

**Gov't Has Raised the Tax on Non-Governmental Legal Entities By 120 Percent in the National Budget Bill for the Next Iranian Calendar Year, Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA) Reported**

# IRAN NEWS

**Production Index of 280 Iranian Industrial Companies Active in the Stock Market Has Grown 7.7% in the 10th Iranian Calendar Month of Dey As Compared to the Figure for the Same Month in the Previous Year**

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## Iran Ready for Reopening of Iranian, Saudi Embassies

IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Nasser Kanaani expressed the country's readiness for the reopening of the embassies and consulates of Iran and Saudi Arabia in the two countries.

Speaking to reporters at a weekly press conference on Monday, Kanaani said Iran has announced several times that, if Saudi Arabia is serious about proceeding with the reconciliation talks, Tehran will be ready to continue the negotiations as well and elevate the talks to the political level and the foreign ministries of the two states.

The Islamic Republic is also prepared for obtaining a result from the negotiations in regard to the reopening of the political and consular missions of Iran and Saudi Arabia in the two countries, he added.

The spokesman stressed that Iran is willing to bring the ties with Saudi Arabia on the right track, as it is prepared to shake hands warmly with anyone extending a hand of friendship. *See Page 7*

## China to Offer \$8.1b In Investment, Finance To Iran Agro Projects

TEHRAN (PressTV) - China will offer \$8.1 billion worth of investment and finance to various agriculture projects in Iran based on agreements reached between the two countries during a recent trip to Beijing by Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi, according to a senior official in Iran's ministry of agriculture (MAJ).

MAJ's deputy for planning and economy Shahpour Alayi said on Sunday that China will invest some \$3.5 billion in fishery, mechanization, arable farming, green houses and dryland farming in Iran as part of a MoU signed between the two countries during Raisi's visit to China earlier this week.

Alayi said Iran will also be able to access some \$4.6 billion worth of Chinese resources under a finance scheme for two major agricultural projects in south and north of the country.

He said Iran will finish preparations for the implementation of the agreements with China until late March, adding that the projects could start in early April.

The official said the MAJ had set up committees to pursue the implementation of the agriculture MoU with China, adding that guidelines on the agreement will be issued for private sector companies and commerce chambers within the next weeks.

## Tehran Rejects Baseless Reports On Its Uranium Enrichment



IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Iran categorically rejected a report by Western media that it has enriched uranium to levels above 60 percent purity, saying the country's nuclear facilities have never enriched uranium above that level.

The spokesman for the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) Behrouz Kamalvandi made the remarks in reaction to a report by Bloomberg that claimed "the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) is trying to clarify how Iran accumulated uranium enriched to 84% purity." It added that the IAEA inspectors had found highly-enriched uranium particles "within the network of pipes connecting centrifuges used to separate uranium isotopes."

Speaking to Iran's official IRNA news agency, Kamalvandi said Bloomberg's report was aimed at distorting the realities. He added that during the enrichment process, the mere existence of individual uranium particles enriched to above 60 percent purity does not mean that uranium is being enriched at levels above 60 percent.

The official was also quoted by Fars news agency as saying that existence of such particles was a totally normal issue in the course of uranium enrichment and could happen even when the feedstock entering centrifuge cascades decreased momentarily.

"What matters is the final product and the Islamic Republic of Iran has never embarked on [uranium] enrichment at a level above 60 percent," Kamalvandi said, adding, "The IAEA is well aware that such issues happen during the [nuclear] work. In various cases in the past, different levels of enrichment have been observed and have been accounted for, and this latest issue will be definitely clarified as well."

He noted that the IAEA does not usually inform its members of such issues, saying, "Publicizing these issues through [Western] media once again shows that, unfortunately, the IAEA has lost its professional and impartial standing since a long time ago. It intentionally provides Western media with technical information, and without a doubt, this conduct will further discredit this important international organization."

Speaking in an interview with Russia's Sputnik news agency in early February, the head of the AEOI criticized the UN nuclear watchdog for the leakage of information about Iran's nuclear energy program to the opponents of diplomatic efforts aimed at reviving the nuclear agreement, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

"The International Atomic Energy Agency gives information about Iran's nuclear program to the opponents of the negotiations held to revive the JCPOA," Mohammad Eslami said.

He also expressed regret over the IAEA's "political, unprofessional behavior" in connection with the disclosure of the JCPOA's confidential reports to those who oppose the negotiations aimed at restoring the 2015 accord, which was unilaterally abandoned by the US in 2018.

## EU Pursuing Trump's Failed Sanctions Policy Against Iran

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Foreign Minister Amirabdollahian has censured the European Union's new round of sanctions on the Islamic Republic, saying the 27-member bloc is sticking to former U.S. president Donald Trump's "ineffectual" policy of sanctions against Tehran.

In a telephone conversation with EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell on Sunday, Amir-Abdollahian slammed Brussels' "overused and obsolete" policy regarding Iran.

Last month, the EU slapped new sanctions on a number of Iranian officials and organizations over an alleged crackdown on riots across the country. Some EU member states and the European Parliament have even pushed for the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) to be listed as a "terrorist organization."

"The behavior of the European Union in recent months is the continuation of Trump's ineffective Iran policy. It further proves the continuation of dual and unrealistic standards combined with the exploitation of human rights concepts," Amirabdollahian said.

He also lashed out at certain European countries for backing anti-Iran groups that sponsor terrorism. *See Page 7*

## Language of Threat Does Not Work With Iran

TEHRAN (MNA) - Language of threat doesn't work with the authorities of Iran, Russian Permanent Representative to International Organizations in Vienna said in reaction to EU's Borrell's anti-Iran remarks.

"Sounds like an ultimatum. This is called the EU diplomacy nowadays. Brussels doesn't understand that such language doesn't work with the authorities of #Iran," Mikhail Ulyanov tweeted on Monday in reaction to EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell's anti-Iran tweet.

Referring to his telephone conversation with Iranian top diplomat Hossein Amirabdollahian, Borrell repeated in a tweet yesterday baseless accusations against the Islamic Republic of Iran.

This comes as Iran and Russia have always rejected baseless allegations leveled by Europeans that Tehran supplied Moscow with assistance in the war in Ukraine.

## Aid Group MSF Issues Urgent Appeal for Quake-Hit Syria

DAMASCUS (Dispatches) - The Geneva-based humanitarian non-governmental organization made the appeal on Sunday, as the death toll from the 7.8-magnitude earthquake that struck Turkey and Syria on February 6 has crossed 46,000.

"An urgent increase in the volume of supplies is needed to match the scale of the humanitarian crisis," MSF said, adding that supplies "currently fail to even match pre-earthquake volumes."

Hakim Khaldi, MSF's head of mission in Syria, also said, "Aid is trickling in negligible amounts for the moment." He said the charity group has emptied its emergency stocks in three days.

MSF has delivered a convoy of 14 trucks laden with emergency assistance, including tents and winter kits, to Syria. The convoy has arrived through the al-Hammam crossing in the e northwestern Syrian district of Afrin.

"The delivery was arranged outside of the United Nations cross-border humanitarian mechanism," the aid group said.

MSF also said that "according to UN data, five days after the earthquake, only 10 trucks had entered" militant-held areas of Syria through the Bab al-Hawa Border Crossing from Turkey.

"In the 10 days following the earthquake, the number of trucks that crossed the border into northwest Syria was lower than the average weekly number for 2022," it said. *See Page 7*

## Thousands in U.S. Protest Funding of Ukraine War

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Thousands of anti-war demonstrators took to the streets in Washington on Sunday against the U.S. government's war-mongering policies, urging the Joe Biden administration to stop supplying arms to Ukraine and disband the NATO military alliance.

The biggest demonstration was held at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, DC, a symbolically significant venue for American political activists, as people participated in the 'Rage Against the War Machine' national rally.

The protesters at the rally, who held anti-war placards, called for peace talks between Russia and Ukraine, an end to US funding and military aid to Kiev, and diverting the Pentagon budget to fund numerous domestic needs. The anti-war protesters also demanded the dissolution of the NATO military alliance, blaming it for the horrors of war across the world.

Nick Brana of the "People's Party" and Angela McArdle of the Libertarian Party, who moderated the national rally, described the event as an opportunity by the organizers and the speakers from across the political spectrum of the United States to "bring together" the "left and the right" and end the war in Ukraine.

Pacifist journalist and author Chris Hedges delivered one of the keynote speeches at the event. The Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist, who was a foreign correspondent for fifteen years for The New York Times, where he served as the Middle East Bureau Chief and Balkan Bureau Chief for the paper, set the platform for the notable "left-right" speakers who would follow up in the national gathering. Veteran U.S. Congressman and former presidential candidate for the Libertarian Party, Ron Paul was one of the speakers who spoke at the rally, stating that a "simple" way to stop the wars was to "end the Fed!" - and to not send people to war unless they vote for it.

"If you cannot print the money, you cannot collect taxes by debasing the currency and stealing the wealth from the people, unnerving the middle class and the poor because that is who really pays for this, you could not have a war," Paul said.

"Why do the people go to war?" Paul asked, answering himself that, "If you think you should have war - have a vote and make sure that the vote is carried out by the people between 8 and 24. This is the group that gets punished the most." *See Page 7*

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## Navy Commander Meets With Omani Counterpart

TEHRAN (MNA) – Rear Admiral Shahram Irani, the commander of the Iranian army Navy traveled to Oman and held a meeting with the commander of the Omani navy on Sunday.

Rear Admiral Shahram Irani arrived in Muscat on Sunday afternoon and was received by Rear Admiral Saif Nasser al-Rahbi, Commander of Royal Navy of Oman (RNO).

Along with the Omani navy commander, the Iranian ambassador to Muscat Ali Najafi also welcomed the Iranian navy commander upon his arrival.

Rear Admiral Irani is slated to hold meetings and discussions with some Omani officials during this trip.

## Baku Urged to Stop Politicizing Bitter Embassy Attack

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Foreign Ministry Spokesman says Azerbaijan should avoid politicizing the “bitter” armed attack on the country’s embassy in Tehran late last month.

“Talking to media to present non-legal interpretations of this incident is not a constructive action in the path of the legal and judicial investigation into the case,” Nasser Kanaani said in a statement on Sunday.

“It is better to avoid any prejudgment, politicization and promotion of the issue,” he said.

On January 27, an assailant entered Azerbaijan’s embassy in Tehran holding a firearm and started shooting. The head of the security service of the embassy was killed and two embassy guards were wounded in the attack.

The gunman, identified as Yasin Hosseinzadeh, claimed that his wife visited Azerbaijan’s embassy in April 2022 and never returned, leaving him frustrated.

