

Health Ministry Announced on Sunday That the Number of Deaths From the Coronavirus Pandemic in Iran Increased to **144,804** With **Seven** More Iranians Killed by the Virus Over the Past 24 Hours

IRAN NEWS

Minister of Interior Ahmad Vahidi Says the Torture Officers of the Pahlavi Regime's SAVAK and All Those Who Looted the Country's Assets During That Era Will Be Prosecuted

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Iran Says Prisoner Swap Deal With U.S. Stopped

IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Foreign ministry spokesman Nasser Kanaani has said Washington is using a "carrot and stick" strategy trying to weaken Tehran's will to resist its demands.

He also claimed that negotiations for a prisoner exchange are in limbo because "the American government did not act according to its promises."

Kanaani visited the offices of the hardliner Mehr News Agency Saturday and spoke with the editorial staff about issues related to nuclear talks and American's held in Iran.

"The West led by America has adopted a policy of attrition in negotiations, whereby they use every means of pressure, including instigating protests and [continuing] sanctions," Kanaani said.

He insisted that Washington is indirectly communicating with Tehran, but parallel to talks it uses every means of pressure possible to bring Iran's tolerance to the breaking point. Among these pressures, Kanaani also mentioned the Iranian opposition that he claimed has "no stature among the Iranian people."

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Tehran, Riyadh to Resume Talks Soon

TEHRAN (MNA) - Iran and Saudi Arabia will resume their talks in near future, Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia' Al-Sudani said Sunday.

Iran is our neighbor and we have historical relations with it, the Iraqi prime minister said on the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference on Sunday.

Emphasizing that Iraq is the key to solving regional problems, Al-Sudani stated that his country seeks to establish balanced relations with Iran and the US based on Iraq's national interests.

Referring to negotiations between Iran and Saudi Arabia, Al-Sudani stated that efforts are being made to bring the approaches of the two sides closer and the meetings will resume soon.

Earlier, Iraqi Foreign Minister Fuad Hussein said that the previous meetings between Riyadh and Tehran were held at the security and intelligence levels and Baghdad is thinking of holding a new meeting.

The relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran seem more positive compared to the past, he added.

China Allocating Credit Line For Investment in Iran



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Secretary of Iranian Oil, Gas and Petrochemical Products Exporters' Union (OPEX) Hamid Hosseini says China is to allocate credit line for investment in Iran through Iran's oil revenues in China.

Speaking to ILNA, Hosseini said that Iran's oil revenues have increased by \$8b in the first half of the year and China is to allocate a credit line for investment in Iran through Iran's oil revenues in China.

He then pointed to President Seyed Ebrahim Raisi's visit to China and called it very important from the view of foreign policy because China is one of the major actors of the world politics.

He went on to say talks with China are important because China plays major part in Iran's economic policy and exports. Hosseini said that Iran's oil revenues in the first half of the year were \$26b while the figure was \$18b in the same period last year. He stated that since major oil exports are China-bound, it is expected the oil revenues to increase next year.

He went on to say that China is very important for Iran both politically and economically and some agreements and contracts with China are not revealed due to the U.S. sanctions.

He stressed that with allocation of the credit line, Chinese companies can choose favorable projects and enter Iran market. Hosseini said that Iran's trade with China usually was over \$50b in the past years but this year so far the figure has been \$24b and it is expected it to hit \$30b by the yearend. He noted that China is present in Iran's infrastructural projects like railways and it has held talks.

Meanwhile Head of the Iran-China Joint Chamber of Commerce said Iran is to open a trade center in China by the end of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20), IRIB reported.

According to Majid-Reza Hariri, the center is going to be launched with the aim of pursuing the implementation of the recent agreements and deals signed between the two countries.

Pointing to the conclusion of numerous business agreements between Iranian and Chinese companies during the recent visit of President Raisi to China, Hariri said: "In order to follow up on contracts and develop business relations, an office will be established in China which will also work to facilitate the presence of Chinese businessmen in Iran."

China has remained Iran's largest trading partner for 10 consecutive years as of 2022, according to the Chinese Ministry of Commerce.

"China-Iran trade totaled \$15.8 billion in 2022, up seven percent, year on year," Shu Jueting, a spokesperson for China's Commerce Ministry, told a press conference on Thursday.

"During President Raisi's visit to China, the two countries exchanged in-depth views on promoting bilateral economic and trade relations and reached a series of positive results," Shu said.

West Silence Against Syria's Sovereignty Violation Shameful

IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Foreign Ministry spokesperson called the silence of Western countries against the repeated violation of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria by the Zionist regime shameful.

Nasser Kanaani strongly condemned the Zionist regime's attack on Damascus and its suburbs which led to the martyrdom and wounding of a number of innocent Syrian citizens.

Referring to the fresh attacks of the Zionist regime on the Syrian nation just a short while after the ISIL terrorist group attack, he called the connection and coordination of these two terrorist entities a natural and inherent connection that is aiming at intensify the pains of the quake-hit Syrian nation.

Kanaani also called the silence of Western countries against the repeated violation of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria by the Zionist regime shameful. He called for an immediate, serious and effective response from the international community and the Security Council to the Israeli aggressions in Damascus.

The Israeli regime has launched a fresh missile attack on the Syrian capital Damascus and areas around it, as the regime continues its acts of aggression against the Arab country.

Syria's health ministry said five people were killed in the strike, including one soldier, while fifteen others were wounded, some of whom were in critical condition.

According to Syria's official SANA news agency, the country's air defenses responded to Israel's new missile attack, which took place early Sunday, intercepting most of those missiles.

Meanwhile, al-Mayadeen news agency reported that the Israeli strike hit areas in Damascus countryside, Kafr Sousa neighborhood, and Tal al-Masih near the city of Shahba, north of al-Suwayda in southwestern Syria.

A Syrian military source was quoted by SANA as saying that the Israeli missiles were fired from the direction of the occupied Golan Heights, targeting some locations in Damascus and its suburbs, including residential neighborhoods inhabited by civilians. The source said most of the Israeli missiles were shot down by Syria's air defenses.

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ViewPoint When the West Forgets Humanity

By: Hamid Reza Naghashian

The Western countries for centuries have claimed they support human rights and humanity in the world but it seems this claim is not true because the West comes to defend humanity and human rights issue whenever it likes or thinks it is necessary otherwise it gives a damn for such issues especially in Muslim states.

In recent days many high-ranking Western officials have attended at the Munich Security Conference to tackle many issues for the sake of peace and security in the world but they have ignored humanity by focusing more on Ukraine and the Islamic Republic of Iran rather than on the quake in Turkey and Syria which has been one of the most deadliest quakes in the history that its death toll has been so far over 45,000 people and it is expected the toll surpasses 50,000 at least.

Western leaders have pledged unwavering support for Ukraine "as long as necessary" as Russia's military campaign against the former Soviet state is approaching its first anniversary with no end in sight.

Speaking at the 59th Munich Security Conference (MSC) on Saturday, Western leaders vowed to remain steadfast in their support for Kiev amid worries about "a prolonged conflict."

In their speeches, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz and French President Emmanuel Macron stressed that the West would not lose its patience, even as debate intensifies about the war effort's scale, its cost, and the economic damage it has inflicted around the world.

"It is not really a very good idea" to "discuss the question of when, in which month, the war will end," Scholz said.

"The really important decision that we should all take together is saying that we are willing to do it as long as necessary and that we will do our best," he added.

Macron also stated that the West is "ready for a prolonged conflict," stressing that there could be no talks until the Kremlin had been pushed back from Ukraine.

"Now the question is how to resist? How to help the Ukrainians to make on the ground something which will force Russia to come back to the table on the conditions of Ukraine," he said.

British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak urged world leaders to double down on military support for Ukraine while stressing the importance of bolstering the country's "long-term security."

He further called for a new security framework that would protect non-NATO countries such as Ukraine against any future offensives.

He also noted that winning in Ukraine would represent a triumph over wider global threats, adding that he wants "a victory over the very idea of war."

Elsewhere in his remarks, Sunak pointed to the potential supply of fighter jets to Ukraine, saying there are "complications" with providing certain types of aircraft.

However, he said, the UK is training Ukrainian fighters to use the jets at a NATO standard, adding that London would "happily support other countries" if they had the capacity to provide jets immediately.

U.S. Vice President Kamala Harris also reaffirmed Washington's commitment to Kiev during her speech, saying the US is proud to be Ukraine's partner in "this noble pursuit."

Harris acknowledged that Ukrainians will "continue to be tried and tested", though she was confident they will "rise to the task".

In spite of the Russian government's repetitive warnings against fanning the flames of war in Ukraine, Harris said "If Putin thinks he can wait us out, he is badly mistaken, "adding that "time is not on his side."

One can see all of those leaders have concentrated their attention on Ukraine and blaming Russia but they have not given a damn to what has happened in Turkey and Syria. It seems humanity is like a ball for playing and the Western states play with it whenever they like and for them criticizing Russia and Iran is currently more important than any issue in the world while innocent people in Turkey and Syria need global help and attention.

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Tehran to Host Int'l Jewelry Exhibition Next Week

TEHRAN (MNA) - The 14th International Exhibition of Gold, Silver, Jewelry, Watches, and Related Industries is going to be held at Tehran Permanent International Fairgrounds during February 21-24, IRIB reported.

Well-known companies active in the jewelry industry are going to showcase their latest products and achievements in this four-day exhibition.

Gold, silver, antiques, pearls, precious stones, cut ornaments and jewelry, watches, as well as jewelry-related machines, tools, and equipment are among the items presented at this international exhibition.

U.S. Failed to Stop Iran's Progress Through Sanctions

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - President Ebrahim Raisi says the United States and its Western allies sought to stop the Iranian nation's advancement by means of sanctions but failed in their attempts, describing the coercive measures as another form of warfare against the country.

Raisi made the remarks in an exclusive interview with China's state-run and English-language CGTN television news network broadcast on Saturday.

"In essence, this is also a form of war. The only difference is that the method has changed from the military force to sanctions regimes. Sanctions are incredibly cruel. Essential medications needed by patients, including drugs for treating children with the butterfly skin disease, have been added to the list of sanctioned items against Iran. This has caused immense sufferings for patients and their families. They also sanctioned COVID-19 vaccines," the Iranian president pointed out.

"When I met with the secretary-general of the United Nations [António Guterres] in New York [on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly], I brought up this issue. He expressed his apologies, saying that despite his best efforts, he could not persuade the United States to lift the ban on vaccine exports to Iran."

