

An Iranian Court on Tuesday Sentenced Jamshid Sharmahd, A Terrorist Group Ringleader, To Death on Conviction for Masterminding and Directing Terrorist Activities in Iran

# IRAN NEWS

Health Ministry Announced on Tuesday That the Number of Deaths From the Coronavirus Pandemic in Iran Increased to **144,817** With **5** More Iranians Killed by the Virus Over the Past 24 Hours

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## Iran to Increase Its Oil Prices for Asian Buyers in March

LONDON (Dispatches)- Iran will raise the price at which it sells crude oil to Asia next month, Reuters has reported, citing an unnamed source.

According to the source, Iran Light will sell for \$2 per barrel above the Dubai/Oman average in March, which is a \$0.20-per-barrel increase from the February price.

The price of Iran Heavy will be raised to \$0.35 above the Dubai/Oman average for March. This would be a change of \$0.60 per barrel, from a discount to the Dubai/Oman average of \$0.25 per barrel.

The biggest price increase in Iranian crude will be seen by Pars crude, the price of which will be raised by \$0.85 per barrel, to \$3 per barrel below the Dubai/Oman average from \$3.85 per barrel below the average.

Earlier this year, Iran also raised the prices of the crude oil it sells to Syria, pressed by the worsening economic situation at home. Citing Iranian sources, the Wall Street Journal reported in January that despite its continued support for the Assad government, Tehran could not afford to sell its oil at a discount even to such a close ally.

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## Tehran to Respond To EU Sanctions

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran has reacted to the European Union's latest sanctions that target a number of Iranian officials and entities, promising countermeasures in response to the EU's move.

The announcement came late Monday, hours after Council of the European Union imposed restrictive measures on 32 Iranian individuals and two entities in a fifth round of sanctions over what the bloc called Tehran's crackdown on the recent riots.

"The Islamic Republic will soon announce a list of its reciprocal sanctions in response to the European Union's recent bans," Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Nasser Kanaani said.

According to the EU press release, Iran's Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance Mohammad Mehdi Esmaeili, Minister of Education Yousef Nouri, the deputy commander and spokesperson of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC), a number of MPs, members of the police and judiciary in various parts of the country, as well as prison wardens are among the individuals blacklisted by the EU.

The EU's restrictive measures now apply to a total of 196 individuals and 33 entities, consisting of an asset freeze, a travel ban to the EU and a prohibition to making funds or economic resources available to those listed.



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# Tehran Seeks Eliminating Dollar, Euro In Trade With China and Russia



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Minister of Finance says Iran seeks trade with China and Russia in yuan and roubles and wants to eliminate euro and dollar in its trade with these two countries

Speaking to reporters, Ehsan Khandouzi said that using the rial and Yuan can solve challenges facing Iran-China financial transactions and trade, adding that Iran and China enjoy strong economic ties.

The Finance Minister who is the spokesman of government economic team said the administration is seeking to minimize in-dollar trades with its partners.

Khandouzi told reporters in response to a question about dollar-free trade that it was the issue President Raisi pursued in his visit to China and Russia, which was welcomed by the two sides.

He added: "The policy of Raisi's administration in commercial transactions with its main trading partners is to use the capacity of local currencies and minimize the need for global currencies such as the euro and the dollar."

Until today, the majority of Iran's trade with China as a trading partner was going on in yuan and rarely in currencies other than yuan, he noted.

The minister also said that the governor of Central Bank had negotiations with the relevant Chinese officials and its results would be reported by him.

The economic spokesman of the Iranian administration said that in the 11 months of the current Iranian year (starting from March 21, 2022), the total revenues of the administration was 1,147,000 billion toman, which is equivalent to 9% of the figure approved by the budget law for the coming year, which if compared with the same period last year, it has been increased by 60% in revenues.

Khandouzi emphasized: "The current revenues and the tax field and other current revenues of the administration have been realized in a suitable manner, almost 100% of the approved figure of the 11-month budget."

He further said: "In the field of expenditure in 11 months, 1154,000 billion toman were the administration's expenses, which increased by 52 percent in the 11 months of this year compared to last year. Almost equivalent to 90 percent of the number approved in the current year's budget law, has been realized."

"Meanwhile, the administration's construction payments in 11 months have reached 104,000 billion toman, which is an increase of eight percent over the eleven months of last year," he said.

The economic spokesman of the administration added: "In the field of bonds, the administration's financial performance shows that the government has repaid 126,000 billion toman of the principal and interest of the bonds sold by the administration this year and the last one or two years, which if divided monthly, 11 and a half thousand billion toman per month from the administration's revenues have been used to repay the interest of bonds of the past years."

He claimed that the condition of the forex will get better in the upcoming weeks and blamed virtual space for recent rise in devaluation of rial against dollar.

He also noted that the growth rate of liquidity has fallen to 34.1% and it bespeaks of success of the monetary policy of the country.

## Russia Criticizes West Over Its Concerns About Iran Nuclear Program

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - A senior Russian diplomat says the concerns raised repeatedly by Western countries in their media about Iran's nuclear program are no more than "crocodile tears" as the issue can be resolved in a diplomatic manner.

Russia's Permanent Representative to International Organizations in Vienna Mikhail Ulyanov said Western media had decided to "heat up" the situation around Iran's nuclear activities.

The remarks came in reaction to a Sunday report by Bloomberg that claimed Iran has enriched uranium to a purity of 84 percent. Citing two unnamed diplomatic sources, the report alleged that the IAEA inspectors had found highly-enriched uranium particles in pipes connecting centrifuges.

Ulyanov said that such leaks in the media came at a critical time ahead of a session of the Board of Governors of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in a bid to disrupt the visit of the agency's chief Rafael Grossi to Tehran.

"Unfortunately, such things as 'leaks' of sensitive information in the media are not uncommon. This is done largely for obvious political reasons — to complicate the situation around Iran and its nuclear program. So now, Bloomberg sources decided to 'heat up' the situation on the eve the upcoming session of the IAEA Board of Governors [to be held in Vienna from March 6 to 10]. Or maybe the task, in addition to this, was to disrupt the plans of the IAEA Director General to visit Tehran. Rafael Grossi has repeatedly stated the importance of such a trip now," he told Sputnik news agency.

"You can't go along with the 'stuffing' that some media operate on and whip up passions, taking into account the sensitivity of the situation around the topic of the Iranian atom, you need to wait for the conclusions of experts."

The Russian envoy also underlined the need for a "speedy restoration" of the US-abandoned 2015 Iran nuclear deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

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## CBI Launches Currency, Gold Exchange Center

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The Central Bank of Iran (CBI)'s center for the exchange of currency and gold was officially launched on Tuesday in a ceremony attended by the bank's officials, the CBI portal reported.

As reported, CBI's currency and gold exchange center will have several trading halls for the exchange and supply of foreign currency and gold, however, in the first phase only two halls including the Services Currency Hall and the Remittance Hall will be opened and start operating.

Establishing exchange rate authority, increasing the volume of official transactions, and facilitating access to foreign currency and gold are among the most important goals of Iran's foreign currency and gold exchange center.

According to CBI, the foreign currency that is offered in this exchange will be provided through the exports of petrochemicals, copper, mining products, steel, oil products, bitumen, and other commodities.

Earlier on Monday, CBI Governor Mohammad-Reza Farzin announced that the center is opened with the aim of controlling market fluctuations and determining the rates based on the economic realities of the country.

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## Iran, Belarus to Step Up Economic Cooperation

MINSK (Dispatches) - Ways to step up trade and economic cooperation between Belarus and Iran were discussed during a meeting between Belarusian Minister of Antimonopoly Regulation and Trade Aleksei Bogdanov and Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Islamic Republic of Iran to Belarus Saeed Yari.

The parties talked over the topical issues of Belarusian-Iranian cooperation. "Cooperation between our countries has a significant potential, which has not been fully utilized. We are interested in actively working with Iran in all areas of mutual interest, and are also ready to consider new promising areas of joint activity," Aleksei Bogdanov noted.

Special consideration was given to the need to further increase trade and economic cooperation, including through the expansion of export commodity range and the development of import-substituting manufacturing. Following the meeting, the parties reaffirmed their commitment to implementing the agreements reached, the press service noted.

## Germany Says No Legal Grounds to Designate IRGC as Terrorist Entity

BRUSSELS (Dispatches) - Germany says there is no legal basis for blacklisting Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) as a "terrorist organization," echoing earlier remarks made last month by the European Union's foreign policy chief.

Speaking on Monday following a meeting of EU foreign ministers in Brussels, German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock said German experts have found no legal grounds to justify such a move against the IRGC.

"As of now, we don't have legal grounds in the EU to list the [Islamic] Revolutionary Guards [Corps] as [a] terrorist organization," she said.

The new development came as the 27-nation bloc has been slapping sanctions on Iran over what it calls the country's approach towards foreign-backed riots that erupted in some Iranian cities in September.

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



# Official Highlights Iran Humanitarian View Toward Prisoners Swap

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Foreign Ministry Spokesman Nasser Kanaani referred to the special effort made by the Sultanate of Oman to exchange prisoners between Iran and the U.S., saying that Iran looks at prisoner swap from a humanitarian perspective.

Kanaani said that the Islamic Republic of Iran considers exchanging prisoners from a humanitarian point of view. He also appreciated the special efforts made by the Sultanate of Oman in this regard.

Meanwhile, addressing his press conference on Monday, Kanaani said that Iran has indirectly pursued the issue of prisoner exchange with the United States, adding that the U.S. side has failed to abide by its commitments.

## Tehran Ready to Host 3+3 Format Meeting of Regional Top Diplomats

IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian says Tehran is ready to host a foreign ministerial meeting within the framework of a 3+3 group comprising three southern Caucasus countries and their three neighbors while stressing the importance of bolstering regional cooperation.

AmiraAbdollahian made the remarks in a meeting with the visiting Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Alexander Grushko in Tehran.

Iran has repeatedly declared its readiness to help resolve the longstanding conflict between estranged neighbors, Azerbaijan and Armenia, through different formats and mechanisms.

The 3+3 format includes three southern Caucasus countries (Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia) and three neighboring countries (Russia, Turkey and the Islamic Republic of Iran).

Iran was one of the countries that proposed the formation of a 3+3 group in line with its foreign policy of resolving problems, differences and challenges faced by countries in the region.

The top Iranian diplomat also emphasized the importance of promoting bilateral and regional cooperation between the Islamic Republic and the Russian Federation, the statement noted.

For his part, Grushko welcomed the idea of enhanced cooperation between the



two all-weather allies in the bilateral, regional, and international spheres.