Following the incident, Tehran’s Police Chief Hossein Rahimi said a preliminary investigation pointed to “family problems” as the motive behind the fatal shooting, but Azerbaijani officials, including President Ilham Aliyev, called it a “terrorist act.”

Speaking to reporters on the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference on Saturday, Aliyev claimed that entities related to the Iranian government were involved in the attack.



“Normalization of relations with Iran depends on a transparent investigation that will bring the perpetrators (of the attack) to justice,” he said.

Reacting to the Azerbaijani president’s claims, Kanaani said the Iranian officials have time and again said that the case was going through its legal procedures and that what was released so far about the incident was the explicit notes of the gunman.

The Iranian spokesperson emphasized that all aspects of this tragic incident are under thorough investigation.

He once again expressed Iran’s readiness to give the results of the investigation to Azerbaijan, saying, “We are confident that in an atmosphere of cooperation and a constructive approach, the Azerbaijani officials will receive the necessary responses regarding all the ambiguities and the questions in their minds.”

## Special Economic Zones, An Opportunity for Development of Country

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Advisor to President and Secretary of the Supreme Council of Free Trade-Industrial and Special Economic Zones says the 13th government and especially the president himself emphasizes efficient use of free zones, and sees it an opportunity and capacity for the development of the country.



In the meeting with managing directors of special economic zones of the country in Bandar Abbas, Hojjatoleslam Abdolmaleki noted that the government sees free zones as an opportunity for development of the country and this capacity should be used efficiently.

He added that if there is some discontent in this field it is because all capacities have not been properly used. He said that major part of China’s economic power is because of the pick-up in its free and special economic zones, noting that attention to these zones exists in the literature of the Islamic Revolution and it has been even emphasized in the policies which have been set by the Supreme Leader on the resistance economy.

Abdolmaleki went on to say that popularization and globalization of free zones and special economic zones is the new approach of this organization and elaborated that economic activists, investors and the natives as well as the whole people of the country should benefit these zones and feel this benefit.

He stressed that they pursue completing soft and hard international infrastructures, attracting foreign investment, creating models for presenting in the international level and creating joint special and free zones with other countries in the international dimension.

Abdolmaleki stated that special economic zones have an irreplaceable role in job creation, production and exports and for this reason the performance of these zones should be hailed.

He went on to say that all issues which have been raised in the meeting will be taken into consideration and reviewed, reiterating that the job of the council is to remove concerns of the managers for advancing the affairs.

Abdolmaleki stipulated that synergy and joint cooperation should be on the agenda because all are members of a group and with collective work they can get better result.

He stressed that attraction of foreign investment should be pursued seriously through preparing packages for investment as well as boosting the knowledge of the CEOs of the special economic zones.

## Iranian Banks No Longer Need SWIFT

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – All banks of Russia and a number of banks have been connected to Iran’s financial telecommunications system, obviating the need for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication (SWIFT), Iranian Central Bank deputy governor said.

All Iran-China banking agreements signed during President Rasi’s visit to Beijing are confidential, Mohsen Karimi told reporters, noting that this is because its publication will cause challenges in its realization.

Karimi made the remarks on the sidelines of the 9th Annual Conference on Electronic Banking and Payment Systems on Monday.

He also said that Iranian banks do not need to use SWIFT for financial transactions anymore.

All Iranian banks are connected to a number of foreign banks in Russia and all Russian banks, Karimi also said, adding that these banks do not need SWIFT for their financial transactions because they use the national systems of their own countries.

Saying that the removal of the dollar from banking transactions is on the agenda, the Iranian Central Bank Vice Governor said, “Therefore, we no longer need SWIFT in this area.”

Iranian and Russian banking officials on January 29 signed a MoU in Tehran, following which the deputy CBI governor Karimi announced the launch of a banking messaging system between the two nations.

## Tehran, Beijing Weigh Plans for Enhancing Stability in Afghanistan

TEHRAN (Tasnim) – The special envoys of Iran and China for Afghanistan discussed ways for cooperation between Tehran and Beijing to ensure peace and stability in Afghanistan.

Hassan Kazemi Qomi, the Iranian president’s special envoy for Afghanistan who also acts as the caretaker ambassador of Iran in Kabul, held a meeting with Chinese Foreign Ministry’s special envoy on Afghan affairs Yue Xiaoyong in the Afghan capital.

In a post on his Twitter account, Kazemi Qomi said he has held a “cordial and constructive” meeting with the Chinese envoy in order to carry out the decisions made recently by the Iranian and Chinese presidents.

He said negotiations have been held on the promotion of cooperation between Iran and China with the purpose of ensuring sustainable peace and stability in Afghanistan.

Last week, Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi paid a landmark visit to China, during which a number of agreements were signed by the two sides.

In a joint statement issued at the conclusion of the presidential visit, Iran and China emphasized the responsibility of the United States and NATO in the current situation of Afghanistan.

They also urged the Afghan governing body to form an inclusive government with the meaningful participation of all ethnic and political groups and eliminate discrimination against women, minorities and religions.

## Iran, Switzerland Discuss Syria, Yemen Latest Developments

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Foreign Minister’s Senior Advisor for Special Political Affairs Ali Asghar Khaji, and the Head of the Middle East and North Africa Department at the Swiss Ministry of Foreign Affairs Maya Tissafi in a meeting on Sunday reviewed Syria and Yemen’s latest developments.

Khaji met and held talks with the Head of the Middle East and North Africa Department at the Swiss Ministry of Foreign Affairs Maya Tissafi on Sunday.

During the meeting, the two sides discussed the latest developments and humanitarian situations in Syria after the recent earthquake as well as the political developments in Syria and Yemen.



Expressing regret over the recent earthquake in Syria, Khaji called for more cooperation by the international community in dispatching humanitarian aid to Syria.

While the Syrian people are trying to save their families from the rubble, the Zionist regime’s attack on residential areas in Syria displays the aggression of the regime, he noted.

Referring to the humanitarian crisis in Yemen, he stressed the need for the immediate lifting of Yemen’s humanitarian and economic blockade besides the establishment of a ceasefire in the country.

## FM Condolences Demise of Ex-Palestinian Envoy

TEHRAN (MNA) – The Iranian foreign minister Hossein Amirabdollahian offered condolences over the demise of the former Palestinian ambassador to Tehran.

In his message of condolence, Hossein Amirabdollahian described the former long-serving Palestinian Ambassador to Tehran, Salah al-Zawawi, as a Mujahid and revolutionary diplomat.

“I offer my condolences on the demise of this mujahid and revolutionary diplomat to his revered family, especially Mrs. Salam Al-Zawawi, the Palestinian ambassador to the Islamic Republic of Iran, as well as the resistant and mujahid nation of Palestine, and I ask God for forgiveness and divine mercy for the deceased,” the top Iranian diplomat said.

“During the long years of fighting against the Zionist enemy, as well as several decades of diplomatic activity in the Islamic Republic of Iran, the late al-Zawawi always tried and fought for the rights of the oppressed Palestinian nation, to keep alive the Palestinian cause and to defend the Holy Quds,” he added.

“I hope that in the near future, we will witness the realization of several decades of effort and struggle of the resistant people of Palestine, including the late Salah al-Zawawi, with the full liberation of this holy land from the hands of the Zionist occupation and the formation of an independent and unified Palestinian state with holy Quds as its capital in the entire historical land of Palestine,” Amirabdollahian concluded in his message.

On January 9, 2022, Al-Zawawi bid farewell to the Islamic Republic of Iran after nearly four decades as the ambassador of the Palestinian nation in Tehran.



## Less Than 0.5% of Iranian University Students Go Abroad for Studies

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - The Iranian deputy science minister said Sunday that before the victory of the revolution, 40% of Iranian students used to travel abroad to continue their studies but that figure is now less than 0.5%.

“Before the victory of the revolution, 40% of Iranian students traveled abroad in order to get their universities degrees, but now that figure does not even reach half a percent,” Hashem Dadashpour said during a speech before Friday prayers sermon in Birjand Mosque in Birjand, the capital of South Khorasan Province.

“Since the Islamic Revolution, a huge revolution has taken place in the academic and scientific field in the country, and we hope that this movement will reach a place where the Islamic civilization and the entire world will benefit from it,” the deputy science minister said.

According to him, before the revolution, Iran used to import doctors and physicians from India and Pakistan, while now lots of foreign students are studying medical sciences at Iranian universities.

“Also, in the field of technology, our progress has been remarkable, and before the victory of the Islamic Revolution, there was no technology in the country, while now Iran’s defense and military warfare are being exported [to other countries],” Dadashpour also noted.

The deputy minister also said that the Iranian revolution was not only in the material field, but also it has attracted many hearts and minds.

## Monthly Trade Volume Up By 18% on IME



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Iran Mercantile Exchange (IME) in last Iranian calendar month of Bahman witnessed trade of 10,399,570 tons of commodities and 10,730 vehicles with a total trading value of more than \$3.4b on its physical market, logging growths of 18.5% and 13.5% in volume and value of trades compared with the month before that.

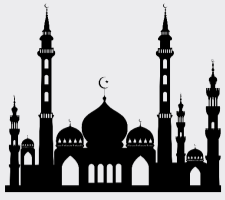
According to a report by the IME’s International Affairs and PR, the exchange saw on both domestic and export pits of its oil and petrochemical trading floor, trade of 1,745,035 tons of commodities valued at more than \$1b.

On this floor the IME sold 478,069 tons of bitumen, 437,433 tons of polymeric products, 392,000 tons of vacuum bottom, 195,500 tons of lube cut, 175,975 tons of chemicals, 49,400 tons of sulfur, 18,475 tons of oil, 2,104 tons of petroleum products, 800 tons of feedstocks and 400 tons of insulation.

Furthermore, the exchange saw trade of 8,597,429 tons of commodities and 10,730 vehicles worth more than \$2b on its metals and minerals trading floor.

Items traded on this floor included 4,649,414 tons of cement, 1,979,000 tons of iron ore, 1,577,338 tons of steel, 122,400 tons of sponge iron, 53,750 tons of zinc, 42,095 tons of aluminum, 30,372 tons of copper, 790 tons of molybdenum concentrate, 48 tons of precious metals concentrate and 33 kg of gold bars.

Last was the IME’s side market on which the exchange traded 57,105 tons of commodities.



## PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	12:18
■ Evening (Maghreb)	18:09
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	05:29
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	06:43

37. This Qur'an is not such as can be produced by other than Allah. on the contrary it is a confirmation of (revelations) that went before it, and a fuller explanation of the Book - wherein there is no doubt - from the Lord of the worlds.

