

Foreign Ministry Spokesman Nasser Kanaani Said Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian will soon go To Moscow, adding that Iran-Russia Military and defense cooperation is Not against any third country

IRAN NEWS

President Seyed Ebrahim Raisi Inaugurated a Mega Water Transfer Project of the “Kani Sib” Dam to Lake Urmia in an Effort to Restore Famous Lake Urmia, Considered The Endorheic Salt Lake in Northwestern of the Country

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Tehran Calls for Forming Cross-Regional Group of States To End Ukraine Conflict

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's ambassador and permanent representative to the United Nations (UN) expressed Tehran's readiness to establish a group of cross-regional countries to help end the conflict in Ukraine which marks its first anniversary on Friday.

Amir Saeed Iravani made the remarks while addressing the UN General Assembly's eleventh emergency special session on the Ukraine conflict on Thursday.

He said that Tehran "supports the idea of leveraging the Secretary General's capacity, as mandated by the UN Charter, to establish a cross-regional group of independent, competent, impartial countries. The Islamic Republic of Iran is ready to contribute to this process."

This can facilitate dialogue and help find a way out of the current "impasse", he added.

Iravani stressed that Iran's position with regard to the war in Ukraine has not changed. "We are steadfast in our commitment to upholding the principles and purposes enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, including the principles of sovereign equality and territorial integrity of States." **See Page 7**

Iran Eyes \$2b Worth of Dairy Exports to China Until 2025

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran expects to earn some \$2 billion from exports of dairy products to China in the next two years as part of recent bilateral agreements that will lead to an increase in Iranian agrifood exports to the east Asian country.

Iran's agriculture minister Javad Sadatinejad said on Wednesday that the country had secured an agreement with China under which Iranian dairy companies can launch exports to the country for a first time.

Sadatinejad said the agreement was finalized during a visit last week by Iranian President Ebrahim Raeisi to China and was part of a larger food diplomacy understanding to expand agriculture cooperation with Beijing.

He said China will also start importing apple from Iran under the deal signed last week, adding that some 100,000 metric tons of Iranian apple shipments will be exported to China under a first phase of the agreement.

The minister said Iranian agrifood exports to China had reached some \$350 million in the 10 months to late January, adding that the figure was a fivefold increase compared to exports figures reported four years ago.

Leader Says Enemies Seeking To Create Despair in Iran



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN – Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei says creating despair in Iran is among the main policies of the country's enemies.

The Leader made the remarks in a meeting with the chairman and members of the Assembly of Experts in Tehran on Thursday.

Ayatollah Khamenei said some enmities toward the Islamic Republic are "political enmity," adding, "For example, the Islamic Republic pursues a stance on the Palestinian issue and [world] powers have another position. [This] creates enmity."

"These are not very important. The one that is more important is intrinsic enmity. The nature of the Islamic Republic creates this enmity," the Leader added.

The Islamic establishment "opposes those who believe in the Western prescription, which is against any kind of religious interference in social affairs, or opposes the leaders of liberal democracy, who have hatched a plot to dominate over and plunder the world's resources behind the false flag of freedom and democracy," he said.

The Islamic Republic, according to the Leader, has disrupted such a plot by putting "democracy and freedom" next to "religion".

The Leader warned that some Western countries use liberal democracy to dominate the world, emphasizing, however, that the Islamic Republic brings democracy and freedom along with religion.

Ayatollah Khamenei stated that a democracy based on religion leads to hostility because it foils the enemies' conspiracies.

The Leader highlighted the remarkable popular power of the Islamic establishment which he said is "unique or rare in the world."

Ayatollah Khamenei described the Iranian people's huge turnout in the rallies to mark the 44th anniversary of the Islamic Revolution earlier this month as another sign of the nation's support for the Islamic establishment.

The Leader added that the strong popular support for the Islamic establishment is a national asset, urging all to work tirelessly to preserve and increase it.

Meanwhile later Ayatollah Khamenei urged Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) to double its efforts to strengthen its military and moral power with the goal of protecting the ideals of the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

Ayatollah Khamenei sent a message to a gathering of the IRGC commanders and military officials, which was read out by IRGC Commander Brigadier General Hossein Salami as the session opened on Thursday.

"The convening of the meeting, which is aimed at outlining the horizons of the IRGC and the Basij Force's movement toward a bright future for the Islamic Revolution, is a source of joy and will, God willing, bring blessings," the message read.

The IRGC, the Leader said, "is expected to attract, train and educate the talented youth at a level that befits the Islamic Revolution, enable the IRGC to achieve all capabilities [required] to fortify the Revolution, and bolster its own spiritual, revolutionary and military power."

The call comes weeks after a contentious decision by the European Parliament for the European Union to blacklist the IRGC, an official division of Iran's Armed Forces.

The European Union, however, has not acted on the decision, which is widely viewed as a symbolic move, arguing that the bloc lacks the necessary legal basis for such designation.

IAEA Accusations Politically Motivated to Pressure Iran

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The never-ending reports by the UN nuclear agency making false, baseless accusations against Iran's nuclear program are "politically motivated" to put maximum pressure on Iran, according to the spokesman of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI).

Behrouz Kamalvandi said the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) publicizes confidential reports about Iran's nuclear activities even before the investigations are complete in order to prepare the ground for fabrications against the country's peaceful atomic energy program.

After the recent inspection of the Fordow Fuel Enrichment Plant (FFEP) in January, the UN agency claimed Iran has made an "undeclared change" to the interconnection between the two clusters of advanced machines enriching uranium to up to 60 percent purity at the plant.

Soon afterward, a joint statement by the United States, Britain, France and Germany accused Iran of being "inconsistent in meeting its nuclear obligations."

Dismissing the sweeping claims, Kamalvandi said Iran has only changed modes of enrichment, not "unannounced changes to the design information questionnaire" (DIQ) as stated by the IAEA. **See Page 7**

IRGC Commander Says Europe at War With Iran

TEHRAN (IFP) - The commander of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps says today Europe has officially waged a non-hard war on Iran.

General Hossein Salami added the nation's enemies hatched the most complicated plots to achieve their goals against the Islamic Republic, but to no avail.

He made the remark in a meeting with the Iranian Army's Commander General Abdol Rahim Mousavi on Thursday.

General Salami noted that Iran is not at peace with the enemies of the Islamic Revolution and the Iranian people.

He added that all strategic reserves of arrogant powers have depleted in the face of Iran.

The IRGC commander said after the downfall of Saddam, the enemies created Takfiri terrorism and Daesh as their proxy against Iran but the terrorists were also destroyed thanks to the prudence of Iran's leader and the vigilance of the Iranian people.

Salami then scoffed at the move by Iran's adversaries to mobilize the "stranded opposition" against the Islamic Republic.

He said these "bankrupt" persons, who were let down by the Iranian people, are being used by the West as a tool in order to hamper Iran's progress, but they are doomed to failure.

Iran, China Come to Pakistan's Rescue Amid Economic Crisis

ISLAMABAD (Dispatches) - With Pakistan's foreign exchange reserves at their lowest in 10 years and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) delaying unlocking the next tranche of a \$6.5 billion loan, Pakistan has been forced to look elsewhere for help.

China and Iran's efforts to help Pakistan overcome its economic crisis have brought some much-needed relief to the country's struggling economy. With foreign exchange reserves at their lowest in 10 years and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) delaying unlocking the next tranche of a \$6.5 billion loan, Pakistan has been forced to look elsewhere for help.

China has stepped in with a new \$700 million loan made through the state-owned China Development Bank to boost the country's foreign exchange reserves by about 20 percent. This loan comes as Pakistan is negotiating with the IMF to unlock funds from the previously agreed bailout package.

It is worth noting that China is currently the largest creditor of Pakistan, with its commercial banks holding approximately 30 percent of Pakistan's external debt. **See Page 7**

U.S Confirms Limited Sanctions Waiver for IRIB

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - State Department spokesperson confirmed the U.S. limited sanctions waiver on the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) channel and said that the waiver includes the provision of satellite services to the IRIB.

U.S. State Department spokesperson, Ned Price added that we periodically review the waiver to allow IRIB to continue broadcasting its satellite programs.

Earlier the U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken waived sanctions on the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) channel, on Feb. 15, according to a non-public notice transmitted to Congress and obtained by the Washington Free Beacon. The waiver allows the IRIB to conduct financial transactions. The waiver comes less than a month after the Biden administration lifted sanctions on Iranian and Russian nuclear cooperation.

The sanctions waiver provides exemptions for anyone doing business with the IRIB, providing it access to global telecommunications infrastructure.

This includes "transactions involving the provision of ground connectivity services and fiber optic connections outside of Iran," as well as various satellite management transactions, according to the information contained in the waiver.