During his visit to Tehran, Grushko also held talks with his Iranian counterpart, Ali Bagheri Kani, on a range of issues including the war in Ukraine, the situation in Afghanistan, the crisis in Syria as well as developments in Central Asia and the Caucasus, said the statement.

In their meeting on Monday, Kani called for greater cooperation between Tehran and Moscow to safeguard regional peace and stability and promote multilateralism.

He also stressed the need for the two countries to continue cooperation with other independent countries in order to protect national interests and counter discriminatory and unilateral approaches.

The Russian diplomat, for his part, also highlighted the significance of promoting multilateralism in the world and cooperation among independent countries.

He criticized Western countries for abusing freedom, democracy and human rights and said interaction among world countries must be based on rules and regulations.

## Iran Sees Major Benefits in Cooperation With China

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Minister of Industry, Mine and Trade of the Islamic Republic of Iran Reza Fatemi Amin says that economic cooperation with China can give Iran some major benefits.

In an interview with the Iranian television on Monday, Fatemi Amin referred to the importance of Iranian trade ties with China by mentioning the fact that the East Asian country has a very large economy with a foreign trade volume of nearly \$6.3 trillion and a gross domestic product of \$17 trillion.

“A very important issue is that this country (China) has entered all kinds of industrial and technological fields and has a diverse range of products,” he said.

The minister said that China has become an expert in a wide range of economic, manufacturing and technological activities unlike some countries that have specialized in one or two areas of the economy.

“The second issue is that China considers itself to have an independent position and they are obviously focused on the Chinese civilization, and they do not follow the European, Western and American countries,” he said.

Further in his remarks, Fatemi Amin said that Iran expects its trade volume with countries like Belarus, Iraq, Oman, and some African countries to increase in the upcoming years.

He said some 60 African and 30 Russian business delegations have come to Iran since the beginning of the current Iranian calendar year in March.

## Official Denies Impoundment of Chamshir Dam

TEHRAN (IFP) - The CEO of water utility in the Iranian province of Kohkiluyeh and Boyerahmad Province has denied a claim by a UN expert about the impounding of Iran’s Chamshir Dam in the province.

The official said the dam has not been impounded even tentatively.

Some media outlets earlier quoted the CEO of the Kohkiluyeh and Boyerahmad water utility as announcing the impoundment of Chamshir Dam. But officials have announced that this will be done during the Iranian president’s visit to the region.

Meanwhile, Kaveh Madani, Vice President of the United Nations Environmental Assembly Bureau, also said in a tweet threat that the dam had been impounded. He cited satellite images to back up his claim.

Critics of the impoundment of Chamshir Dam involve two groups: archeologists and environmental activists and geologists.

## Next Year’s Budget Bill to Intensify Inflationary Stagnation

TEHRAN (MNA) - Head of the Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA) Research Center has said the national budget bill for the next Iranian calendar year 1402 (starts on March 21) is going to exacerbate the inflationary stagnation that the country’s economy is currently facing.

Speaking at a meeting of the heads of ICCIMA’s specialized committees on Tuesday, Mohammad Ghasemi said Iran’s economy is in a situation of inflationary stagnation and the prepared budget for the next year is going to aggravate this condition even more, the ICCIMA portal reported.

“The same thing happened in [the Iranian calendar year] 1400 [ended on March 20, 2022] and the budget that was proposed and executed for [the year] 1401,” Ghasemi regretted.

Ghasemi stated that the budgeting system in Iran is such that the expenses are calculated first and then incomes are foreseen based on those expenses.

“In Iran, tax revenues are one of the income sources that are taken into account in the conditions of decreasing oil revenues. But it should be noted that taxes cannot be easily increased when the country is facing recession,” he added.

According to the head of the ICCIMA Research Center, removing tax exemptions is also another measure that the government considers for increasing its revenues, and the Iran Chamber has tried as much as possible to confront this trend.

## Iran Mocks UK-Based Hostile TV’s Relocation to U.S.

TEHRAN (Tasnim) – The spokesperson for the Foreign Ministry described the Iran International TV channel’s decision to relocate its studio operations from the UK to the U.S. as a puppetry that reveals collaboration among the intelligence services of several countries.

Nasser Kanaani described the Iran International TV channel’s move to shift its operations from London to Washington, D.C., as a “puppetry and new theatrical measure” that reveals that the intelligence services of several countries are sharing responsibilities.

“The developments surrounding the (Iran) International terrorist quasi-media indicate that the channel is being supported and managed by the intelligence services of a number of certain countries, including the UK,” the spokesman said.

Kanaani said the function and performance of the quasi-media outlet prove its role as an “operational and training arm” employed to provoke and fuel riots, insecurity and anti-security activities inside Iran.

The quasi-media has been listed as a terrorist entity on

the basis of hard evidence and after the hostile TV channel provided a stage for the well-known elements of the terrorist and separatist groups, he stated.

“From our viewpoint, even if the channel is relocated from London to the US, the responsibility will still lie with the governments sponsoring and hosting such quasi-media, particularly the UK government, in relation to its (the channel’s) terrorist, separatist and anti-Iranian activities,” Kanaani added.

The spokesman said the Iran International channel’s role in fueling riots in Iran in the past recent months amount to definite criminal acts that make the channel, its host, and its overt and covert sponsors accountable legally, judicially and internationally, adding that the Islamic Republic of Iran will continue to sue them.

He advised the U.S. government to be mindful of all legal and international responsibilities for hosting a violent and terrorist quasi-media. “Undoubtedly, the Islamic Republic of Iran reserves all rights to future prosecutions and will take the necessary measures.”

## Jannati Re-Elected as Assembly of Experts Chief

TEHRAN (Tasnim) – Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati was re-elected as the chairman of Iran’s Assembly of Experts on Tuesday.

During a meeting of the Assembly of Experts in Tehran today, the senior cleric was re-elected as the head of the body.

Seyyed Ebrahim Raisi and Seyyed Hashem Hosseini Bushehri were also elected as the first deputy and second deputy of the Assembly.

The high-ranking body elects and oversees the activities of the Leader of the Islamic Revolution.

The 88 members of the assembly are directly elected to office by people for an eight-year term. It holds biannual meetings to appoint a new chairman.



## Iran Stresses Backing Political Solution in Ukraine War

TEHRAN (MNA) - Issuing a statement, Iran’s embassy in Kuwait, once again clarified Tehran’s position regarding the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, saying that Iran supports resolving the crisis through political means.

The fundamental position of the Islamic Republic of Iran regarding the Ukraine crisis, which is based on supporting the sovereignty of Ukraine and the need to end the conflict through political channels and solutions and taking no sides, has been clear from the beginning, the statement read.

According to Arab media, the Iranian embassy also emphasized that Tehran has not provided

any weapons or military equipment to any of the parties to be used in the Ukraine war.

Iran’s defense cooperation with other countries is based on international rights and obligations, the statement emphasized. Diplomacy and political dialogue is the sole way to end regional crises, and sending equipment and weapons to either side of the war will only prolong the war, the embassy added.

Iran has repeatedly called on the Ukrainian side to provide any document or proof if it has any or to form a technical and military committee to investigate its claim, but Kyiv officials have not yet agreed, the statement concluded.

Ukraine has accused Iran of sending drones to Russia for use in the Ukraine war without providing any evidence.

## Claims on Iran Enrichment Meant To Influence IAEA Meeting

TEHRAN (IRNA) - A senior member of the Iranian parliament says that media reports claiming that Iran has been involved in uranium enrichment up to 84% of purity are meant to influence an upcoming meeting of the Board of Governors of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

Abolfazl Amouei, who serves as the spokesman of Iranian Parliament’s National Security and Foreign Policy Commission, made the comments on Monday in reaction to a recent report by the Bloomberg suggesting that Iran had started uranium enrichment to weapons-grade levels.

Amoui said that Iran is currently settled on a 60% uranium enrichment program under IAEA’s full supervision, adding that the country will inform the UN nuclear agency about any decision to go beyond that level.

“The publication of such stories by the American media is more aimed at making hue and cry about the Islamic Republic of Iran ahead of the IAEA Board of Governors meeting in March,” said the Iranian lawmaker.

## IRISL Granting Scholarship



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – The Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Line Group (IRISL) admits students to complete its required human forces to work on the ocean liner ships.

According to reports, the IRISL via its educational institute admits students for absorbing human forces required to work on its ocean liners in the levels of second officer of the deck and third engineer of engine.

The institute announced those who are interested in enrolling for this educational course can start enrolling from March 5.

The course is just for Iranian citizens with full health and the applicants should have finished their conscript service. According to the announcement, those who are in their last year of their high school and university can also take part in the related examination.

Those who are interested in the course can log on the website of the educational institute of the group for more information.

## 700 Tons of Illicit Drugs Seized in 10 Months

TEHRAN (MNA) – Secretary-General of the Drug Control Headquarters said that the Iranian anti-narcotics police confiscated 700 tons of various types of drugs in the past 10 months.

According to Eskandar Momeni, 12 Iranian anti-narcotics forces were martyred during the operations carried out to fight against the smuggling of narcotics in the same period.

Despite high economic and human costs, the Islamic Republic has been actively fighting drug-trafficking over the past decades.

The country has spent more than \$700 million on sealing its borders and preventing the transit of narcotics destined for European, Arab, and Central Asian countries.

The war on the drug trade originating from Afghanistan has claimed the lives of nearly 4,000 Iranian police officers over the past four decades.



# Start of 65 Infrastructural Projects in Qeshm Free Trade Zone

## Qeshm, a Successful Model of Local and Economic Balanced Development Among Free Trade Zones



Qeshm Free Zone celebrated the 44th anniversary of the victory of the Islamic Revolution differently from previous years. Every year, the days of the blessed decade of Ten-Day-Dawn Festivities are associated with the groundbreaking, opening and start of various projects throughout the country, and this time in Qeshm Island, conditions were provided for the realization of the largest infrastructural and economic projects in the region.

According to the public relations and international affairs of the Qeshm Free Zone Organization, while it has past less than two years of the life of the popular and revolutionary government and new management of the Qeshm Free Zone Organization, many efforts have been made to bring half-finished projects to a conclusion and to start new projects. During this period, the redesign and improvement of the island's basic infrastructure has been pursued at a faster pace, and it can be said that this issue has increased the trust and hope of the local community, and today the residents of the island are cooperating with the Qeshm Free Zone Organization in implementing macro-economic plans. Qeshm Free Zone Organization has succeeded under its new management period in the 13th government to take stronger steps in fulfilling its social responsibilities for the progress and development of the island and play an effective role in this field. Today, many elders and well-known and most effective figures of the island believe that development and progress are being done in a balanced manner in all parts of the island, in all infrastructural sectors, economic, industrial, tourism, cultural and ...The infrastructural measures of the Qeshm Free Zone Organization during this time have been able to benefit the local community and contribute to the further development of the local and national economy.