38. Or do they say, "He forged it"? say: "Bring then a Sura like unto it, and call (to your aid) anyone you can besides Allah, if it be ye speak the truth!"

Surah 10. Jonah (37 - 38)

## Developing Connecting Corridors Is Main Priority of Country

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

**TEHRAN - Deputy Foreign Minister for Economic Diplomacy Mehdi Safari says creating and developing corridors is very important for the country and Iran welcomes any investment from the regional and neighboring countries in these corridors.**

Speaking in a national conference on developing Makran Coasts, Safari said that Makran coasts extends from Jask to Chabahar Port and this area because of vicinity to the Strait of Hormuz can encourage foreign countries for investment in this area, adding that countries like India, China and Russia are interested in investment in onshore and offshore of Chabahar.

He reiterated that the goal behind growth of Makran is to increase exports to the target countries, adding that blue economy in the field of aquatic animals and ports is very important and one of the export goals of Iran in the field of aquatic is China. He added that Iran saw 67% increase in exports in this field comparing to the previous year and China accounted for 92% of this amount.

Safari said that China needs over 500,000 tons of shrimp that Iran has so far exported some 32,000 tons and it has received required license for exporting 5 to 6 types of fish to China that it can export up to 500,000 tons.

He went on to say that they should talk with China for production especially for fish in the cage, adding that the country should attract investors to bring investment for purchase.

Safari went on to say that the main goal in the field of aquatic animals is the exports to China and some Far East Asian countries, admitting that the regional markets do not have high capacities for exports comparing to China.

He said that Chabahar is a special area with special license which is not under sanctions and since 2015, Indians have been supposed to invest but we did not have any move to attract them and no sustainable agreement has been signed and it



prolongs, reiterating that the ground for investment of Indians in Chabahar should be reinforced as soon as possible in order to form the north-south corridor that India is one party of the corridor.

Safari reiterated that India is very strategic for Iran, adding that India is the only country which backs Iran's policies in Afghanistan but it does not mean that Iran does not support presences of other countries of the region in Makran.

Touching upon investment in two ports of Jask and Chabahar, he said that they have talked with Indians and the Chinese, adding that they are interested in completing the chain and taking their products in the field of petrochemical and petro refinery.

Safari then talked about attracting investment in the fields of ports, aquatic animals, petrochemical and petro chemical and said that they are of main goals of blue economy, adding that construction of ports for corridors is very important and Oman, Qatar and the UAE, Central Asian countries and Russia cooperate with Iran.

He added that Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan are interested in creating a logistical base in Chabahar for exporting their goods to India and Oman.

Safari reiterated that construction and development of corridor Iran is very important for Iran, adding that north-south corridor is not only for Russia but it is for the Caucasus, Black Sea and Europe.

He noted that some shipping routes have been launched to China, India, Oman and Qatar via Chabahar.

## Iran-China Agreements to Come on Stream in Next Two Months

TEHRAN - The head of the Trade Promotion Organization of Iran has said that most of the country's agreements with the Chinese side are to be implemented within the next two months.

And its positive effect will be felt in the country's economy, Ali-Reza Peyman-pak said in an interview with a radio program.

During the interview, the trade official said Iranian and Chinese car-manufacturing companies are working on designing a joint production.

Referring to the recent visit of Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi to China, the official said it took place after months of planning aimed at developing bilateral trade and economic relations.

Promotion of Iran-China economic ties is among the priorities of the Islamic Republic's 13th government, Peyman-pak announced.

He went on to say that Tehran and Beijing have reached good agreements on the issues of industry, technology, and car production.

He further mentioned tourism, trade, mining, investment, and industrial equipment among other issues of cooperation between the two countries.

Referring to Iran's great capacities, the official said Iran and China are to develop cooperation in order to export jointly-manufactured products to the regional states.

As the West observes talks and agreements with China, details about mutual agreements will be kept secret till their operational phase starts, he noted.

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK



At the head of the high-ranking delegation, the Iranian president arrived in Beijing at the official invitation of his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping and was welcomed by the Chinese president at the Great Hall of the People there on February 14.

Deputy Agriculture Minister Shahpour Alaei has also said that during President Raisi's visit to China, the two countries have signed two memorandums of understanding (MOUs) worth over \$8.1 billion to cooperate in various agricultural fields.

According to Alaei, an MOU worth \$3.5 billion was signed between the two sides for cooperation in the fishery sector, and for agriculture mechanization, development of greenhouse, rainfed cultivation, and exchange of knowledge.

Another MOU valued at about \$4.6 billion was inked for the funding of a major irrigation project in southwestern Iran, Alaei said.

He noted that special working groups have been formed at the Agriculture Ministry to follow up on the implementation of the mentioned agreements.

The said memorandums are expected to be implemented as of the beginning of the next Iranian calendar year (March 21), the official added.

Heading a high-ranking delegation, Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi was on a three-day state visit to China starting February 14.

## Aluminum Ingot Output Up 17% in 10 Months on Year

TEHRAN (MNA) - Production of aluminum ingot in Iran rose 17 percent in the first ten months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21, 2022-January 20, 2023), as compared to the same period of time in the past year, according to the data released by Iranian Mines and Mining Industries Development and Renovation Organization (IMIDRO).

As reported, the production of aluminum ingot stood at 528,060 tons in the ten-month period of this year, while the figure was 451,193 tons in the same time span of the previous year.

Among the country's four major producers, South Aluminum Corporation (SALCO) had the best performance in the first ten months of the present year, producing 226,467 tons of aluminum ingots, followed by Iranian Aluminum Company (IRALCO) producing 147,560 tons, Almahdi Aluminum Company producing 123,403 tons, and Iran Alumina Company producing 30,630 tons of the product.

According to the data previously released by IMIDRO, production of aluminum ingot in Iran rose 20 percent during the past Iranian calendar year 1400 (ended on March 20, 2022), as compared to its preceding year.

The IMIDRO's data put the annual production of aluminum ingot at 538,633 tons in 1400, while the figure was 446,836 tons in 1399, and 278,318 tons in 1398.

Among the country's four major producers, Iranian Aluminum Company (IRALCO) had the best performance in the previous year producing 177,058 tons of aluminum ingots, although the figure was 185,000 tons in the preceding year.

South Aluminum Corporation (SALCO) produced 173,594 tons, production by Almahdi Aluminum Company stood at 150,738 tons, and Iran Alumina Company produced 37,243 tons of aluminum ingots in the Iranian calendar year 1400, the IMIDRO's data indicated.

Annual production of aluminum ingot in the country had been planned to increase by 63 percent in the past year. Iranian officials estimate the country's aluminum sector has a value of \$22 billion, which is sufficient to meet the country's aluminum needs.

At present, Iran is the 18th biggest aluminum-producing country in the world.

The country plans to reach the annual production of 1.5 million tons of aluminum ingot by the Iranian calendar year 1404 (March 2025-March 2026).

## Iran to Hold Conference On Dust, Sand Storms

TEHRAN (MNA) - Iran is to hold a conference to discuss regional dust and sand storms in the upcoming June or July, an Iranian official said.

Head of Iran's Department of Environment Ali Salajegheh said that the United Nations introduced Iran as the host of a summit on combating dust storms.

The decision has been made due to the Islamic Republic of Iran's successful experience in combating dust storms, he further noted.

A delegation from the Islamic Republic of Iran is scheduled to travel to Iraq in late February or March, he pointed out.

The delegation is going to discuss the problems of dust storms and make decisions on the origin of the challenge, he added.

Reportedly, the environmental authorities of Iran and Iraq have inked a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to jointly fight dust storms.

## Vietnam Envoy Stresses Boosting Ties With Iran

TEHRAN (MNA) - Ambassador of Vietnam to Iran, Luong Quoc Huy has called for bolstering bilateral relations with Iran, particularly in tourism.



Vietnamese envoy said that his country is prepared to welcome tourists following the pandemic.

Iran and Vietnam enjoy a rich capacity in the sphere of tourism to be leveraged, he underscored.

Tourist exhibitions are considered the proper means for the two sides' officials to develop mutual cooperation, he further noted.

Not numerous Iranian and Vietnamese tourists pay a visit to the countries, he said, stressing the need to increase the figure in this regard.

The official described the Vietnamese nation as friendly like Iranians.

## Meat Consumption Down by 50%

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Amid reports about a sharp increase in food prices in Iran, officials say that over the past year demand for red meat has decreased by 50 percent.

Head of the Meat and Protein Industry Association of Iran, Masoud Rasouli told ILNA news website Sunday that "Compared to the last Iranian year [Ending in March 20, 2022], the demand for red meat has decreased by 50 percent while the demand for poultry also experienced a 30 percent fall."

Regarding fish, he said most is exported because of the drop in the value of national currency making exports more profitable, and little domestic demand for it.

Rasouli further noted that some of the meat production units in Iran have shut down, adding that "out of 700 meat packing companies, only 120 are active and 20% of them have closed down last year."

Iranian media report that the price of boneless mutton has reached 5,000,000 rials or 11 dollars per kilogram. Compared with the minimum monthly salary of 42,000,000 rials which is nearly \$87 in the exchange rates, workers cannot afford any meat.

In recent years, various reports have been published about the increase in the price of all kinds of meat, and the decrease in the consumption of high-protein foods in Iran.

## Petchem, Petro-Refinery Projects Online in 2 Years

TEHRAN (Shana) -- The Chairman of the Oil Industry Pension Funds Board said Soroush, Negin and Kangan Olefin Petrochemical Plants will come on stream by the end of the next Iranian calendar year to March 2024.

Abdul Hossein Bayat said that all related projects Funds, especially Kangan Petrorefinery, have favorable progress status.

He considered one of the factors of the success and tangible progress of the petro-refinery and petrochemical projects in Kangan region to be the placement of group companies with different engineering and design capacities (such as EIED from the companies of the Funds Economic Group) next to the projects under construction, and said: "Engineering and design services in this area has been completely localized by the subsidiaries of the funds and we have the ability to export it."

## Over 5.7m Tons of Steel Ingots Exported In 10 Months



TEHRAN (MNA) - As announced by Iranian Steel Producers Association (ISPA), 5.748 million tons of steel ingots were exported in the first ten months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21, 2022-January 20, 2023).

Based on the ISPA data, the 10-month steel ingot export indicates a one percent fall from the figure for the same period of time in the past year, which was 5.807 million tons.

As announced by the Iranian Mines and Mining Industries Development and Renovation Organization (IMIDRO), the country's export of steel ingots increased by 25 percent in the past Iranian calendar year 1400 (ended on March 20, 2022), from the preceding year.

The IMIDRO's data put the country's annual steel ingot exports at 7.678 million tons in the past year, and at 6.162 million tons in the previous year.