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AEOL Chief Reacts to Probable Anti-Iran BOG Resolution

TEHRAN (IP) - The head of the Iranian Atomic Energy Organization reacted to the probability of issuing a resolution of the IAEA Board of Governors.

The Islamic Republic of Iran has always emphasized its obligations to the implementation of the International Atomic Energy Agency. Mohammad Eslami referred to the probability of issuing a resolution of the IAEA board of Governors against Iran: “We do not let them make any excuse.”

The next meeting of the Board of Governors will be held in March 2023, and for some analysts, the meeting will be of great importance on Iran’s nuclear issue.

Commander Recounts Feats Achieved By IRGC Navy

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - The commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Navy of Iran recounts the numerous feats that have been achieved by the force in line with Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei’s call on it to expand its maritime presence.

The Navy embarked on equipping itself with oceangoing vessels “following the Leader’s call on the IRGC to establish a presence in distant and oceanic waters,” Rear Admiral Alireza Tangsiri told a televised interview on Thursday.

“We now possess three oceangoing vessels, named Shahid (Martyr) Roudaki, Shahid Mahdavi, and Shahid Bahman Baqeri,” the commander added.

He described the Shahid Mahdavi vessel as a “mobile naval base” equipped with four 350-kilometer (217-mile)-range missiles. The vessel can also be outfitted with 750-kilometer (466-mile)-range missiles, and can carry three helicopters, the commander added.

The Shahid Bahman Baqeri vessel enjoys a 180-meter-long landing strip that can be used by unmanned aerial vehicles, he noted, saying the vessel can carry as many as 30 Ashura-class speedboats.

According to the official, the boats and the country’s Tareq-class speedboats are “soon” to be outfitted with respectively 12-kilometer (7-mile)-range and 180-kilometer (111-mile)-range missiles.

“In the near future,” the IRGC Navy would be equipped with another oceangoing vessel, Tangsiri said.



The official named the ship in question as the Shahid Hassan Baqeri patrol combat vessel, describing it as the second vessel of the Shahid Soleimani class to join the Navy.

According to Tangsiri, the second ship would have a 5,000 nautical mile combat radius, and would be the first-ever domestically-manufactured ship that can be outfitted with Navvab and Sayyad (Hunter) missiles. The missiles use a vertical launching system (VLS) and can fly as far as 150 kilometers (93 miles).

Hailing the IRGC Navy’s other achievements, the commander said as many as 650 new vessels joined the force within the space of just three years.

The naval force’s new vessels can sail at the speed of 75-90 nautical miles, he said, announcing that the force was to be joined by more vessels in the future that can sail as fast as 110 nautical miles. “This is while Americans are in possession of vessels that can travel [only] as fast as 30 nautical miles,” said the commander.

“Our vessels are made of carbon and are radar evasive,” Tangsiri stated, and announced that the IRGC Navy was to be joined by as many as 90 more rocket and missile cruisers throughout the coming weeks.

Members of Experts Assembly Renew Allegiance to Imam Khomeini

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Members of the Assembly of Experts on Thursday morning attended the mausoleum of the Founder of the Islamic Republic in Iran, in southern Tehran, to renew allegiance to the late Imam Khomeini.

In renewing allegiance to the late Imam Khomeini, the Vice-President of the Assembly of Experts Ayatollah Hosseini Bushehri referred to the recent riots in Iran and said that the enemies had provided all their resources in a hybrid, cognitive, and perceptual war to damage the Islamic revolution, but they did not know Iranians and it was a big miscalculation.

He added that the Iranian people may face economic problems and other issues, but they have never forgotten the allegiance they pledged to the late Imam Khomeini in the beginning days of the Islamic Revolution.

Car Manufacturing Rises 25%

TEHRAN (MNA) - Car manufacturing in Iran increased by 25 percent during the first eleven months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21, 2022-February 19, 2023), as compared to the same period of time in the past year, according to the data released by the Ministry of Industry, Mining and Trade.

Based on the ministry’s data, over 1.126 million vehicles were manufactured in the 11-month period of this year.

It should be noted that the officials of the Industry, Mining and Trade Ministry have repeatedly emphasized that car production will reach 1.6 million vehicles in the current year, however, car production this year is almost 30 percent behind the projected schedule.

As reported, the ministry’s auto manufacturing target for the next Iranian year 1402 (begins on March 21) is 1.8 million vehicles.

Desecration of Quran Exposes Enemy’s Desperation To Harm Islamic Society

TEHRAN (IRNA) - President Ebrahim Raisi has criticized Western countries for insulting Islam’s Prophet Mohammad and the holy Quran, saying that it exposes their desperation to deal a blow to the Islamic society and their attempts to withdraw from a “cultural deadlock” they are gripped with.

President Raisi made the comment at the closing ceremony of the 39th International Quran Competitions that kicked off in the Iranian capital Tehran on February 18, 2023.

He said that enemies insult Quran to cover up their defeat caused by the holy book, stressing that the desecration of the Prophet Mohammad and the holy Quran is actually an insult to humanity and freedom.

A society built on Quranic rules stands on its own feet, while neither being cruel nor accepting cruelty, the president said.

Enemies do not approve of such a society and attempt to destroy it, he noted, stressing that they have failed in their attempts.

Raisi also said that paying attention to the holy Quran and its teachings is the secret behind unity and sovereignty of the Islamic society.

Terror Ringleader Handed Death Penalty Based on Iranian Laws

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran’s top human rights official says the death sentence handed down to the ringleader of a US-based terrorist group was issued in accordance with the country’s judicial laws and after his case went through a fair legal process.

Kazem Gharibabadi, secretary of Iran’s High Council for Human Rights and the Judiciary chief’s deputy for international affairs, on Wednesday defended the verdict against Jamshid Sharmahd after German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock called the ruling “absolutely unacceptable” and threatened a “strong reaction.”

Berlin also expelled two Iranian diplomats over the ruling against the 67-year-old terrorist, who also holds German nationality and US residency.

“Jamshid Sharmahd is a terrorist, but being a terrorist did not prevent him from receiving a fair trial,” Gharibabadi said.

“Sharmahd stood at a completely fair trial with his legal rights reserved. The sentence was issued according to Iran’s judicial laws and it can be appealed.”

The top Iranian rights official also pointed out that the Islamic Republic does not recognize dual citizenship.

“Sharmahd, who lived in the US before his arrest, has repeatedly said that he is under the protection of the FBI and that the Islamic Republic cannot reach him,” he added.

The ringleader of the Tondar (Thunder) terrorist outfit, Sharmahd was convicted of planning to commit 23 terrorist acts, of which he succeeded in five, including the 2008 bombing of a religious congregation center in the southern Iranian city of Shiraz that left 14 people dead and 300 others wounded.

Gharibabadi said, “In just one terrorist act, Sharmahd martyred dozens of innocent people, including women and children, at Shiraz Seyed al-Shohada Hussainiyah. How does Germany allow itself to defend a terrorist and threaten to pursue the sentence against Sharmahd in international forums?”

He also said that Iran will pursue the issue through international bodies, adding, “The German and US governments must be held accountable for turning into a safe haven for terrorists and providing them with security, financial, intelligence and political support.”

Iran, he went on, has more than 17,000 terror victims who were killed by terrorists living in the US and Europe.

Shamkhani to Visit Iraq to Sign Security Deal

TEHRAN (MNA) – Secretary of Iran’s Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) Rear Admiral Ali Shamkhani will visit Iraq to sign a security cooperation document, according to the Iranian foreign minister on his Baghdad visit.

In a meeting with the Iraqi National Security Advisor Qassem Arajii in Baghdad on Thursday evening, the Iranian Minister of Foreign Affairs Hossein Amirabdollahian announced the imminent visit of the Secretary of Iran’s Supreme National Security Council to Iraq to sign a security cooperation document.

In the meeting, the Iranian foreign minister expressed his gratitude to Qassim Al-Arajii for his efforts to manage security issues at the shared borders of the two countries.

While announcing Iran’s constant support for a modern and stable Iraq, Amirabdollahian expressed regret that the two countries have not formed a high-level security committee to resolve some concerns in the Kurdistan region of Iraq yet.

Meanwhile, he announced the imminent trip of the secretary of Iran’s Supreme National Security Council to Iraq to sign the security cooperation document with Iraq.

He reiterated that Tehran considers the presence of any anti-revolutionary and separatist groups in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region as unacceptable and declared that this issue poses threats against Iran, Iraq and even the Kurdistan Region.

Explaining Iran’s regional interactions, the foreign minister informed the Iraqi side of the latest status of JCPOA talks and other foreign issues.