### Inauguration and groundbreaking of four mega projects in Qeshm Island

This year's Ten-Day-Dawn festivities in Qeshm Island were accompanied by the opening and launching of four megaprojects; Projects that each one alone carries a great burden of development, progress, increasing employment, economic prosperity and fulfilling social responsibility in the region. Simultaneously with the seventh day of the festivities on February 7 and with the presence of Hojatullah Abdulmaleki, Secretary of the Supreme Council of Free Zones, Afshar Fathollahi, Chairman of the Board of Directors and CEO of the Qeshm Free Zone Organization, Brigadier General Mohammad Marani, Commander of Medina Headquarters of IRGC Ground Force, Dr. Hojjati, Deputy Minister and Head of the National Security Organization, together with a group of MPs and executive officials of Hormozgan province and Qeshm city, four mega projects in the infrastructural and economic fields in Qeshm Island were launched and inaugurated. Resumption of the national mega project of building the Persian Gulf bridge to connect Qeshm Island to the mainland after a seven-year hiatus, as one of the long-standing wishes of the people of Qeshm and Hormozgan Province, was the first action taken during the Ten-Day-Dawn. In the second step, the Ilia Steel Aria Qeshm factory, with the goal of producing all kinds of stainless steel sheets with an investment of 200,000b rials was the second big project in Qeshm Island. Also, Iran's largest caged fish breeding project in Qeshm Island with the capacity to produce 1000 tons of fish per year in the first phase was opened. Meanwhile handing over of predicted plots of land was done for implementation of the housing plan for the youth of the island in the cities of Tabal, Souza and Ramkan in Qeshm Island in line with the promise of the 13th government to build annually one million housing unit and resolving housing problem of the island residents.

### Resumption of the construction project of the Persian Gulf bridge after 7 years of Hiatus

The construction of the Persian Gulf Bridge, as a long-standing wish of the residents of Qeshm Island, was resumed, after a seven-year hiatus, with the efforts of jihadists in the 13th government. The construction of the Persian Gulf Bridge will connect the largest island of Iran and the Middle East to the mainland with an investment credit of 460m euros. The construction of the Persian Gulf Bridge as one of the four pillars of the comprehensive Persian Gulf communication network plan, centered on and relying on four projects, port, bridge, road and rail, will create a new route from Qeshm in contact and connection with the commercial corridors of the region and connecting to the national road network. The length of this bridge is in the onshore area towards Laft and Pahl ports, and its cable structure with 360-meter openings is in the middle of the sea and its useful width of the deck is about 32 meters as the total length of the bridge is 3430 meters, and the length of the bridge is over the sea. The establishment of the Persian Gulf Bridge will reduce transportation costs by at least 30%, decrease the time of goods transit by 40%, and reduce the cost of goods and services due to the existence of a rail and road transportation network. Considering the strategic role of Qeshm and the start of executive operations for the development of road and highway infrastructure in the island and with the construction of the Persian Gulf Bridge, 92 kilometers of highway from Bandar Kaveh to national highways and also 86 kilometers of railway from Bandar Kaveh to national highways, Ring Island transportation will be completed. The mega Persian Gulf bridge project includes four vehicle lanes, one train lane, emergency and pedestrian lanes, and according to the plans, it is expected to be completed in about three and a half years. The Persian Gulf Bridge construction project currently has 15% physical progress and today it started its executive activity after a seven-year break in the 13th government.

### Start of 65,000b toman infrastructural projects in Qeshm Free Zone

The chairman of the board of directors and the CEO of the Qeshm Free Zone Organization said: "ince the beginning of the 13th government, more than 650,000b rials of infrastructural and construction projects have been started in the Qeshm Free Zone. With the beginning of the implementation of various projects throughout the island, today Qeshm has a large construction workshop in the field of road construction, infrastructural, industrial, and oil and energy. Referring to the initiation of various infrastructural projects with a credit amounting to 650,000b rials in the 13th government, he added: With the completion of these projects, Qeshm Island can act as a driving engine economic to play a role in the national economy of

Islamic Iran. The CEO of the Qeshm Free Zone Organization continued: Today, after years of hiatus, with the definition of a new model of financial resources, the implementation of the construction of the Persian Gulf Bridge will begin as one of the long-standing dreams of the residents of the island. According to Fathollahi, planning for the construction of the Persian Gulf Bridge was one of the promises made by President Raisi during his provincial visit to Qeshm Island, which kickstarted today with continuous pursuitand the support of the government and parliament. He stated that the construction of the Persian Gulf Bridge due to the lack of financial resources was halted during the previous government, adding, "In the new model of financing this huge national project, part of the resources will be provided by the government, another part by Qeshm Free Zone Organization and the rest by the capital and finance market. The CEO of the Qeshm Free Zone Organization noted: "The expected time for the implementation of the Persian Gulf Bridge is three and a half years, and the construction date board of this project will be installed on the site for public supervision."

### The construction of the Persian Gulf Bridge in line with the strategy of globalization of free zones

Advisor to the President and the Secretary of the Supreme Council of Free Zone said: "The implementation of the huge Persian Gulf Bridge project has been restarted today and after years of interruption, with the special attention of Ayatollah Raisi, the President, and in line with the implementation of the strategy of globalization of the country's free zones. Hojjatollah Abdulmaleki stated in the restarting ceremony of the implementation of the Persian Gulf Bridge project: "The free zones of the country in the 13th government have two strategies of popularization and globalization, and the construction of the Persian Gulf Bridge is also in line with the operationalization of these strategies. He continued: The full implementation of the four pillars of the comprehensive communication plan of the Persian Gulf, including the construction of a bridge, the development of Kaveh Port, the construction of highways and railways in this region to complete the north-south corridor is of great importance. Kaveh Port for the docking of international commercial ships is very important. Abdulmaleki said, noting, "After the construction of the Persian Gulf Bridge and the development of Kaveh Port, benefiting from the capability of this port to complete the commercial capacities of Shahid Rajaei Port will also be on the agenda. According to Abdulmaleki, the construction operation of the Persian Gulf Bbridge and the connection of Qeshm Island to the mainland through this bridge is carried out by obtaining the necessary permits and observing all environmental considerations.

### The construction of the Persian Gulf Bridge is a long-standing dream of the Iranian people

A member of the parliament's energy commission said: "With the resumption of the construction of the Persian Gulf Bridge, one of the long-standing dreams of all Iranian people will come true." Ahmad Moradi, in the ceremony of the construction of the Persian Gulf Bridge, said: Qeshm Island, its local community and its rich culture are a unique capacity and opportunity for the national culture and economy of Islamic Iran.



### With the construction of the Persian Gulf Bridge, the development of Qeshm will accelerate

Also, another member of the Hormozgan Province Representative to Majlis said: "With the change in the positive approach of the 13th Popular Government, the free areas of the country have become the backyard of the nation today. Mohammad Ashuri Taziani said in the ceremony: "The four dimensions of development (political, cultural, social and economic) should be in the hands of the human development of societies. He continued: "Human development has characteristics, among which we can mention the creation of comfort, security, and central justice, which are essential for progress, development and well-being of human societies is essential."

### Joining of Qeshm to the production chain of steel products in the country

By establishing a company in the field of big industries with 200,000b rials of credit and creating employment for 1800 native workers, Qeshm Island joined the chain of steel products production in the country. The launch of big industries with the increase of production in the island and the employment it brings, it will be a driving force for economic transformation in Qeshm. The construction of Ilia Steel Aria Qeshm Company, with a credit of 200,000b rials, in Kaveh Qeshm Industrial Town, in an area of 97 hectares and a production capacity of 300,000 tons of stainless steel sheets, is the beginning of growth and the creation of sustainable direct employment for 1800 local workers. The construction of this company, which is expected to be put into operation by 1405 (Iranian calendar year), along with the Persian Gulf Bridge groundbreaking ceremony, can provide the ground for the presence of big and heavy industries that, by choosing the Qeshm Free Zone as a zone for investment, facilitating exports, cheap transportation and tax exemption, can play a significant role in the economic boom of the country. The final product of this company will be the production of cold and hot rolled stainless steel sheets for use in domestic and foreign metal industries.

### Cutting dependence on stainless steel sheets Started in the country

The chairman of the board of directors and the CEO of the Qeshm Free Zone Organization said: "With pickling and in the next step, the operation of the factory for the production of stainless steel sheets is one of the long-standing dreams." It is implemented for the country's steel products production chain in Qeshm Island. Afshar Fathollaho, in the ceremony of raking the factory of stainless steel sheets in Qeshm Island, stated: The implementation of the stainless steel sheet production plan is one of the most important measures to stop the country's dependence on This is the product.

### Earning 1.5b Euro by producing stainless steel sheets

The adviser to the president and the Secretary of the Supreme Council of Free Zones of the country also said: "Planning for the jump in the export of products with high added value is one of the economic priorities of the free zones. Abdulmaleki speaking in the ceremony of the stainless steel sheet company's groundbreaking ceremony in Qeshm Island said: "The production of stainless steel sheets is one of the products with high added value in the chain of steel products, which can lead to foreign exchange savings and foreign exchange for the country. It has grown 80 times and has reached from 500,0 00 tons to about 40m tons per year." He further said: "This industrial unit has the capacity to produce 300,000 d tons of stainless

steel sheet, which after exploitation, in addition to meeting the domestic needs, it will save the country 500 million euros.Abdulmaleki noted according to the plan, the stainless steel sheets produced by this complex, by exporting to the target markets, can earn one billion euros for the country through exports to target markets.

### Inauguration of first phase of the largest caged fish breeding project in Iran

The Chairman of the Board of Directors and the CEO of the Qeshm Free Zone Organization announced the inauguration of the first phase of Iran's largest caged fish breeding project in Qeshm Island in order to develop the blue economy and materialize realize the Second Step Revolution concurrent with the 44th anniversary of the victory of the Islamic Revolution. Afshar Fathollahi, announcing the news,said: "The first phase of fish breeding in the cages of Andishe Shilat Qeshm located in Gambbron village - Bandar Selkh Qeshm with 8 cages and a total capacity of 1,000 tons was put into operation. He continued: "The capacity of this project in the final phase is 40. The cage will be increased to 5,000 tons, and in its future outlook it will reach 10,000 tons, and two species of sea bass and seabream will be bred in this project. In the first phase of this project, 300 billion rials of working capital and 870,000 foreign currency capital have been taken into consideration. Fathollahi stated: 5,000b rials of capital and 6 million euros of foreign currency capital are needed for the operation of this project in the final phase. It has been predicted the project to improve the island's fishery products and economic boom beside playing important role in earning forex and providing food security for the country.