The Iranian Steel industry has been constantly developing over the past years against all the pressures and obstacles created by outside forces like the U.S. sanctions and the coronavirus outbreak that has severely affected the performance of the world's top producers.

According to the latest report released by the World Steel Association (WSA), Iran's crude steel production increased by eight percent in 2022 when the production by the world's top 64 steelmakers declined by 4.2 percent.

According to the WSA data, Iran was ranked first among the world's top steel producers in terms of production growth in the previous year.

Based on the report, Iran produced 30.6 million tons of crude steel in the mentioned year.

Meanwhile, WSA stated that crude steel production by the world's top 64 producers fell 4.2 percent to stand at 1.787 billion in 2022.

According to the World Steel Association, similar to the past two years, Iran has maintained its 10th place among the world's top steel producers, after countries like China, India, Japan, and Russia.

The country is expected to climb to seventh place among the world's top steel producers by the Iranian calendar year 1404 (March 2025).

## Russia Condemns Israeli Strike on Damascus



MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russia's Foreign Ministry said that it strongly condemned an Israeli air strike on the Syrian city of Damascus and its surroundings, calling it a "flagrant violation" of international law.

"We strongly urge the Israeli side to stop armed provocations against the Syrian Arab Republic and refrain from steps that are fraught with dangerous consequences for the entire region," spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said.

Witnesses and officials said an Israeli rocket strike early on Sunday hit a building in central Damascus's Kafr Sousa neighbourhood near a large, heavily guarded security complex close to Iranian installations, killing five people.

## Israeli Diplomat Removed From African Union Summit



ADDIS ABABA (Dispatches) - A senior Israeli diplomat has been removed from the African Union's annual summit in Ethiopia as a dispute over Israel's accreditation to the bloc escalated.

A video posted on social media showed security personnel walking Ambassador Sharon Bar-Li out of the auditorium during the opening ceremony of the summit in Addis Ababa. Ebba Kalondo, the spokesperson for the African Union's chairman, said the diplomat was removed because she was not the duly accredited Israeli ambassador to Ethiopia - the official who was expected.

An AU official later told AFP news agency the diplomat who was "asked to leave" had not been invited to the meeting, with a non-transferable invitation issued only to Israel's ambassador to the African Union, Aleli Admasu.

## U.S. Stages Joint Air Exercises With Asian Allies



SEOUL (Dispatches) - The United States held joint air exercises bilaterally with South Korea and Japan involving strategic bombers on Sunday, a day after North Korea fired a Hwasong-15 intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) in a "sudden launching drill".

South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said the exercise, in which South Korea's F-35A, F-15K and U.S. F-16 fighters escorted American B-1B bombers, demonstrated the allies' "overwhelming" defense capabilities and readiness posture.

"(The exercise) strengthened the combined operation capability and affirmed the United States' ironclad commitment to the defense of the Korean Peninsula and the implementation of extended deterrence," the South's military said in a statement.

Japan flew F-15s over the Sea of Japan with the U.S. Armed Forces' B-1 bombers and F-16s in tactical exercises, Japan's Defense Ministry said in a statement, calling the security environment "increasingly severe" after the latest North Korea missile landed within its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).

"This bilateral exercise reaffirms the strong will between Japan and the United States to respond to any situation, the readiness of (Japan's Self Defense Forces) and U.S. Armed Forces, and further strengthens the deterrence and response capabilities of the Japan-U.S. Alliance," the ministry said.

The air drills come a day after North Korea launched a long-range ballistic missile into the sea off Japan's west coast, following a warning of a strong response to upcoming military drills by South Korea and the United States.

North Korea's state media KCNA said the country conducted a "sudden launching drill" on Saturday in an "actual proof" of its efforts to turn the "capacity of fatal nuclear counterattack on the hostile forces into an irresistible one".

Leader Kim Jong Un's sister, Kim Yo Jong, issued yet another warning and accused the United States of trying to turn the U.N. Security Council into what she called a "tool for its heinous hostile policy" toward Pyongyang.

"I warn that we will watch every movement of the enemy and take corresponding and very powerful and overwhelming counteraction against its every move hostile to us," she said in a statement.

Saturday's missile launch, the North's first since Jan. 1, came after Pyongyang threatened on Friday an "unprecedentedly persistent, strong" response as South Korea and the United States geared up for their annual military exercises as part of efforts to fend off the growing nuclear and missile threat that the North poses.

North Korea's state news agency said its missile had flown for 1 hour, 6 minutes and 55 seconds, as high as 5,768 km (3,584 miles), before accurately hitting a pre-set area 989 km (614 miles) away in open waters. It first test-fired a Hwasong-15 in 2017.

Last year nuclear-armed North Korea fired an unprecedented number of missiles, including ICBMs capable of striking anywhere in the United States, while resuming preparations for its first nuclear test since 2017.

South Korean Foreign Minister Park Jin said Saturday's launch "clearly" signals the North's intent to conduct further provocations.

"If North Korea conducts the seventh nuclear test, which could happen at any time, it will be a game changer in a sense that North Korea could develop and deploy tactical nuclear missiles," Park told the Munich Security Conference on Saturday.

KCNA said the North's latest launch, guided by the Missile General Bureau, was conducted on an "emergency firepower combat standby order" given at dawn, followed by a written order from Kim Jong Un at 8 a.m. (2300 GMT on Friday). South Korea's military said it detected the missile at 5:22 p.m. (0822 GMT).

## West Urged to Provide More Military Aid to Ukraine



BRUSSELS (Dispatches) - The West must provide more military aid to Ukraine and speed up its deliveries, the European Union's foreign policy chief, Josep Borrell, says.

"Much more has to be done and much quicker," Borrell said at the Munich Security Conference on Sunday. "There is still a lot to be done. We have to increase and accelerate our military support."

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy urged Western allies to speed up their military aid for Ukraine, warning attendees at the conference on Friday that delays would play into Russia's hands as the invasion approaches its first anniversary.

Borrell said he supports an Estonian proposal for the EU to buy ammunition on behalf of its members to help Ukraine. "I completely agree with the Estonian prime minister's proposal, and we are working on that, and it will work," Borrell said.

The war in Ukraine has dominated discussions at the Munich conference, an annual gathering of security and defence officials from around the world.

## Turkey Winds Down Quake Rescue

ANTAKYA (Dispatches) - Turkey said rescue efforts following last week's devastating earthquake had ended in all but two provinces as visiting US Secretary of State Antony Blinken announced \$100 million in fresh humanitarian aid.

The 7.8-magnitude tremor that struck southeastern Turkey and northern Syria on February 6 has killed more than 44,000 people, with the likelihood of finding survivors two weeks on extremely remote.

No survivors have been found in at least 24 hours.

The head of Turkey's disaster agency Yunus Sezer on Sunday said search and rescue efforts had been completed in all provinces apart from Hatay and Kahramanmaraş, the earthquake's epicentre.

Sezer said search and rescue efforts continued at around 40 buildings in the provinces on the 14th day but expected the number to fall by late Sunday.

The agency head also said Turkey's death toll had risen to 40,689.

The total death toll including Syria is now 44,377.

The winding-down of rescue operations came as Blinken arrived in Turkey to show solidarity with a NATO ally and announce a new aid package worth \$100 million.

Washington's top diplomat met his Turkish counterpart Mevlut Cavusoglu at Incirlik air base in southern Turkey, through which the United States has shipped aid.

Blinken then accompanied Cavusoglu in a helicopter to view the damage wrought by the disaster in Hatay province.

The new aid "will be moving soon. Sadly, it's less about search and rescue but long-term recovery. This is going to be a long-term effort", he told reporters.

"It's going to take a massive effort to rebuild but we're committed to supporting that effort," he added, saying the United States had now contributed \$185 million in assistance to Turkey and Syria.

The trip had been planned before the earthquake, the worst natural disaster to hit Turkey in its post-Ottoman history.

Turkish Vice President Fuat Oktay said Saturday that some 105,000 buildings either collapsed, needed to be demolished or were severely damaged.

## Thousands Missing After Cyclone Gabrielle Hits New Zealand

AUCKLAND (Dispatches) - At least 11 people have died and thousands are missing in New Zealand after Cyclone Gabrielle hit the North Island last week.

The cyclone hit the northern part of the island on February 12 and tracked down the east coast, inflicting widespread devastation.

Prime Minister Chris Hipkins has called Gabrielle New Zealand's biggest natural disaster this century.

On Sunday, police reported two more cyclone-related deaths in hard-hit Hawke's Bay.

More fatalities are possible, Hipkins told reporters in the capital, Wellington because more than 6,400 people are missing.

Lives had been "turned upside down" and recovery was a "steep mountain ahead", he said, pointing to disrupted telecommunications, shortages of freshwater and damaged roads still restricting access to some areas.

Supply chains have been disrupted, causing problems moving goods; crops had been destroyed; and 28,000 homes are still without power, Hipkins said.

Last week, he warned that recovery would take time with power not expected to be restored to some areas for weeks

and the cleanup likely to take much longer than that.

After initially setting aside offers of help from the United States and other countries, Hipkins said New Zealand is now accepting them.

Last Tuesday, New Zealand declared a national state of emergency for only the third time in its history.

A team from Fiji is to leave for New Zealand in the coming days to assist with its recovery, one of 12 offers of international aid received so far, Hipkins said. Twenty-seven emergency workers from Australia are assisting with relief efforts.

Teams from the Auckland Council carried out rapid building assessments on damaged homes on Sunday in the coastal areas of Muriwai and Piha, about 60km (40 miles) west of the nation's largest city, Auckland.

Emergency authorities and the military have been dropping critical supplies from helicopters to communities stranded since the cyclone, which washed away farms, bridges and livestock and inundated homes.

Police have sent an extra 100 officers to Hawke's Bay and nearby Tairāwhiti, including to isolated areas, after reports of looting.



## Kenya's Ruto Urges Accountability For World Polluters



ADDIS ABABA (Dispatches) - Kenyan President William Ruto called for rich countries to be held accountable for driving global warming and for a revamp of international financial institutions to better fight climate change.

Poorer nations, especially those in Africa, have been hit disproportionately hard by the fallout from climate change, which has aggravated droughts and flooding, despite being least responsible for carbon emissions.

In an interview on the sidelines of the African Union summit in the Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa, where climate change is a major topic, Ruto said the time was ripe for a "paradigm shift".

"We are at a place where we have no options," he told AFP.

The situation "is not getting better unless something gives way and until we have an honest conversation", he said, urging richer countries and financial institutions to start treating Africa as "an asset" in climate talks.

"We want a system that is accountable, that holds the emitters who pollute the world to account. If it is not accountable, then it is corrupt," Ruto said, adding that Africa should not be treated as "beggars" in climate talks.