Qassim al-Arajii, for his part, congratulated the anniversary of the victory of the Islamic Revolution of Iran and described some recent conspiracies to attack the Islamic Republic of Iran as “an illusion”. In expressing the importance of regional interactions, Iraq’s national security adviser emphasized that if the interactions between the countries of the region are widespread, there will be no room left for the presence of foreigners in the region.

He considered the existence of any threat against the Islamic Republic of Iran from inside Iraq as unacceptable and denounced it. Al-Arajii also emphasized the necessity of finalizing the inhuman assassination legal case of the anti-terror martyrs Iranian Lt. Gen. Soleimani and Iraqi Abu Mahdi Al-Muhandis between the two countries.

Sports Minister Severely Injured in Helicopter Crash

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Sports Minister Hamid Sajjadi has been severely injured in a helicopter crash in the southen province of Kerman which killed one of his colleagues.

A video that ricocheted around social media showed Sajjadi on the ground after the air accident on Thursday. The helicopter, carrying other sports ministry officials along with Sajjadi, crashed due to an unknown cause.

Sajjadi’s aide who was killed has been identified as Esmail Ahmadi.

Other people on board were all injured.

Reports say the sports minister has suffered a massive brain hemorrhage due to a severe blow to his skull and is in critical condition.

Gohar Zamin Co. Innovates and Designs Full Automatic Scrubber

TEHRAN – Head of Laboratory and Quality Control Unit of Gohar Zamin Iron Ore Company announced innovation and design of full automatic two-edged scrubber for calibration of weighing systems.

Mehdi Dianatpour in an interview announced the achievement and pointed to the significance of this innovation. He added that using the full automatic two-edged scrubber has no life-threatening and leakage and it only needs one human force for its operation.

He added that if this scrubber is used in proper position for calibrating operation, the period of annual calibration for the weighing system will reduce from 60 hours to almost 8 hours.

Dianatpour noted that using manual scrubbers for calibration of weighing system leads to many problems like life threat, prolongation of time of ending feed, requirement of a large number of human forces.

He then enumerated some other advantages of the full automatic two-edged scrubber.

It is worth noting that the invitation has been the outcome of efforts of laboratory and control unit of Gohar Zamin Iron Ore Company and has been patented in the Iran Patent Office of the country under the international classification of B65G45/16.





PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	12:17
■ Evening (Maghreb)	18:13
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	05:14
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	06:38

43. And among them are some who look at thee:
but canst thou guide the blind,- even though they will not see?

44. Verily Allah will not deal unjustly with man in aught: It is man that wrongs his own soul.

Surah 10. Jonah (43 - 44)

IRISL to Dispatch 3rd Ship of Iranian Goods To Venezuela in May

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK



shipping line from Iran to Venezuela has been launched regularly for every two months basis.

The mentioned line with competitive fare and regular journey schedule has been carried out two times so far and the third shipment to Venezuela will be carried out in May.

The group noted despite announcement and promoting this service, only two auto making companies have welcomed it and other companies and exporters have not welcomed it so far and since the cost of dispatch of ocean liner ships on Iran-Venezuela route is very high, IRISL calls on all exporters and economic activists who are keen to export their products to Venezuela to take advantage of these services and facilities.

In late November, IRISL Group announced the launch of a direct shipping line to Venezuela.

The announcement said that the way the businesspeople from both sides welcome this shipping line would determine whether it would continue to operate or no.

Top Iranian Companies Honored For Organizational Excellence



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Top Iranian companies were honored in the 20th National Award for Organizational Excellence which was held in the presence of the head of Industrial Development and Renovation Organization of Iran (IDRO) and some of senior managers and elites of the country.

Addressing the event which was held with focus on organizational excellence and digital development, Head of National Productivity Organization Mr. Mirsaman Pishvae said that the most important obstacles in way of productivity in the country are weakness in implementing the laws and lack of cost-effectiveness.

Meanwhile Head of Industrial Management Institute Mr. Abolfazl Kiani Bakhtiari in the event pointed to the influence of digital developments in the organizational excellence and noted that three factors of technology, having elites and knowledge-based companies and accepting relations which is a cultural issue are of main factors of moving ahead towards digital development in the country.

In this edition of the Organizational Excellence Award, 55 qualified organizations were evaluated and two organization managed to win the golden statues, 17 organizations silver statues and 13 organizations won letters of appreciation and 9 more organizations won the commitment to excellence awards.

Participating organizations in this year's event were active in the fields of mining and steel, auto making, rail transport, commercial and investment, insurance, IT, engineering services, oil and gas, petrochemical, municipalities.

This conference and award is held annually to create a competitive climate for the organizational excellence and encourage the organizations for creating operations for evaluating them and knowing their strong and weak points to improve themselves as well as creating a climate for sharing the successful experiences.

Iran Alloy Steel Co. Wins Golden Statue at Health Oriented Industry

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK



TEHRAN – Iran Alloy Steel Company won the golden stature at the national festival of health oriented industry for its performance in the field of health.

According to the reports, the fifth national festival of health oriented industry was held by Iranian Health Education and Promotion Association in collaboration with related bodies like health ministry and ministry of industry, mine and trade, Iran Alloy Steel Company received the golden statue for its brilliant performance in the field of health.

Over 100 big companies active in industry, mine and trade had participate in this festival which was held at Shahid Beheshti University.

The jury after receiving required documents from 40 qualified companies and evaluating them awarded Iran Alloy Steel Company with golden statue for its top performance among the participating companies in the festival.

Only five big mining industrial companies could win golden statue in this event.

This year's event was held with the slogan of health orientation, organizational culture and sustainable development and it is aimed at to promote health in the economic enterprises and industries.

Iran Signs €450m Deal to Start Car Exports to Russia

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's second largest carmaker Saipa has finalized a contract to launch exports to Russia amid efforts by Iranian automotive companies to expand their presence in the Russian car market nearly a year after Western brands left the country because of the sanctions over the Ukraine war.

Saipa's CEO Mohammad Ali Teymouri and businessmen from Russia signed the €450 million contract on Wednesday in a ceremony in Tehran, according to a report by Iran's Trade Promotion Organization (TPO).

The deal will enable Saipa to supply 45,000 cars to Russian customers, said the report.

The signing of the deal comes some six months after Iranian carmakers attended the MIMS Automobility Moscow 2022 and reached initial understandings with Russian trade partners for exports of cars to the country.

TPO's head Alireza Peymanpak, a deputy trade and industry minister, was present in the Wednesday ceremony where the deal between Saipa and Russian importers was signed.

Peymanpak said Iranian carmakers have a good opportunity to increase their presence in the Russian car market which he said is worth around \$20 billion.

He said Iranian and Russian carmakers are planning to launch joint manufacturing projects in Iran, adding those projects will lead to a major increase in exports of cars and parts from Iran to Russia.

Chadormalu's Capital Up by More Than Double

Approval of increasing Chadormalu's capital from 119,000b Rials to 271,500b in the Extraordinary General Meeting



Following the invitation notice published in the widely circulated newspapers Donya Eghtesad issue No. 5668 dated on February 9, 2023 and Jahan Sanat issue No. 5190 dated on February 9, 2023, the extraordinary general meeting of the shareholders of Chadormalu Mining and Industrial Company was held on Monday, February 20 at the place of Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs Cultural and Sports Complex, Hall of Effort at the address: Tehran - Valiasr St. - above Jam Jam - not reaching the Shahid Chamran intersection (Parkway) with the presence of 39.84% of the company's shareholders or their legal representatives, representative of the Securities and Exchange Organization, representative of the independent auditor and legal inspector, members of the board of directors and the CEO of the company.

According to our reporter, in this meeting, after the election of Mr. Dr. Rai, representative of Omid Investment Group, as the chairman of the assembly and supervisors, Mr. Salahshouri, representative of Justice Share and Mr. Monsan, representative of Mobarakeh Steel Company, Khalilzadeh, representative of the Securities and Exchange Organization and the company's legal inspector Engineer Amir Ali Taherzadeh, as the secretary of the assembly and the CEO, the participants were briefed with a report on the performance and executive plans of the company, including extraction operations, production and sale of products and future plans and plans of the company, part of which is financed from the place of capital increase, for the information of the attendees and then the report of the auditor and legal inspector was presented and the following decisions were made and approved.

Capital Increase:

First stage: The assembly agreed with the increase of capital from the amount of 119 thousand billion Rials to the amount of 192 thousand 500 billion Rials (divided into 192 thousand 500 ordinary shares with the name of one thousand Rials) from the accumulated profit. It was decided that the board of directors will amend Article "5" of the company's articles of association as follows:

It was decided that the board of directors will take the necessary legal measures according to the usual regulations for all shareholders to the extent of the accumulated profit of the shares with the new name, and in case of creation of fractional shares, respecting the rights of the shareholders.