"Everyone knows that sanctions hurt ordinary people. They say the sanctions only target the Iranian government, but it is the people who bear the brunt of their cruel impact," Raisi said.

"They (American politicians) and their supporters often say that the Iranian government will be gone in six months, or in the year of such and such. But now more than 40 years have passed. It is those who made such claims that are gone. Some have passed away, while some have left office. But our Islamic establishment exists with



great vitality. The US wanted to hamper our development through sanctions. But our people, especially our youths, have neither become discouraged nor stopped moving forward," the Iranian president said.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Raisi pointed to Vienna negotiations on the salvage of the 2015 nuclear deal -- officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) -- and removal of anti-Iran sanctions.

"They (Western parties to the accord) claim to be looking for an agreement, but what we see is that their actions do not correspond to their allegations. While Iran has declared its resolve to reach a good agreement, they do not follow the suit. They have both gone back on their pledges and withdrawn from the JCPOA. They have also left the negotiating table and announced interest to pursue their goals on streets and instigate chaos than to engage in talks," Raisi said.

What we see in the behavior of the current US administration led by President Joe Biden is no different from those of its predecessors, the Iranian president said.

"We believe that Americans are gravely mistaken. They have miscalculations. Some European countries have made miscalculations as well. Their knowledge of Iran and the Iranian nation is off beam. They have compared the Iranian nation with others. They believe they can achieve their goals through actions that are very wrong," Raisi also said as he made a reference to the recent unrest across the country.

Culture Minister Highlights Quranic Basis of Iran's Islamic Revolution

TEHRAN (IQNA) –Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance Mohammad Mehdi Esmaeili said the Islamic Revolution of Iran talks to the world with the language and message of the Holy Quran.

He made the remark at the opening ceremony of the 39th edition of Iran's International Holy Quran Competition, held Saturday afternoon concurrent with Eid al-Maba'ath (marking the appointment of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) as the last messenger of God).

Esmaeili added that the Islamic Revolution has come with the message of the Quran to save humanity from ignorance and from serving Taghuts (Those who rule by other than the rule of God).

He said the organization of the annual international Quran competition shows everyone that this revolution began with a Quranic nature and will continue like that, too.

He noted that the Leader of the Islamic Revolution, Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei has on various occasions emphasized that our revolution is a Quranic one and that it will continue by keeping the teachings of the Holy Book alive in everyday life.

The culture minister stressed that promoting the Quran is on top of the Iranian administration's cultural agenda.



He further thanked all of those involved in organizing the international Quranic event.

The ceremony was held at the Tehran Summit Hall with high-ranking Iranian officials in attendance.

Hojat-ol-Islam Seyed Mehdi Khamoushi, head of the Awqaf and Charity Affairs Organization, provided

details about the competition at the ceremony, noting that this is the first edition which includes the category of Tarteel for women.

He said that a total of 52 participants from 33 countries will vie in the final round of the event in Tehran in the coming days. The competition's closing ceremony is scheduled to be held on Wednesday, February 22, with Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi in attendance.

The competition's categories include memorization, recitation and Tarteel for men and memorization and Tarteel for women.

A total of 149 Quran reciters and memorizers from 80 countries, including 114 men and 35 women, took part in the first round.

The motto of this edition, like the previous one, is "One Book, One Ummah", a testimony to the significance that the Islamic Republic of Iran attaches to unity and fraternity among Muslim nations.

Iran Slams Media Hype on Iran in Munich Conference

TEHRAN (IRNA) - The spokesman of the Iranian Foreign Ministry says the media propaganda against Iran by European countries and the US government during a recent security conference in Munich was a futile effort that was in line with the West's general Iranophobia campaign against the Islamic Republic.

In a Twitter post late on Saturday, Nasser Kanaani said that the U.S. and a number of European governments have resorted to media propaganda against Iran to justify their illegal acts and human rights violations against the Iranian nation.

"Creating external crisis and engaging in blame games are among the hackneyed tactics of the West and the apartheid Zionist regime to cover up their internal crises amid repeated waves of public protests and strikes," he said in his Farsi tweet.

The comments came after foreign ministers of several Western countries held a meeting on Iran on the sidelines of Munich Security Conference to pretend they have put a united front on the issue.

Staying Away From Quran, Origin of Failures

TEHRAN (IP) - Majlis Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf stresses the distance from the Quranic culture as the cause of failures in the country.

Qalibaf stressed the promotion of the Quranic culture throughout the country.

He said that wherever the officials have distanced from the Quran, Islamic teachings, and people they suffer failures.

He said: "At the opening ceremony of Iran's 39th International Holy Quran Competition said: said: Today, wherever we failed in cultural, social, political, economic, and even environmental issues, it is at the same point that we distanced ourselves from divine traditions and excluded people from effective work and participation." He made the remarks at Iran's 39th International Holy Quran Competition kicked off in Tehran's International Conference Center.

"Beside memorizing and reciting Quran, today we should promote the Quranic messages and practice them," Qalibaf stressed. He said that the Islamic Republic of Iran was established based on the Quranic principles, and relying on its social capital, it produces power, knowledge, and, wealth.

The Iranian parliament speaker pointed to the international Quran contest and reminded the audience of the fact that such an event was an opportunity to convey the message of peace, friendship, unity, freedom, independence, support for the oppressed, and the fight against the tyrants.

Qalibaf referred to the Israeli regime's movements in the region against the Muslims, noting that the regime was always trying to cast aspersion and division among the Muslims and among the Islamic governments.

Cavusoglu Thanks Iran for Assisting Turkish Quake-Hit People

TEHRAN (MNA) – Visiting the Iran Army's field hospital in Adiyaman city of Turkey, Cavusoglu hailed Iran's assistance to the quake-hit people and wished health and success to the Iranian government and nation.

During his visit to one of the camps for displaced people in Adiyaman city, the Turkish Foreign Minister visited the field hospital of the Islamic Republic of Iran Army in this area.

Mevlut Cavusoglu was briefed about the activities and services of this hospital to the people affected by the earthquake in the Adiyaman Province in southeastern Turkey.

Dr. Habib Sadr, head of the Health and Medical Department of the Islamic Republic of Iran Army, gave explanations about the activities of this hospital.

Cavusoglu also appreciated Iran's assistance to the quake-hit people of Turkey and wished health and success to the government and the people of Iran.

Twelve days after a devastating earthquake hit Turkey and Syria, more than 46,000 people have died and more than 84,000 buildings have either been severely damaged, need urgent demolition, or collapsed, according to officials.

Gov't Starts Pilot Phase of Project to Transfer Water to Lake Urmia

TEHRAN (PressTV)- Energy Ministry says it has launched a pilot phase of a major project to transfer water to Lake Urmia amid hopes that the project could ease environmental concerns about drying up of the lake in northwestern Iran.

Officials said on Saturday the 36-kilometer tunnel linking the Little Zab river to Lake Urmia had started operating with partial transfer of water from Kani Sib Dam to the lake. Iran has spent some \$200 million on the Zab tunnel project which will enable the annual transfer of some 600 million cubic meters of water to Lake Urmia once the project is completed.

The Iranian Energy Ministry is also racing against the clock to finish two other projects for transfer of nearly 200 million cubic meters of water per year to the lake from sewage treatment facilities in metropolitan cities of Tabriz and Urmia.

Experts say it would take some five years for the lake to take some 3.4 billion cubic of water it needs to reach ecologically sustainable levels.

A total of 19 projects have been designed as part of Iran's campaign to restore Lake Urmia.

Contractors said on Saturday that a first phase of the Zab tunnel project will come on line soon in a ceremony that will be attended by senior government officials.

Iran to Unveil unmanned Qaher Fighter Jet Next Year

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The Iran Aviation Industries Organization (IAIO) has announced plans to unveil an unmanned version of home-grown Qaher single-seat stealth fighter aircraft in the next solar calendar year that begins on March 21.

Speaking during a TV program on Saturday night, the IAIO chief executive Brigadier General Afshin Khajefard said the aircraft was manufactured at the IAIO and the project was first brought up in the media 10 years ago.

"The Qaher project has reached full maturity in terms of technology, but we are producing more diversified products. It means that by the middle of next year, you will see [new] versions of this aircraft that will be delivered to the armed forces," he said. "The Qaher project will emerge as an unmanned aircraft."

Khajefard also emphasized that Iran is self-reliant in the field of overhauling commercial aircraft and manufacturing components in defiance of sanctions.

"We have reached a level of self-sufficiency in the field of engines so that today we can produce 10 types of engines, most of which are used on drones and cruise missiles. Of course, our defense industries have also reached self-sufficiency in designing and making heavy engines," he added.

Referring to electric aircraft, Khajefard said that the IAIO has started working on several prototypes that will be tested next year

"Of course, our electric drones have reached full maturity, but manned eclectic aircraft require more improvements," he explained.

Touching on Iran's achievements regarding development of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), he said, "We have various classes of missiles, precision-strike bombs, electronic warfare avionics and reconnaissance drones. However, we are trying to develop drones with civilian applications, because drones can be used for agriculture, mapping and firefighting."

Iranian military experts and technicians have in recent years made substantial headway in manufacturing a broad range of indigenous equipment, making the armed forces self-sufficient in the arms sector.

Iranian officials have repeatedly warned that the country will not hesitate to strengthen its military capabilities which are entirely meant for defense.

Weekly Trade on IME Exceeds 2m Tons



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Iran Mercantile Exchange (IME) last week witnessed trade of 2,018,658 tons of commodities and 8,106 vehicles with a total trading value of nearly \$800m on its physical market, posting growths of 5.68% in value of trades compared to the figures of the previous week.

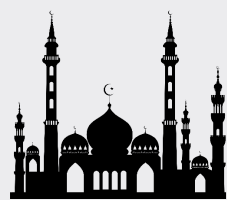
According to a report by the IME's International Affairs and PR, the exchange saw on its metals and minerals trading floor trade of 1,575,264 tons of commodities valued at more than \$537m.

On this floor the IME sold 1,020,479 tons of cement, 320,000 tons of iron ore, 186,807 tons of steel, 29,400 tons of sponge iron, 10,375 tons of aluminum, 7,052 tons of copper, 1,900 tons of zinc, 190 tons of molybdenum concentrate and 8,106 vehicles.

Furthermore, the IME witnessed on both domestic and export rings of its oil and petrochemical trading floor 439,689 tons of commodities worth more than \$258m.

