraft -- are searching for debris from the third object in the Yukon, Anand said Saturday.

The Pentagon said the FBI is working closely with Canadian police.

U.S. officials say images of the first balloon show it had surveillance equipment that could intercept telecommunications. US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said it was intended "to surveil strategic sites in the continental United States."

A former chair of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, Michael Mullen, suggested China, or some in its military leadership, intentionally wanted to subvert an impending visit by U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken.

The United States has said the balloons were part of a "fleet" that has spanned five continents. Some analysts say it may be the start of a major Chinese surveillance effort targeting foreign military capabilities ahead of possible acute tensions over Taiwan in coming years.

Analysts said U.S. and Canadian intelligence constantly receive huge amounts of raw data, and generally screened some out to focus on the threat of incoming missiles, not slow-moving objects like balloons.

"Now, of course, we're looking for them. So I think we're probably finding more stuff," Jim Himes, the top Democrat on the House Intelligence Committee, told NBC.



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## Azeri Oil Leaves Turkey's Ceyhan for First Time Since Quakes

BAKU (Dispatches) - The Nordlotus sailed from Turkey's Ceyhan oil export hub loaded with Azeri crude, the first such shipment since earthquakes hit the region on Feb. 6, ship-tracking data showed and a trading source said.

The tanker carried 682,500 barrels of oil and began loading on Feb. 12, Turkish state energy company BOTAS said in a statement on Monday.

The Alfa Baltica was also shown at a jetty at the Botas Ceyhan oil terminal on Monday and was loading Azeri crude, the trade source said.



## China's CNPC Set to Seal Mega Qatari LNG Deal

SINGAPORE (Dispatches) - China National Petroleum Corp (CNPC) is close to finalising a deal to buy liquefied natural gas (LNG) from QatarEnergy over nearly 30 years from the Middle Eastern exporter's massive North Field expansion project, three people with knowledge of the matter said.

If sealed, this would be the second such deal between major LNG exporter Qatar and the world's no.2 LNG buyer, as Beijing looks to beef up gas supply and diversify its sources in a drive to replace coal and cut carbon emissions.

CNPC's talks follow a deal announced last November by China's Sinopec, in which QatarEnergy agreed to supply 4 million tons of LNG annually for 27 years, the longest duration LNG supply contract ever signed by Qatar.

"CNPC has agreed on the major terms with Qatar in a deal that will be very similar to Sinopec's," said a Beijing-based state-oil official who declined to be named as he is not authorized to speak to the media.

CNPC declined to comment. QatarEnergy did not respond to a request for comment.

"This is a good move for CNPC, securing additional long term supply from a reliable and well positioned partner. This will further insulate from market volatility, diversify supply while optimising between the state owned units," said Toby Copson, global head of trading at Trident LNG.

Wei Xiong, analyst at Rystad Energy, said although CNPC dominates China's piped gas imports, it still needs other import options to mitigate any potential risk, in line with China's energy policy on supply diversification. Therefore the deal will eventually strengthen the energy giant's competitiveness.

Sinopec said in November the gas purchase agreement was part of an "integrated partnership", which indicated the Chinese firm could be considering acquiring a stake in Qatar's North Field expansion export facility.

The two companies have yet to announce any stake investment. As Beijing's ties with the United States and Australia, Qatar's two biggest LNG export rivals, are strained, Chinese national energy firms increasingly see Qatar as a safer target for resource investment.

Sinopec and CNPC would not opt for such long-duration supply contracts unless they were also hoping to acquire small stakes in the North Field expansion export facility, a second Beijing-based state gas official said.

QatarEnergy has maintained a 75% stake overall in the North Field expansion, that will cost at least \$30 billion, and could give up to a 5% stake to some buyers, QatarEnergy Chief Executive Officer Saad al-Kaabi has said.

Kaabi has said the state energy company is negotiating supply deals with many potential buyers and they would be announced when agreements are reached.

State-controlled CNPC, China's top gas importer, last year also stepped up gas imports from Russia, by pipeline and tanker, snapping up supply that was no longer going to Europe due to sanctions amid Moscow's war on Ukraine.

Chinese customs data showed the country's imports of Qatari LNG surged 75% last year from 2021 to 15.7 million tons, making up a quarter of the nation's total imports, while China's total LNG imports shrank nearly 20%.

In contrast, imports from Australia and the United States dropped 30% and 77% respectively from 2021, to 21.9 million tons and 2.09 million tons.

QatarEnergy last year signed five deals with international majors for the North Field project, a two-phase expansion plan that will boost Qatar's liquefaction capacity to 126 million tons per year by 2027 from 77 million tons.