The second stage: the assembly, by increasing the capital from the amount of 192 thousand 500 billion Rials to the amount of 271 thousand 500 billion Rials, from the place of claims and bringing in cash from the shareholders, agreed and based on article "162" of the legal bill to amend a part of the trade law, practical authority He delegated the increase of capital and the amendment of Article "5" of the statute to the board of directors within two years, so that the board of directors can implement it after obtaining permission from the Securities and Exchange Organization.

- It was decided that the board of directors will have the right to unused advances and partial shares resulting from the capital increase at each stage and in accordance with the provisions of Article "172" of the bill to amend a part of the commercial law and in compliance with the legal terms and conditions of the Securities and Exchange Organization within the deadline. It is stipulated by the company and through the stock market that the proceeds from the sale, after deducting the expenses and fees, should be credited to the credit account of the beneficial shareholders.

- In line with Resolution No. 128519/T59759H dated 20/07/1401 of the Honorable Board of Ministers and with due regard to the explanations presented in the Assembly, the amount of 5,634 billion Rials was spent in order to implement the aforementioned resolution and it was decided that the remaining amount will be determined Up to the limit of 7,000 billion



rials, the expenses of the company should be provided to the board of directors, taking into account all the financial, strategic, social and technical dimensions.

It was also decided to make arrangements in such a way that no cost would be imposed on Chadormalu Mining and Industrial Company for water supply.

According to paragraph "6" of the minutes of the Annual General Meeting dated 04/18/1401 of Chadormalu Mining and Industrial Company, it was decided that the right to attend the non-commissioned members of the board of directors from the beginning of 1401 can be paid for holding at least two meetings per month up to a maximum of two



meetings. The right to attend specialized committees of the board of directors can be paid for holding at least one meeting per month, at most once per month. Also, personnel, consultants and any person who has any contractual relationship with the company, in case of membership in the specialized committees of the company, will not be granted the right to attend from the date of this resolution.

According to the same report, the goal of Chadormalu Mining and Industrial Company (public share) is to increase the capital to provide part of the resources needed to complete the ongoing development projects, including:

- Construction of a combined cycle power plant with a capacity of 546 MW as EPC

- Construction of ferroalloys factory (high carbon ferromanganese, ferrosilico manganese and ferrosilic) with a production capacity of 20,000, 30,000, 15,000 tons per year respectively.

- Construction of the production line of non-combustible products, including (310 thousand tons of processing of types of non-combustible materials, 185 thousand tons of production of types of bricks, aggregates and special non-combustible parts.

- Construction of Oxygen Factory No. 2 with a capacity of 15,000 normal cubic meters per hour using the EP method

- Reimbursement of expenses incurred for participation in capital increase of investment companies.

- Participation in increasing the capital of investment companies

- Reimbursement of expenses incurred for the acquisition of investments (purchase of shares and establishment of the company).

- Studying investments (company establishment - ongoing).

- Compensation of capital expenditures made for the purchase and construction of capital assets (buildings and facilities, machines and equipment, vehicles, etc.) and completion of projects under implementation and development.

- Providing part of the working capital required by the company in order to supply iron ore (extraction and purchase).

This capital increase is financed from the place, accumulated profit, current demands of shareholders and cash flow and internal resources of the company.

Cyprus Leaders Meet as Peace Talks Remain Deadlocked

NICOSIA (dispatches) - Leaders of Cyprus’s estranged Greek and Turkish communities met on Thursday as a deadlock persisted in peace talks on the ethnically divided island.

The meeting was the first for newly elected Cypriot President Nikos Christodoulides, the new Greek Cypriot leader, and Ersin Tatar, the Turkish Cypriot leader.

They met on neutral ground in a United Nations-controlled buffer zone splitting the two sides in the divided capital, Nicosia, at the home of Canadian diplomat Colin Stewart who heads the peacekeeping mission on the east Mediterranean island.

The U.N. mission, UNFICYP, said the meeting was ‘open and constructive’.



Afghanistan Reopens Key Pakistan Trade Route

ISLAMABAD (Dispatches) - The Taliban government in Afghanistan has reopened a key border crossing with Pakistan after four days of closure that saw thousands of trucks carrying food and other items stranded at the frontier.

Pakistani authorities on Thursday said they will also open their side of the Torkham crossing after completing the “administrative requirements”.

“We are just completing the necessary documentation and other administrative work before reopening the gate, which is expected in another few hours,” a Pakistani security official posted at the crossing told Al Jazeera, requesting anonymity.



Ukraine Defends Front Line On Eve of War Anniversary



KYIV (Dispatches) - , Feb 23 (Reuters) - Ukraine said its forces had repelled Russian assaults along the length of the front line on Thursday on the eve of the war’s anniversary, as President Vladimir Putin, empty-handed after a bloody winter offensive, talked up Russia’s nuclear arsenal.

After a series of strident speeches in the runup to the anniversary of his invasion, Putin announced plans to deploy new Sarmat multi-warhead intercontinental ballistic missiles this year. Earlier this week he suspended Russia’s participation in the START nuclear arms control treaty.

“As before, we will pay increased attention to strengthening the nuclear triad,” said Putin, referring to nuclear missiles based on land, sea and in the air.

“We will continue mass production of air-based hypersonic Kinzhal systems and will start mass supplies of sea-based Zircon hypersonic missiles,” Putin said in the remarks issued by the Kremlin early on Thursday.

Ukraine and its Western allies have brushed off the nuclear posturing as a diversion from a failing Russian military campaign on the ground, a year after Putin launched the biggest land war in Europe since World War Two.

The last weeks have seen Russia mount infantry assaults across frozen ground in battles described by both sides as the bloodiest of the war.

Western officials said they believed Russia had planned an offensive to capture new territory ahead of the anniversary, using hundreds of thousands of reservists conscripted in recent months to give Putin a victory to announce.

Moscow’s forces have made progress trying to encircle the small city of Bakhmut, but have failed to break through Ukrainian lines to the north near Kremmina and to the south at Vuhledar where they have taken heavy losses assaulting across open ground into the teeth of Ukrainian artillery.

Ukrainian forces repelled 90 Russian attacks in the northeast and east over the past 24 hours, the military said early on Thursday.

Ukraine has shut some schools for the war’s anniversary in anticipation that Moscow might launch long-range missile attacks to mark the date. But Kyiv officials said they believe Moscow no longer has the capability for a dramatic show of force.

“Nothing unusual will happen. Usual (Russian) effort... A small missile strike is planned,” Kyrylo Budanov, the head of Ukraine’s military intelligence, told the Ukrainska Pravda news website in an interview.

“23-24 (February), they have two dates. Believe me, we have experienced this more than 20 times,” he said.

Britain’s military said in a daily intelligence update that Moscow could be planning another large-scale assault on Vuhledar, despite costly failed attacks there earlier this month. It said last week that two full brigades of thousands of elite Russian marines had been rendered combat ineffective because of massive losses there.

With no major battlefield victories to report in time for the anniversary, Putin has instead turned to nuclear rhetoric, announcing in a major speech on Tuesday that Russia would suspend participation in the New START arms control treaty.

Palestinians Recount Fatal Israeli Raid on Nablus

RAMALLAH (Dispatches) - At least 150 Israeli soldiers in dozens of armored vehicles swooped on Nablus on Wednesday in what turned out to be one of the deadliest military raids in the occupied West Bank since the mass Palestinian uprising or Intifada of 2000-05.

Within four hours, the Israeli army killed 11 Palestinians and injured more than 80 people with live ammunition – some of them critically. The raid comes barely a month after 10 Palestinians were killed in a similar raid in the Jenin refugee camp about 41km (25 miles) away.

Jenin and Nablus, which have emerged as the centers of limited armed Palestinian resistance, have become the scenes of increased deadly Israeli attacks.

Among the victims of Wednesday’s raids were three elderly men – aged 72, 66 and 61 – and a 16-year-old boy, while hundreds of others suffered tear gas inhalation.

Turkey Probes Contractors, Races to House Quake Survivors

ISTANBUL (Dispatches) - Turkey is widening its investigation into building contractors suspected of violating safety standards as the authorities rush to provide safe housing for the homeless following the powerful earthquakes on February 6.

Interior Minister Suleyman Soylu said 564 suspects had been identified, with 160 people arrested and many more still under investigation for their role in the collapse of some of the thousands of buildings flattened in the 10 provinces affected by the earthquakes.

Opposition parties have accused President Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s government of not enforcing building regulations, and of misspending special taxes levied after the last major earthquake in 1999 to make buildings more resistant to quakes.

The death toll from the quakes that devastated the Turkey-Syria border region has risen to nearly 50,000, with close to 8,000 aftershocks recorded. Soylu said 43,556 people have died in Turkey.