Commodities traded on this floor included 120,875 tons of bitumen, 108,592 tons of polymeric products, 97,000 tons of vacuum bottom, 56,000 tons of lube cut, 38,145 tons of chemicals, 13,800 tons of sulfur, 6,272 tons of base oil, 500 tons of petroleum products, 200 tons of insulation and 190 tons of feedstocks.

The IME also traded within the same week 5,696 tons of commodities on its side market.



PRAYER TIME

| | |
|--------------------------|-------|
| ■ Noon (Zohr) | 12:18 |
| ■ Evening (Maghreb) | 18:08 |
| ■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr) | 05:20 |
| ■ Tomorrow's Sunrise | 06:44 |

35. Say: "Of your 'partners' is there any that can give any guidance towards truth?" Say: "It is Allah Who gives guidance towards truth, is then He Who gives guidance to truth more worthy to be followed, or he who finds not guidance (himself) unless he is guided? what then is the matter with you? How judge ye?"

36. But most of them follow nothing but fancy: truly fancy can be of no avail against truth.

Verily Allah is well aware of all that they do.

Surah 10. Jonah (35 - 36)

China Keen on Investing \$50m in Mahshahr Petzone

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN (Shana) - A delegation of Chinese investors visited Mahshahr Petrochemical Special Economic Zone with the aim of checking the existing infrastructure and the possibility of investing \$50 million to build a carbon-sulfur production plant.

According to the Special Petrochemical Economic Zone Organization, this Chinese investment delegation, which is applying for the construction of a carbon-sulfur production plant in the Petrochemical Special Economic Zone, held a meeting with the CEO and investment officials of the Petrochemical Special Economic Zone Organization to announced the willingness of Chinese companies to invest in Iran under the title of long-term cooperation document between Iran and China.

After visiting the facilities and infrastructure of the Petrochemical Special Economic Zone, during a meeting with the managers of the Razi Petrochemical Company, the Chinese investment delegation reviewed the status of the feedstock required for the proposed investment plan, and then held a meeting with the CEO of



the Special Zone Organization, the director of the Oil Industry Science and Technology Park and the Director General of Finance of Khuzestan province, and discussed the initial feasibility of implementing the project in the special region.

These developments came immediately after the state visit of Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi to China.

It should be mentioned that the infrastructure created in the petrochemical special economic zone is welcoming to investors in Iran's first petrochemical hub.

Last week 20 cooperation documents were signed between high-ranking officials of the Islamic Republic of Iran and China in the presence of the presidents of the two countries.

The official ceremony of signing 20 cooperation documents and memoranda of understanding between the Islamic Republic of Iran and China was held today (Tuesday, February 14) by the high-ranking officials of the two countries in the presence of President Raisi and Xi Jinping.

Iran, China Economy Could Complement Each Other



TEHRAN (Shana) - The former director of international affairs of the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) emphasized that the economy of Iran and China can complement each other and meet many of each other's needs.

Mohammad Ali Khatibi stated that according to the growing trend of China's economy, experts predict that this country's economy will occupy the first place in the world in the coming years and overtake the United States, adding: "Naturally, China needs to reach The first ranking power of the world economy and needs more energy, so Iran, relying on its oil and gas reserves, can be considered a reliable partner and supplier for this country in the long term."

Referring to China's negotiations and dealings with oil-exporting countries in the world and the country's efforts to diversify its supply of imported oil and gas resources, he said: "Iran, as the largest owner of the world's total oil and gas resources, should have a significant share in the big energy market in the coming years."

The former director of international affairs of the National Iranian Oil Company stated: "China has been very active in the field of renewable energies, especially solar energy, in recent years so that now we can buy solar energy technology and infrastructure at much lower prices than European countries."

Khatibi said: "Iran's oil industry urgently needs foreign investors to increase and maintain its oil and gas production, so one of the ways to solve this challenge is to use the financial power of large Chinese oil and gas companies. The use of currencies other than the dollar, especially national currencies that do not have sanctions problems, can be important in the development of financial relations between the two countries. Of course, the two countries have experienced economic cooperation with currencies other than the dollar."

He said: "Development should be all-round, so the relations between Iran and China should not be limited to the economic sphere only. Cooperation in geopolitical, strategic, cultural, political, social and other fields should be strengthened."

Iran, Turkmenistan Discuss Energy Deals



TEHRAN (Shana) - The Iranian delegation attended separate meetings with the managers of Turkmengas, Turkmenneft and Turkmenchemistry companies on the second day of Iran's exclusive exhibition in Turkmenistan.

An Iranian delegation from the Oil Ministry, led by Vahidreza Zeidifard, deputy minister of petroleum for engineering, research and technology affairs, met with Turkmen delegations on the sidelines of the 14th special exhibition of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the city of Ashgabat in the presence of executives from the companies under the Ministry of Petroleum in separate meetings.

In this showcase, while introducing the capabilities of Iranian companies in the oil industry, Zeidifard emphasized on the development and cooperation between the two countries.

He also referred to the manufacture of more than 70% of Iranian equipment and parts in oil projects and demanded cooperation in supplying the equipment needed by Turkmenistan's oil industry.

The Deputy Oil Minister for Engineering, Research and Technology Affairs announced the readiness of Iran's oil industry to build a refinery, develop oil and gas fields, and supply parts and equipment of competitive quality and reasonable prices to the Turkmen parties, and invited the oil and gas officials of Turkmenistan to visit the capabilities of Iran's oil industry projects.

New Private Airline Launched Despite Aviation Sanctions

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran has launched a new private airline despite American sanctions targeting the country's civil aviation sector.

Senior government officials from Iran's ministry of tourism attended a ceremony late on Friday to celebrate the launch of Yazd Air, a private airline which will be based in Yazd, a historic city in central Iran.

The ceremony came after a first flight by Yazd Air from the capital Tehran landed at Yazd's Shahid Sadooghi airport.

The airline will use two Airbus A310s for flights to international destinations, which will include Najaf in Iraq, Dubai, Istanbul and Mumbai. Its fleet will also include two short haul British Aerospace 146 planes for flights on domestic routes.

The official IRNA news agency said that private investors

had provided some 10 trillion rials (nearly \$22 million) for the launch of Yazd Air.

It said the company will rely on Iran's second largest airline Mahan Air for services in its first two months of operation and then will set up its own offices after recruiting some 70 staff members.

Head of Iranian parliament's tourism committee Mohammad Reza Dashti said Yazd Air has major expansion plans to become one of the most reliable airlines in Iran.

The launch of Yazd Air comes despite a series of unprecedented sanctions imposed by the US on the Iranian aviation industry.

The sanctions have barred Iranian airlines from buying new planes or parts needed for aircraft repair.

MSC Aids to Quake-Hit Khoy, Snow-Hit Koohrang

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

ISFAHAN – The manager of the public relations of Mobarakeh Steel Company (MSC), the company beside its leadership in production has shown its commitment to social responsibilities in the critical conditions in the country like the pandemic, flood in south and southwest of the country, quake in the western country, quake in Yasooj in the past years and now with timely presence in the quake-hit town of Khoy in West Azarbaijan Province as well as west of Isfahan Province.

Mohammad Javad Barati said that MSC since the quake in Khoy has rushed to help its fellow citizens and in this line since February 2 and in collaboration with officials of Khoy and support of Jihadi groups has set up some mobile bakeries for preparing bread and preparing warm meals in cooking centers.

He added that the company has always shown in the past its commitment to observing its social responsibilities in the critical times like during the pandemic and some natural disasters and now it has rushed to help people of Khoy to show its commitment to social responsibilities like its leadership in production.

Barati further said that after heavy snow in Chaharmahal Va Bakhtiari Province and Koohrang area as well as in some parts of Isfahan Province, MSC in collaboration with the Disaster Management Headquarters of the province has tried to take some actions to help the people through offering services.

He added that preparing and distributing over 1100 package including rice, oil and tinned fish for the people of Koohrang and dispatch of several water tankers as well as bulldozers and trucks to Chadegan, Fereidoonshahr, and different areas of the province have been of some actions of the company in recent days.

CE Marketing Certificate of ESCO Extended

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

ISFAHAN – In order to have access to EU member states' markets and getting license for exports of Esfahan Steel Company (ESCO) to those states, the CE marketing certificate of the company was extended for the ninth consecutive year after related auditing and evaluation.



In the opening session of the auditing and evaluation of the company, the CEO of ESCO Mr. Mehdi Koochi pointed to the importance of international standards and certificates in ESO, and said that this company as the first and biggest producer of construction structures in Iran has taken into consideration export of its products to countries and EU markets and for this reason, it welcomes implementation of the latest related standards.

Meanwhile manager of inclusive quality of the company Mohammad Sadri touched upon this auditing and evaluation session and said that annual evaluation of CE (Conformity European) Marketing Certificate was held by Spanish auditing company ICDQ on Feb.12-13 without former announcement and it was done successfully.

Sadri added that different managements and units of the company especially central lab., rolling, steelmaking, automation and communication, raw material purchase, energy and refractory had active participation during the evaluation.

In the closing session of the evaluation program, the head of evaluation team of ICDQ explained the process of auditing and evaluation of different parts of the company and hailed massive efforts of ESCO for materializing and fulfilling the condition for getting CE certificate and said that the company passed the evaluation successfully and its certificate is extended.

CEO of Khorasan Steel Co. Appointed

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Tahmoures Javanbakht was appointed as the sixth CEO of Khorasan Steel Complex Company on last Thursday and he officially started his job.



In his first speech as the CEO of the biggest steel hub in eastern country, Javanbakht said that Khorasan Steel Company produces 3% of raw steel and 5% steel ingot of the country and noted that the main target of the company is to increase its share of Iran's steel market and to at least double the current share and this will be materialized through endeavors and efforts of committed and specialized staff of the company.

He emphasized improving the production capacity in the company as the effective and prioritized strategy and added that if the priority is to create job, unlike the past, their focus on development issue and increase capacities in an appropriate span of time should be prioritized.

Javanbakht further said that developing human capital and increase incentive and enthusiasm and commitment of the staff on course of goals of the company are the major axes of his management strategy.

He stated that currently the share of this biggest pole of steel production in eastern country is less than what it deserves and diversification of products and balance in the production chain of the company are of the main solutions of improving this share.