For years, African governments have been demanding that the world's top polluters pay for the harm their emissions have caused, known as "loss and damage".

The latest round of UN climate talks held in Egypt last year agreed on a fund to cover costs that developing countries face from climate-linked natural disasters and impacts like rising sea levels.

But more must be done, including a plan to reduce planet-heating emissions from fossil fuels, said Ruto, who chairs the committee of African leaders on climate change.

"Continuing the impunity of turning on fossil fuel, turning on coal as is happening today puts the whole globe at risk," Ruto said.

"We cannot be that reckless. We cannot be indifferent."

The Kenyan leader said Africa must be treated as a key partner and that the global financial system must be overhauled if any results were to be achieved.

"Emitters and polluters get better rates for development than us... is it the case that those who have caused the least pollution are being punished?"

## Japan's Indigenous Peoples Fight Stigma To Reclaim Identities



TOKYO (Dispatches) - In a forest in northern Japan's Hokkaido, Atsushi Monbetsu kneels on the moss in the thick morning fog and begins to pray in a language that has nearly disappeared.

"Kamuy," he begins, addressing the gods of the Ainu Indigenous people, as he starts a small fire with birch bark. "An Ainu man is now entering your forest, wishing to hunt deer," he says. Soon after, he spots an animal, makes a clean kill and offers prayers for its soul.

Monbetsu belongs to the Ainu Indigenous group that traditionally lived in what is now northern Japan, as well as in territory now part of Russia.

Growing up, the stigma of his ethnic origins was so great that his mother banned him from using the word "Ainu". But, like a growing number of younger people from Indigenous communities in Japan, Monbetsu, 40, has reclaimed his identity and some of the traditional practices he considers his birthright.

For centuries, Ainu traded with Japanese from the mainland, known to them as Wajin. But in 1869, Japan's imperial government annexed Ainu lands and banned "barbarian" practices like facial tattoos for the community's women.

Ainu were forced to abandon traditional hunting practices, speak Japanese and take Japanese names. Japan did not legally recognise them as Indigenous people until 2019, and forced assimilation left deep scars.

"I still hate the way I look sometimes, so clearly Ainu," said Monbetsu, who wears the full beard that was traditionally favoured by Ainu men.

Despite his mother's fears, Monbetsu's father took him to local Ainu gatherings where he learned dances and other customs.

As an adult, he embraced traditions like hunting, and praying to the "kamuy" gods that Ainu believe occupy everything, from trees to tools.

"When you live only with what you hunt in nature, you become humble, you feel you are alive thanks to kamuy," Monbetsu said.

Tomoya Okamoto hid his Ainu heritage as a child, fearing he would be "mocked". "I wouldn't tell my friends because nothing good would come of it," the 25-year-old said.

Over time, though, his feelings changed, spurred in part by the popular manga series "Golden Kamuy", which highlighted Ainu culture. He sees "nature-friendly" Ainu traditions as aligned with modern environmental concerns and is now a traditional sculptor who feels "glad to be Ainu".

"I can make it my work to protect Ainu culture," he told AFP, speaking with reverence about Shitaehori, a 19th-century Ainu artist whose work he recreates.

"I make replicas because they are cool," he said, displaying a wooden scabbard with delicate flower carvings.

The last survey of Ainu in Hokkaido, in 2017, put the population at around 13,000, but intermarriage and a reluctance by some to reveal their heritage mean the true figure is likely much higher.

Counting Japan's other main Indigenous people, the Ryukyu, is even more complicated, as the central government does not recognise them.

Most of the 1.5 million residents of Japan's southern Okinawa islands are believed to have Ryukyu heritage. The Ryukyu Kingdom -- a string of islands from southern Japan's Amami region to the Yaeyama islands near Taiwan -- was formally annexed by Japan in 1879, when authorities began forcible assimilation.

While Japan sent settlers to Hokkaido after annexation, in Okinawa, assimilation was more proactive, said Eiji Oguma, a professor at Keio University.

"Japan had policies to teach them Japanese, demand loyalty to the nation and eventually (to) draft them for war to become full members of Japan," he told AFP.

## U.S. Launches Artificial Intelligence Military Use Initiative



THE HAGUE (Dispatches) - The United States launched an initiative promoting international cooperation on the responsible use of artificial intelligence and autonomous weapons by militaries, seeking to impose order on an emerging technology that has the potential to change the way war is waged.

"As a rapidly changing technology, we have an obligation to create strong norms of responsible behavior concerning military uses of AI and in a way that keeps in mind that applications of AI by militaries will undoubtedly change in the coming years," Bonnie Jenkins, the State Department's under secretary for arms control and international security, said.

She said the U.S. political declaration, which contains non-legally binding guidelines outlining best practices for responsible military use of AI, "can be a focal point for international cooperation."

Jenkins launched the declaration at the end of a two-day conference in The Hague that took on additional urgency as advances in drone technology amid the Russia's war in Ukraine have accelerated a trend that could soon bring the world's first fully autonomous fighting robots to the battlefield.

The U.S. declaration has 12 points, including that military uses of AI are consistent with international law, and that states "maintain human control and involvement for all actions critical to informing and executing sovereign decisions concerning nuclear weapons employment."

Zachary Kallenborn, a George Mason University weapons innovation analyst who attended the Hague conference, said the U.S. move to take its approach to the international stage "recognizes that there are these concerns about autonomous weapons. That is significant in and of itself."

Kallenborn said it was also important that Washington included a call for human control over nuclear weapons "because when it comes to autonomous weapons risk, I think that is easily the highest risk you possibly have."

Underscoring the sense of international urgency around AI and autonomous weapons, 60 nations, including the U.S. and China, issued a call for action at the Hague conference urging broad cooperation in the development and responsible military use of artificial intelligence.

"We are in time to mitigate risks and to prevent AI from spiraling out of control, and we are in time to prevent AI from taking us to a place we simply don't want to be," Dutch Foreign Minister Wopke Hoekstra said. The call to action issued in the Netherlands underscored "the importance of ensuring appropriate safeguards and human oversight of the use of AI systems, bearing in mind human limitations due to constraints in time and capacities."

The participating nations also invited countries "to develop national frameworks, strategies and principles on responsible AI in the military domain."

Military analysts and artificial intelligence researchers say the longer the nearly year-long war in Ukraine lasts, the more likely it becomes that drones will be used to identify, select and attack targets without help from humans.

Ukraine's digital transformation minister, Mykhailo Fedorov, told The Associated Press in a recent interview that fully autonomous killer drones are "a logical and inevitable next step" in weapons development. He said Ukraine has been doing "a lot of R&D in this direction."

Ukraine already has semi-autonomous attack drones and counter-drone weapons endowed with AI. Russia also claims to possess AI weaponry, though the claims are unproven. But there are no confirmed instances of a nation putting into combat robots that have killed entirely on their own.

Russia was not invited to attend the conference in The Hague.

China's ambassador to the Netherlands Tan Jian did attend and said Beijing has sent two papers to the United Nations on regulating military AI applications, saying the issue "concerns the common security and the well-being of mankind, which requires the united response of all countries," he said.



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## Algeria Announces \$1b For African Development

ALGIERS (Dispatches) - Algerian President Abdelmadjid Tebboune said the North African nation will allocate a billion dollars to finance development projects across the continent through the Algerian Agency of International Cooperation for Solidarity and Development. The official APS news agency said his decision was announced in a speech read by Prime Minister Aïmene Benabderrahmane at the annual African Union summit of leaders in the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa.

"I have decided to inject one billion US dollars for the benefit of the Algerian Agency of International Cooperation for Solidarity and Development to finance development projects in African countries," read the speech, part of which was published by APS.

It said attention would be paid to "integration projects or those able to contribute to accelerating development in Africa".



## Russia, Ukraine Now Major Sources of Wheat for Bangladesh

DHAKA (Dispatches) - Russia and Ukraine have become major sources of wheat for Bangladesh after India's ban of its shipment, thanks to a United Nations and Turkey brokered grain deal that allowed moving the cereal from Ukraine over the Black Sea.

Importers said they started importing wheat from both countries a couple of months after the deal in July last year which enabled them to offset a shortfall in imports resulting from India's ban in May last year.

The neighbouring country had become a major source of wheat for Bangladesh as businesses found imports cheaper and convenient due to the shorter shipment period, low freight cost and geographic proximity, said the U.S. Department of Agriculture in a report on Bangladesh earlier.

The report said India accounted for 67 per cent of Bangladesh's total wheat import, followed by Canada, Ukraine, Australia and Russia in marketing year 2021-22.

"Our imports from the Black Sea region came almost to a halt for several months after the war began," said Abul Bashir Chowdhury, chairman of BSM Group, a Chattogram-based commodity importer.

"Now, Ukraine and Russia are gradually becoming a major source for low protein wheat," he said.

Bangladesh produces around 11 lakh tons of wheat against an annual requirement of 75 lakh tons, meaning the rest is imported.

In fiscal year 2021-22, the country imported 40.12 lakh tons of wheat. And between July 1 and February 15 this fiscal year, the import amounted to 17.57 lakh tons in total, according to data by food ministry.

Russia, Ukraine and Canada were now major sources of the grain after the Black Sea deal, said Md Aminul Islam, managing director of Nabil Group, one of the largest importers of wheat.

Overall import from the three countries would be around 14 lakh tons so far this fiscal year, he said. "Availability of wheat is not an issue now. There are supplies in the international market," he said.

"The problem is now opening of letters of credit for banks' lack of interest amid dollar shortage. Wheat imports will increase if this problem is over," Islam said. The Black Sea Grain Initiative brokered by the United Nations and Turkey last July allowed grain to be exported from three Ukrainian ports, reports Reuters.

The agreement was extended by a further 120 days in November and is up for renewal again in March, it says.

However, it takes longer now for importing wheat from Ukraine because of several checks on the way, said Taslim Shahriar, senior assistant general manager of the Meghna Group of Industries.

"It will be great if the war ends," he said.

He said the situation in the Ukraine-Russia region was important for Bangladesh as the region was a key source of wheat.

So, further extensions of the Black Sea grain deal are vital for a smooth supply of wheat to Bangladesh, Taslim added.

Negotiations will start in a week on extending a United Nations-backed initiative that has enabled Ukraine to export grain from ports blockaded by Russia after its invasion, said Reuters on Friday quoting a senior Ukrainian official as saying.

The Black Sea Grain Initiative created a protected sea transit corridor and was designed to alleviate global food shortages, with Ukraine's customers including some of the world's poorest countries, said Reuters.