## EU Economy Projected to Avoid Recession

LONDON (Dispatches) - A more positive picture of the EU economy has been predicted: it is to avoid recession with lower inflation and higher growth than had been forecast.

The bloc will now avoid a technical recession, the EU said in its winter economic forecast, which is when the economy goes through a six-month period of economic contraction.

Recession had been forecast in the EU's last economic forecast in November, but instead the annual growth rate for 2022 is estimated to be 3.5%.

Growth will continue throughout this year, the latest forecast says. The economy across the 27 countries will grow 0.8% in 2023, the union now expects - up from the 0.3% predicted in the autumn economic forecast.

The growth rate for 2024 remains unchanged at 1.6%.

Similarly, inflation has reached its peak and also been revised downwards for both this year and next, and unemployment remains at an all-time low at 6.1% The rate of price increases dropped from 11.1% in November to 10.4% in December last year, but it's still up from 5.3% a year before.

The decline was mostly driven by the slowing rate of energy price increases. Next year, inflation is forecast to fall to 6.4% in 2023 and to 2.8% in 2024, meaning higher prices will remain.

The more positive outlook is down to a reduced reliance on gas combined with lower gas prices, despite energy costs overall remaining high. More power was sourced from elsewhere and gas consumption dropped, which along with cheaper wholesale gas prices has helped growth.

## India Aims to Triple Defense Exports to \$5b

BENGALURU (Dispatches) - Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi set out ambitions to more than triple annual defense exports to \$5 billion over the next two years, as arms firms flocked to a major air show for a slice of the nation's massive import budget.

The country is looking to sign defense deals worth 750 billion rupees (\$9 billion) at the biennial five-day Aero India event, its biggest ever, as its airlines try to complete jetliner purchases to meet civilian demand and press global aircraft manufacturers to produce more locally, mainly through partnerships. India has been one of the world's biggest importers of defense equipment for decades, but it has punched below its weight in the global arms export market.

New Delhi's export ambitions are a sign of its growing clout as it uses the leverage of huge imports to attract investment in its domestic industry.

"Today, India is not just a market for defense companies, it is also a potential defense partner," Modi said in a speech at the show. "I call on India's private sector to invest more and more in the country's defense sector."

India exports defense products to 75 countries, he added.

Past Indian exports include Hindustan Aeronautics Dhruv helicopters to the Philippines, Mauritius and Ecuador and Russia-India venture BrahMos Aerospace's supersonic cruise missiles to the Philippines. HAL has also offered its Tejas light fighter jet for sale to Malaysia.

India has also exported other items such as offshore patrol vessels, coastal surveillance systems, avionics, chaff rocket launchers and spares for radars.

The air show aims to promote exports of indigenous air platforms such as Tejas, Dhruv, HTT-40 training aircraft, Dornier light utility helicopter and the light combat helicopter.

India also wants smaller domestic companies and start-ups to make parts for large defense products globally as well as to attract foreign investment for joint product development and production.

Defense experts were circumspect about India's ambition.

"From just a 0.2% share in global arms exports, becoming a major exporter is a long haul," said Amit Cowshish, a former financial advisor in the Defense ministry and a former distinguished fellow at the Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defense Studies and Analyses in New Delhi.

"Some of the biggest importing countries, even if they are willing, will find it difficult to withstand pressures from Europe and the U.S. to consider buying whatever little we have to offer by way of major equipment and platforms," Cowshish said.

## Global Business Community Pledges Millions After Turkey Quakes

ANKARA (Dispatches) - Dozens of major global companies have pledged millions of dollars in assistance and offered services after massive earthquakes devastated the southeastern region of Turkey a week ago.

The magnitude 7.7 and 7.6 quakes struck nine hours apart in southeastern Turkey, and severely hit northern Syria as well, on Feb. 6 killing more than 31,640. The death toll is expected to rise considerably as search teams recover more bodies from the rubble.

International companies have joined the massive humanitarian operations both through cash donations and extensions of urgently needed supplies and equipment for some 13.5 million people estimated to be affected in the 10 provinces in Turkey, and in northwest Syria.

The amount of reported donations has exceeded \$39 million as of Feb. 11, according to figures from the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation and companies' own data.

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation had launched private-public coordination efforts and united the American business community in supporting the post-earthquake humanitarian efforts in both Turkey and Syria.

Among companies, financial services giant Allianz Group extended 6 million euros (\$6.41 million) and said it would add another 1 million euros to donations by its employees and affiliated agencies.

The technology consulting firm Accenture said it was donating \$1 million to humanitarian organizations and would organize a donation campaign to assist the region.

E-commerce giant Amazon said it would provide donations of products and logistical support in the area and would be sending \$500,000 in cash donations to groups, including the World Food Program (WFP), Save the Children, UNICEF, Turkish Red Crescent (Kızılay), AKUT Search and Rescue Association, and the Ahbap Foundation.