### The beginning of the housing project for the youth of the island in the towns of Qeshm

The first phase of granting land to the youth of the island in the towns of Qeshm began with the allocation of more than 75 hectares of land in the towns of Ramkan, Souza and Tabal. The housing project for the youth of the island is a project in line with the promise of President Raisi which Qeshm Free Zone is the leader in its implementation Qeshm Free Zone, by implementing the said plan in 6 stages, made 3500 native youths in 38 villages the owners of land by granting them 160 hectares of land and in the next stage, it tries to make the long-standing dream of the Qeshmi families come true dream with groundbreaking of the youth housing scheme.

In the first stage of granting land to the youth of the island in the cities of Qeshm, 322 youths in the town of Remkan in an area of up to 16.1 hectares, 552 youths in the city of Souza in an area of up to 27.6 hectares will become home owners. Also, this plan will provide housing for 635 native youths in a land of 31.75 hectares in Tabal city. It should be noted that, including the handovers in Qeshm villages, this is the seventh stage of the youth housing project of the island, in which a total of 75.5 hectares of land will be allocated to 1509 young people living in the three cities of Remkan, Souza and Tabal.

### Handing over free land for housing construction to more than 5000 Qashmi youths

The chairman of the board of directors and the CEO of the Qeshm Free Zone Organization informed about the planning and serious determination of this organization to solve two housing problems and create employment for the youth of the island. Fathollahi stated in the initiation ceremony of the youth housing project in 3 cities of the island: In the field of housing, with the implementation of the youth housing project, very good measures have been taken to solve the problem of housing for the residents of the island. We are creating sustainable employment for the youth of Qeshm. The CEO of Qeshm Free Zone Organization added: Qeshm is the leader in the implementation of the national housing movement plan by giving land to more than five thousand people for free and under the condition of construction and fulfilling the promise of housing people in the people's government. It is the thirteenth.

### Qeshm is a model for the implementation of the national housing movement in the free ones

The Secretary of the Supreme Council of Free Zones Mr. Abdulmaleki said: "We hope to implement the successful experience of Qeshm Island in implementing the policy of allocating land for housing construction in the National Housing Movement plan as a model in other free zones of the country as well. The start of the youth housing project in three cities of Qeshm Island, he stated: One of the priority policies of the 13th People's Government in the field of social welfare is to provide land and housing for different classes. He continued: The holy system of the Islamic Republic as a political system. The grassroots people always seek to solve the basic problems of the people and create social welfare. The secretary of the Supreme Council of Free Zones of the country noted: In the 13th government, two strategies are popularization and globalization of the zones. It has been put on the agenda and a target has been set for it. Abdulmalei, stating that untangling the activities of investors and producers in free zones is one of the policies of the 13th government, added: "Special attention to the residents and creating prosperity for the local community is and implementation of various programs in the free zones is a priority."

### The appropriate response of Qeshm Free Zone to solve the housing problem of the youth of the sland

A member of the Hormozgan Province representative to Majlis said: "In the implementation of the housing project for the youth of the island, in line with the plan of the national housing movement and the promise of the 13th popular government, great progress has been made in Qeshm Island." He added: "Good cooperation and cooperation between different departments in Qeshm Island for the implementation of the youth housing project has been formed, which deserves appreciation."





## Turkey Not Exporting Items For Use in Russia War Effort

ANKARA (Dispatches) - Turkey is not exporting products that could be used in Russia's war effort, Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said, after U.S. warnings this month about exports of chemicals, microchips and other items.

"It is not true that we have exported to Russia products that can be used in the defense industry," Cavusoglu said. "We asked the United States to notify (us) if there are any violations on this issue."

Speaking after meeting U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken in Ankara, Cavusoglu also said Turkey will not allow U.S. and European sanctions to be violated in or via Turkey, and Ankara is taking steps to prevent it.



## China's Top Diplomat to Visit Moscow This Week

BUDAPEST (Dispatches) - China's top diplomat Wang Yi, who is to visit Russia this week on the one-year anniversary of its invasion of Ukraine, called for negotiations and peace for the sake of the world and Europe in particular.

"We would like a political solution to provide a peaceful and sustainable framework to Europe," Wang said ahead of a visit to Moscow during a stop in Hungary, which could result in billions of euros of new Chinese investment in the country.

China regards Russia as an ally, counter-balancing U.S. global power, and has so far refrained from condemning the Feb. 24 invasion of Ukraine while repeatedly urging peace.



## Biden in Kyiv to Show Resolve Ahead of War's Anniversary



KYIV (Dispatches) - U.S. President Joe Biden walked around central Kyiv on an unannounced visit on Monday, promising to stand with Ukraine as long as it takes, on a trip timed to upstage the Kremlin ahead of the one-year anniversary of Russia's invasion.

Biden, in trademark aviator sunglasses, and President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, in green battle fatigues, walked side-by-side to a gold-domed cathedral on a bright winter morning pierced by the sound of air raid sirens.

"When (Russian President Vladimir) Putin launched his invasion nearly one year ago, he thought Ukraine was weak and the West was divided. He thought he could outlast us. But he was dead wrong," Biden said.

"The cost that Ukraine has had to pay is extraordinarily high. Sacrifices have been far too great ... We know that there will be difficult days and weeks and years ahead."

Outside the cathedral, burnt-out Russian tanks stand as a symbol of Moscow's failed assault on the capital at the outset of its invasion, which began on Feb. 24. Its forces swiftly reached Kyiv's ramparts only to be turned back by unexpectedly fierce resistance.

Since then, Russia's invasion has killed tens of thousands of Ukrainian civilians and soldiers on both sides, cities have been reduced to rubble and millions of refugees have fled. Russia says it has annexed nearly a fifth of Ukraine, while the West has pledged tens of billions of dollars in military aid to Kyiv.

The U.S. president promised a further \$500 million worth of weaponry, including artillery ammunition, anti-armor systems and air defense radars, plus tighter sanctions on Russia.

"This visit of the U.S. president to Ukraine, the first for 15 years, is the most important visit in the entire history of Ukraine-U.S. relations," Zelenskyy said.

Foreign Minister Dmitry Kuleba called the visit a signal to Russia that "no one is afraid of you!"

Russia was notified before Biden's departure, officials in Washington and Moscow said, apparently to avoid the risk of an attack on Kyiv while he was there.

The trip took place a day before Putin was due to make a major address on Tuesday, setting out aims for the second year of what he now calls a proxy war against the armed might of Washington and the transatlantic military alliance NATO.

"Of course for the Kremlin this will be seen as further proof that the United States has bet on Russia's strategic defeat in the war and that the war itself has turned irrevocably into a war between Russia and the West," said Tatiana Stanovaya, a Russian political analyst.

The anniversary has taken on more than symbolic significance, becoming what the West views as the principal motivation for the war's deadliest phase, with Moscow hurling thousands of conscripts and mercenaries into a winter offensive.

Russia has secured only scant gains so far in assaults in frozen trenches up and down the eastern front in recent weeks. Kyiv and the West see it as a push to give Putin victories to tout a year after he launched Europe's biggest war since World War Two.

Moscow received its own signal of diplomatic support on Monday, with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi expected for talks. In public, China has remained neutral over the conflict despite signing a "no limits" friendship pact with Russia weeks before the invasion.

Washington has said in recent days it is concerned Beijing could begin supplying Moscow with arms. Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said the United States was "in no position to make demands of China".

## Blinken, in Turkey, Urges Speedy Nordics Accession to NATO

ANKARA (Dispatches) - Washington strongly supports Sweden and Finland's quick NATO accession given steps they have already taken, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said, even as his Turkish counterpart stressed the need for more concrete action.

Sweden and Finland applied last year to join the trans-Atlantic defence pact after Russia invaded Ukraine, but faced unexpected objections from Turkey.

Ankara says Stockholm has harboured what Ankara calls members of terrorist groups. Turkey recently indicated it would approve only Finland for NATO membership.

"Finland and Sweden have already taken concrete steps to fulfil the commitments that they met under the trilateral memorandum of agreement that they signed," Blinken said.

Reiterating that NATO's Nordic expansion issue is not a bilateral one with Turkey, Blinken said the United States strongly supported Sweden and Finland's accession into the alliance "as quickly as possible".

But Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu, standing alongside Blinken, said all parties in the alliance must convince Sweden in particular to take more action to address Ankara's concerns and win its support for the bid.

When asked if Ankara would approve their accession by a NATO summit set to take place in Lithuania in July, a gathering by which the Western countries are hoping the expansion can be completed, Cavusoglu said Stockholm needed to do more.

"Sweden made a law change, but we see that every kind of activities, including terrorism



financing, recruitment and propaganda, are continuing in Sweden," he said.

"If they take steps that convince our parliament and people, there could be a development in this direction," he added.

But Cavusoglu also said suspended talks with Sweden and Finland on their NATO membership bid would resume "soon" in Brussels, in a clear signal of easing tensions between Stockholm and Ankara.

Turkey had cancelled indefinitely a trilateral mechanism with Sweden and Finland on their applications to join NATO after Rasmus Paludan, leader of the Danish far-right political party

Hard Line, burned a copy of the Koran outside the Turkish embassy in Stockholm in January.

"I of course welcome Turkey's announcement that they want to resume the discussions regarding the trilateral agreements that Sweden has with Turkey and Finland," Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson told a news conference in Stockholm.

Kristersson said a date had not been set for the resumption of the talks with Turkey. He told reporters he was convinced Sweden would be joining NATO soon.

Ankara wants Helsinki and Stockholm in particular to take a tougher line against the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), which is considered a terrorist group by Turkey and its Western allies, and another group it blames for a 2016 coup attempt.

In January, Erdogan said he was open to ratifying only Helsinki's application.

After the talks with Cavusoglu, Blinken had an hour-long meeting with Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan in Ankara.

## N. Korea Fires Two More Missiles Into Its Pacific Firing Range

SEOUL (Dispatches) - North Korea launched two more ballistic missiles off its east coast on Monday, with the powerful sister of leader Kim Jong Un saying North Korea's use of the Pacific as a "firing range" would depend on the behavior of U.S. forces.

The launches come just two days after North Korea fired an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) into the sea off Japan's west coast, prompting the United States to hold joint air exercises with South Korea and separately with Japan on Sunday.

North Korea's state media confirmed it fired two projectiles from a multiple rocket launcher, aiming at targets 395 km (245 miles) and 337 km (209 miles) away.