Developing nations such as Somalia and Eritrea also rely heavily on imports of wheat from Russia, it said. "Renewal of the deal is important for us. Otherwise, it will be a problem for us too," said Islam of Nabil Group which imported nearly 350,000 tons of wheat so far this year.

The company imported 18 lakh tons of the grain in 2022, he added.

## China Refines Capital and Risk Management of Commercial Banks

BEIJING (Dispatches) - China's banking regulator and the central bank plan to adopt a more differentiated regulatory system for assessing commercial banks' capital adequacy and risk management, in a step to better prevent risks in the country's financial system.

The China Banking and Insurance Regulatory Commission and the People's Bank of China on Saturday jointly released amended draft rules that they said aimed to help banks "continuously improve the precision of risk measurement and guide banks to better serve the real economy."

The draft rules, which bring the banking sector closer to global standards, will divide lenders into three groups based on business scale and risk level.

The rules will apply a differentiated regulatory system to banks. Lenders with a relatively large scale of assets or relatively large cross-border business will be under stricter capital requirements and will have to disclose more information to regulators.



In addition, the rules will include more specific factors to measure banks' risk exposure to mortgage lending, such as the types of property, sources of repayments and loan-to-value ratios.

China's property market, once a pillar of growth, has slowed sharply over the past year, hobbled by fragile demand and mounting debt defaults by developers.

The two regulators said implementation of the new rules would leave capital adequacy ratios in the banking sector generally unchanged, though the ratios for some banks would change slightly.

The commission and central bank are seeking public comment before implementing the changes on Jan. 1, 2024.

## IEA's Birol Warns of Tighter Energy Supply Next Winter

BERLIN (Dispatches) - International Energy Agency (IEA) head Fatih Birol has warned of possible energy shortages next winter as relatively little new liquefied natural gas (LNG) is coming to the market while China's consumption is set to rise this year.

European governments made many correct decisions over the last year to ensure energy supply, such as building more LNG terminals to replace pipeline deliveries of Russian gas, Birol told Reuters on the sidelines of the annual Munich Security Conference on Saturday.

But they also got lucky, he said, with a mild winter dampening demand while economic weakness in China led to the first drop in consumption there for 40 years.

"For this winter it is right to say that we are off the hook. If there are no last minute surprises, we should get through...maybe with some bruises here and there," said Birol. "But the question is...what happens next winter?" An additional 23 billion cubic metres (bcm) of LNG is expected this year, Birol said, adding that even with only a small increase in economic output as pandemic restrictions ease, China would likely swallow 80% of the extra gas.

"Even though we have enough LNG import terminals, there may not be enough gas to import and therefore it will not be easy this coming winter for Europe," he said, noting this would likely push prices up again.

"It is not right to be relaxed, it is not right now to celebrate".

Even with a renewed push to develop new gas fields, it would be years before they came online, he said.

## Irish Central Banker Defends Runaway Economic Growth as "Real"

DUBLIN (Dispatches) - Ireland's central bank governor has defended the country's world-beating economic growth against accusations that it is an artificial product of big US companies taking advantage of Dublin's low taxes.

Gabriel Makhoul told the Financial Times that much of Ireland's growth — forecast to be 12.2 per cent last year, more than treble growth in the overall EU — comes from "real factories with real people" even if a lot of activity stems from big technology and pharmaceutical groups.

"Too many people think or jump to the conclusion that this is all about intellectual property that's sort of moving around and it's not real, and that's wrong," Makhoul said.

"This stuff, especially in pharma, it's made in

Ireland. There are people in Ireland. There's a remarkable proportion of the top ten medicines in the world [that] are made in Ireland," he said. "One of the oldest multinationals in Ireland is Intel and they also make stuff."

The debate about Ireland's economic outperformance flared up recently after the country's 3.5 per cent quarter-on-quarter growth in gross domestic product single-handedly prevented the eurozone economy from stagnating in the final three months of last year.

Critics say Ireland's GDP is distorted by the accounting maneuvers of large US multinational groups capitalising on low Irish tax rates. When Apple moved intellectual property assets to its Irish base in 2015, it helped to send Ireland's GDP up 25 per cent, which Nobel-prize winning economist Paul Krugman called "leprechaun economics".

After Ireland's Central Statistics Office published its 2022 growth estimate of 12.2 per cent last month — the highest in the OECD club of rich nations — the Irish Times wrote that the country's economic data "should carry a health warning" because it was "meaningless as a guide to how the economy is doing".

Many big US companies — including Google, Apple, Meta, Intel and Pfizer — have their European bases in Ireland, which has a relatively low 12.5 per cent corporation tax rate. The country is also a global hub for aircraft leasing. This helped its economy to rebound strongly after an earlier "Celtic Tiger" boom came to a sudden end in the 2008 financial crisis.

Even before last year's growth, Irish GDP had more than doubled since 2014, according to Eurostat, the EU's statistics office. That dwarfs the overall EU economy's 23 per cent growth in the same period.

The Irish central bank uses alternative growth measures to strip out the impact of multinational companies and get a better picture of domestic demand. One is a version of gross national income, known as GNI star, which the central bank expects to show much slower growth of 5.9 per cent in 2022.

## Debt-Laden African Countries Charged Extortionate Rates

ADDIS ABABA (Dispatches) - African countries are getting a raw deal from the international financial system which charges them "extortionate" interest rates, the U.N. chief said, as he announced \$250 million in crisis funding, including for famine risk on the continent.

The United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres wants far-reaching reforms to the structure of international finance to serve the needs of developing countries more efficiently, he told the opening ceremony of the annual African Union summit in Ethiopia.

"The global financial system routinely denies (developing countries) debt relief and concessional financing while charging extortionate interest rates," he said.

The U.N. will spend \$250 million from its emergency fund, the largest ever allocation, to respond to several crises around the world, including helping communities at risk of famine in Africa, Guterres later told a news briefing.

The coronavirus pandemic pushed many poor countries into debt distress as they were expected to continue servicing their obligations in spite of the massive shock to their finances.

Public debt ratios in sub-Saharan Africa are at their highest in more than two decades, the International Monetary Fund said last year.

Governments on the continent, including Ethiopia, sought debt restructuring deals under an IMF program to help them navigate the crisis, but conclusion of the process has been delayed.

Others, which have not sought to restructure their debt, like Kenya, have seen their debt sustainability indicators worsen after the pandemic hit their finances. "African countries cannot... climb the development ladder with one hand tied behind their backs," Guterres said.

Ethiopia's Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed echoed the call. "Nearly all of us want to put our economies back on a growth trajectory but this will not happen without sufficient restructuring to make our external debt sustainable," he said.

The summit, which brings together leaders from the 55 African nations, is also focusing on deepening food and security crises on the continent. Armed conflict from the Sahel to the Horn of Africa and the impacts of droughts and floods have driven ever more Africans from their homes.

Hunger, driven by the impact of the armed conflicts and also extreme weather that scientists have linked to climate change, has also worsened in several nations.

Somalia is on the verge of famine after five failed rainy seasons, with hundreds of thousands of people suffering catastrophic food shortages.

"We need to critically assess why one third of the hungry people in the world are in our continent," Abiy said.

## Progressive Economic Growth to Take Malaysia out of the Woods



KUALALUMPUR (Dispatches) - Malaysia is expected to rebound strongly from the global slowdown underpinned by progressive local economic growth as well as promising global economic performance forecast post-pandemic, according to a fund manager.

Principal Malaysia chief executive officer and country head Munirah Khairuddin said the past three years have seen many changes to the global landscape, including geopolitical tensions, changing world governments, and volatile financial markets, that caused financial distress to many, and Malaysians were not spared.

"While we are optimistic of the economic growth, we remain cautious over existing global conflicts and the probability of escalation such as in the Russia-Ukraine war as well as inflation rate in the country," she said in an exclusive interview with Bernama.

She added that while recession fears are still looming, the worst is over for many as the majority of markets have shown strong signs of economic rebound driven by China's economic reopening after a long closure due to its zero-Covid policy.

"The reopening of China will re-ignite the recovery of the largest economy in Asia and second largest globally. Opportunities await in Asia, particularly within the renewables and tourism sectors, so long as the country continues to empower the small and medium enterprise and business sector to attract more foreign direct investments (FDI)."

"While Malaysia will continue to experience a volatile market especially for equities due to global circumstances, it will continue to gain traction as the market has been undervalued," she said.

The Malaysian Investment Development Authority approved total FDI of RM392.9 billion between 2018 and 2021, of which RM300.5 billion or 76.5 per cent had been realised as at end-2021, while major investments were inked in 2022, including with Samsung and AMD.

## University Conducts TB Screening Of Nearly 32k Foreign Nationals

ZAHEDAN (IRNA) - Zahedan University of Medical Sciences has carried out the program of tuberculosis (TB) screening of about 32,000 foreign nationals living in Sistan and Baluchestan Province, a university official said.

Deputy President of Zahedan University of Medical Sciences Mehdi Zanganeh told IRNA on Monday that the TB screening was held in the

area, which is supervised by the university since January 21, 2023.

The official went on to say that the screening program will continue up until April 20 and that the number of foreigners screened is expected to surpass 70,000. Three teams, 80 individuals in total, from the Zahedan University of Medical Sciences visit foreign nationals at their houses in order to conduct the TB screening, he noted.



## Ukraine War Spurs European Demand for U.S. Arms

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - European demand for U.S. weaponry is soaring, but instead of big-ticket items like jets and tanks, shopping lists are focused on cheaper, less-sophisticated items such as shoulder-fired missiles, artillery, and drones that have proven critical to Ukraine's war efforts.

Countries close to Russia like Poland, Finland and Germany are striking deals to build U.S. weapons in Europe, negotiating new deals to buy arms and looking to speed up existing contracts, according to interviews with military officials and industry executives, and a Reuters review of recent announcements by governments and defense manufacturers.

Demand is centered around basic weapons and munitions: 155-millimeter artillery rounds, air defenses, communications equipment, shoulder-fired Javelin missiles and drones, nearly a dozen European military attachés in Washington told Reuters in a series of recent interviews.

The focus on high-volume, less costly weapons underscores how the war in Ukraine has reshaped strategic thinking in European capitals about how future conflicts could be fought.

Visions of high-tech wars more reliant on computers and machines have been replaced by the reality of relentless artillery duels and soldiers dug into muddy trenches. The one-year-old war has seen both sides expend vast quantities of artillery shells and missiles.

Ukraine's high usage rates of "both precision and unguided munitions have shown NATO countries that any future war would require much higher stocks than anticipated," said Roman Schweizer, a defense policy analyst at investment bank Cowen & Co.

The attaches said their governments were particularly keen on buying Javelins after seeing the weapon's effectiveness in Ukraine. The missiles have proven deadly against Russian tanks.