HOSCO Wins Silver Statue in Festival of Proposals System

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Hormozgan Steel Company (HOSCO) won the silver stature during the 17th national conference and 11th festival of proposals system for its proposal on hot processing of slag of electric arc furnaces.



According to reports, HOSCO for its proposal during the festival of proposals system could win the silver statue for its proposal and its steelmaking and continuous casting unit were chosen as the top organizational unit in the festival.

The CEO of the company Ataollah Maroufkhani touched upon this achievement in the festival and pointed to some records in daily and monthly production in the company this year and said that one of the fruits of paying attention to the proposals system from the company is considerable rise in production in the country which has been achieved despite existing restrictions in energy supply in the summer and winter. He went on to say that one of the factors for the rise in production in the company was the project of hot processing of slag of electric arc furnaces which was offered in the form of the proposals system and this project as well as some more factors led to the rise in production.

Maroufkhani went on to say that one of the properties of the company is its use of knowledge in its production line and it has put on its agenda the use of knowledge-based projects and the success of HOSCO continues in this way and now by implementing this project the company hopes more rise in production.

Cyclone Death Toll In New Zealand Rises

SYDNEY (Dispatches) - The death toll from Cyclone Gabrielle in New Zealand rose to nine as the clean-up continued on the battered North Island and authorities worked to find missing people.

The cyclone hit the uppermost region of the North Island last Sunday and tracked down the east coast, causing widespread devastation.

Police on Saturday said they were investigating a possible cyclone-related death of a person in the hard-hit Hawke's Bay region, taking the death toll to nine. Getting aid to impacted communities was also a priority, with the Navy saying a ship with 26 tonnes of supplies was on its way to Napier, in Hawke's Bay.



Japan, China to Hold Security Talks

TOKYO (Dispatches) - Japan and China will hold security talks this week, Japanese foreign minister Yoshimasa Hayashi said after meeting his Chinese counterpart on the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference on Saturday.

The agreement to hold the security talks, the first to be held in four years, came after Hayashi and China's top diplomat Wang Yi spoke ahead of the conference.

"It is important for us to have frank discussions precisely because there are a number of pressing matters in our relationship", Hayashi said to reporters, highlighting a territorial spat in the East China Sea and increasing Chinese and Russian military presence around Japanese waters as some of the issues that need to be discussed.



China Swipes at Hysterical U.S. At Global Security Gathering



MUNICH (Dispatches) - China's top diplomat on Saturday accused the United States of violating international norms with "hysterical" behavior, as a running spat over a suspected Chinese spy balloon bubbled to the fore at a global security conference in Munich.

The comments by Wang Yi further clouded the prospects of a meeting between Wang and U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken at the sidelines of the gathering. Asked by Reuters later whether he would meet Blinken, Wang smiled and declined comment.

Wang was speaking on the second day of the annual Munich Security Conference, which this year had so far been dominated by the global response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine as the war grinds towards its second year.

U.S. Vice President Kamala Harris later shot back, saying she was troubled that China had deepened its relationship with Russia since the Feb. 24 invasion and that Chinese support to Russia would undermine the rules-based international order.

The spat over the balloon - which flew over the United States and Canada before being shot down on President Joe Biden's orders, hit already strained relations and at a time when the West is closely watching Beijing's response to the Ukraine war.

"To have dispatched an advanced fighter jet to shoot down a balloon with a missile, such behaviour is unbelievable, almost hysterical," said Wang.

"There are so many balloons all over the world, and various countries have them, so is the United States going to shoot all of them down?," he said. "We ask the U.S. to show its sincerity and correct its mistakes, face up and resolve this incident, which has damaged Sino-U.S. relations."

The balloon spat had prompted Blinken to postpone a planned visit to Beijing. That Feb. 5-6 trip would have been the first by a U.S. secretary of state to China in five years and was seen by both sides as an opportunity to stabilise ties.

On its part, Washington has been hoping to put a "floor" under relations that hit a dangerous low in August with China's reaction to a visit to Taiwan by then-U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi.

Blinken is set to depart Munich on Sunday morning. A failure by the two diplomats to get together in a meeting could be seen as a further blow to the already strained relationship.

The West has been wary of China's response to the war in Ukraine, with some warning that a Russian victory would colour China's actions towards Taiwan. China has refrained from condemning the war or calling it an "invasion".

"If (Russian President Vladimir) Putin thinks he can wait us out, he is badly mistaken," Harris said in a panel at the gathering of top politicians, military officers and defence industry chiefs and experts at the Munich conference.

Wang reiterated a call for dialogue and suggested European countries "think calmly" about how to end the war.

Wang also said there were "some forces that seemingly don't want negotiations to succeed, or for the war to end soon," without specifying to whom he was referring.

In an interview with Reuters, European Union chief Ursula von der Leyen said Beijing was not neutral regarding Ukraine. "China has taken sides very clearly has signed the unlimited friendship agreement with Russia. So it has taken a specific position," she said.

N. Korea Test-Fires ICBM in Response to Upcoming U.S.-S. Korea Drill

SEOUL (Dispatches) - North Korea fired an intercontinental ballistic missile y which landed in Japan's exclusive economic zone, Seoul and Tokyo said, after Pyongyang warned of a strong response to upcoming U.S.-South Korean military drills.

The launch, Pyongyang's first in seven weeks, comes days before Seoul and Washington are due to start joint tabletop exercises aimed at improving their response in the event of a North Korean nuclear attack.

Japan said North Korea "fired one ICBM-class ballistic missile" which flew for some 66 minutes before landing in the country's exclusive economic zone, chief government spokesman Hirokazu Matsuno told reporters.

Tokyo's defense minister Yasukazu Hamada said the missile could have had the capacity to fly 14,000 km (8,700 miles) -- which would mean it was capable of hitting anywhere on the mainland United States.

Seoul's military told AFP it had detected the launch of an ICBM, which was fired on a lofted trajectory -- up instead of out, typically done to avoid overflying neighboring countries -- and flew some 900 kilometers (560 miles).



Philippines Will Not Lose an Inch of Territory

MANILA (Dispatches) - Philippines President Ferdinand Marcos Jr said that the country "will not lose an inch" of territory, his remarks coming on the heels of continuing maritime tensions with Beijing in the South China Sea.

The Southeast Asian nation this week protested what it called as Beijing's "aggressive activities" that have stoked a long-running territorial dispute over the South China Sea.

"The country has seen heightened geopolitical tensions that do not conform to our ideals of peace and threaten the security and stability of the country, of the region and of the world," Marcos said in a speech at a military alumni homecoming event.

"This country will not lose an inch of its territory. We will continue to uphold our territorial integrity and sovereignty in accordance with our constitution and with international law. We will work with our neighbors to secure the safety and security of our peoples."

Beijing's embassy in Manila did not respond to a request for comment. China's foreign ministry had said its coastguard conducted actions according to law.

On Tuesday, Marcos summoned China's envoy to express his "serious concern" over Beijing's "increasing frequency and intensity of actions" against the Philippine Coast Guard and Filipino fishermen in the South China Sea.

The Philippines' foreign ministry on Tuesday also filed a diplomatic protest after Manila's coastguard reported its Chinese counterpart had directed a "military-grade laser" at one of its ships supporting a resupply mission to troops, temporarily blinding its crew on the bridge.

However, Marcos sees the laser pointing incident as insufficient to invoke a mutual defense treaty with United States, a longstanding ally.

"If we activated that, what we are doing is escalating, intensifying the tensions in the area and I think that would be counterproductive," Marcos told reporters.

Powerful Tunisian Trade Union Defies President With Mass Protests

SFAX (Dispatches) - Thousands of members of Tunisia's powerful UGTT trade union took to the streets of eight cities to protest against President Kais Saied's policies, accusing him of trying to stifle basic freedoms including union rights.

The protests in eight cities marked an escalation in the union's confrontation with Saied and followed its criticism of the recent arrests of several anti-government figures including politicians, a journalist, two judges and a senior UGTT official.

The coordinated arrests have raised fears of a wider crackdown on dissent and prompted the U.N. Human Rights Office to call for the detainees' immediate release.

In the demonstrations, thousands of protesters in the southern city of Sfax carried national flags and banners with slogans including "Stop the attack on union freedoms" and "Cowardly Saied, the union is not afraid."

Senior UGTT official Othman Jalouli told the crowd Saied's government "wants to silence the voice of the union".

Protests also took place in the cities of Jendouba, Tozeur, Monastir, Bizerte, Kasserine, Kairouan and Nabeul.

More demonstrations are planned in other cities in the coming days, concluding with a rally in the capital, Tunis, early next month.

Addressing the Sfax protest, Esther Lynch, confederal secretary of the European Trade Union Confederation, said she had come to convey a message of support from 45 million European trade unionists and called for the immediate release of detained union officials.

Prior to the recent wave of arrests, police detained another UGTT official over a strike by toll booth workers last month and launched an investigation into 14 other transport union officials over a different strike.

The UGTT, which has more than a million members and has brought the country to a virtual standstill during strikes, has denounced such measures, saying the government was trying to stifle freedoms of expression in a bid to deflect attention from the country's economic troubles.

Saied, who shut down parliament in 2021, seizing most powers and moving to rule by decree before writing a new constitution, said this week that authorities do not target freedoms, but seek to hold everyone accountable equally.

In his first comments after the arrests, he accused "traitors" of being responsible for price increases and food shortages and wanted to fuel a social crisis.



Turkey-Syria Death Toll Tops 45,000

ANKARA (Dispatches) - More than 45,000 people have been killed in the earthquake that struck Turkey and Syria, and the toll is expected to soar with some 264,000 apartments in Turkey destroyed and many still missing in the country's worst modern disaster.

Twelve days after the quake hit, three people, including a child, were rescued alive from the rubble of a building in Antakya city of southern Turkey on Saturday, state news agency Anadolu said.

A journalist for Turkish television channel NTV later reported that one of those found had died after being taken to hospital.

NTV broadcast images of rescuers placing the rescued people onto stretchers after they had spent 296 hours trapped in the rubble.

The death toll in Turkey stands at 40,642, while neighboring Syria has reported more than 5,800 deaths. Syria's toll has not changed for days.

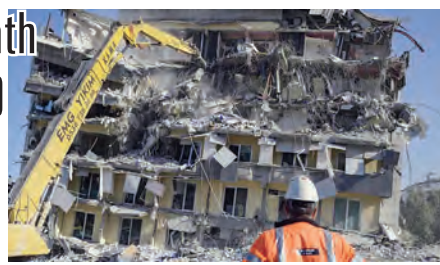
While many international rescue teams have left the vast quake zone, domestic teams continued to search through flattened buildings on Saturday hoping to find more survivors who defied the odds. Experts say most rescues occur in the 24 hours following an earthquake.