"The 600 mm multiple rocket launcher mobilized in the firing ... is a means of tactical nuclear weapon," capable of "paralyzing" an enemy airfield, North Korea's KCNA state news agency said.

Analysts said the warning about the Pacific being a North Korean firing range from leader Kim's sister, Kim Yo



Jong, could signal plans to fire more missiles further, possibly in the direction of the U.S. territory of Guam.

Japan's defense ministry said the two missiles launched on Monday at around 2200 GMT, reached maximum altitudes of about 100 km and 50 km.

Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said he had requested an emergency U.N. Security Council meeting over the tests, and Jiji news agency said the gathering was set for 2000 GMT.

But prospects for a new round of U.N. sanctions appear slim given the previous vetoes by Russia and China amid the Ukraine crisis and a Sino-U.S. feud over a Chinese balloon in American skies.

South Korea's military condemned the launches as a "grave provocation" that should stop immediately. President Yoon Suk-yeol's office said it held a National Security Council meeting to review the tests and discuss countermeasures.

South Korea's foreign ministry announced sanctions on four individuals and five entities linked to North Korea's weapons programs over the latest ICBM and missile tests, in what it called its fastest-ever such response to the North's provocations.

The ministry said its nuclear envoy had phone calls with his U.S. and Japanese counterparts during which they agreed that North Korea's provocations cannot be justified and it would face "consequences of self-indulgence".

## Turkey and Syria Rocked Again By 6.3M Earthquake

ANTAKYA (Dispatches) - A magnitude 6.3 earthquake struck the Turkey-Syria border region late on Monday, setting off panic and damaging buildings in Turkey's Antakya city two weeks after the country's worst earthquake in modern history left tens of thousands dead.

Two Reuters witnesses reported a strong quake and further damage to buildings in central Antakya, where it was centered. It was also felt in Egypt and Lebanon, Reuters reporters said.

The European Mediterranean Seismological Centre (EMSC) said the tremor struck at a depth of 2 km (1.2 miles).

Other witnesses said Turkish rescue teams were running around after the latest quake, checking people were unharmed.

Muna Al Omar, a resident, said she was in a tent in a park in central Antakya when the earthquake hit.

"I thought the earth was going to split open under my feet," she said, crying as she held her 7-year-old son in her arms.

"Is there going to be another aftershock?" she asked.

The two larger earthquakes that hit on Feb. 6, which also rocked neighboring Syria, left more than a million homeless and killed far more than the latest official tally of 46,000 people in both countries.





# Why Do Bangladeshi Youth Want to Leave the Country?

DHAKA (Dispatches) - Mobility is human nature, and the objective is usually to gain a better quality of life. Across the world, this is an ongoing phenomenon, and people from least developed and developing countries are especially eager to move to countries with more advanced economic.

Even though Bangladesh has made much economic and social progress over the past five decades, this has not been enough to keep its people, particularly the youth, in the country.

Human resource is the backbone for a country as it contributes towards economic and social prosperity. But despite having a large population of young people, Bangladesh does not have an adequate amount of highly qualified, skilled, and capable human resources.

There is a desire among many students to go abroad for higher studies as the quality of education is better in more advanced countries. Once students graduate, they do not want to return to Bangladesh as they find better opportunities in the host country to utilise their qualifications. Indeed, Bangladeshi students are increasingly doing well in colleges and universities abroad, and global companies in countries such as the US are always looking for skilled human resources, irrespective of nationality.

Besides, the demand for IT professionals is ever increasing as the world is moving fast towards being an artificial intelligence-based society. So, Bangladeshi students with a good command over technology get job opportunities in the biggest tech companies, even before they graduate.

But there are also push factors due to which not only the younger population, but established professionals also want to move abroad. Besides a higher income, they also seek a better quality of life including access to public services and amenities, safety and security, freedom, political stability, dignity, equity, justice, etc.

Unfortunately, least developed and developing countries lack these aspects to fulfil human needs. Bangladeshis in particular have seen how bright and innocent students at reputed universities are brutally killed by fellow students or miscreants. They also witness how female students are subjected to various types of harassment on university campuses. Student politics has become a means of intimidating other students by exercising borrowed power from political parties, instead of working for the cause of common students (which used to be the case once upon a time, several decades ago). So, the youth who want to lead a normal life feel desperate to go to a better country for the sake of their own future and that of their next generations.

A section of those who return to the country post-graduation join their family businesses, whose size and scale are large. Having access to established businesses, they can enjoy the advantage of being well-connected and the capacity to deal with some of the challenges they face. But even having a lot of wealth and comfort, human beings still need clean air and green, open spaces. Their children need playgrounds. And they want to feel secure when their children are outside by themselves. These are the aspects of a quality life which even money cannot buy.

The number of female students leaving the country is also increasing. This was not the case some decades ago because parents, particularly from middle-class families, wanted to have their daughters married off first before allowing them to go abroad. But nowadays, safety has become a major concern for women and a reason why many want to leave the country. The fear of violence at home, educational institutions, workplaces, and public places haunts girls and women all the time. Such fear of violence restricts their mobility within Bangladesh.



# Too Warm in Canada: World's Largest Ice Rink May Not Open

OTTAWA (Dispatches) - The Canadian capital's iconic Rideau Canal Skateway — the largest outdoor rink in the world and a UNESCO heritage site — may not open this winter for the first time in five decades, due to a lack of ice.

Ottawa is in the grips of its third-warmest winter ever recorded, according to Environment Canada, with temperatures hovering just below freezing through most of December and January. And they're now forecast to climb.

"Mother Nature has presented us with a big challenge this year," Bruce Devine, National Capital Commission senior manager responsible for the skateway, told AFP.

"Mild temperatures have made it difficult to make good, solid ice that can support the weight of our equipment and skaters," he said.

For the canal to freeze up, temperatures must hold steady at -10 to -20 degrees Celsius for almost two weeks. "Currently in several spots the ice is porous and of not very good quality," he said.

Although he remains optimistic for what would be the latest opening on record, others worry the skateway might not open at all this year.

A brief cold spell is forecast to be coming. "The weather will be more conducive (for skating) next week," according to meteorologist Peter Kimbell. "But will it be enough, I don't know."

Chantal Dussiaume, 57, was pessimistic as she eyed ice conditions: "I got skates for Christmas, so it is a big disappointment."

"I've heard so much about the canal and it would have been nice to go skating on it," said Lani Simmons, 46, visiting from Bermuda.

The winding 7.8-kilometre long skateway though the heart of Ottawa is the size of 90 Olympic rinks, according to Guinness World Records, which in 2005 confirmed it was the biggest anywhere, and in recent years attracted an average of 22,000 visitors per day.

They would leisurely skate up and down it, taking in views of parliament and quaint neighbourhoods, stopping at warming huts or food stands along the way offering snacks and hot beverages.

Commuters were also seen skating to work with a briefcase in hand.

"It's part of the DNA of local residents and attracts a lot of visitors from afar," said Devine.

The skateway normally opens at the end of December for 30 to 60 days of skating. But its opening has shifted later and later over the years, and for shorter periods.

That view was echoed by Canada's environment minister, Steven Guilbeault, who said Tuesday, "This is yet another example of how our climate is changing in Canada."

"I don't think anyone has seen it this bad," said Davey Wright, who operates shacks on the canal selling flat fried dough dusted with sugar or cinnamon.

Local businesses, after suffering through pandemic lockdowns and a disruptive trucker-led protest last year, are taking a big hit.

The city was forced to scale back outdoor activities for its annual Winterlude festival, which runs until February 20, while hotel association president Steve Ball said bookings are way down.

"Skating on the canal is our blockbuster (attraction) and what people talk about, why they come back," he explained.

The National Capital Commission has ordered a flurry of climate adaptation studies to try to keep the skateway open earlier in the season and for longer periods.



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## Ericsson to Cut 1,400 Jobs in Sweden

STOCKHOLM (Dispatches) - Telecoms gear maker Ericsson plans to cut about 1,400 jobs in Sweden as part of a broader plan to reduce costs globally, it said. The company had earlier announced plans to cut costs by 9 billion crowns (\$880 million) by the end of 2023 as demand slows in some markets, including North America. Further job cuts, numbering several thousands in other countries, are likely to be announced in the coming days, said two sources close to the

matter. Ericsson last made deep cuts in 2017 when it laid off thousands of employees and focused on research to pull the company out of losses. The company was negotiating with its employee union in Sweden for months on how to handle cost cuts. Agreement has now been reached with Swedish unions on how to manage headcount reductions, a spokesperson said, adding that the company intends to make the cuts through a voluntary program.



## Malaysia Maintains Upward Trade Performance

KUALA LUMPUR (Dispatches) - Malaysia maintained its impressive trade performance in January 2023 with trade, exports and imports registering the highest monthly value for the month of January.

The Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI) said in a statement that trade expanded by 1.9 per cent year-on-year (y-o-y) to RM207.51 billion with exports rising by 1.6 per cent to RM112.84 billion and 2.3 per cent higher imports to RM94.67 billion.

MITI noted that trade surplus amounted to RM18.16 billion, a decrease of 2.1 per cent, which marked the 33rd consecutive month of trade surplus since May 2020.

"The export expansion was bolstered by strong exports of petroleum products, liquefied natural gas (LNG) as well as electrical and electronic (E&E) products.

"Exports to major trading partners notably ASEAN and Japan recorded double-digit growth. Compared to December 2022, trade, exports, imports and trade surplus contracted by 11.8 per cent, 14.4 per cent, 8.6 per cent and 35.5 per cent respectively, due to shorter working days and long festive holidays," it shared.

In January 2023, MITI said exports of manufactured goods which accounted for 84.2 per cent of total exports decreased by 0.1 per cent y-o-y to RM94.97 billion due to lower exports of manufactures of metal, rubber products as well as iron and steel products.

On the other hand, expansion in exports was seen for petroleum products, E&E products, optical and scientific equipment as well as beverages and tobacco. Collectively, exports of petroleum products and E&E products accounted for 52.2 per cent of Malaysia's total exports and rose by RM7.66 billion, it noted.

MITI also highlighted that exports of mining goods (9.1 per cent share) soared by 50.1 per cent y-o-y to RM10.23 billion, the 22nd successive month of double-digit growth which was led by higher exports of LNG while exports of agriculture goods (6.2 per cent share) declined by 19.8 per cent to RM7.01 billion compared to January 2022 due to lower exports of palm oil and palm oil-based agriculture products.

On a month-on-month (m-o-m) basis, the ministry said exports of mining goods edged up by 5.8 per cent while exports of manufactured and agriculture goods declined by 14 per cent and 36.4 per cent, respectively.