Reporting from the southern Turkish city of Adana, Al Jazeera’s Sami Zeidan said, citing the United Nations, that 1.5 million people became homeless by the earthquakes. Some 500,000 homes have been destroyed and 210 million tons of rubble need to be cleared, which would fill an area of 30sq km (11.6sq miles).

Turkey started an operation on Thursday to relocate people from tents to container cities. The first phase would be to move people into 15,000 containers. Erdogan, who faces elections within months, has promised to rebuild housing within one year.

This week he said about 865,000 people were living in tents and 23,500 in container homes, while 376,000 were in student dormitories and public guesthouses outside the earthquake zone.

There have always been fears of the next big earthquake in Istanbul, Turkey’s most populous city. But now there is a greater sense of urgency among residents who want experts to certify that their buildings are strong and the foundations robust, said Al Jazeera’s Hashem Ahelbarra.



South Africa Army Defends Naval Drills With Russia

RICHARDS BAY (Dispatches) - South Africa’s military yesterday defended its decision to host controversial naval exercises jointly staged with Russia and China and coinciding with the one-year anniversary of the Kremlin’s invasion of Ukraine.

Originally slated to start last week, the exercise dubbed Mosi-II kicked off on Wednesday along South Africa’s eastern coast.

But coming on the eve of the anniversary of Russia’s onslaught on Ukraine, the drills were described by commentators as politically “dubious” and showing “insensitivity”.

The exercises have also been criticized by the United States and the European Union.

South Africa has refused to condemn the invasion of Ukraine which has largely isolated Moscow on the international stage, saying it prefers dialogue to end the war.

“There is a difference between military and politics,” Lieutenant-General Siphwe Sangweni, chief of joint operations in the South African National Defense Force, told a news conference in the eastern port town of Richards Bay.

He said the army was “guided by government” but also needed to learn skills from other military forces to protect South Africa and for use in international peacekeeping operations.

“Yes, there will be other countries who feel differently in how we have approached this, but... all countries are sovereign nations and have a right to handle things (as) they see fit,” he said.

Sangweni said “cooperation and coordination with all other militaries is one that is very important to us”.

More than 350 members of South Africa’s armed forces will take part in the exercises which wind up on February 27. Russia is the “lead” country in the drills, said South Africa.

A Russian military frigate equipped with a powerful Zircon missile system and a Chinese destroyer will be used in the exercises.

The Russian military said in a statement that the frigate “Admiral Gorshkov” will be used among other things to practice tactics on how to fend off threats to security at sea.

Oleg Gladkiy, a commander and captain with the Russian contingent, said the exercises will include mutually maneuvering the three countries’ ships to simulate the liberation of a vessel captured by pirates, and “artillery fire” which would not include the firing of hypersonic missiles.

Brazil is participating as an observer, in the second such exercise involving South Africa, China and Russia.



Somaliland Clashes Kill Nearly 100 in Two-Weeks

SOMALILAND (Dispatches)

- At least 96 people have been killed in more than two weeks of clashes between security forces and clan members in the breakaway Somali region of Somaliland, a hospital director said.

“We have 96 dead and 560 wounded,” Ahmed Mohamed Hassan, director of the main hospital in the contested town of Las Anod, told AFP by telephone.

Garaad Jama Garaad Ali, a senior clan chief, had said on Wednesday that 150 people had been killed and 500 wounded.

Somaliland, which has claimed independence from Somalia since 1991, but has never been recognised internationally, is often seen as a beacon of stability in a chaotic region.

However, political tensions have surged in recent months, leading to deadly violence between government forces and militias loyal to Somalia.

The latest fighting broke out on February 6 in Las Anod, which straddles a key trade route and is claimed by both Somaliland and neighbouring Puntland, a semi-autonomous state of northeastern Somalia.

The UN says more than 185,000 people have been displaced by the violence. Heavy fighting was still raging on Thursday, according to the region’s clan leaders and witnesses.

“It started in the early morning and already several artillery and mortar shells landed in the town,” resident Mohamed Saleban said by phone, adding that people were fleeing.

On Wednesday, Hassan said the hospital itself had been bombarded and that several employees had on “a number of occasions” survived shelling.

“They have destroyed the electricity system of the hospital, the oxygen system, the blood bank, the office of the human resources and other parts of the hospital building,” he told reporters, vowing to continue working.

The violence erupted after elders in the Sool region, where Las Anod is located, issued a statement pledging support for Somalia’s federal government and urged Somaliland authorities to withdraw their soldiers from the area.

Somaliland authorities announced a ceasefire on February 10, but days later accused Somalia of attacking its forces.



"It could be caused by different arrangements of iron atoms at high temperatures and pressures or the preferred alignment of growing crystals," Pham said.

NEW ZEALAND - Estate planning company Perpetual Guardian experimented with a four-day week in 2018 and subsequently made it permanent, citing rising productivity and lower absenteeism. Consumer goods giant Unilever has also experimented with a four-day working week for local staff.



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Iraq to Allow Trade With China in Yuan

DUBAI (Dispatches) - Iraq’s central bank said it planned to allow trade from China to be settled directly in yuan for the first time, in an attempt to improve access to foreign currency.

The central bank has been taking urgent steps to compensate for a dollar shortage in local markets, which prompted the cabinet to approve a currency revaluation earlier this month.

“It is the first time imports would be financed from China in yuan, as

Iraqi imports from China have been financed in (U.S.) dollars only,” the government’s economic adviser, Mudhir Salih, told Reuters on Wednesday.

The move is the latest sign of the yuan’s growing role on the international stage as China gradually opens up its financial markets and some countries look to diversify their currency exposures.

The central bank could, as part of its plan, boost the balances of Iraqi banks that have accounts with Chinese banks in yuan, it said in a statement.



Electricity Bill Hike Adds to Misery of Sri Lankans Amid Crisis

COLOMBO (Dispatches) - The latest electricity price rise in crisis-hit Sri Lanka has left stall owner Mohammed Lafeel in a quandary: the 66 percent increase means he can’t afford to pay for electricity but can’t manage without it so goes deeper into debt to keep it on.

Over the last month, with inflation hovering at 55 percent year-on-year, Lafeel says his income has fallen by about a third as fewer customers buy his knick-knacks as more of them struggle under the island’s worst financial crisis in 70 years.

Lafeel says he does not know how he can repay the 300,000 rupees (\$835) he borrowed for his daughter’s wedding and has had to borrow more to reconnect the power at home after it was cut off because he hadn’t paid the bill.

“Everyone is under pressure,” Lafeel told Reuters news agency at his stall next to the main railway station in the city of Colombo, days after the second power price increase since a 75 percent rise in August.

The power price increase is the latest measure by Sri Lanka to clinch a \$2.9bn loan from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to tackle a crisis that evolved from the confluence of the COVID-19 pandemic battering its tourism-reliant economy, rising oil prices and populist tax cuts by a previous government.

President Ranil Wickremesinghe took office last July promising to pull the country out of crisis after protests against the economic mess led to the downfall of his predecessor.

On Tuesday, the cabinet said talks with the IMF were in the final stage. The government hoped to reach a deal by March and gradually reduce record-high interest rates in line with inflation, the president’s office said.

Like most of Sri Lanka’s 22 million people, Sanjula Peiris, managing director of family-owned Wish Bakers, desperately needs a break from food inflation, running at a stubbornly high 60 percent year-on-year.

The company, which has 15 outlets on the outskirts of Colombo, decided not to increase prices for fear of losing business. Their costs, however, have tripled in the past year, with the latest electricity bill increase adding to the burden.

“It’s not just the ovens, most of our machines need power,” Peiris said. “We are struggling to maintain our business.”

About 200 of Sri Lanka’s 5,000 bakeries have shut down, said N K Jayawardena, president of the largest bakeries’ union, the All Ceylon Bakery Owners’ Association. Many of those still running have laid off staff, he said.

“This power tariff increase is very unfair, especially when it comes on top of so much hardship,” he said.

The government has acknowledged the pain of the higher electricity bills but said it had no other way out of the crisis.

Carpenter Mohamed Sathurudeen said that was cold comfort.

“We can’t afford a hike in electricity prices, we’re already suffering great economic difficulty,” he said. “If the government can’t find a solution to this, then it has failed. Please give this to someone who can manage it properly.”

Morgan Stanley Ups 2023 Oil Demand Growth Estimate by 36%

LONDON (Dispatches) - Morgan Stanley has raised its global oil demand growth estimate for this year by about 36%, citing growing momentum in China’s reopening and a recovery in aviation, but flagged higher supply from Russia as an offsetting factor.

Global oil consumption is now expected to increase by about 1.9 million barrels per day (bpd), versus its previous 1.4 million bpd forecast, the bank said in a note dated Tuesday.