Hakan Yasinoglu, in his 40s, was rescued in the southern province of Hatay, 278 hours after the 7.8-magnitude earthquake struck in the dead of night on February 6, the Istanbul Fire Brigade said.

Earlier, Osman Halebiye, 14, and Mustafa Avci, 34, were saved in Turkey's historic city of Antakya, known in ancient times as Antioch. As Avci was carried away, he was put on a video call with his parents, who showed him his newborn baby. "I had completely lost all hope. This is a true miracle. They gave me my son back. I saw the wreckage and I thought nobody could be saved alive from there," his father said.

Aid organizations say the survivors will need help for months to come with so much crucial infrastructure destroyed.

In neighboring Syria, already shattered by more than a decade of civil war, the bulk of fatalities have been in the northwest, an area controlled by insurgents who are at war with President Bashar al-Assad - a conflict that has complicated efforts to aid people affected by the earthquake.



Electric Boat Goes Airborne For Cleaner Ocean Voyage



SAUSALITO (Dispatches) - Appearing at a glance to be just a simple pleasure boat floating on the San Francisco Bay, as the hydrofoil-equipped vessel picks up speed it suddenly begins rising above the water, grabbing the attention of passengers on a nearby ferry.

But instead of a roaring engine thrusting the boat along, its electric motor barely makes a sound.

Such electric boats with computer-guided hydrofoils may soon supplant conventional ferries with combustion engines in harbors and bays around the world, if Swedish "flying boat" maker Candela has its way.

"It's half plane and half boat; almost like riding a magic carpet," French sailor Tanguy de Lamotte said from the helm of the 8.5-meter (28-foot) long C8.

De Lamotte, who has completed the Vendee Globe solo round-the-world race in a sailboat twice as large as the C8, heads Candela's US arm.

The Swedish company's goal is to make the most energy-efficient electric boats "and get away from fossil fuels," according to de Lamotte.

Hydrofoils that act as underwater wings lift the boat as it accelerates, leaving only the rotor and hydrofoils immersed and greatly reducing friction.

In addition to using some 80 percent less energy to travel, the boat also avoids nausea-causing waves or swells, de Lamotte said.

And since the engine is electric, passengers are spared the noise and smell of gas-powered motors.

Candela has received some 150 orders for the C8, which has a starting price of \$400,000. The first delivery is expected to arrive in Florida by the end of the month.

While the project may seem like a drop in the ocean when it comes to countering climate change-inducing fossil fuel emissions, it is at least an oar stroke in the right direction, Lamotte contended.

Even if the C8 is a hit, their environmental benefit would be limited since recreational boats tend to be used only a couple of days a week and when weather is pleasant.

So Candela wants to tackle ferries. Their next model is a catamaran with 25 seats to be tested as a shuttle in the Stockholm archipelago later this year, he said.

The service is expected to cut in half the amount of time it takes people using ferries or buses to get from the Ekero suburb to the city center once it gets going.

The company also plans to test its P8 craft -- a "limousine" version of the C8 -- between the airport and hotels in Venice, Italy.

For now, electric motors combined with hydrofoils are far from being viable in massive container ships or cruise ships.

And, the issue of producing batteries and recycling the materials remains a hindrance in the industry.

"The solution of our environmental problem is going to come with technology," de Lamotte told AFP aboard the C8.

"That is what we are trying to do; for sure the impact is way less than what we are using these days with internal combustion engines."

Candela touts the C8 as the "fastest" and "longest-range" electric boat on the market, traveling as far as 57 nautical miles (about 100 kilometers) on a single charge with an average speed of 22 knots and peak at 30 knots.

According to an Allied Market Research report published last year, the electric boat market was worth \$5 billion in 2021 and will exceed \$16 billion by 2031.

Drought and Frost Batter Vital Potato Crops in Bolivia



LA PAZ (Dispatches) - Dozens of furrows lie barren in a dusty field on the Bolivian highlands. It should be replete with potato plants ready for harvest, but a deadly combination of drought and frost proved too much for the crop.

Cristobal Pongo, one of many peasants of the Aymara Indigenous group who devote their lives to potato farming in this region highly susceptible to climate change, looks dejectedly upon the dismal scene.

"The potato is our life. We harvest, we sell... It is our livelihood... (it pays) for our children's education," the 64-year-old told AFP as he knelt in his field about 4,000 meters (13,100 feet) above sea level.

This year, Pongo will have nothing to sell at the market in Calamarca, some 70 kilometers south of the capital La Paz. He does not know what he will do.

"The frost has killed the potato... Look at it, it is dead," he said, crestfallen.

Pongo's crop is not the only one affected by bad weather during the growth season. And the resulting shortage has seen the price of potatoes shoot up sevenfold to almost \$2 per kilogram (2.2 pounds) in some markets.

This in a country where more than a third of the population lives in poverty, according to official figures.

Experts say seasonal rains that came too late and untimely frost are likely the outcome of a changing climate.

"The highlands, and... the whole region of Bolivia, are vulnerable to (climate) change," said Luis Blacutt, an atmospheric physics expert at the Higher University of San Andres in La Paz.

"These changes are manifesting now. There is a very, very acute rain deficit," he told AFP.

Normally, the region receives up to 70 percent of its annual rainfall between November and March, but in 2022, it came only at the end of December.

The delay also wreaked havoc in the Andean regions of neighboring Peru, which declared a 60-day state of emergency in several districts in December due to drought.

Already in 2010, a study in the Annals of the Association of American Geographers, a peer-reviewed journal, warned that "climatic changes in the Altiplano (or highlands) might have serious consequences for water management and Indigenous agriculture."

And research published in 2019 in the journal Frontiers in Environmental Science said human-induced climate change helped explain "the negative rainfall changes detected in the Altiplano during the last decades."

According to the International Potato Center, based in Peru, there are more than 4,000 varieties of edible potato -- the third most cultivated crop for human consumption after rice and wheat.

Most of them are found in the South American Andes.

Pongo now has to wait until the end of October to replant his crop, having given up on having any useful harvest this time around.

If no rain has fallen by then, he will have to wait even longer as the soil needs to be moist for potatoes to germinate.

But if he waits too long, the winter frosts that come ever earlier could once again destroy the fruits of his labor.

In the face of such uncertainty, Pongo and some neighbors have started using greenhouses erected with the support of a local NGO, Cipca, which comes to the aid of peasant farmers.

"In the Bolivian highlands, we are fully experiencing the effects of climate change," said Cipca technician Orlando Ticona.

"We are experiencing a climate crisis, which has had a profound impact on all crops in the highlands, that is potatoes and Andean grains. The potato mostly."

If not in the field, potatoes can be successfully produced in greenhouses, said Ticona.



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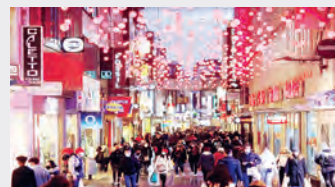
German Producer Prices Ease

BERLIN (Dispatches) - German producer prices rose more than expected in January, though the rate of increase eased for the fourth month in a row, signalling that inflation in Europe's largest economy could be starting to wane, according to data released.

Producer prices of industrial products were up 17.8% on the same month last year, the Federal Statistical Office reported, compared with analysts' expectations for the rate of increase to ease to 16.4%.

Compared with December 2022, prices fell 1.0%, which was above consensus for a drop of 1.6%. The decline was driven by a 5.0% drop in energy prices, with a particularly strong dip in electricity prices.

However, energy prices were also largely responsible for the year-on-year increase, being up 32.9% on the year. The overall producer prices index disregarding energy was up 10.7% on year.



U.S. Claims Russia's Crude Output Cut Signals Unsold Oil

HOUSTON (Dispatches) - Russia's decision to cut crude oil production by 500,000 barrels per day reflects its inability to sell all of its oil, Ben Harris, a U.S. Treasury Department Assistant Secretary, said.

Russia's Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak last week said it would voluntarily cut production beginning next month following the start of Western price caps on Russian oil and oil products on February 5. The move to cut around 5 per cent of output temporarily pushed up global prices.

"They cut back on production because they just couldn't sell it (the oil), not because they wanted to weaponize oil and refined products," Harris said in remarks at the Argus Americas Crude Summit.

The cut follows embargoes and sanctions, including an unprecedented \$60 a barrel price cap on its crude, by Western countries to punish Moscow for its invasion of Ukraine. Poland, Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia have pushed for lowering the crude oil cap.

Russia's monthly budget revenues from oil and gas fell 46 per cent in January to their lowest level since August 2020 under the impact of Western sanctions on its most lucrative export, according to finance ministry data.

The cap sought to maintain market stability and to drive down Russian revenue, both of which have been achieved, Harris said. There have been no American companies involved in trading Russian oil above the price cap, he said.

It is unclear whether Russia will shut in crude because of the logistical difficulties of placing crude at the cap, or if the production cut lasts, Michael Cohen, BP's chief US economist, said during the conference.

Colin Parfitt, vice president of midstream for Chevron Corp, also said it was not yet clear whether the output cut is major. The market is in a "wait-and-see" approach to the announcement, Parfitt told Reuters on the sidelines of the conference.

Russia is still selling discounted barrels of crude to purchasers including China and India. Purchasing those Russian barrels is "extremely lucrative" for a large part of the world, said Mercuria President Daniel Jaeggi at the conference.

However, Goldman Sachs said in a note earlier this week that Moscow's trade partners have increasingly paid more for Russian crude than quoted prices suggest, cushioning Russia from the impact of Western sanctions.

Phillips 66's Chief Executive Mark Lashier said the company's base assumption is that Russia's crude and oil products will find their way into the marketplace.

U.S. Crude Oil Exports to Be in Demand This Year

HOUSTON (Dispatches) - U.S. crude oil exports that have been boosted by a trade flow reshuffle in the aftermath of Russia's invasion of Ukraine will remain elevated this year as Europe and Asia search for supplies, company officials and analysts said.

Western sanctions on Russia's crude and oil products have opened the door to rising demand for U.S. crude grades as many European countries have become thirsty for alternative supplies. This year, Russia's oil is expected to continue flowing to India and China, while heightened volumes of U.S. crude will go to European and Asian customers.