Five European countries, meanwhile, have expressed interest in buying Raytheon Technologies' (RTX.N) precision-guided 155 millimeter artillery rounds, according to a company spokesperson, who declined to name them. The rounds are accurate to within 12 feet (4 meters) and have a range of 20 miles (32 km).

The interest from the five countries has not been previously reported. The company already sells to three other European nations.

Expressions of interest are the first step in a multi-step acquisition process that includes approval from the United States government and negotiations between the buyer and weapons contractor. It can be a year or more before a weapon is actually delivered.

Several of the military attachés, who declined to be named because they were not authorized to speak to the media on behalf of their governments, said their countries have been making sure payments to defense contractors have been on schedule, hoping to forestall any delays. The weapons purchases are now a domestic policy priority in their countries, they said.

U.S. arms makers have in the past complained about late customer payments on calls with investors.

Small drones and bigger unmanned aircraft, which cost about \$20 million each without sophisticated sensors, cameras and other "extras," have also appeared on shopping lists.

Finland and Denmark began talks with General Atomics after Russia invaded Ukraine last February, a source familiar with the discussions told Reuters. They want to buy a small number of MQ-9B SeaGuardian drones that can be used for maritime and land surveillance.



A Finnish defense ministry spokesperson declined to comment. A Danish defense ministry spokesperson said they have begun the process to buy at least two "long range, long endurance Remotely Piloted Aircraft System(s)" to strengthen "military capacities in the Arctic," without naming any companies.

Poland, which has been eager to get its hands on the same model drones, just received two of the previous generation model on lease from General Atomics until they get U.S. approval to buy the new ones, according to two sources familiar with the situation.

Defense minister Mariusz Blaszczak confirmed the delivery, although not the number, in a Feb. 12 tweet that said they will be used to surveil the country's eastern border, which it shares with Ukraine and Russian ally Belarus.

Some European countries are also keen to begin producing U.S. weapons on their soil because it would reduce dependency on foreign imports and lower purchasing costs.

In Germany, arms maker Rheinmetall is ready to boost the output of tank and artillery munitions and may start producing High Mobility Artillery Rocket System (HIMARS) mobile rocket launchers, which have had great success targeting Russian positions, CEO Armin Papperger told Reuters. [read more](#)

The system is currently produced by Lockheed Martin Corp in Camden, Arkansas. It is not clear whether the system would be produced under license, a joint venture or some other arrangement.

A Lockheed Martin spokesperson declined to comment directly on the possibility of Rheinmetall beginning production of HIMARS. Lockheed Martin's Eastern European business development manager for several missile programs, Rita Flaherty, said the company was "exploring co-production and technology transfer with several international partners."

Latvia, too, is interested in co-producing U.S. munitions. "We recognize the benefits provided by local production of large caliber munitions," military affairs spokesperson Roberts Skraucis said in a statement to Reuters.

Expectations remain high that European fears of Russian aggression will still generate orders for the biggest, multibillion dollar U.S. weapons like fighter jets and expensive missile defense systems with sophisticated radar.

### Iran Ready for...

FROM PAGE 1

Iran believes that if the main focus is on the fulfillment of the interests of the two countries, there will be no obstacle to the normalization of relations between Tehran and Riyadh, he stated, noting that rapprochement depends on "political will".

Representatives of Iran and Saudi Arabia have held several rounds of talks in Baghdad during the past year.

Kanaani also rejected the claims raised by the Israeli regime's Prime Minister who accused Iran of attacking an oil tanker in the Persian Gulf last week.

The Zionist regime has gotten used to making accusations like its main supporter, the US government, Kanaani stated.

Stressing that Iran is among the most effective countries in maintaining the security and freedom of sailing in international waters, the senior Iranian diplomat cited, "Iran will continue its efforts in maintaining the security and freedom of sailing in international waters and is among the countries that have played a very effective and determining role in this field so far."

"We are among the countries that emphasize the necessity of creating comprehensive security for all countries in order to use shipping opportunities in international waters," Kanaani said, adding, "But a regime that endangers the security of others and does not adhere to the security of others exposes itself to mutual threats."

Elsewhere in his remarks, the Iranian foreign ministry spokesman criticized the approach of several countries toward Iran and said that Iranophobia has been an old policy of several states, including the US regime and the Zionist regime, against Iran for more than 4 decades.

Stressing that the Islamic Republic of Iran is an effective country in the field of security in the regional and international arena, Kanaani emphasized, the fact that they prevented Iran from attending the Munich Security Conference shows that Iran's voice is accepted in the world arena.

"Iran will follow its constructive approach in regulating relations with different countries based on a balanced and dynamic foreign policy," he added.

The Munich Security Conference, which, of course, we believe was organized in the name of security, but for the sake of war and warmongers, should give an equal opportunity to all members of the international community to express their views and assessments regarding the opportunities and challenges related to international security and global order and the mechanisms that help to consolidate and strengthen stability and security, he added.

Not inviting Iran and Russia to this conference means that they took the opportunity to propose different and multilateral views on international order and security and gave it to a party that seeks to consolidate unilateralism in the international arena. "It is a gross mistake that the organizers of this conference made," he added.

We hope that the German government and the organizers of the Munich Security Conference will make up for their gross mistake next year and regain their lost credibility, Kanaani cited.

Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian is scheduled to pay a visit to Baghdad in near future to discuss bilateral issues, Kanaani said, adding that the top Iranian diplomat is expected to have another trip as well.

Reacting to the media allegations of 84% uranium enrichment in Iran, Kanaani stated that Iran is committed to the NPT and the Comprehensive Safeguards Agreements and attaches great importance to professional cooperation with IAEA.

"Of course, in return, we expect the agency (IAEA) to behave professionally in connection with Iran's peaceful nuclear activities and adhere to the principles and frameworks of professional and specialized cooperation with member countries, including Iran," he added.

Citing that the political use of IAEA distorts the professional status of this important international organization, the senior Iranian diplomat noted that such matters should be discussed in technical and specialized interactions and bilateral meetings, and bringing up such issues in the media is a sign of the agency distancing itself from its professional behavior and specialized position.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Kanaani touched upon the JCPOA revival talks, saying, "The framework of the negotiations related to the lifting of unilateral and oppressive sanctions against Iran and the responsible return of all parties to the agreement is clear and should continue in the same framework, and We hope that the agency will fulfill its professional and helpful duties within the framework of the professional and specialized duties assigned to it in connection with the nuclear agreement."

Kanaani also announced that planning for the trip of the delegation from the IAEA to Tehran is underway and it can happen as soon as the preparations are done.

## Tehran University Among World's Top Institutions

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The Webometrics Ranking of World Universities has ranked the University of Tehran (UT) among the top 300 in the world.

Iran's premier university has jumped 101 spots to 295th globally in the January 2023 edition of the Webometrics Ranking of World Universities ranking.

Three indicators are affecting the ranking, including Impact Rank, Openness Rank, and Excellence Rank.

The Internet TV of the institution played a vital role in that progress, according to Dr. Sharifi, a lecturer and the head of the digital network.

Sharifi also noted that the social media platforms helped in promoting the university's website.

The Webometrics Ranking of World Universities is an initiative of the Cybermetrics Lab, a research group belonging to one of the first basic research

organizations in Europe.

The Cybermetrics Lab is "devoted to the quantitative analysis of the Internet and Web contents specially those related to the processes of generation and scholarly communication of scientific knowledge."

"This is a new emerging discipline that has been called Cybermetrics or Webometrics," the website of the ranking system reads.

### EU Pursuing...

FROM PAGE 1

Touching on the interactions between Iran and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) concerning the issues related to safeguards agreements, the foreign minister said Tehran is planning for a visit by IAEA Director General Rafael Grossi and that joint initiatives are on the agenda.

"If the agency acts with a technical and non-political perspective, it is possible to reach a framework to resolve the issue," he added.

Iran and the IAEA are currently in a dispute triggered by the agency's Israeli-influenced accusations, which were leveled against Tehran's peaceful nuclear activities just as the Islamic Republic and other parties to the 2015 Iran nuclear deal appeared close to an agreement on reviving the deal.

Referring to the Ukraine war, Amirabdollahian said the Islamic Republic has always stressed the need for a ceasefire and diplomatic strategies to resolve the conflict.

Iran, he added, believes that respect for other countries' territorial integrity guarantees sustainable peace, including in Ukraine, and it has spared no efforts to push for truce and peace.

Borrell, for his part, referred to Europe's support for Kiev and voiced pessimism about the prospects of reaching a ceasefire in the coming weeks or even months.

He also expressed hope for the progress made in the cooperation between Iran and the IAEA, underlining the need for keeping up the talks.

### Aid Group...

FROM PAGE 1

The Bab al-Hawa Border Crossing, which is located on the Syria-Turkey border, is currently the only way UN aid can reach civilians in war-torn Syria.

On Monday, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad decided to open two more crossing points on the Turkish border to allow more aid into the earthquake-stricken regions northwest of the country.

Since the quake, the UN has sent more than 170 aid trucks to northwest Syria.

The UN says an anti-government group that has been designated as a terrorist group by the international community is preventing aid consignments from being delivered to the earthquake-stricken areas in the northern part of Syria.

### Thousands in U.S...

FROM PAGE 1

Former U.S. Congresswoman and presidential candidate, Tulsi Gabbard, also spoke, reminding the crowd of what caused her to run in 2020, and how there was "no other candidate willing to talk about the dangers where this new Cold War and nuclear arms race would lead."

"And so here we are. Two short years later what I warned about then is now a reality. This proxy that we are fighting against Russia right now could turn at any moment into a direct conflict between the United States/NATO and Russia," she said, warning that "anyone with a little bit of common sense" knows that a Cold War can at any moment turn into a hot war against a nuclear-armed country."

"And here is the insanity of it all: we have talking heads on TV, we have politicians, we have very powerful people here in the United States and all around the world speaking with a straight face about 'how we gonna fight and win' as if such a war could be won. It cannot be won," she stated.

She added that there is "only one destination for such war, and that is a nuclear holocaust."

Former Green Party presidential candidate Dr. Jill Stein, another speaker at the event, called for slashing the Pentagon's enormous budget, arguing in her speech that even the "\$100 billion we are spending to support the war in Ukraine" could help the nation solve a wide range of domestic issues.

"This murderous military spending consumes resources desperately needed here at home: by 70,000 people who die each year for lack of health insurance; for a half million homeless people on any given night out in the street; for 33 million marred in student debt; a 100 million in medical debt, 22 million impoverished children and on and on."