“Mobility indicators for China, such as congestion, have been rising steadily,” while “flight schedules have firmed-up the outlook for jet fuel demand,” the bank said.

But supply from Russia has been stronger than expected, leading to a slightly smaller than previously assumed deficit in the second half of the year, analysts at the bank wrote, trimming their Brent oil price forecast for that period to \$90-100 a barrel from \$100-110 previously.

“We previously estimated a ~1 mb/d year-on-year decline in 2023, which we moderate to 0.4 mb/d,” the bank said, referring to its Russian output outlook in million barrels per day.



Russian Economy Shrank 2.1% in 2022, Much Less Than Expected

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russia’s economy contracted by 2.1 percent last year, the federal statistics service said on Monday, shrinking less than expected despite its invasion of Ukraine last February and sanctions imposed by European nations and the United States.

Rosstat’s first gross domestic product (GDP) estimate for 2022 was a marked improvement on forecasts made soon after the conflict began. In 2021, the economy saw a 5.6 percent year-on-year rise.

The economy ministry had at one point predicted a contraction of more than 12 percent last year, exceeding the falls in output seen after the Soviet Union collapsed and during the 1998 financial crisis.

In April 2022, the World Bank predicted a contraction of 11.2 percent.

“Due to its invasion of Ukraine, Russia faces the largest coordinated economic sanctions ever imposed on a country,” the World Bank said in a statement.

“Russia’s economy will be hit very hard, with a deep recession looming in 2022. GDP is expected to contract by 11.2 percent, with little recovery in the ensuing two years,” it added.

Before the conflict in Ukraine began, the Russian government had expected GDP growth of 3 percent in 2022. Manufacturing industries and wholesale and retail trade were among the sectors that declined in 2022, while agriculture, hospitality, construction and mining all registered growth. Public administration and “military security” gained 4.1 percent in 2022, the statistics agency said, adding to a 3.3 percent rise in 2021. President Vladimir Putin in January paid tribute to the defense sector for supporting the economy.

Sticky Inflation to Nudge Reserve Bank of India to Hike Rates Once More

BENGALURU (Dispatches) - The Reserve Bank of India will increase its main interest rate by 25 basis points to 6.75% in April and then pause until the end of 2023, according to a Reuters poll of economists who also said risks were for the terminal rate to go even higher.

Following higher-than-expected January inflation and after the central bank reiterated its tightening bias at its Feb. 8 meeting, economists lifted their forecast for the terminal rate from 6.50% expected in a January poll.

Nearly two-thirds of respondents, 34 of 55,

expected the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to raise rates to a seven-year high of 6.75% in April and the median forecast in the Feb. 14-21 Reuters poll showed it would then keep the rate steady for the rest of 2023. Since last May, India’s central bank has raised rates by 250 basis points.

“The RBI... very clearly indicated that they’re still in the mode of withdrawing the accommodation. They need to see a decisive fall in inflation happen for them to change their stance to neutral,” said Dhiraj Nim, economist at ANZ Research.

“The volatility in food prices is a bit of a concern right now, and we have to see what happens on that front for the overall inflation trajectory to be shaped. Core inflation... is problematically sticky at 6%. If it does not come below that, I think the job of the Reserve Bank of India is not done.”

Inflation in Asia’s third-largest economy was above the central bank’s upper tolerance limit of 6.00% for the first 10 months of 2022, followed by two months of decline on softening food prices.

However, in January, food inflation accelerated once again, taking the headline number to 6.52%, well above the central bank’s upper tolerance limit.

The survey also showed inflation was likely to remain sticky at 6.00% this quarter, higher than the RBI’s forecast of 5.70%.

All 27 respondents who answered additional questions said the biggest risk to their inflation and terminal rate forecasts was that these rates would be higher than they predicted.

Globally, persistent inflation is prompting major central banks to continue tightening monetary policy until price pressures are tamed.

The RBI, however, is likely to end its tightening cycle in April, as growth in the Indian economy was predicted to slow to 6.0% in 2023/24 from 6.9% in the current fiscal year, the poll showed.

China Urges State Firms To Drop Big Four Auditors

BEIJING (Dispatches) - Concerns about data security have prompted Chinese authorities to ask state-owned firms to stop using the four biggest global accounting firms as Beijing seeks to curb the influence of Western auditors, Bloomberg News reported.

China’s Ministry of Finance is among government entities that gave informal guidance to some state-owned enterprises as recently as last month, urging them to let contracts with PwC, EY, KPMG and Deloitte expire, the report said, quoting people familiar with the matter.

While offshore subsidiaries can use the global auditors, their parent firms were urged to hire local Chinese or Hong Kong accountants when contracts come up for renewal, one of the people told Bloomberg.

The Ministry of Finance did not immediately respond to Reuters’ requests for comment. PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) declined to comment and the other leading audit firms did not immediately respond.

Data policy is one of several areas over which China has tightened its scrutiny to try to ensure practices do not threaten the country’s national and economic interests.

At the same time, geopolitical tensions are running high, with some business leaders voicing concerns about the decoupling of China, the world’s second-largest economy, from the United States, the largest.

China implemented its Data Security Law in September 2021, broadly requiring Chinese companies and localities to categorise data based on its relevance to national security and the economy.

The leading accounting firms in the world by revenue are Deloitte, PwC, Ernst & Young (EY), and Klynveld Peat Marwick Goerdeler (KPMG), or the Big Four.



They collectively received revenue of 20.6 billion yuan (\$2.99 billion) from all Chinese clients in 2021, Bloomberg said, quoting finance ministry data.

China has been reluctant to permit offshore authorities to access U.S.-listed Chinese companies’ audit papers without its approval, citing national security concerns.

The two sides reached a deal last year to allow U.S. securities regulators to inspect the documents in Hong Kong. The U.S. accounting watchdog in December said it has full access to inspect and investigate firms in China for the first time.

Erica Williams, chair of the U.S. Public Company Accounting Oversight Board, said on Wednesday there would be “no loopholes” for accounting firms in China that are registered with her agency.

“Should PRC authorities obstruct or otherwise fail to facilitate the PCAOB’s complete access at any point in any way, the board will act immediately,” she said.

Switzerland Sent \$3.6b of Gold to Turkey in Jan



LONDON (Dispatches) - Switzerland sent 58.3 tons of gold worth 3.3 billion Swiss francs (\$3.6 billion) to Turkey in January, by far the most for any month in records stretching back to 2012, Swiss customs data showed.

Gold is traditionally seen as a safe means of storing wealth and Turkish demand for the metal has rocketed as sky-high inflation erodes the value of the local lira currency.

Switzerland is the world’s biggest bullion refining and transit hub. It shipped 188 tons of gold worth 10.1 billion Swiss francs last year to Turkey, up from only 11 tons in 2021.

But January’s shipments are an acceleration. Switzerland’s gold exports to Turkey have never previously exceeded 34 tons in a single month, Swiss data shows.

Turkish demand for gold rocketed in 2022 and accelerated further in January 2023.

The quantity of gold flowing into Turkey has worsened Turkey’s current account deficit, which rose to \$48.8 billion last year.

After earthquakes struck Turkey this month, causing thousands of deaths and huge economic damage, the government moved to reduce the amount of gold entering the country by suspending some imports and asking banks to widen the spread for gold transactions, making them costlier to curtail demand.

Switzerland’s shipments to Turkey accounted for 42% of its total gold exports in January.

The country sent 3.2 tons to India in January, the lowest for any month since May 2021, and 26.1 tons to mainland China, the least since May 2022.

India and China are the two biggest gold consumer markets and demand often rises when gold prices are low and falls when gold prices increase.

Iran Ranks 9th in World Steel Producing Ranking

Iran Voices Readiness to Help Regional Water and Climate Challenges

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - The Director of the Regional Center for Urban Water Management under UNESCO and the Advisor to the Minister of Energy announced Iran's readiness to help the countries in the region in adapting to the climate and manage water challenges. "Mohammed Haj Rasouliha" said on Thursday at the 13th meeting of the Board of Governors of the Regional Center on Urban Water Management (RCUWM): "Since this meeting began to work 5 months ago, regarding national strategies Adaptation to climate change in connection with the water challenge, a draft plan has been prepared."

He pointed out: "Based on Iran's aboriginal policies, we in the government, along with the Ministry of Agriculture Jihad and the Ministry of Energy are implementing these strategies for Iran, and if other countries are interested in this field, we are ready to use the expert team to implement this course to help the countries of the region."

Haj Rasouliha said:" 8 agendas will be presented in line with these topics. He also pointed out: "In 2023, due to the occurrence of recent destructive floods in the world,



Abu Amani stressed the use of new technologies such as remote control and other technologies to have a better understanding of hydrology.