"A key change in flow is U.S. crude going to Europe," Colin Parfitt, Vice President of Midstream for Chevron Corp, told Reuters on the sidelines of the Argus Americas Crude Summit. "For this year, I'm pretty confident Europe is short of Russian oil, and we'll see more U.S. crude there."

Exports of U.S. crude to Europe reached nearly 1.69 million barrels per day (bpd) in December, the highest in at least two years, according to data and analytics firm Kpler. It has since eased to about 1.42 million bpd in February.

As U.S. refineries on the Gulf Coast run at high levels, barrels from the prolific Permian Basin will be exported, said Brian Freed, chief executive of oil pipeline and storage operator EPIC Midstream.

"Whether they go to Canada, or somewhere else in the United States, or to Europe or Asia, they're going to end up on the water to clear the basin," Freed told Reuters.

Customers in Asia and India are buying discounted Russian Urals crude after Western nations imposed an unprecedented \$60 a barrel price cap on Russian oil in December. About 25% of Indian crude imports are now coming from Russia, said

South Korea Economic Slowdown to Continue

SEJONG (Dispatches) - South Korea's finance ministry said Friday the country's economy has slowed amid higher inflation and sluggish exports.

"South Korea's inflation remains at a high plateau, and domestic consumption recovery is slowing down. A persistent slump in exports and deteriorating business sentiment indicate an economic downturn," the Ministry of Economy and Finance said.

The finance ministry had been mentioning the possibility of an economic slowdown in its monthly economic assessment report, called the Green Book, since June last year.

"(Since June), South Korea's exports have been sharply losing ground, and recently, even consumption started to slow," Lee Seung-han, the director of the ministry's economic analysis division, said during a press conference.

Lee Seung-han, the director of the economic analysis division under the Ministry of Economy and Finance, speaks during a press conference held in the central city of Sejong on Feb. 17, 2023. (Yonhap)

Lee Seung-han, the director of the economic analysis division under the Ministry of Economy and Finance, speaks during a press conference held in the central city of Sejong on Feb. 17, 2023. (Yonhap)

It marked the first time for the ministry to assess that the economy has slowed since the country gradually recovered from the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In January, the country's trade deficit reached a monthly record high of US\$12.69 billion, marking the 11th straight month of losses, primarily due to soaring energy costs. South Korea is highly dependent on energy imports.

Tourism Revival Boosts Thai Economy But Exports Sluggish

BANGKOK (Dispatches) - Thailand's economy expanded by 2.6 percent last year on the back of a tourism recovery and strong consumer confidence but an export slowdown dragged on growth, officials said.

The figure was below expectations and followed 1.5 percent growth the previous year.

Southeast Asia's second-largest economy ran out of steam in the fourth quarter with only 1.4 percent growth year on year, down

from 4.6 percent in the previous quarter, according to Thailand's National Economic and Social Development Council.

"The growth was driven mainly by the tourism recovery and continual improvement of domestic demand in both private consumption and investment," the council said.

Border restrictions during the coronavirus pandemic battered the kingdom's key tourism industry, which previously contributed around a fifth of national income.

While visitor numbers are steadily increasing again with 11.2 million international arrivals last year, the number is a far cry from the 40 million recorded in 2019.

Thailand is now banking on a return of tourists from China, which was previously the biggest source of visitors.

Across other sectors, goods exports were sluggish in the fourth quarter following weaker demand from the United States and Europe.

Headline inflation stood at 6.1 percent in 2022, but private consumption still expanded 6.3 percent through the year.

The council is forecasting the Thai economy will expand by between 2.7 and 3.7 percent this year.

Kiatnakin Phatra Securities chief economist Pipat Luengnaruemitchai said the data showed Thailand is experiencing an uneven economic recovery.

"People expected 3.5 percent growth on the back of a strong tourism recovery," he told AFP.

But the tourism revival might be concentrated in Bangkok, Phuket, Pattaya and Chiang Mai, he added.

"The rest of the country will continue to face a sluggish recovery," Pipat said.

The slowdown in exports formed part of a global trend, he added.

"The strong Thai currency doesn't help much" and coming Thai elections expected around May could create uncertainty and spur investors and consumers to take a "wait-and-see" approach.

UK Consumers Bought More In January But Overall Gloom Persists

LONDON (Reuters) - British consumers unexpectedly increased their shopping in January, but the big picture remains one of weak demand from inflation-hit households relying more on discounts at retailers to make ends meet.

Official data published on Friday showed sales volumes rose by 0.5% from December for only the second month-on-month increase since August 2021. A Reuters poll of economists had pointed to a 0.3% fall in sales last month.

Fuel sales rose in January, reflecting a fall in prices, and discounting helped online retailers as well as jewellers, cosmetic stores and carpet and furnishing shops, the Office for National Statistics said.

But clothing store sales fell back sharply after rising for four months, and food store sales dropped again as consumers hunted for cheaper products and bought fewer items.

Sales volumes in the key Christmas month of December fell more deeply than previously reported, dropping by 1.2% from November, rather than the original estimate of a 1.0% decline.

"After December's steep fall, retail sales picked up slightly in January, although the general trend remains one of decline," ONS Director of Economic Statistics Darren Morgan said in a statement.

Sales fell by 5.1% compared with January 2022 for their 10th consecutive year-on-year drop, the longest such run since the 2008-09 global financial crisis.

Volumes were 1.4% below their levels immediately before the coronavirus pandemic struck.

Britain's economy is widely expected to fall into a recession this year under the weight of the leap in inflation and polling firm GfK's consumer confidence index last month showed households close to their gloomiest since at least 1974.

Sterling fell slightly against the dollar and the euro immediately after the data was published.

The Bank of England has said the surge in inflation seems to be turning a corner and data published on Wednesday showed the consumer prices index fell by more than expected, although at 10.1% it is more than five times the BoE's target.

It is also much higher than growth in wages, eating into the spending power of consumers.

Energy bills for households could fall by the summer which, while still sky-high compared with their levels before Russia's invasion of Ukraine, could alleviate the drag on demand.

But James Smith, an economist with ING, said the prospect of house price falls and higher mortgage costs risked adding to the gloom among consumers.

"Overall, we're expecting a very mild recession through the first half of this year," he said.

Finance minister Jeremy Hunt has ruled out another major round of support for households when he delivers an annual budget statement on March 15, and there is also likely to be more pain for borrowers from the BoE soon.

The central bank is expected by most analysts and investors to raise interest rates again, this time by a quarter of a percentage point in March. It might do the same again in May, which would take Bank Rate to 4.5%, the highest since 2008.

China Takes Top Spot In Global Refining Capacity



BEIJING (Reuters) - China's oil refining capacity overtook the United States as the world's largest in 2022, an industry official said on Thursday, though its production of fuel products lagged the United States due to low utilization rates.

Total refining capacity in China expanded to 920 million tons per year, or 18.4 million barrels per day (bpd), in 2022 Fu Xiangsheng, vice president of the China Petroleum and Chemical Industry Association, told reporters.

That compares with U.S. refining capacity as of December at 17.6 million bpd, according to the International Energy Agency's latest oil market report.

China's recent wave of refinery expansions has been led by state-run PetroChina and large private firms such as Zhejiang Rongsheng group and Jiangsu Shenghong Petrochemical, mainly to fill a supply gap in petrochemicals rather than transportation fuels.

China's total refined products output last year was less than 700 million tonnes (5.1 billion barrels), at an average plant utilisation rate of around 70%, the association said, compared with more than 800 million tonnes in the United States, where average utilisation exceeded 90%.

China has 32 refineries with at least 200,000 bpd capacity each, according to the association, citing the launch of a new facility built by PetroChina (601857.SS) in Jiayang in Guangdong province as a recent example of the country's growing capacity.



2 Iran Skiers Shined at Alpine Champs

TEHRAN (MNA)– Two Iranian skiers have gained proper results at the 2023 World Alpine Skiing Championships. Mohammad Kiadarbansari and Mohammad Saveh Shemshaki could advance to the finals at the event. This is considered Iran’s best performance in the history of world championships. So far, the Iranian athletes have stood in 23rd place in the tournament in which 118 contenders have participated. The 47th FIS Alpine World Ski Championships is underway in two neighboring locations in the French Alps, Courchevel, and Méribel.



U.S. Tries to Woo India Away From Russia With display of F-35s, Bombers

BENGALURU (Dispatches) - The United States brought its most advanced fighter jet, the F-35, to India for the first time this week alongside F-16s, Super Hornets and B-1B bombers as Washington looks to woo New Delhi away from its traditional military supplier, Russia.

India, desperate to modernize its largely Soviet-era fighter jet fleet to boost its air power, is concerned about Russian supply delays due to the Ukraine war and faces pressure from the West to distance itself from Moscow.

The American delegation to the week-long Aero India show in Bengaluru, which ended on Friday, is the biggest in the 27-year history of the show and underlines the growing strategic relationship between the United States and India.

In contrast, Russia, India’s largest weapons supplier since the Soviet Union days, had a nominal presence. Its state-owned weapons exporter Rosoboronexport had a joint stall with United Aircraft and Almaz-Antey, displaying miniature models of aircraft, trucks, radars and tanks.

At previous editions of the show, Rosoboronexport had a more central position for its stall, although Russia has not brought a fighter jet to Bengaluru for a decade after India began considering more European and U.S. fighter jets.

Boeing (BA.N) F/A-18 Super Hornets have already entered the race to supply fighter jets for the Indian Navy’s second aircraft carrier and Lockheed Martin’s (LMT.N) F-21, an upgraded F-16 designed for India unveiled at Aero India in 2019, are also being offered to the air force.

A \$20 billion air force proposal to buy 114 multi-role fighter aircraft has been pending for five years, brought into sharp focus by tensions with China and Pakistan.

The F-35 is not being considered by India “as of now”, according to an Indian Air Force (IAF) source, but the display of two F-35s at Aero India for the first time was a sign of New Delhi’s growing strategic importance to Washington.

It was “not a sales pitch” but rather a signal to the importance of the bilateral defence relationship in the Indo-Pacific region, said Angad Singh, an independent defence analyst.

“Even if weapons sales aren’t the cornerstone of the relationship, there is a cooperation and collaboration at the military level between India and the U.S.,” he added.



The United States is selective about which countries it allows to buy the F-35. When asked if it would be offered to India, Rear Admiral Michael L. Baker, defence attache at the U.S. embassy in India, said New Delhi was in the “very early stages” of considering whether it wanted the plane.