It also announced it created the Turkey Disaster Relief Hub near Istanbul to quickly provide relief items to the impacted areas in Turkey and Syria.

Apple CEO Tim Cook said the technology giant "will be donating to relief and recovery efforts."

"Sending our thoughts and condolences to the people of Turkey, Syria, and anyone affected by the devastating earthquakes," Cook wrote on Twitter.

Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp owner Meta Platforms said it was donating \$550,000 aimed at assisting aid and recovery in Turkey and Syria.

Google CEO Sundar Pichai said the search engine company had activated "SOS alerts" to aid relief operations. The service will provide emergency information to the people impacted by the disaster. Pichai added that Google and its employees would offer support to the victims of the tragedy.

German multinational pharmaceuticals company Bayer said it had created a 1.5 million euros emergency fund to assist the population in the affected regions.

Of that sum, 500,000 euros each will be extended to Ahbab and Kızılay, and 200,000 euros to the German Red Cross for disaster response in Syria.

## South Korea's Current Account Surplus Plunges in 2022



SEOUL (Dispatches) - South Korea's current account surplus plunged from US\$85.23 billion in 2021 to an 11-year low of \$29.83 billion in 2022.

South Korea's current account surplus dropped from \$85.23 billion in 2021 to an 11-year low of \$29.83 billion in 2022. This is because its goods account surplus dropped with energy prices soaring to cause an overwhelming increase in imports.

The same is likely to apply to this year. The South Korean government's current account surplus estimate for this year is about \$20 billion and those of the Bank of Korea and the Korea Development Institute are \$28 billion and \$27.5 billion or so, respectively.

According to experts, demand rebound in the semiconductor industry and resumption of economic activities in China are the two most important factors for the surplus to increase. The industry accounts for the largest portion of South Korea's total exports, 18.9 percent last year, and its current account balance has moved in close connection with the cycle of the industry. The resumption can have a positive effect on the service balance side. Last year, South Korea succeeded in reducing its service account deficit to mitigate the impact on the goods side at least to some extent.

They also point out that any delay in current account recovery may lead to a higher level of volatility in the foreign exchange market. "The South Korean currency cannot but be very sensitive to foreign fund movements if the current account surplus does not rebound," one of them said.

## Indonesian Economic Growth Rises to Nine-Year High

JAKARTA (Dispatches) - Indonesia's economic growth accelerated to a nine-year high in 2022 despite global uncertainty and a final-quarter slowdown, official data showed yesterday, owing to soaring commodity prices and easing COVID-19 curbs.

Indonesia was badly affected by the coronavirus pandemic, with its exports and tourism-reliant economy taking a massive hit in 2020 as GDP shrunk by 2.07 percent, its first recession since the 1997 Asian financial crisis. But Southeast Asia's largest economy has bounced back since then, posting economic growth last year of 5.31 percent, Statistics Indonesia said yesterday, the highest level since 2013.

"The figures show that Indonesia's economy grew solidly in 2022," statistics agency head Margo Yuwono said.

He said growth was propelled by high export prices and the lifting of travel restrictions, with dropped quarantine requirements in March spurring business and spiking tourist arrivals.



"The reopening of almost all international airports has boosted people's economic activity," Yuwono said.

The country welcomed more than 740,000 visitors in the first half of the year, an increase of more than 900 percent on-year.

The annual rise came despite slowing growth in the final quarter of the year after a strong July-September. The economy expanded 5.01 percent on-year in October-December, down from 5.72 percent in the previous three months.

But it still maintained its annual rise from pandemic lows after expanding 3.69 percent in 2021 as coronavirus cases started to decline and export prices for key commodities like palm oil, coal and nickel rose significantly.



## Foes Pretend They Had Not Been Engaged in Iran Unrest

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian has said that following disappointment of a multi-layered hybrid warfare, the enemies tried to pretend in diplomatic messages and meetings that they had not been involved in recent unrest in the Islamic country. Amirabdollahian made the remarks in a meeting of the ministries and executive apparatus of the Islamic Republic in Tehran on Monday, noting that the foes have done whatever they could by using media outlets, security services, as well as social media, against the Islamic Republic

of Iran. The United States, Israel and their Western allies have committed whatever they wanted against Iran, the foreign minister said, underlining that definitely the wise stances adopted by the Supreme Leader, the Iranians' insight, as well the great public support for the Islamic establishment, caused the failure of all plots hatched by the enemies; then, the great nation conveyed the strong message on February 11 (Bahman 22nd) celebrations – the 44th victory anniversary of the Islamic Revolution – that Iran would not be affected by the velvet coup.