Pointing to the upcoming water meeting in New York, he said: The second water meeting in New York is a very important meeting that will be held after several decades.

At this conference, the member countries can have a voice and the key members of UNESCO can play a big role in it.

a book on comprehensive flood management is being prepared nationally, which will be presented for further use."

Meanwhile the representative and director of UNESCO's water science department said that water management should be based on science and adaptability and build resilience against climate change.

: Abu Amani made the comment at the 13th meeting of the Board of Governors of the Regional Center for Urban Water Management.

He said: "If the member countries pay attention to these elements and act in harmony based on scientific topics, they can improve their resilience."

Amirabdollahian Highlights Effective Regional Cooperation With Iraq

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian highlights "fast and effective" regional cooperation between Iran and Iraq, saying the two neighboring countries need to further develop ties, particularly in the parliamentary sector.

The top Iranian diplomat, who is in Baghdad on an official two-day visit, was speaking in a meeting with Iraqi Parliament Speaker Mohammed al-Halboosi.

He said Iran attaches great significance to Iraq's development and progress, commending the two sides' efforts to prepare a comprehensive document for long-term bilateral cooperation.

Amirabdollahian noted that the expansion of transit cooperation and the construction of railways linking the southern Iraqi oil city of Basra to the Iranian border town of Shalamchah and the Iranian city of Kermanshah to the Iraqi capital Baghdad would play an effective role in increasing economic and trade exchanges between the two countries.

Halboosi, for his part, said further enhancing parliamentary relations with Iran is among the Iraqi parliament's priorities.

Amir-Abdollahian arrived in the Iraqi capital, Baghdad, on Wednesday to discuss bilateral, regional and international issues with high-ranking Iraqi officials.

Iran FM hails Iraq's efforts to help restore Tehran's ties with Riyadh, Cairo

Iran FM hails Iraq's efforts to help restore Tehran's ties with Riyadh, Cairo

In a meeting with the head of the State of Law Coalition, Nouri al-Maliki, the Iranian foreign minister said Iran wants to see development and stability in Iraq.

Maliki also outlined the latest political situation in Iraq and said the expansion of all-out ties with Iran is among his country's foreign policy priorities.

The Iranian foreign minister also hailed great efforts by the Iraqi Popular Mobilization Units (PMU), known in Arabic as Hashd al-Sha'abi, to fight Daesh terrorists and restore stability and security to Iraq.

Iran to Boost LPG, Propane, Butane Exports in South Pars

TEHRAN (Shana) - The engineering director of the South Pars Gas Complex stated that the preparations for equipping the LPG export jetty for the National Iranian Gas Company (NIGC) in South Pars have been put on the agenda, adding that with its completion, the export of liquified petroleum gas (LPG), propane and butane in this complex will accelerate.

Seyyed Mehdi Shafiei Motahar said: "With the presence of a group of managers and experts of the Iranian Gas Engineering and Development Company, preparations were made to equip the export jetty for LPG, propane and butane for NIGC in South Pars region.

He added: "In the visit and specialized meeting, which was attended by the special representative of the international affairs department of NIGC, experts of the special region and the National Petrochemical Company (NPC), the most important solutions and specialized cases for the start of equipping the export jetty of NIGC were presented and reviewed."

The engineering director of South Pars Gas Complex stated: "Feasibility cases and roadmap for equipping and constructing a new LPG pipeline, in line with the timely export of products and reducing the time required for berthing and loading the vessels, were presented and compiled by the engineering management of South Pars Gas Complex."

Shafiei noted: "By speeding up the operation of equipping this export jetty, export of strategic items from South Pars Gas Complex will accelerate in the near future and bring prosperity to the country's economy."

IAEA Accusations...

FROM PAGE 1

"The inspector came and pointed out that the mode has changed, he was right, the mode had changed, but DIQ had not changed," he said in the interview.

Kamalvandi added that after the agency was informed of the inspector's "mistake," he came back for another inspection and confirmed that Iran had not made any changes to the DIQ, the mode that has been changed was mentioned in the DIQ submitted to the agency.

"I think the reaction of the agency was deliberate... it seems to me that the agency did not immediately accept our argument based on some political benefits," he asserted.

"[The agency] submitted a report against us, and unfortunately, immediately after that, the three European countries and the United States made a statement against Iran."

Kamalvandi slammed the statement by the US and its European allies as a "premeditated" move.

"When a statement is issued against Iran at this speed, it shows that the action taken was a premeditated one. Of course, they are a bit impulsive in this show, ... they didn't even bother to wait at least two or three days so that their show looks a little bit more real.

"The reports are indeed technical, but their purpose is political, ... these issues should be discussed between us and the agency, other parties should not be present. The agency should not report [them] until the investigation is complete," he said.

Commenting on the recent Bloomberg report that claimed the IAEA "is trying to clarify how Iran accumulated uranium enriched to 84 percent purity," Iran's nuclear agency spokesman said finding highly-enriched uranium particles in the pipes connecting centrifuges was a "normal issue."

"For example, we are producing 5 percent enriched [uranium], 11 percent particle is seen in it, or we are producing 20 percent [enriched uranium], 47 percent particle is seen in it. We had several correspondences about this in the past... it's a natural thing in enrichment," he explained.

"The machine is spinning fast. If the amount of the feed decreases for a moment, the enrichment will increase by a few percent; but it doesn't matter because the end product is what matters."

Kamalvandi stated that If Iran "wants" to produce highly-enriched uranium, it will announce it to the UN agency, but so far it has not felt the need to produce more enriched uranium.

"So, it is clear that there is a conspiracy here," he noted, referring to the confidential reports being leaked to Western media and distortions made about the IAEA inspections and subsequent findings.

He criticized the IAEA for allowing the correspondence between Tehran and the agency to leak to the press, holding the agency "100 percent guilty" in the case.

"There was a confidential letter between us and the agency, a question was raised, and we answered. Their question is broadcast in the media, but our answer is not... the goal is to create space for those who want to accuse Iran...of violating its commitment and not respecting safeguards."

Kamalvandi said Iran has still consistently "complied" with the safeguards, adding that "15 reports of the agency itself are proof of our honesty and that Iran has fully fulfilled its obligations."

"There is no logical reason for the action of the agency unless there is a political purpose behind this case which aims at distorting the image of the Islamic Republic of Iran," he remarked.

Kamalvandi justified Iran's remedial measures to reduce its commitments under the 2015 nuclear deal, known officially as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), after the former US administration unilaterally pulled out of the deal and European parties failed to fulfill their commitments to confront the US and salvage the deal.

"We had obligations beyond the safeguards. We had additional protocol commitments, we had JCPOA commitments. We switched off surveillance cameras and ceased our additional protocol obligations because they did not comply with their own obligations, the sanctions were still in place, the decision of the government authorities and the strategic action plan of the parliament determined that our relationship with the IAEA must be limited to the safeguards," he said.

The nuclear agency spokesman hastened to add that safeguards commitments have a very clear meaning - "what the agency should monitor is the amount and method of using atomic materials."

"The safeguards has nothing to do with centrifuges, it has nothing to do with research, it should not have anything to do with...the sites where you don't have original atomic materials," he noted.

Kamalvandi said that based on the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and safeguard regulations Iran reserves the "right to produce whatever percentage it wants."

Echoing what top Iranian officials have repeatedly said, Kamalvandi asserted that no country is bombarded by negative propaganda as much as Iran is, pointing to the number of foreign-based Persian-language media outlets leading the media campaign against Iran.

"The volume and extent of propagandist pressure against the country and the government are clearly aimed for political purposes," he said.

"When they say maximum pressure, they mean pressure by any means. Sometimes they use economy, sometimes politics or issues regarding IAEA, sometimes it is human rights, some other times it is terrorism and many other excuses which are raised every now and then. Whenever it is necessary and they can't use their old pretexts, they fabricate an issue against Iran."

Kamalvandi said the fact that international bodies like the UN Security Council and the IAEA Board of Governors are structured in such a way that benefits the West, there is nowhere that Iran can file a complaint about false accusations made against the country.

"They raise these accusations to inflame the political atmosphere, to take their own advantage, and when the accusation is cleared a year or two later, they move on to the next false accusation.

"We gave all the answers to the agency, there is no issue that we did not answer. Still, they make a scene anyway. I don't believe this will be over soon, they will go find other issues, make noise under the pretext of that, and then quietly say that the problem has been resolved for a while. It's been like this so far," the official remarked.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Kamalvandi censured Western parties to Iran's nuclear deal for not fulfilling any of their commitments.