An IAF spokesperson did not respond to a request for comment on its interest in F-35s.

Ahead of the show, Russian state news agencies reported that Moscow had supplied New Delhi with around \$13 billion of arms in the past five years and had placed orders for \$10 billion.

The United States has approved arms sales worth more than \$6 billion to India in the last six years, including transport aircraft, Apache, Chinook and MH-60 helicopters, missiles, air defence systems, naval guns and P-8I Poseidon surveillance aircraft.

India also wants to manufacture more defence equipment at home in collaboration with global giants, first to meet its own needs and eventually to export sophisticated weapons platforms.

Amazon Pollution: The Stain on Ecuador’s Oil Boom



LAGO AGRI (Dispatches) - Lago Agrio is where it began in February 1967: Ecuador’s first oil well drilled by the US Texaco-Gulf consortium to ring in an era of black gold for the Ecuadorian Amazon.

“On that day, ministers and officials bathed in oil. Then they threw it in the river... a good start,” Donald Moncayo, coordinator of the Union of People Affected by Chevron-Texaco (Udapt), told AFP, ironically.

Fifty-six years later, the oil continues to flow, some 500,000 barrels per day that President Guillermo Lasso has vowed to double.

Oil is the South American country’s top export -- generating some \$13 billion per year.

That first well at Lago Agrio in Ecuador’s northeast closed in 2006 after generating nearly 10 million barrels.

But millions of hectares have been transformed -- for better or worse -- into Ecuador’s oil capital.

The region’s forests are receding as pollution spreads, activists claim -- the landscape increasingly dominated by wells, pipelines, tanker trucks, oil flares and processing plants.

The government says oil income is essential for the country’s development, and that of its people.

But for Moncayo, who says he was born “200 meters from an oil well” 49 years ago, it is an industry synonymous with poverty and large-scale pollution.

He has led a long and difficult legal fight against Texaco since the 1990s.

In 30 years of operation, the company dug 356 wells around Lago Agrio, each with retention ponds -- 880 of them in total -- holding a toxic sludge of oil waste and contaminated water.

Some 60 million liters of this liquid were discharged into the environment, according to Udapt, contaminating water used for fishing, bathing and drinking.

The open pits remain scattered throughout the forest today.

In 1993, some 30,000 residents of the Lago Agrio region sued Texaco, since bought by Chevron, in a New York Court.

The case was dismissed over misplaced jurisdiction, and the plaintiffs turned to the courts closer to home.

In 2011, Ecuador’s Supreme Court found in favor of the community and ordered the company to pay \$9.5 billion in compensation for pollution of native lands.

But seven years later, the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague ruled in favor of Chevron and Texaco.

It found the Ecuador court’s judgment was in part “corruptly ‘ghostwritten’” by plaintiffs’ representatives who had promised a judge a bribe.

How Sanctions Complicated Day-to-Day Banking for Russians

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Financial sanctions against Russia have strangled its banks’ profits and wrecked many lenders’ international operations, but one year after Moscow sent its troops into Ukraine how much do they matter for average Russians?

For the majority, who bank in roubles with huge retail lenders, such as Sberbank (SBER.MM), the answer is: not much.

“Nothing has changed for me at all,” said Vyacheslav Fatikhovich, a taxi driver in the Urals city of Yekaterinburg.

“The only thing is that customers are paying less by card and more often in cash,” he said.

Russia’s monetary authorities managed to stave off a full-scale run on its banks with capital controls, and the rouble supply has remained plentiful with long lines at ATMs during an early spring dash for cash now a thing of the past.

However, for those who travel abroad, want to move money there or hold foreign currencies or securities, life has become more complicated after Russia’s major banks got effectively booted from the SWIFT global payments network.

Those with foreign currency accounts were allowed to withdraw just \$10,000 if the money arrived in their account before the curbs were imposed on March 9. Those who deposited hard currencies after the cutoff can only withdraw roubles.

It is anyone’s guess how much hard currency got stuck outside of the banking system as some rushed to dump roubles and took out their hard currency deposits, fearing looming curbs would cut them off altogether.

A retail worker, who asked not to be identified, said the memory of the mad scramble for cash made her to this day make sure she had ample cash handy.

“I spent hours in my car driving between banks where people were withdrawing not just dollars, but also roubles,” she said.

The suspension of Russian operations by Visa (V.N) and Mastercard (MA.N) also meant their cards issued there stopped working abroad, sparking a rush to Russia’s alternative, Mir cards.

Danil Usikov, a 45-year-old entrepreneur, who is based in Belarus and was there when Russian cards stopped working, said he had enough cash not to panic.

“But the problem had to be solved and I flew to Moscow, opened a Mir card, returned to Belarus and then was able to pay for everything.”

Yet Mir, which means “world” or “peace” in Russian, is facing headwinds abroad, with some “friendly” countries - those that have not sanctioned Russia - such as Turkey restricting access.

Former journalist Andrey said China’s UnionPay was his lifeline.



“I quickly opened three UnionPay cards at different Russian banks,” Andrey, who now works outside Russia, said. “Moreover, I went to Kazakhstan to get a MasterCard there, which proved to be invaluable in the past year.”

Many Russians who have moved abroad, worried about reprisals for their political views or fearing being called up to fight in the conflict, also had to figure out how to get money out of Russia.

While some banks can still access SWIFT and

process cross-border transfers, commissions and fees have gone up, driving people to alternatives, such as cryptocurrencies.

For example, users of Binance, the world’s largest crypto exchange, can transfer roubles via the “stablecoin” Tether pegged to the U.S. dollar.

Other ways of extracting cash from Russia are more adventurous.

One financial services professional, who left Moscow soon after the conflict began and requested anonymity, asked a friend to withdraw millions of roubles from his Russian accounts and meet a man in Moscow.

The transaction, based entirely on trust, was completed three hours later when a woman arrived at his hotel room in Dubai with around \$50,000 in a paper KFC bag.

Thousands of Russians who have flocked to Dubai found that that even though it is a “friendly” destination, opening a bank account there was anything but straightforward, especially without an Emirati ID.

“It’s possible, but the verification process takes one to three months, and the result is not always predictable,” said Telegram user, Inna, on a channel for Russians called ‘Hi Dubai’ about opening an account without local ID.

As the West banned transactions with Russia’s central bank and the freezing of some \$300 billion in its overseas assets limited its ability to defend the rouble, individuals were also affected by restrictions. More than 5 million retail investors in Russia had over 320 billion roubles (\$4.28 billion) in foreign stock holdings frozen as a result, the central bank has estimated.

“We lost our assets after Feb. 24, 2022 and still to this day - assets are frozen and they remain so,” said investor Svetlana Mavrinskaya.

Another investor, Yulia Zykova said: “Neither the central bank, nor brokers are doing anything in the interests of Russian investors.”

The Bank of Russia says is working to unblock retail investors’ assets. Still, for most Russians, like Fatikhovich, the taxi driver, such concerns are alien.

“I go on holiday to my mother’s in the countryside, not abroad,” he said. “I’ve seen dollars of course, but I’ve never held any in my hands.”

When the West...

FROM PAGE 1

The Islamic Republic of Iran is the only country which has reiterated it will continue helping Turkey and Syria as the country has sent several aid packages to Turkey and Syria. Muslim states should take this point into consideration that the Western states should not be expected to help Turkey and Syria because they are Muslim states and this is something that the West is sensitive on it as we know Syria is under heavy sanctions imposed by the West.

As the Supreme Leader of Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei on Saturday reiterated, Muslims should rush to help Syria and Turkey to alleviate the pain of the quake as Tehran has shown its commitment in the past and in recent days that it will support Muslim states in the hard times and it is time for all Muslim states to help Syria and Turkey as their brotherly countries.

The West is also better to forget the issue of humanity and continue the game of Ukraine and blaming Iran for baseless accusations and people in the world do not trust the West and its support of humanity issues because they see the double standard approach of the West practically in dealing with quake in Syria and Turkey or other issues like the crimes of Israel. The West does everything to save Ukraine by any kind of financial help but it spares any decision to financially support for Syria and Turkey or at least for easing sanctions against Syria to let Muslim countries help this country.

So Muslim nations are recommended to show the West real commitment to humanity by helping Turkey and Syria to overcome the devastating disaster which claimed lives of tens of thousands.



Iran Says...

FROM PAGE 1

NBC News reported February 15 that indirect negotiations were taking place for a possible prisoner exchange between the United States and the Islamic Republic. The report said that the two sides were exploring ways that could include a prisoner exchange and the release of \$7 billion of frozen Iranian funds by South Korea.

NBC also reported that the release of the funds would be on the condition that the money will use the money for purchase of food, reminiscent of ‘food for oil’ arrangement during Saddam Hussein’s rule in Iraq in the 1990s.

Kanaani who said Iranian citizens arrested in the West for violating US sanctions should be freed, which would be at the heart of a “prisoner exchange” deal.

West Silence Against...

FROM PAGE 1

Syria’s health ministry said five people were killed in the strike, including one soldier, while fifteen others were wounded, some of whom in critical condition.

A Syrian security source was also quoted by SANA as confirming that the country’s air defenses had shot down most of the Israeli missiles before they reached their target.

Israel frequently carries out missile attacks on targets in Syria, mostly using the airspace of Lebanon or the occupied territories.

Syrian has repeatedly complained to the UN over Israeli assaults, urging the Security Council to take action against Tel Aviv’s crimes. The calls have, however, fallen on deaf ears.

In early November 2022, Syrian Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates Faisal Mekdad emphasized that his country will definitely give a crushing response to such acts of aggression at some point in the future.

Covid Infection Gives Similar Immunity to Vaccination

PARIS (Dispatches) - The protection against Covid-19 from being previously infected lasts at least as long as that offered by vaccination, one of the largest studies conducted on the subject said.

Ten months after getting Covid, people still had an 88 percent lower risk of reinfection, hospitalisation and death, according to the study published in the Lancet journal.

That makes this natural immunity “at least as durable, if not more so” than two doses of Pfizer or Moderna’s vaccines, the study said.

The authors nevertheless emphasised that their findings should not discourage vaccination, which remains the safest way to get immunity.

The study, led by the US-based Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME), said it was the most comprehensive analysis on how long protection lasts for the different forms of immunity.

The researchers reviewed 65 studies from 19 countries up to September 2022, meaning some covered the period when Omicron swept across the world.