On trade with major markets in January, MITI said ASEAN contributed 26.6 per cent to Malaysia's total trade, rising by 5.6 per cent y-o-y to RM55.26 billion with exports growing by 10.7 per cent to RM34.1 billion, the 18th consecutive month of double-digit growth, underpinned by higher exports of petroleum products and E&E products.

Imports from ASEAN, however declined by 1.8 per cent to RM21.16 billion, it noted. "Exports to Asean major markets that recorded increases were Singapore which grew by RM2.86 billion, on account of robust exports of E&E products and Thailand up by RM431.4 million on the back of petroleum products exports.

"Compared to December 2022, trade, exports and imports dropped by 11.6 per cent, 10.3 per cent and 13.6 per cent respectively," it said.

In January 2023, trade with China made up 17.8 per cent of Malaysia's total trade contracted by 7.9 per cent y-o-y to RM37.01 billion.

## EU Calls for Fast-Track Crypto Capital Rules for Banks

LONDON (Dispatches) - Tough capital rules for banks holding cryptoassets must be fast-tracked in the European Union's pending banking law if Europe wants to avoid missing a globally-agreed deadline, the bloc's executive has said.

The global Basel Committee of banking regulators from the world's main financial centers has set a January 2025 deadline for implementing capital requirements for banks' exposures to cryptoassets such as stablecoins and bitcoin. "For the time being, banks have very low crypto-asset exposures and only a limited involvement in providing crypto-asset-related services," the European Commission said in an informal discussion paper seen by Reuters. "Banks have expressed interest in trading crypto-assets on behalf of their clients and to provide crypto-assets-related services."

Basel's standards are applied in the EU with a law, and a delay could mean that banks have to wait longer to enter the cryptomarket as separate EU rules for trading cryptoassets come into force in 2024.

To enforce Basel's crypto rules, the EU could either propose a new law, or expand the banking law it is now finalising as called for by the European Parliament.

Parliament and EU states have equal say on the banking law and are due to start negotiating the final text, which could include the provisions on cryptoassets, the paper said.

This would give banks clarity on their requirements for crypto-asset exposures and would ensure that risks stemming from these are adequately addressed, the Commission paper said.

## Taliban Plans to Turn Former Foreign Bases Into Special Economic Zones

KABUL (Dispatches) - The Taliban administration will move ahead with plans to turn former foreign military bases into special economic zones for businesses, the acting deputy prime minister for economic affairs said in a statement.

The acting commerce minister had told Reuters in December that his ministry was working on the plan for former American bases and would submit it to both the economic committee led by acting deputy PM Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar and to the cabinet for approval.

"Following a thorough discussion, it was decided that the Ministry of Industry and Commerce should

progressively take control of the remaining military bases of the foreign forces with the intention of converting them into special economic zones," Mullah Baradar said in the statement.

He added a pilot plan would begin to convert bases in the capital Kabul and in northern Balkh province.

Afghanistan's economy has struggled and aid agencies are warning of a severe humanitarian crisis since the Taliban took over in 2021 as foreign troops withdrew after 20 years of war.

The takeover sparked a cut in development funding, the freezing of foreign-held central bank assets and sanctions enforced on the banking sector.

The Taliban administration's decision to bar most female NGO workers from work last year prompted many aid agencies to partially suspend operations while millions remain dependent on humanitarian aid.

The Taliban have said they are focused on boosting economic self-sufficiency through trade and investment. Some foreign investors have expressed concerns over a series of attacks, including at a hotel popular with Chinese businessmen, claimed by Islamic State.

However, the World Bank has also noted that exports rose and the Taliban administration managed to keep revenues largely steady in 2022.

## India to Continue With Efforts to Curb Inflation

NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - The Indian government and the central bank are taking steps to control inflation, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said, as retail prices have again risen above comfort levels.

Among other moves, the government has increased the import of edible oil as required to rein in inflation and provided free grains to the poor since the COVID-19 pandemic, and would "continuously monitor prices," Sitharaman said at a post-budget industry interaction in Jaipur.

Last week, India's annual retail inflation rate (INCPYI=ECI) rose above the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) upper tolerance band for the first time in three months to 6.52% in January, as prices rose for food products such as cereals and wheat.

RBI has targeted keeping inflation between 2%-6%.

The RBI will take necessary steps to manage inflation within "expected limits," said Sitharaman, who was accompanied by other finance ministry officials including the chief economic adviser.

Economists have said the soaring prices of cereals such as wheat and rice were a concern for the Indian economy even though the January inflation data may have overstated the extent of the increase.

Some Asian and western countries that have been providing subsidized food and energy since the pandemic started, calculate consumer price index-based inflation using a weighted average of a segment of the population that pays market price for such items and those who don't, said country's Chief Economic Adviser V Anantha Nageswaran.

Since India does not do that, the "stated increase in grains price is not exactly what all consumers bear, therefore stated inflation rate overstates the underlying inflation rate," he said.

In its last monetary policy decision on Feb. 8, RBI raised its key rates by 25 basis points and surprised the markets with its hawkish stance.

## Vietnam Shoe Maker for Nike, Adidas to Cut 6,000 Jobs



HANOI (Dispatches) - One of Vietnam's largest shoe manufacturers for major brands such as Nike and Adidas will cut thousands of workers at the end of the month due to a slump in orders, according to local authorities.

PouYuen Vietnam, a unit of Taiwan-based Pou Chen Group, will lay off 3,000 factory workers and will not renew the contracts of 3,000 others because of "very few production orders in 2023", according to a Ho Chi Minh City labour department document obtained by AFP.

Vietnam, one of the world's largest exporters of clothing, footwear and furniture, has been badly affected by the cost-of-living crisis in major markets in Europe and the United States, with the buying power of worldwide consumers plunging.

PouYuen is commercial capital Ho Chi Minh City's largest employer, with around 50,000 employees.

"The company has told the workers' union that in February it plans to cut 3,000 workers... and it will expect to make an announcement to those workers on 25 February," the document said.

Factory workers will continue to be paid until they receive unemployment benefits, according to the document.

The lay-offs come after PouYuen put 20,000 of its workers on paid leave in rotation at the end of last year.

More than 630,000 workers lost their jobs or had their hours cut in Vietnam in 2022, according to the labour ministry.

In the final quarter of 2022, orders were down 30 to 40 per cent from the United States and 60 per cent from Europe, compared to the previous year, according to the Vietnam General Confederation of Labour.

## China Holds Loan Prime Rate Steady for Sixth Straight Month

BEIJING (Dispatches) - China kept its key loan prime rate unchanged at historical lows on Monday, as the country struggles to maintain a balance between supporting a fledgling economic recovery and keeping its yuan currency robust.

The People's Bank of China (PBOC) held its one-year loan prime rate (LPR) at 3.65%, while the five-year LPR, which is used to determine mortgage rates, was maintained at 4.30%. Both lending rates were at their lowest in the past two decades.

February now marks the sixth straight month that China has maintained its key lending rates at historically low levels, after an unexpected cut in August 2022.

The LPR is decided by the PBOC based on considerations taken from 18 designated commercial banks, and is in turn used as a benchmark by private banks in offering loans.

Monday's move was largely in line with a Reuters poll. But it did disappoint a minority of analysts that forecast more interest rate cuts, given that Chinese economic growth slowed drastically in 2022, and has so far shown little improvement despite the lifting of anti-COVID measures earlier this year.

The lifting of anti-COVID measures triggered an immense spike in infections, which disrupted local business activity. Still, Chinese government officials recently declared a "decisive victory" over COVID, citing a relatively small fatality rate in the latest outbreak.

China's move to hold interest rates was also driven by concerns over the yuan, which was dangerously close to moving past the key 7 to the dollar level. The currency had tumbled to its lowest level since the 2008 financial crisis after the People's Bank unexpectedly cut the LPR in August.

But the currency is now under renewed pressure from growing fears of a consistently hawkish Federal Reserve. Strong inflation and job market readings are expected to see the Fed keep raising rates in the near-term, widening the gulf between Chinese and U.S. interest rates.



## France One of Worst EU Countries for Company Taxation

PARIS (Dispatches) - A new Europe-wide survey found France has one of the most burdensome fiscal frameworks for companies, where taxes other than corporate tax represent 3.8% of the country's GDP in 2021, compared to a 2.5% EU average.

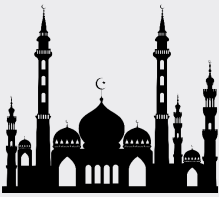
The survey, published last week by French think tank Institut Montaigne, in partnership with auditing firm Mazars, found that taxes on companies' production processes and value-add - so-called 'production taxes' - were second highest in Europe, behind Sweden.

"France is very, very far behind," Lisa Thomas-Darbois, policy officer at the Institut Montaigne and survey coordinator, told EURACTIV.

Production taxes are a complex category of tax levers that apply to the entire production chain of a company, with the aim of financing local government services. Unlike corporate tax, which applies only to a company's profits, production taxes apply regardless of how a company is fairing - and France is taxing production more than almost all of its EU counterparts.

Bar Sweden, which stands as an outlier, production taxes in France as a fraction of GDP are the highest in the EU - with negative externalities on French companies' productivity and competitiveness.





PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)

■ Evening (Maghreb)

■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)

■ Tomorrow's Sunrise

12:17

18:10

05:28

06:42

39. Nay, they charge with falsehood that whose knowledge they cannot compass, even before the elucidation thereof hath reached them: thus did those before them make charges of falsehood: but see what was the end of those who did wrong!

40. Of them there are some who believe therein, and some who do not: and thy Lord knoweth best those who are out for mischief.

Surah 10. Jonah ( 39 - 40 )

Daughter of Thaksin Banking on Nostalgia to Win Thailand Election

AMNAT CHAROEN (Dispatches) - Touting her billionaire family’s legacy of populism and massive election victories, Thailand’s Paetongtarn Shinawatra is emerging as the candidate to beat in upcoming polls, betting that nostalgia can win millions of working class votes.

Paetongtarn, 36, is campaigning hard in the vote-rich rural strongholds of the Shinawatra family’s Pheu Thai political juggernaut, hoping to reignite the kind of fervor that swept father Thaksin and aunt Yingluck to power in unprecedented landslides.

Political neophyte Paetongtarn is promising Pheu Thai will complete unfinished business from three stints in office since 2001, all of which were cut short by court rulings and military coups that it says were orchestrated by Thailand’s conservative establishment.

“We managed to fix everything in the first year but then four years later we were ousted by a coup, so there are things that we have not achieved,” Paetongtarn told Reuters in her first formal interview with foreign media ahead of the election, expected in May.