# Seizing Russian Assets Is Easier Said Than Done

LONDON (Dispatches) - The idea is seductively simple: the West should turn over billions of dollars of frozen Russian assets to Ukraine to fund reconstruction. But it faces major legal problems which mean little progress has been made.

After the Kremlin's invasion of Ukraine last February, unprecedented economic sanctions against Moscow saw an estimated \$350 billion in state assets, foreign reserves and oligarch property frozen by Western banks and officials.

Nearly 12 months on, politicians and campaigners in the West are pushing for this idle wealth to be put to work rebuilding the shattered infrastructure, homes and businesses destroyed during Russia's aggression.

"So much damage has been done and the country that did the damage should pay," Canadian Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland told an audience at the World Economic Forum last month.

In December, Canada began proceedings for the first time to turn over around \$26 million belonging to a sanctioned company owned by oligarch Roman Abramovich -- something Russia's ambassador likened to "robbery in broad daylight".

Earlier this month, the European Commission pledged to "step up its work towards the use of Russia's frozen assets to support Ukraine's reconstruction". Poland and three Baltic states pressed publicly for action "as soon as possible".

Estonia has announced plans to be a frontrunner in the EU, drawing up its own confiscation plans.

"Putin broke it, he should fix it," former US investor and activist Bill Browder, a dogged campaigner against the Kremlin, told AFP in a recent interview.

The man behind the Magnitsky Act -- pioneering legislation to sanction Russian government officials involved in human rights abuses -- is now seeking to build pressure on lawmakers.

"There are 50 different alternative proposals for how to do it. And if you want to make sure that something never gets done, present 50 different proposals," Browder said.

The US Congress has been holding hearings on ways in which US law could be changed to enable permanent seizures, although President Joe Biden's administration has been publicly cautious about the idea.

Legal experts make a distinction between private assets frozen by Western governments -- such as an oligarch's yacht -- and state property, such as the foreign currency reserves of Russia's central bank.

In the case of private assets, legal safeguards mean Western states are permitted to permanently seize them only in very limited circumstances -- usually when they can be proven to be the proceeds of crime.

And even though Russian oligarchs operate in the murky weeds of Russian capitalism "we don't really know that the properties that have been frozen are the proceeds of crime," Anton Moiseienko from the Australian National University told AFP.

Seizing them poses a challenge to fundamental legal and human rights, such as the right to property, protection from arbitrary punishment, or the right to a free trial.

The West's public commitment to respecting the rule of law would also be on the line.

"How are you going to prove that they (the seized assets) constitute the proceeds of crime without the cooperation of Russia?" Moiseienko, an international law expert, added.

Other problems arise due to bilateral or international investment treaties signed with Russia, potentially exposing states to legal claims in international arbitration courts further down the line.



Canada so far is the only state so far to take what Moiseienko calls a "uniquely aggressive approach".

"It will be interesting to see how it plays out in court," he added.

State assets such as central bank reserves pose different but equally knotty problems because they are covered by so-called "sovereign immunity" -- an understanding that one state will not seize another's property.

Western central banks such as the Federal Reserve, the European Central Bank or the Bank of Japan are thought to have blocked reserves worth around \$300 billion held with them by Russia.

"The customary international law of state immunity generally protects state assets from seizure," Paul B. Stephen wrote in the Capital Markets Law Journal last June in a review of existing legislation.

"Exceptions exist, but their scope is unclear," he added.

A lively debate has taken place between scholars since Russia's invasion about the circumstances under which Western states could "vest" assets such as central bank reserves.

Some have invoked the international law of countermeasures, which holds that one state can impose costs on another when it is acting outside the bounds of international law.

But so-called "countermeasures" are meant to be reversible.

Many lawyers believe Ukraine's best chance of compensation is to try to force a favourable agreement to end the fighting, which would include reparations -- which it is entitled to under international law.

But others argue for a more radical approach which would send a message to other states, including China.

"It seems illogical that Putin can invent new types of crimes and we cannot reinvent a legal framework to respond to those crimes," Browder told AFP.

## China Needs Stronger Family-Focused Policies to Spur Births



BEIJING (Dispatches) - China should enhance incentives for people to build families and boost the birth rate as the country's now-falling population could threaten the world's second-biggest economy, a Chinese family planning expert said.

Mainland China's population fell by 850,000 last year, the first decline since 1961, to 1.42 billion, the government said last month, potentially falling behind India's as the world's largest, the start of a likely long decline with profound implications for its economy and the world.

Wang Pei'an, deputy director of the China Family Planning Association, said on Saturday more tax incentives should be created based on the family unit that could encourage births.