Omicron proved to be more contagious than previous strains, but less severe.

Homa Leads in Genesis Invitational

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - Former champion Max Homa fired a four-under-par 68 to take a one-shot lead in the Genesis Invitational, where Tiger Woods was poised to play the weekend in his return to PGA Tour golf.

Homa's 10-under-par total of 132 gave him a one-shot lead over third-ranked Spaniard Jon Rahm and Americans Keith Mitchell and Lee Hodges, with Woods 11 strokes adrift in his first tournament since he missed the cut at the British Open.

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Kiplimo Wins World Cross Country Title

BATHURST (Dispatches) - Jacob Kiplimo upset distance king Joshua Cheptegei to win the world cross country title as top women's star Letesenbet Gidey dramatically collapsed in sight of the finish line as she looked destined for gold.

Uganda's Kiplimo clocked 29min 17sec around the 10km-long course at Mount Panorama in Bathurst, northwest of Sydney -- better known as one of the world's most challenging motor racing courses. He crossed nine seconds clear of Ethiopia's Berihu Aregawi with fellow Ugandan Cheptegei taking bronze.

St-Germain Shocks Shiffrin For World Slalom Gold

PARIS (Dispatches) - Canada's Laurence St-Germain caused a massive upset by winning world slalom gold in Meribel, outgunning favorite Mikaela Shiffrin who took silver.

It meant the end of Shiffrin's bid for a fifth world slalom title after she dominated the first of two runs in the French resort, but floundered on the second to allow the Canadian in for a stunning victory.

The result still saw the 27-year-old American leave the champs with giant slalom gold and a second silver from the super-G.

St-Germain had been third fastest after the first leg down the Roc de Fer slope in sunny, warm conditions and held her nerve on the second run for a winning aggregate time of 1min 43.15sec.

It was a remarkable victory for the 28-year-old Quebec native who has never made a World Cup podium. The best result of her 13 top 10 finishes from her eight seasons on the circuit is a fifth place in a parallel slalom in St Moritz in December 2019.

"That is weird!" St-Germain said when asked how it felt to be the newly-crowned world champion.

"I was really not expecting this obviously. I was really stressed, I was kind of nauseous. "I had bit of a mistake but I was thinking 'go down, go down, go down', and it worked out," said St-Germain, who becomes the first Canadian woman to win a world gold since Melanie Turgeon claimed victory in the downhill in St Moritz in 2003.

Shiffrin, whose attention will immediately turn to her bid to equal and then surpass Ingemar Stenmark's overall record of 86 World Cup victories, suffered a terrible second run to finish 0.57sec off the Canadian's pace, with Germany's Lena Duerr taking bronze (+0.69).

"These two weeks have been unbelievable," said Shiffrin, who split with long-time coach Mike Day just 24 hours before her giant slalom victory.

She said she'd run the "full range of emotions: disappointment, excitement, triumph, stress, everything I could possibly feel".

"Today my energy has gone, I put everything I had into the hill."

Italy's Lara Della Mea took up the early lead in the second leg, with a third of the course in the shade and course workers battling rapidly melting snow under the bright sun.



That held through 15 racers until first Sweden's reigning Olympic giant slalom champion Sara Hector and then Norway's Mina Fuerst Holtmann went atop the leaderboard.

The top eight readied themselves for their second descent, Sweden's Hanna Aronsson Elfman failing to bother the podium, while Croatian teenager Zrinka Ljutic disappointingly skied out and Slovenia's Ana Bucik came in just behind Della Mea.

The business end of the day's racing saw Slovakia's reigning Olympic champion Petra Vlhova, fifth fastest in the first leg, go second 0.14sec behind Holtmann.

Germany's Duerr then nipped in ahead of the Norwegian, piling the pressure on the top three.

First down was St-Germain, who not only refused to buckle but took the lead by 0.69sec in a swashbuckling display of aggressive slalom skiing.

Switzerland's two-time Olympic slalom medallist Wendy Holdener looked prime to go top, but skied out with the line in view.

That left Shiffrin in the starthut, but a hesitant start saw the American lose time throughout, eventually clocking the 27th slowest time of the top 30 to finish second.

The silver sees Shiffrin move clear of former Swedish racer Anja Paerson to a personal tally of 14 world medals. Only Germany's Christl Cranz (15) has more, but she was skiing between 1934-39, when world champs was held every year and ski racing was yet to evolve to what it is nowadays.

Having also won slalom bronze in the 2021 worlds, Saturday's silver also saw Shiffrin become the first skier, male or female, to claim at least six world championships medals in a specific event.

Ghana Footballer Atsu Found Dead in Turkey Quake/Rubble



HATAY (Dispatches) - Former Ghana international Christian Atsu was found dead on Saturday, almost two weeks after a devastating earthquake in Turkey.

Atsu, 31, was caught up in a 7.8-magnitude quake that rocked Turkey and Syria on February 6, killing more than 43,000 people in both countries.

There were initial reports the former Chelsea and Newcastle player had been rescued a day after the quake, but these turned out to be false.

His manager in Turkey, Murat Uzunmehmet, told DHA news agency on Saturday that his body had been found under the rubble of luxury flats that crumbled in the Turkish southern province of Hatay.

"We have reached his lifeless body. His belongings are still being removed. His phone was also found," Uzunmehmet told DHA.

Ghana's ministry of foreign affairs said it had "received the unfortunate news".

"The elder brother and twin sister of Christian Atsu and an officer of the (Ghanaian) embassy were present at the site when the body was recovered," the ministry said in a statement. Ghana said it was working with the Turkish government to organise the transport of the body back to Atsu's home country for burial.

Midfielder Atsu scored the last of his 33 career goals for Hatayspor in Turkey's Super Lig on February 5, hours before the quake struck. "There are no words to describe our sadness," tweeted his Turkish top-flight club.

"We will not forget you, Atsu. Peace be upon you, beautiful person."

Man Ordered to Pay

Arsenal Keeper Ramsdale Over Derby Assault

LONDON (Dispatches) - A spectator was ordered to pay compensation to Arsenal goalkeeper Aaron Ramsdale after admitting to assaulting him following last month's north London derby against Tottenham Hotspur.

Joseph Watts, 35, jumped out of the crowd and lunged at Ramsdale with his foot as the 24-year-old goalkeeper went to retrieve his water bottle from behind the goal after Arsenal's 2-0 win.

Tottenham fan Watts pleaded guilty at Uxbridge Magistrates' Court near London to assault by beating, going on to an area adjacent to the playing area and throwing a missile on to a football playing area.

He was ordered to pay £100 in compensation to Ramsdale and carry out 150 hours of unpaid work.

The pub worker from north London is also banned from attending football matches for four years.

The district judge sentencing Watts called the assault a "relatively short-lived, comprising a single blow".

"It has had some psychological effect and he (Ramsdale) will have this in the back of his mind when he goes to work in the future," added the judge.

Barca v Man United Set Europa League Attendance Record

LONDON (Dispatches) - The Europa League knockout stage playoff clash between Barcelona and Manchester United attracted the biggest crowd in competition's history as 90,255 people watched the game at the Camp Nou.

Barcelona fought back to earn a 2-2 draw with United in a pulsating knockout round playoff first leg on Thursday, breaking the previous attendance record of 80,465 fans who saw Tottenham Hotspur host Gent at Wembley Stadium in February 2017.

Barcelona are also current holders of the attendance record in the Champions League, ever since 115,500 people attended the first leg of their 1994-95 quarter-final against Paris St Germain.



Zidane Says He Needs a Project

LONDON (Dispatches) - Former Real Madrid coach Zinedine Zidane says it's time for him to find "a new project".

The 50-year-old, out of work since 2021, had been thought to be in line to take over as France coach after the Qatar World Cup, only for Didier Deschamps to extend his stay.

Arsenal Revive Title Bid at Villa

BIRMINGHAM (Dispatches) - Arsenal got their stuttering Premier League title push back on track with a thrilling 4-2 win at Aston Villa to move back to the top of the table thanks to two added-time goals on Saturday.

With the game looking set for a 2-2 draw, Jorginho's shot came off the bar and bounced off Villa goalkeeper Emiliano Martinez into the net before minutes later Gabriel Martinelli stroked into an empty goal for Arsenal's fourth.

The result put the Gunners back on top with 54 points after 23 games, three points above Manchester City who go to Nottingham Forest for their 24th match.

At a packed and raucous Villa Park in the Midlands, Ollie Watkins fired home the hosts' opener — and his fourth goal in as many games — in the fifth minute after a scintillating run into the box and jink past defender William Saliba.

Bukayo Saka struck back for Arsenal with a fine left foot drive from inside the area in the 16th minute, before Philippe Coutinho restored Villa's lead with a low shot in the 31st following a clever dummy from Emiliano Buendia.

Oleksandr Zinchenko levelled for Arsenal in the 62nd minute with a low drive past World Cup-winning goalkeeper Martinez.

Before the thrilling finale, both sides missed guilt-edged chances, Martin Odegaard pulling wide for Arsenal when he looked certain to score and Villa's Leon Bailey seeing a shot tipped onto the crossbar.



Alcaraz Into Argentina Open Semis

BUENOS AIRES (Dispatches) - Top seed Carlos Alcaraz shrugged off damp, cold conditions to sweep into the semi-finals of the Argentina Open with a straight sets victory over Serbia's Dusan Lajovic.

The Spanish world number two, who is making his return to tennis at this week's event in Buenos Aires after a four-month injury layoff, eased into the last four with a 6-4, 6-2 victory in 1hr 33min.

Friday's quarter-finals took place in chilly conditions after a week of wild weather swings in Buenos Aires which saw temperatures go from 38.1 C (100.6 degrees Fahrenheit) last Sunday to 7.9C (46.2F).

Nevertheless the weather did not deter around 5,000 fans from packing the Guillermo Vilas court at the Buenos Aires Lawn Tennis Club to watch Alcaraz march into the last four. Alcaraz, who had looked rusty in his opening match of the tournament on Wednesday, made a solid start to take a 3-0 lead before surrendering the initiative to allow Lajovic to level at 4-4.

The 19-year-old then held and broke Lajovic to take the first set.

Alcaraz was stronger in the second, swiftly opening up a big lead before clinching victory with a trademark forehand winner.

"Everything was very different from what we have been used to -- there was rain and it was cold," Alcaraz said of the conditions.

"But the tennis player's day-to-day job is to adapt to the conditions, and I think a great match came out.