“So we go on each stage to tell people how our policies can change their lives. And only through stable politics can people’s lives change in a sustainable manner,” she said, while campaigning in the northeast.

Thaksin and Yingluck were toppled by the army in 2006 and 2014 respectively, despite overseeing big economic growth. Both live in self-imposed exile to avoid prison convictions their allies say were designed to prevent their political comebacks.


The baton has passed to Paetongtarn, Thaksin’s youngest daughter, who is using the same playbook in offering minimum wage hikes, utilities subsidies and long-promised high-speed rail systems and infrastructure to manage floods and droughts.

Pheu Thai’s slogan is “Think Big, Act Smart”, taking aim at incremental reforms by the military-backed governments of Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha since he seized power in 2014.

“The picture has to be big and we must be able to address longstanding problems that festered. These must be completely dealt with,” said Paetongtarn.

Though yet to be named as Pheu Thai’s prime ministerial candidate, Paetongtarn is far ahead in opinion polls for premier, with twice the support of Prayuth.

Pheu Thai is expected to win most votes, but could struggle to lead a government given the military’s influence over an appointed Senate, which together with the elected lower house chooses the prime minister.



Paetongtarn said she consults regularly and remains close with her father, who lives mainly in Dubai. His chief worry, she said, was her campaigning while nearly seven months pregnant.

“But I’m OK,” she said. “This is my second pregnancy. I am aware of myself. I won’t go too hard.”

Despite their electoral popularity, the Shinawatras are loathed in Thailand as much as they are loved.

They have long been accused by opponents of cronyism to enrich business friends and of buying off the poor with wasteful populist policies. The Shinawatras deny the charges.

Thailand’s election is shaping up to be another grudge match between warring elites in Southeast Asia’s second-biggest economy.

Paetongtarn said she remains concerned about the impact of the country’s intractable power struggle involving her family, including coups, which she said makes Thailand “go backwards”.

“It also makes the world see our country in a different light. They don’t want to trade with us. It reduces the opportunities for everyone,” she said.

“Our country has been frozen for so long. So a coup should not take place again. The country must progress and people deserve to have better livelihoods.”

Iran to Increase...

FROM PAGE 1

Meanwhile, as the nuclear talks with the United States seem to have reached a dead end, Washington has stepped up the sanction pressure on Tehran, with a continued focus on oil.

Earlier this month, the U.S. Department of the Treasury’s Office of Foreign Assets Control sanctioned six Iran-based petrochemical manufacturers or their subsidiaries and three firms in Malaysia and Singapore involved in facilitating the sale and shipment of crude oil and petrochemicals.

“The Biden Administration will not hesitate to take action against sanctions evaders, and we are determined to step up our enforcement in light of Iran’s continued, alarming nuclear advances,” Robert Malley, the U.S. Administration’s special envoy for Iran, said, commenting on the latest round of sanctions.

CBI Launches Currency...


FROM PAGE 1

“Unfortunately, the current rate in the market is not the rate expected and accepted by us in the central bank”, the official lamented, adding that the rate that will be discovered and announced in this center will be the base rate and pricing reference in the market.

“During the recent months, the central bank has tried to provide enough foreign currency for all the real needs of the country, according to this, in the current year, the currency provided in the NIMA System (domestic Forex Management Integrated System) for importing all the goods needed by the country has risen 48 percent compared to last year”, Farzin further stated.

Saying that in the current situation, the central bank will try to use all the past experiences in the field of currency, the CBI governor emphasized: “The use of past experiences is to minimize currency fluctuations, and God willing, we will see stability in the currency market.”

Airbus’ Defense Arm Says Berlin Delaying Exports Worth Billions



MUNICH (Dispatches) - Slow German government export approvals are holding up Airbus Defense & Space defense exports worth several billions of euros, the company’s chief executive said on Sunday, urging Berlin to speed up the process.

“Several countries are interested in the (military transport plane) A400M. Unfortunately we are having difficulties to get the German export licenses on time,” Michael Schoellhorn told Reuters in an interview at the Munich Security Conference.

“Our problem is that we haven’t received any contracts yet from the Zeitenwende and important exports are not being approved. This puts us in a very unsatisfactory situation,” Schoellhorn said.

He was referring to a 100-billion-euro (\$107 billion) special fund set up last year to bring the military back up to scratch after Chancellor Olaf Scholz announced a “Zeitenwende” or sea change in security policy days into Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

“We cannot put up with the constant delays (in export procedures). Planning security is essential,” Schoellhorn said.

He said orders for several products, not only the A400M, were stuck with the government in Berlin but declined to give details - although he offered a rough estimate of the financial volume.

“In total, we are talking about several billion euros,” he said.

On the loss-making A400M, Schoellhorn said he expected no further significant charges due to industrial problems in future if developments continued as they had in the past years, after Airbus results showed another 500-million-euro charge on Thursday.

He added that the company should eventually receive partial payments that customers held back.

Asked whether in future space developments Europe will have to fall back on Elon Musk’s SpaceX company following Airbus Defense & Space’s loss of two satellites on a Vega C rocket, Schoellhorn said any such solution would be temporary.

“Depending on the mission, we will have to temporarily use other launchers, whether they will come from SpaceX or somewhere else we will have to see,” he said. “But we don’t want to do this over the long haul.”

European Natural Gas Prices Sink to 18-Month Low

LONDON (Dispatches) - Europe’s benchmark natural gas price fell on Friday to the lowest level in 18 months as concerns about a gas crisis this winter continue to recede amid mild weather and above-average inventories across the continent.

On Friday morning in Amsterdam, the front-month futures at the TTF hub were down by 6% and fell below the threshold of 50 euros (\$53) per megawatt-hour (MWh) for the first time since August 2021.

Prices are now more than 85% down from the record high of 300 euros (\$318) per MWh from August 2022, and down by around 35% so far this year alone.

“EU gas trades below €50/MWh for the first time in 17 months, and equally important, the winter 23/24 and 24/25 continues to soften as well, both trading below €60,” Ole Hansen, Head of Commodity Strategy at Saxo Bank, said on Friday, commenting on the Friday slide in prices.


Weather in many parts of Europe is milder, and inventory levels are above the five-year average for this time of the year.

But the falling price in Europe could incentivize more demand in the industrial sector, as well as more demand in Asia, which would compete for spot LNG supply with Europe.

Europe looks to be out of the woods this winter, but next winter could be more difficult. Analysts warn that further downside to European gas prices is limited.

The race to ensure supply for next winter hasn’t even started in earnest yet. Prices are set to hold higher than before the Russian invasion of Ukraine through the summer as Europe will face stiffer competition from Asia for LNG supply. Last year, Asia – including China – saw LNG imports decline amid high spot prices and a slowdown in the Chinese economy. With China’s reopening, however, demand for gas and LNG is set to rebound, increasing the competition between Asia and Europe for spot supply, analysts say.

U.S. to Receive 3m Barrels of Venezuelan Crude Oil in February



NEW YORK (Dispatches) - The United States is on track to receive nearly 3 million barrels of crude oil from Venezuela this month, according to shipping documents seen by Reuters.

Chevron is on track to ship 100,000 barrels of Venezuelan crude oil per day into the United States as part of a license it received from the U.S. Treasury Department that gives it a limited pass to move sanctioned oil, after a three-year ban.

Since obtaining its license, Chevron has exported Venezuelan crude oil for use in its Pascagoula, Mississippi, refinery, and has sold some to Phillips 66 and Valero Energy, shipping documents show—both in the United States.

Under Chevron’s limited authorization, profits from the sale of oil and petroleum products would go to paying down PDVSA’s debt to Chevron and not boosting state-run PDVSA’s profits.

Venezuela’s heavy crude oil is prized by U.S. refiners, who, until recently, looked to Russia’s heavy crude to replace it. In December, it was reported that several refiners were hitting up Chevron to get their hands on the rare Venezuelan crude oil.

While Chevron is the only oil company with approval from the U.S. to import crude oil from Venezuela, other oil and gas companies are looking for a similar authorization—including foreign oil and gas companies who are demanding fair treatment.

ConocoPhillips is also said to be looking into the possibility of selling Venezuelan crude oil in the United States as a way of offsetting some of the \$10 billion it is owned by Venezuela. ConocoPhillips already has a license from the U.S. Treasury Department to negotiate a potential debt recovery with PDVSA.

Other companies, too, are looking to get back into the gain to negotiate debts with PDVSA, including Repsol and Eni.

Automakers Slashing Prices to Sell Off Excess Inventory

LONDON (Dispatches) - The Automotive MMI (Monthly MetalMiner Index) rose slightly higher than in previous reports. Month-over-month, the index went up by 5.08%.

Automobile inventories may be rising, but consumers are much more reluctant to purchase than they were six months ago. With interest rates still climbing, more and more consumers continue to steer away from vehicle purchases. In response, many automobile distributors have begun lowering prices or offering large discounts/ rebates to help clear out inventory.

Hot dipped galvanized prices are also rising along with numerous steel forms. This had a significant impact on the index’s jump. Combined with the recent spike in copper prices, it is no surprise that the index climbed more than expected. That said, there were also negative factors. The largest factors pulling the index down were palladium and platinum.

As palladium prices continued their downward decline, platinum prices began tumbling from their long-term resistance levels. More and more U.S. vehicle manufacturers like Ford are turning their attention to EVs. This should come as little surprise considering the demand for electric vehicles has risen steadily in recent years. However, the car manufacturing industries globally are changing to meet this demand head-on.

For instance, Ford recently announced that it would carry out a large layoff of its European employee base. Around 3,800 employees will be cut from Ford’s workforce as it refocuses its efforts on EV manufacturing. However, the zero-carbon emission push is more than just a U.S. phenomenon. European companies like Volvo, BMW, and Volkswagen have also stepped up their EV game in recent years. Indeed, Volkswagen has even taken it upon itself to create its own EV battery recycling facilities to recycle lithium-ion batteries.



## Bol Breaks Long-Standing World Record

LONDON (Dispatches) - Netherlands' Femke Bol ran the 400 meters in 49.26 seconds at the Dutch Indoor Championships in Apeldoorn to break one of the longest-standing world records in track and field.

Bol's time beat the previous record of 49.59 set by Czech athlete Jarmila Kratochvilova on March 7, 1982. "It was because of all the fans here that I ran this record," said the 22-year-old, who claimed bronze in the 400m hurdles at the Tokyo Olympics behind Americans Sydney McLaughlin and Dalilah Muhammad.

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## Alcaraz Hails Dream Return From Injury After Buenos Aires Win

BUENOS AIRES (Dispatches) - Carlos Alcaraz enjoyed a dream return to action after more than three months out due to abdominal and hamstring injuries as the world number two claimed the Argentina Open title by beating Cameron Norrie 6-3 7-5 in the final.