Speaking at the third Chinese and Development Forum in Beijing, Wang cited a growing trend among younger generations to forestall having children. He called for more incentives around employment, medical care, social security and housing that could encourage people to build families. The government imposed a one-child policy on families in much of the country between 1980 and 2015, but with the population now falling, the authorities are scrambling to prop up the birth rate.

In calling for more supportive measures, health officials cite factors such as worries over expenses and younger women focusing on careers.

The average Chinese household shrank to 2.62 people in 2020, a decrease of 0.48 from 2010, according to a survey cited by state broadcaster CCTV.

A 2021 survey found women born in the 1990s felt the ideal number of kids to have was 1.54, while for those born in the 2000s it was just 1.19. The percentage of women who never had children surged to nearly 10% in 2020 from 6.1% in 2015.

## North American Companies Notch Another Record Year for Robot Orders

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - North American companies struggling to hire workers in the tightest labor market in decades brought on more robots last year than ever before, with many earmarked for new electric vehicle and battery factories under construction.

Demand for robots appears to have slackened near the end of the year, though, raising questions about how strong 2023 will be in the face of shifting household consumption patterns and the rising interest rates engineered by central bankers to bring high inflation under control.

Companies, overwhelmingly located in the United States but including some in Canada and Mexico, ordered just over 44,100 robots in 2022, an 11% increase over the previous year and a new record, according to data compiled by the Association for Advancing Automation, an industry group also known as A3. The value of those machines totaled \$2.38 billion, an 18% increase over the prior year, according to the data.

The "labor shortage doesn't seem to be letting up," said Jeff Burnstein, president of A3. Many companies, scrambling to find workers amid the lowest U.S. unemployment rate since 1969, see automation as a quick fix.

Burnstein said there was a visible slowdown in orders at the end of the year, which raises a question about how 2023 will evolve. "The fourth quarter was really propped up by the strength in the auto industry," he said. "We saw a falling-off in non-automotive" orders.

A shift away from pandemic-era consumer behavior likely played a role in the orders drop-off in some segments, he added. "You saw companies like Amazon put a pause on building new warehouses, which means they probably canceled or delayed purchases of new automation."

Supply chain problems may also have distorted last year's results. Burnstein said robot makers saw some customers place extra orders during the COVID-19 health crisis - just to ensure they would get part of what they needed.

More than half of last year's orders came from automakers and their suppliers - a group that has long led the way in automation of U.S. factories. New plants for electric vehicles, batteries and battery recycling have been announced since the beginning of 2021 at a cost of \$160 billion, according to Atlas Public Policy, a U.S.-based research group working with automakers and environmental groups.

### Iran Can Become One of...

FROM PAGE 1

International Tourism and Related Industries Exhibition is organized on a regular basis. It is an effective platform for finding new partners, sharing experience and evaluating trends in the general tourism sector, to which Armenian tourism companies should also be invited (actively participate). Within the framework of the exhibition, Iran's Minister of Tourism Ezatullah Zarghami met with experts from Armenia at the invitation of the IRI Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts and the 'Iran-Armenian Friendship Association' NGO.

It is noteworthy that 116,430 tourists from the IRI arrived in Armenia in 2022, which is 27.5 percent more than last year. Although the total number of tourists departing from Armenia increased by 2.6 times during 2022, the tourist flows of Armenia to the IRI are very small, which is mainly due to the lack of and sometimes incorrect information about Iran, the

passivity of Iranian and Armenian travel companies, and other circumstances.

However, in recent years, Kish (in Hormozgan Province), a small Iranian island in the Persian Gulf, has become a new and active tourist destination for Armenian tourists. It is one of the largest and most famous beach resorts in Iran and the Persian Gulf. The entire territory of the island is a free economic zone where you can buy goods of various importance at very affordable prices.

Cheap airline tickets can contribute to the growth of tourist flows [from Armenia] to Iran. I should mention that Armenian and Iranian airlines have several regular flights a week.

The IRI implements its foreign policy on the principles of dignity, wisdom and expediency, which allows developing and expanding Armenian-Iranian trade and economic ties in all directions.

### Iran to Build...

FROM PAGE 1

Reuters, citing an unnamed source, said construction of the India Urquiza must start soon. By the end of the contract, PDVSA will have paid Iran about \$168.6 million for the four vessels, according to the proposal.

Iran's SADRA has built two vessels for PDVSA, the Aframax Arita and Anita, that can each carry 500,000-800,000 barrels of oil.

The Arita — now renamed Colon — first set sail in 2017. The Anita departed Iran in late December carrying an Iranian condensate cargo for PDVSA.