## Mane Returns to Training With Bayern Munich

MUNICH (Dispatches) - Senegalese international Sadio Mane said "it was just fantastic" to be back in training with Bayern Munich three months after suffering the injury that ultimately ruled him out of the World Cup.

The 30-year-old forward has handed the German champions a much-needed boost a week ahead of their top of the table clash with Union Berlin.

Bayern lost 3-2 to Borussia Moenchengladbach on Saturday.

LICENCE HOLDER: SOKHAN GOSTAR INSTITUTE

**Switchboard:**  
(+98) (21) 44253448

**Public Relations Tel:**  
(+98)(21) 44253450

Editorial Board: 44253449

**Public Relations Fax:**  
(+98)(21) 44253395

**Advertising Department:**  
Tel/Fax:(+98) (21) 44253335-9/44253234

**Website:**  
http://www.irannewsdaily.com

**E-Mail Address:**  
info@irannewsdaily.com

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## Alcaraz Reaches Argentina Open Final

BUENOS AIRES (Dispatches) - World number two Carlos Alcaraz reached the final at the Argentina Open as he bid to win his first title of 2023 after returning from a near four-month injury layoff.

The Spaniard, who suffered an abdominal injury at the Paris Masters in November, beat compatriot Bernabe Zapata Miralles 6-2 6-2 in the semi-final and will play Britain's Cameron Norrie in the title clash.

# Lillard Takes Home 3-Point Title at All-Star

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - Portland Trail Blazer's star Damian Lillard won the 3-point contest at the NBA's All-Star, topping Indiana teammates Buddy Hield and Tyrese Haliburton in the final round.

Lillard represented his school and his brand, and he did them both proud.

He wore a customized Weber State jersey with 'Dolla' on the back. Weber State is his college; he performs music under the name Dame D.O.L.L.A. And when he got the trophy, he had a Blazers warmup shirt on for that moment.

"They say the third time's the charm," said Lillard, who got his first 3-point title in his third try at the event. "And I'm happy that it happened here. It's a perfect situation. I'm happy that I did it in my home, coming back here to Utah."

Lillard won the final round with 26 points. Hield had 25 and Haliburton scored 17.

He played his college games in Ogden, Utah, about a half-hour outside of Salt Lake City. And the historic ramification of finally getting a 3-point title wasn't lost on him.

"The best shooters in the history of our game, most of them have one of these," Lillard said as he held the trophy. "I just wanted to get it done at least one time. And now I have it, so I can retire from it."



Haliburton won the first round with 31 points. Lillard had 26, and Hield had 23.

Eliminated in the first round were Boston's Jayson Tatum, Utah's Lauri Markkanen, Miami's Tyler Herro, New York's Julius Randle and Sacramento's Kevin Huerter.

The Jazz - a roster composed of Utah players Jordan Clarkson, Walker Kessler and Collin Sexton - won the Skills Challenge on Saturday night, prevailing in two of the three competitions.

"It feels good, especially to do it in front of the home team," Sexton said.

The Rooks were second, with Orlando's Paolo Banchero, Detroit's Jaden Ivey and Houston's Jabari Smith Jr. getting 100 points.

"I had a lot of fun just doing that even though we took the L," said Banchero, who was part of the winning squad in Friday's Rising Stars games. "It was really fun getting out there in front of the fans. Skills Challenge, watched that all the time growing up during All-Star Weekend. So being a part of it was great."

The Antetokounmpo were third, with Thanasis Antetokounmpo, Alex Antetokounmpo and Jrue Holiday - a fill-in for injured Milwaukee Bucks teammate Giannis Antetokounmpo - getting shut out.

The Rooks won the team relay for 100 points, after having the best time on a course where teams had to complete a 35-foot outlet pass, do downcourt dribbling, a short jumper, a left corner 3-pointer and then a dunk at the other end.

Next up was the team passing event, won by the Jazz - giving them 100 points - after they were the most accurate in a series of 35-foot outlet passes, 20-foot bounce passes and 25-foot chest passes.

It ended with the Team Shooting event - worth 200 points - with the Jazz prevailing there to clinch the win.

"We did it for Utah, man," Clarkson said.

## Rashford Shines as Man Utd Rout Leicester

LONDON (Dispatches) - Marcus Rashford showed Manchester United won't be distracted by the race to buy the Old Trafford club as his double inspired a 3-0 win against Leicester.

United owners the Glazer family are considering rival offers from Sheikh Jassim bin Hamad Al Thani, chairman of one of Qatar's biggest banks, and British billionaire Jim Ratcliffe.

Further bids could still be made amid reports United may be under new ownership within six weeks -- but Erik ten Hag's side have kept their focus firmly on the pitch.

Rashford has been the key to United's impressive form in Ten Hag's first season and the England forward proved too hot for Leicester to handle at Old Trafford.

Rashford has scored 24 times in all competitions for United this season, the highest goal tally he has ever managed in a single campaign.

Remarkably, 16 of those goals have come in 17 appearances since he returned from the World Cup in December.

The 25-year-old is also the first United player to score in seven consecutive home league games since Wayne Rooney in 2010.

Rashford endured a difficult period prior to Ten Hag's appointment last season, sparking suggestions the forward might look to leave Old Trafford.

But Rashford is now United's most influential player as he rediscovers the form that made him a teen sensation.

United sit third in the table, just five points behind leaders Arsenal, after a third win in their last four league matches.

Ten Hag has played down his side's hopes of catching Arsenal, who have a game in hand on United.

But if United do fall short in the title race, there are other opportunities to make it a memorable season in what could be the final campaign of the unpopular Glazers' 18-year reign.

United are without a major trophy since 2017, when they won the League Cup and the Europa League, while their last Premier League crown came 10 years ago.



## Messi Snatches Dramatic Win for PSG

PARIS (Dispatches) - Lionel Messi scored a 95th-minute free-kick to give Paris Saint-Germain a 4-3 win over Lille in an extraordinary Ligue 1 game in which Kylian Mbappe scored twice but Neymar was taken off on a stretcher with an apparent ankle injury.

Messi's late winner came after PSG had squandered a two-goal lead and fallen 3-2 behind, with Mbappe grabbing a late equaliser before the Argentine's stunning strike.

The result ends a run of three straight defeats for PSG and moves them eight points clear of second-placed Marseille, who visit Toulouse later and then host the capital club next weekend.

"We came through it. It wasn't a great performance," Mbappe told broadcaster Amazon Prime.

"We made lots of mistakes and lost concentration too often and against a quality side you pay dearly for that, but we showed that even when we are not at our best and the context is not exactly favourable we are a different team with different players and we can always find a way."

Of immediate concern to the Parisians will be the injury to Neymar, who looked to be in tears as he was helped onto a stretcher early in the second half after turning his ankle.

The Brazilian's fitness is now likely to dominate headlines in the run-up to next week's Marseille showdown but also the second leg of PSG's Champions League last-16 tie against Bayern Munich on March 8.

# Fritz to Face Kecmanovic in ATP Delray Beach Final



MIAMI (Dispatches) - World number seven Taylor Fritz took the first five games and six of the last eight to defeat Mackenzie McDonald and reach the ATP Delray Beach Open final.

US top seed Fritz beat his 56th-ranked compatriot 6-3, 7-6 (8/6) in 95 minutes to book a chance at his fifth career ATP crown.

"I feel really good," Fritz said. "I'm just playing better and better each match since I've been here. I love the moment. I love competing in finals so I know I'll play a good game tomorrow."

Fritz will face Serbian fourth seed Miomir Kecmanovic, who defeated Moldova's Radu Albot 7-6 (10/8), 3-6, 6-2 after two hours and 28 minutes in the other semifinal.

Fritz, in his 10th career ATP final, has won his past three title matches, taking trophies last March at Indian Wells, last June at Eastbourne and last October's Japan Open.

"I don't feel like I've been in 10," Fritz said. "But I try to forget about the ones I lose so maybe that's why."

Fritz rolled ahead at the start and rallied from a 4-1 hole in the second set. He netted a backhand on his first match-point chance in the tie-break but McDonald netted a backhand on the next point and Fritz took advantage.

Handcuffed by a shot, Fritz smacked a backhand volley that dropped in for the deciding winner.

"I just came out with a lot of energy. I was being really aggressive in the beginning," Fritz said. "Anytime I got time for the ball to settle I was ripping it."

"I was down a break in the second, maybe got away from that a little bit and in the end just tried to get back into being aggressive."

Kecmanovic's only ATP title came in 2020 at Kitzbuehl.

Albot, whose only ATP title came at Delray Beach in 2019, was up a break in the third set before the Serb rallied to capture his 100th career ATP match victory.

## Kristoffersen Wins World Slalom Gold

PARIS (Dispatches) - Norway's Henrik Kristoffersen won world gold in a dramatic men's slalom in Courchevel as AJ Ginnis claimed silver for Greece's first-ever championship medal.

Kristoffersen, just 15th fastest in the first run, laid down the speediest second leg for a winning aggregate of 1min 39.50sec.

Athens-born Ginnis, who competed for the US team before switching allegiance to the country of his birth, came in second, at 0.20sec, with Italy's Alex Vinatzer claiming bronze (+0.38).

"So far this (medal) is the best one," said Kristoffersen, a two-time Olympic medalist who won giant slalom gold in the world championships in 2019 and slalom bronze in Cortina two years ago.

"Now it's done, I'm pretty calm. It's worse standing in the finish and waiting than standing at the top. I've done both plenty of times, but the finish is worse because you've done your run, and you can't change anything."

Manuel Feller had raised hopes of bagging Austria's first gold medal in the final event of the World Ski Championships by topping the first run.



## India Hammer Australia to Take 2-0 Test Series Lead

NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - India spinner Ravindra Jadeja returned career-best figures of 7-42 to help India take an unbeatable 2-0 Test series lead with a six-wicket thrashing of Australia inside three days of a dramatic match.

Jadeja, a left-arm orthodox bowler, teamed up with fellow spinner Ravichandran Ashwin to dismiss Australia for 113 in a morning session when the tourists' batting imploded, thanks to overusing the sweep shot on a tricky New Delhi pitch.

The hosts romped to their victory target of 115 in the second session, guaranteeing that they retain the Border-Gavaskar trophy in the four-match series.

They have won their previous three series against Australia and are now close to securing a spot in the World Test Championship final.

India lost skipper Rohit Sharma, run out after a fluent 31, and Virat Kohli, who surpassed 25,000 international runs during his innings, stumped on 20.

Nathan Lyon took two wickets to return a match-haul of seven.

Cheteshwar Pujara stood firm with 31 in his landmark 100th Test to steer his team home with a winning four, as wicketkeeper-batsman Srikar Bharat, unbeaten on 23, looked on.