The top seed won the US Open in September and became the youngest player to top the world rankings at 19 years old, but suffered an abdominal issue at the Paris Masters in November before pulling out of the Australian Open with a leg injury.

8 IRAN NEWS

SPORTS

WEDNESDAY FEBRUARY 22, 2023

# Tatum Sets Scoring Record as Team Giannis Beat Team LeBron

SALT LAKE CITY (Dispatches) - Jayson Tatum took over the NBA All-Star Game, setting the record for the most points scored in the annual showcase with 55 as Team Giannis beat Team LeBron 184-175 at Vivint Arena. The final target score was 182, adding 24 points to the score of the leading team after three quarters.

Tatum added 10 rebounds and six assists en route to the MVP. Donovan Mitchell, who spent the first five seasons of his career in Utah before being traded to the Cleveland Cavaliers last off-season, added 40 points, 10 assists, four rebounds and three steals for Team Giannis.

Jaylen Brown led Team LeBron with 35 points and 14 rebounds, and Joel Embiid and Kyrie Irving had 32 points apiece. Neither team captain finished the game. Here's how the night unfolded.

Giannis Antetokounmpo was everywhere during All-Star weekend, but his shortest appearance was in the actual All-Star Game. The team captain scored the game's first bucket, drew a foul and exited 20 seconds into the game. He is nursing a sprained right wrist.

LeBron James and Tatum both lobbed the ball off the glass to themselves for dunks, while Mitchell threw a lob to Lauri Markkanen — the Jazz's past and future — to highlight the first quarter.

The first quarter ended tied at 46, meaning the teams' selected charities each received \$50,000 (Team LeBron: Big Brothers Big Sisters of Utah; Team Giannis: Raise the Future). Tatum led Team Giannis with 13 points in the quarter, while Irving led Team LeBron with 11.

The arena atmosphere is dead. Not much to cheer about anyway, but the eerie quiet of the arena definitely didn't help this lackluster game.

Team Giannis won the second quarter, 53-46, to earn \$100,000 for its charity.

During halftime, it was announced that James would miss the second half with a hand injury after hitting his hand on the rim. That immediately followed the NBA's announcement that James was voted as the fan favorite for an iso-cam in the second half. It was quickly changed to Luka Doncic.

Then, James was honored for becoming the league's all-time scoring leader in a special moment with the league's Nos. 2 and 3 scorers: Kareem Abdul-Jabbar and Karl Malone. James passed Abdul-Jabbar's previous mark earlier this month.

Tatum took over the third quarter, pouring in an All-Star-record 27 points in the period, to lead Team Giannis to the third-quarter win and another \$100,000 for its charity.

## Rahm Wins Genesis Invitational to Return To World No. 1

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - Jon Rahm used two late birdies to power past Max Homa for a victory in the Genesis Invitational that moved the Spaniard back to number one in the world.

Spain's Rahm grabbed his third US PGA Tour title of 2023 after wins at the Tournament of Champions and the American Express in La Quinta, California.

It was his fifth win in his last nine worldwide starts, a run that included his third Spanish Open triumph in October and victory in the DP World Tour Championship in November.

Rahm was thrilled to capture a win at Riviera Country Club, the classic course west of downtown Los Angeles that has produced such champions as Ben Hogan but where, Rahm noted, Jack Nicklaus and Tiger Woods have never won. Woods, who hosts this week's event, was in the spotlight as he returned to competition for the first time since missing the cut at the British Open.

The 15-time major champion, still limited by the severe right leg injuries he suffered in a February 2021 car accident, carded a final-round 73 to finish on one-under 283, tied for 45th.

"To reach that milestone of double digit wins, is pretty incredible," Rahm said after capturing his 10th career US tour title.

"And to do it at a golf course with this legacy, this history and hosted by the man himself, Tiger Woods, it's a true honor. I can't really explain it." For a while, however, it looked like Rahm might let this one get away.

He started the day with a three-shot lead over Homa and was up by three through eight holes.

## Grand Slam Win Has Fuelled Hunger for Success

LONDON (Dispatches) - Aryna Sabalenka heads into this week's Dubai Duty Free Tennis Championships as the WTA Tour's newest Grand Slam champion, and the Belarusian said she is more motivated than ever before to build on her success.

The big-hitting 24-year-old rallied to beat Wimbledon champion Elena Rybakina 4-6 6-3 6-4 in last month's Australian Open final to claim her maiden Grand Slam crown after three previous semi-final defeats at the majors.



But Lillard put on a show, casually pulling up from midcourt and defending his 3-Point Contest title a little early.

Lillard, who went to college at nearby Weber State, was a fan favorite throughout the weekend, finally winning the Saturday night contest basically designed for him while wearing a custom Weber State jersey that had "DOLLA" on the back.

Tatum was the story of the quarter and the night, setting the All-Star Game scoring record with 55 points. He earned the Kobe Bryant MVP trophy.

Antetokounmpo basked in his first All-Star Game win with an iconic Giannis moment. Only one player did not score in the All-Star Game: Sacramento's De'Aaron Fox.

The pregame draft was a hit, with Antetokounmpo bringing just the right amount of levity by attempting to pick Morant, who was selected into the game as a starter, during the reserves portion of the draft. When it was time to pick starters, you know Antetokounmpo wasn't going to let James take Morant.

James had his own antics during the draft, selecting "Hookah" Doncic and possible tampering pick, Irving. Before James could make his last pick, two-time MVP Nikola Jokic got up and walked behind him, effectively making James' pick.

Despite the flip of reserves being selected before starters, the final pick was the local player, Markkanen.



## Djokovic Equals Graf's Record For Weeks Spent as World No.1

PARIS (Dispatches) - Tennis legend Novak Djokovic is a week away from another milestone after equaling Steffi Graf's all-time record for most weeks spent at number one of 377.

The 35-year-old Serbian remains top of the latest ATP rankings released today bringing him level with the amount of weeks that Graf spent as women's world number one.

Djokovic returned to number one spot for a seventh time after his victory in the Australian Open at the end of January which was a record equaling 22nd Grand Slam singles title.

Two former world number ones enjoyed success at the weekend — Daniil Medvedev claiming the Rotterdam title and Carlos Alcaraz making a winning return to the circuit in Argentina.

Medvedev's three set victory — his 16th career title — over Italian Jannik Sinner sees him return to the top 10 — he rises three spots to eighth.

The losing finalist's consolation is a climb of two places to 12th in the rankings.

Alcaraz's successful return to the tour, after almost four months out, in landing the Argentina Open on Sunday sees him solidify his second place in the rankings.

Greece's Stefanos Tsitsipas — whom Djokovic beat in the Australian Open final — rounds off the top three.



# Medvedev Clinches 16th Career Title

ROTTERDAM (Dispatches) - Former world number one Daniil Medvedev captured his 16th career title with a tough three-set victory over in-form Jannik Sinner in the Rotterdam ATP final.

Medvedev triumphed 5-7, 6-2, 6-2 over his Italian opponent who had won the Montpellier tournament last weekend.

The 27-year-old Russian took his career head-to-head record against Sinner to 6-0 and will return to the world top 10 on Monday.

Medvedev hoped his run to the title at Rotterdam and a return to the top 10 in world rankings can be the perfect launchpad for the rest of the season after a disappointing Australian Open last month.

Medvedev had slipped to number 12 following his third round defeat by Sebastian Korda at Melbourne Park, but the 27-year-old Russian rediscovered his rhythm at Rotterdam last week and beat Sinner for his first title of 2023.

"It's great, because it's still the beginning of the year," Medvedev, who is now ranked eighth in the world, said. "It's my third tournament of the year and already a title. Last year I probably needed 12 tournaments or something like this. Beating great players, playing great here."

"In Adelaide I was playing great but lost to Novak Djokovic. The Australian Open was really disappointing... mentally, it's tough to come back after you go out of the top 10 and lose in the third round of a Grand Slam you were hoping to win."

"I'm happy to find my form and I'm looking forward to the next tournament and hopefully I can continue this way."

Montpellier champion Sinner looked on course for back-to-back titles after claiming a tight opening set but Medvedev was not to be denied a 16th tour-level crown.

"It was a tough match mentally for both of us," Medvedev said. "Jannik was on top of me, especially in the first part of the first set. I managed to come back even though I was playing worse than him. Maybe that gave me some time to find my rhythm."

"I started playing a little bit more offensive on a few shots and it managed to work well at the beginning of the second set. I managed to continue pushing him mentally down until the end of the match."

## James Hungers to Avoid Second Straight NBA Playoff Miss

SALT LAKE CITY (Dispatches) - LeBron James has not missed the NBA playoffs in back-to-back seasons since his first two campaigns and the Los Angeles Lakers star really doesn't want it to happen this year.

The 38-year-old playmaker who became the NBA's all-time scoring leader earlier this month said before Sunday's NBA All-Star Game that the closing push to reach a playoff spot is among his biggest regular-season goals.

"It's 23 of the most important games of my career for a regular season," James said. "It's the type of mindset that I have and I hope the guys will have coming back off the break."

The Lakers have struggled to a 27-32 start and rank 13th in the Western Conference. That's two games behind Oklahoma City for 10th and the last spot in the post-season play-in games and 3.5 games behind sixth-place Dallas for the last guaranteed playoff spot.

"I want to make a push to make the playoffs," James said. "I don't want to see myself not being part of the post-season for two years straight. It's just not part of my DNA."

"We're sitting up here talking about the record and things of that nature, and that's all cool, but I'm more passionate about trying to make the post-season and give ourselves a chance to compete for another (title)."



## Spurs Call for Action After Reprehensible Racist Abuse of Son

LONDON (Dispatches) - Tottenham Hotspur called for social media companies and authorities to "take action" after online racist abuse was directed at Son Heung-min following his goal against West Ham on Sunday.

South Korea captain Son emerged from the bench in the second half to net Spurs' second goal in the 2-0 win in the London derby at the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium.

"We have been made aware of the utterly reprehensible online racist abuse directed at Son Heung-min during today's match, which has been reported by the club," Tottenham said on the club's official Twitter feed on Sunday night. "We stand with Sonny and once again call on the social media companies and authorities to take action."

The Football Association echoed the club's call for action.

"We strongly condemn the racist abuse aimed at Son Heung-min this evening," an FA spokesperson replied to Tottenham's tweet.

"This has no place in our game and we fully support the authorities and social media companies to take the strongest possible action to tackle it."

In June 2022, a group of 12 men who had been arrested for racially abusing Son on Twitter were given community service punishments and wrote apologies to the Tottenham forward.