According to monitoring firm TankerTrackers.com, two separate vessels chartered by Iran's Naftiran Intertrade Company (NICO), the supertankers Wen Yao and Sea Cliff, are expected to deliver Iranian condensate to Venezuela this month as part of an oil swap with PDVSA.

Both Iranian and Venezuelan oil sectors are under US sanctions that have pushed the two countries closer to boost trade and help each other.

Earlier this month, Venezuelan Oil Minister Tareck El Aissami hailed Iran's experiences in the field of energy and technology, saying his country is willing to benefit from them and forge closer cooperation with Tehran.

Aissami's remarks during a meeting Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abollahian in Caracas coincided with reports that Iranian and Venezuelan firms would start in the coming weeks a 100-day revamp of the South American nation's largest refining complex to restore its crude distillation capacity.

The effort by PDVSA and the National Iranian Oil Refining and Distribution Company (NIORDC) to boost fuel output at the Paraguana Refining Center marks a step toward ending Venezuela's reliance on US refinery technology, Reuters said.

### No World Power...

FROM PAGE 1

The IRGC commander also appreciated the Iranian people's "insight and intelligence" in the face of the conspiracies hatched by the enemies, saying that separatist groups dream of wresting control over the Iranian provinces of Kurdistan and Sistan and Baluchestan.

Elsewhere in his speech, General Sharif slammed Emmanuel Macron and Frank-Walter Steinmeier, the French and German presidents, for their recent meetings with anti-Iran elements, saying the nation will never forget the crimes committed by the two European countries throughout the Iraqi-imposed war in the 1980s.

French Mirage aircraft bombarded Iranian cities while German mustard gas provided to the Ba'athist regime affected many Iranians, he added.

The IRGC spokesman also lashed out at European officials for allowing members of the anti-Iran terrorist cult Mujahedin-e-Khalq Organization (MKO) to rally outside the European Parliament.

The MKO's infamous ringleader Maryam Rajavi "thinks that our people have forgotten the crimes of the MKO," he said. "They killed 17,000 Iranian people and officials and embraced [Iraq's] Ba'athist party during the imposed war. They stood in the ranks of traitors to their nation and killed dozens of the country's youths with the help of [Iraqi dictator] Saddam Hussein."

"The IRGC must be added to the list of designated terrorist organizations by the European Union," Rajavi told the attendees on Sunday.

The MKO terrorist group is responsible for causing the largest part of the 17,000-plus fatalities that have resulted from acts of terror since the 1979 victory of Iran's Islamic Revolution.

### Iran Exports to Iraq...

FROM PAGE 1

But accessing that money is a different story.

Since the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, Iraq's foreign currency reserves have been housed at the United States' Federal Reserve, giving the Americans significant control over Iraq's supply of dollars. The Central Bank of Iraq requests dollars from the Fed and then sells them to commercial banks and exchange houses at the official exchange rate through a mechanism known as the "dollar auction."

The system of keeping Iraq's oil revenues at the Fed was originally imposed by UN Security Council resolutions after the 2003 ouster of Iraq's Saddam Hussein by the US-led invasion. Later, Iraq chose to maintain the system to protect its revenues against potential lawsuits, particularly in connection to Iraq's 1990s invasion of Kuwait.

"The average supply of dollars, which is completely controlled by Washington, is now between 79 million and 84 million dollars per day, and in fact, the United States is responsible for the sharp decrease in the supply of dollars in Iraq," Rabihavi said.

As a result, far fewer of the dollars are going toward buying imports as well, down to around 34% from 90%, which has resulted in steep rises in commodity prices.



## World Cup-Winning Captain Morgan Retires From Cricket

LONDON (Dispatches) - Eoin Morgan, who captained England to a thrilling One Day International World Cup success in 2019, said he was retiring from all forms of cricket. The 36-year-old Ireland-born batsman had already called it a day in terms of international cricket last June when he stepped down as England ODI skipper. Morgan captained England in a record 126 ODIs and 72 T20s. His 118 wins as skipper across the two formats is also a record.

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## Swiatek Dominates WTA Rankings

PARIS (Dispatches) - Poland's Iga Swiatek continued to dominate the WTA rankings, with the only notable change the exit of Estonia's Annett Kontaveit from the Top 20. A distant second behind Swiatek, was the Belarussian Aryna Sabalenka, who won the Australian Open. Tunisian Ons Jabeur remained third. Kontaveit, who won the St Petersburg tournament a year ago but lost in the round of 16 in Abu Dhabi last week, dropped nine spots to 27th.

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SPORTS

WEDNESDAY FEBRUARY 15, 2023

# Mahomes Leads Chiefs to Super Bowl Win Over Eagles

GLENDAL (Dispatches) - Patrick Mahomes proved why he is the NFL's Most Valuable Player as he shrugged off an ankle injury to lead the Kansas City Chiefs to a dramatic 38-35 win over the Philadelphia Eagles to claim their second Super Bowl in four years.

Kansas City's hopes of returning home with the Lombardi Trophy looked bleak late in the opening half when quarterback Mahomes appeared to re-injure the right ankle that had been a major worry coming into the game.

Grimacing in pain after a tackle, Mahomes hobbled off the field and slammed his helmet to the turf as the Chiefs headed into halftime trailing 24-14.

But when the teams returned after the break a resilient Mahomes produced a heroic effort, tossing two fourth-quarter touchdowns and engineering a final drive to set up Harrison Butker's 27-yard game-winning field goal with eight seconds to play.

Mahomes, who also threw for a touchdown in the first half, had a total of 21 completions for 182 yards and rushed for 44-yards.

"I told you all this week there was nothing going to keep me off this football field," said Mahomes after accepting the Super Bowl MVP award to go along with the NFL MVP honor he received on Thursday.

"It's the Super Bowl, you can worry about getting healthy in the off-season.

"I fought through and we were able to win,"

## IOC Not on Wrong Side of History Over Russia

COURCHEVEL (Dispatches) - International Olympic Committee (IOC) President Thomas Bach said his organization is not on the wrong side of history after opening the door for Russian and Belarussian athletes to participate in next year's Summer Games in Paris.

The IOC received a backlash after setting out a path last month for athletes of both countries to earn slots for the Olympics through Asian qualifying and to compete as neutrals, with no flags or anthems.

Athletes from Russia and its neighbor Belarus have been banned from many international competitions in the wake of Moscow's invasion of Ukraine a year ago.

In a letter to Bach last week, Ukrainian athletes said the IOC was "on the wrong side of history" after Bach had urged Ukraine to drop threats of a boycott.

When asked if the IOC was on the wrong side of history, Bach told reporters yesterday: "No, history will show who is doing more for peace. The ones who try to keep lines open, to communicate, or the ones who want to isolate or divide.

"We're trying to find a solution that is giving justice to the mission of sport, which is to unify, not to contribute to more confrontation, more escalation."

Lithuania's sports minister said on Friday a group of 35 countries, including the United States, Germany and Australia, will demand Russian and Belarussian athletes are banned from the 2024 Olympics.

## Bencic Clinches Abu Dhabi Title

ABU DHABI (Dispatches) - Olympic champion Belinda Bencic saved three match points to defeat Liudmila Samsonova in the Abu Dhabi final for the eighth title of her career.

The 25-year-old world number nine came through 1-6, 7-6 (10/8), 6-4, saving the three championship points in a marathon second-set tiebreak.



Mahomes' play against the NFL's top-ranked defense was worth the price of admission alone, even if tickets were going for \$3,200 on resale sites.

The 27-year-old has been described as a "magician" and an "escape artist" for his ability to avoid tacklers but on Sunday Mahomes showcased his courage and steel, playing through the pain and saying he did not take any painkillers.

"Well he's the MVP. That's all the needs to be said, right? MVP. And you saw it tonight," said Kansas City coach Andy Reid. "He's seen the greats and he strive to be the greatest. "That's what he wants to do, and that's the way he goes about his business. He does it humbly."

Hurts, another leading candidate for the NFL MVP award, turned in an almost equally dazzling performance, running for three touchdowns and a Super Bowl record 70 yards. He also threw for a touchdown.

While there were question marks over Mahomes' ankle there was no doubting his determination as he started the third quarter by leading a 75-yard drive capped off by a one-yard run by Isiah Pacheco to cut the Philadelphia lead to 24-21.

Jake Elliott booted his second field goal to increase the Eagles' advantage before Mahomes found Kadarius Toney with a five-yard touchdown strike for the Chiefs' first lead of the night at 28-27.

Toney returned an Eagles punt 65-yards, the longest in Super Bowl history, to the Philadelphia five, where Mahomes found Skyy Moore for a four-yard touchdown to increase their lead to 35-27

But the Eagles were not about to wave the white flag, Hurts spotting a wide open Devonta Smith at the two before diving over for the touchdown himself.

Philadelphia tied the game 35-35 with a two-point conversion with five minutes to play.

## Qatari Investors Preparing Imminent Bid For Man United

LONDON (Dispatches) - Qatari investors are preparing to make a bid to buy Premier League club Manchester United "in the coming days", Bloomberg reported, citing sources familiar with the deal.

The report added that the consortium will submit an initial bid for the club by the end of the week, and that officials from the Qatar Investment Authority are helping with preparations for the bid.

Reuters has contacted Manchester United for comment.

Jim Ratcliffe's company INEOS formally entered the bidding process to buy United last month after the club's U.S. owners, the Glazer family, said in November they had begun looking at options including new investment or a potential sale.

Earlier this month, the Daily Mail newspaper reported that Qatari investors are planning to make a huge bid to buy Premier League club Manchester United.

The Daily Mail report stated the interested investors are separate from Qatar Sports Investments (QSI), which owns Paris St Germain, and that the money will come from an "individual fund" rather than a sovereign wealth fund.

United, managed by Erik ten Hag, are third in the league on 46 points after 23 games, two points behind Manchester City and five adrift of leaders Arsenal.



# Djokovic Remains Top

PARIS (Dispatches) - American Taylor Fritz moved up one spot to No. 7 in the ATP rankings today as Novak Djokovic remained comfortably in first place.

Fritz, 25, rose to his highest career ranking despite a surprise loss to Wu Yibing in the Dallas semi-finals.

Yesterday, the 23-year-old Wu beat another American, John Isner, in a marathon final, to

become the first Chinese man to win an ATP Tour title. Wu jumped 39 paces to 58th.

Isner, climbed two places to 37th at the age of 37.

Italian Jannik Sinner, who won the title in Montpellier yesterday, moved up three spots to No. 14.

American Maxime Cressy, who lost the final to Sinner, climbed 11 places to 40th.

Sebastian Baez, who won his second title on the circuit in an all-Argentine final at Cordoba, also rose 11 spots and is 36th.

The beaten finalist in the event in Argentina, Federico Coria, gained 18 places to 49th, the best ranking of his career at the age of 30.

## Rodrigues, Ghosh Lead India to T20 World Cup Win Over Pakistan

CAPE TOWN (Dispatches) - Jemimah Rodrigues and teenager Richa Ghosh took India to a seven-wicket win over Pakistan in their Women's T20 World Cup match at Newlands in Cape Town.

What had been a tense run chase turned into a comfortable win with an over to spare as Rodrigues and Ghosh put on an unbeaten 58 off 33 balls.

Rodrigues batted with calm skill to make 53 not out off 38 balls while Ghosh, 19, hit powerfully to score 31 not out off 20 balls.

Pakistan posted 149 for four after deciding to bat on a dry pitch.

It was a total which looked unlikely when they were labouring at 68 for four in the 13th over.

But captain Bismah Maroof (68 not out) and Ayesha Naseem (43 not out) transformed the innings in an unbeaten partnership of 81 off 47 balls.

The left-handed Maroof faced 55 balls and hit seven fours while the 18-year-old Naseem hammered her runs off 25 balls, hitting two fours and two sixes.

Naseem almost immediately went on the attack with some powerful hitting, including a six beyond long-off in an over from the medium-paced Renuka Singh which cost 18 runs.

The Indian innings followed a similar pattern with Pakistan left-arm spinner Nashra Sadhu bowling superbly to take two for 15 in her four overs.

Sadhu dismissed Shafali Verma, who was superbly caught on the boundary by Sidra Ameen, and Indian captain Harmanpreet Kaur, leaving India needing to score at almost 10 runs an over in the last six overs.

But Pakistan paid the price for only picking five bowlers and the remaining bowlers were expensive, while their fielders were guilty of several misfields.



## Man City Have Smallest Squad in Premier League

MANCHESTER (Dispatches) - Manchester City manager Pep Guardiola claimed his squad depth is the lowest in the Premier League after Sunday's victory over Aston Villa left his side just three points off the top.

Goals by Rodri and Ilkay Gundogan and a penalty by Riyad Mahrez sealed a 3-1 win at the end of a week in which the champions were charged with more than 100 cases of alleged financial wrongdoing by the Premier League.

City have spent close to £2 billion on players since Abu Dhabi's Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed al-Nahyan became owner in 2008 — winning six Premier League titles in that time.

Guardiola's current squad is valued at €1.05 billion by website transfermarkt and on Sunday he started with the likes of England internationals Calvin Phillips and Phil Foden and Argentina striker Julian Alvarez on the bench.

Yet the Spaniard claimed he is working with a squad of less than 20 players as they chase league leaders Arsenal and attempt to win the Champions League for the first time.

"We have just 18, 19 players. Our depth is so, so small, maybe the smallest one in the Premier League by far," Guardiola told Sky Sports. "It's important that we don't have injuries but we have an incredible methodology for training to manage the fatigue and avoid injuries.

"We have incredible doctors and physios and everyone. I fight for that for many years."

City will face an independent commission to answer 115 charges brought by the Premier League, dating back to 2009.

If found guilty City, in the worst case scenario, could face a points deduction or even be relegated with Guardiola saying this week that the club had already been 'condemned'.