"They do not do what they write and sign in any way... we have a fatwa [decree] that it is forbidden to build an atomic bomb, and therefore we will not build it. It has no value to [the Western powers] because they are like that and their words cannot be trusted. And therefore, they say that the best thing is that Iran does not have a nuclear industry at all," he noted.

Worldsteel figures showed that Iran's steel output had increased by 27.7% from January 2022, the largest increase reported by the top 10 steel manufacturers in the world.

Only Iran and China has reported year on year increases in production in January with other eight producers reporting declines in output, showed the figures.



Tehran Calls for...

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"We urge all parties to fully comply with their obligation on the international humanitarian law including taking constant precautions to protect civilians and critical infrastructure and facilitating access to safe and unfettered access to humanitarian aid for those in need," said the diplomat.

Noting that the ongoing conflict is "detrimental to both parties as neither can earn any long-term advantage", he added that "it is crucial for all involved parties to abandon the military ambitions and prioritize finding a peaceful diplomatic resolution."

Iravani also pointed to the need to solve the root causes of the conflict. "By prioritizing dialogue and diplomacy and addressing the underlying cause of the conflict we can take a crucial step toward achieving a solution that not only mitigates the devastating humanitarian part but also restores regional stability and security," he said.

"As a first step, we call for an immediate and comprehensive ceasefire, coupled with the provision of humanitarian aid to those in need, which should take precedence over all else."

The diplomat also criticized the draft of the proposed resolution, saying, "unfortunately, the proposed text falls short of comprehensively and impartially addressing all aspects of the issue and fails to acknowledge the conditions and provocations that have contributed to the crisis."

He noted that the actions and policies of certain sponsors of this resolution raise doubts about the political will to resolve the dispute peacefully.

The resolution was adopted with 141 member states in favor and seven against while 32 countries, including China, Iran, and India, abstained.

By the terms of the 11-paragraph resolution, the Assembly reiterated its demand that Russia "immediately, completely and unconditionally withdraw all of its military forces from the territory of Ukraine and called for a cessation of hostilities."

Elsewhere in his remarks, Iravani responded to "Iranophobic" allegations made by a representative of the Israeli regime to the UN during the UNGA a day earlier.

"Iranophobic campaign and widespread systematic dissemination of disinformation and baseless allegations against Iran have always been one of the main elements of the statements by the Israeli regime at the UN," he said.

"The Israeli regime cannot conceal its brutalities in Palestine or distract attention from its long-standing malign activities and demonic policies in other countries," he said, adding that the regime is "notorious for its atrocities and apartheid policies against the people of Palestine and the region by targeting innocent people including women and children."

The Israeli regime continues to commit flagrant and systematic violations of human rights and all norms of international humanitarian law, the diplomat said.

According to the diplomat, the regime possesses "all types of weapons of mass destruction as well as the most sophisticated conventional weapons" and continues to "endanger peace and security in the region and beyond" while also rejecting international calls to join international legally binding instruments banning WMDs.

"Nevertheless it attempts to portray Iran's conventional weapons capabilities or its exclusively peaceful nuclear program as a challenge to regional stability," he said while also strongly rejecting the allegations that Iran has sent military drones to Russia for use in the Ukraine war.

Iran, China...

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Meanwhile, Iran has established six border markets to promote trade with Pakistan. Iran's Consul General Hasan Noorain said in the last 10 months, the volume of bilateral trade between the two countries has reached \$2 billion dollars, adding that the target has been set at \$5 billion.

He further informed trading is facing difficulty due to the absence of a banking channel. He added that progress is being made in barter trade with Pakistan and that the visa policy has been relaxed to facilitate trade between the two countries.

In order to secure funding from the IMF, the country has been implementing policy changes in line with the conditions set out by the Washington-headquartered financial body.

These changes include measures to increase tax revenues and promote a more equitable distribution of valuable resources. The IMF has recommended reducing subsidies for those who do not require them, as part of this effort to improve resource allocation.

In response to the recommendations, the national assembly of Pakistan unanimously approved the government's Finance (Supplementary) Bill 2023 or 'mini-budget', and increased taxes on luxury goods and services.

Additionally, the government raised prices on fuel and essential commodities, which has made it challenging for the general public to fulfill their basic needs.

Curry to Miss at Least Another Week

SAN FRANCISCO (Dispatches) - Golden State Warriors star Stephen Curry is making “good progress” but will miss at least one more week as he recovers from left knee and leg injuries, the NBA team said.

Curry suffered partial tears to his knee ligaments and membranes and a lower leg contusion in a February 4 game against the Dallas Mavericks. He missed five games before the All-Star break. The team said in a statement posted on Twitter that he would be sidelined another week before he is re-evaluated, meaning he will miss the Warriors’ next four games.

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Suns, Kevin Durant Target March 1 for Return

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - The Phoenix Suns and Kevin Durant are targeting March 1 at the Charlotte Hornets for the newly acquired superstar to return from injury and make his team debut, The Athletic reported.

Durant has not played since spraining his MCL on Jan. 8 while still a member of the Brooklyn Nets, who dealt Durant to Phoenix two weeks ago at the trade deadline. The Suns added Durant to an underachieving squad that sits at 32-28, and is in fifth place in the Western Conference. In 39 games this season, Durant is averaging 29.7 points, 6.7 rebounds and 5.3 assists.

Man City Held to a Draw at Leipzig; Inter Win



LEIPZIG (Dispatches) - RB Leipzig defender Josko Gvardiol powered home a towering header in 70th-minute to earn them a 1-1 draw against visitors Manchester City in their Champions League Round of 16 first leg.

The 21-year-old defender bagged the deserved equaliser after City’s Riyad Mahrez had slotted in following a Leipzig mistake in the 27th minute.

City have now drawn their last two games after being held 1-1 by Nottingham Forest in the Premier League on Saturday while Leipzig’s four-game winning run in the competition came to an end. The return leg is in Manchester on March 14.

The visitors, aiming to reach the Champions League quarter-finals for a sixth straight season, were in complete control in the first half, with coach Pep Guardiola having made three changes to the City side that drew with Forest.

They went in front when Jack Grealish easily intercepted a weak Xaver Schlager pass on the edge of the box and played the ball through the middle for Mahrez to finish.

Rodri should have doubled their lead three minutes later when he was left completely unmarked at the far post but his header sailed wide.

The hosts, who were outplayed in the first half and only had their first shot on target in stoppage time, came out swinging after the break.

They should have equalised when Benjamin Henrichs was left completely alone in the box but sent his low shot wide.

City keeper Ederson then palmed away an Andre Silva effort from close range before also denying Dominik Szoboszlai in the 69th as Leipzig poured forward.

The Germans were rewarded a minute later when Marcel Halstenberg floated a cross into the box and defender Gvardiol outjumped his marker to head in the equalizer.

Meanwhile substitute Romelu Lukaku grabbed an 86th-minute goal to earn Inter Milan a 1-0 victory over Porto in a tight first leg of their Champions League last-16 tie.

Porto midfielder Otavio was sent off after receiving a second yellow card 12 minutes from time and Belgian striker Lukaku took full advantage to give his side a narrow advantage to take to Portugal next month.

Lautaro Martinez could have put Inter ahead after 13 minutes but sent his header wide from an unmarked position inside the box.

Inter keeper Andre Onana pulled off a good stop to keep out an effort from Marko Grujic who was played free inside the box by a backheel pass from Mehdi Taremi.

Alessandro Bastoni was close to giving Inter the lead in first-half stoppage time, but his downward header was expertly saved by Porto keeper Diogo Costa.

After Otavio’s dismissal following a poor challenge on Hakan Calhanoglu, Inter poured forward in search of the winner and Lukaku headed Nicolo Barella’s cross against the post before knocking the rebound past Costa.

The win ended Inter’s run of four successive first-leg defeats in Champions League knockout-stage ties and sent the home crowd into raptures as they chanted the name of Lukaku who has endured an injury-plagued campaign.

Porto host Inter in the second leg on March 14.

Alcaraz Wins Rain-Delayed Opener in Rio

RIO DE JANEIRO (Dispatches) - World number two Carlos Alcaraz overcame 556th-ranked Mateus Alves of Brazil in a rain-delayed opening match to advance to the second round of the ATP Rio Open.

Reigning Rio champion Alcaraz, who returned last week after four months out because of injury, started his title defense at the clay-court tournament.

However, he and Alves had their match interrupted by a torrential downpour with the 19-year-old Spaniard leading 6-4, 5-3.

Home-crowd favorite Alves, 22, who had pushed Alcaraz harder than expected Tuesday, looked determined to mount a comeback when play resumed on stadium court, winning the first game.

But US Open champion Alcaraz held serve in the second to take the match, 6-4, 6-4.

Alcaraz, who made his 2023 debut last week by winning his seventh career ATP title at the Argentina Open, will next face 86th-ranked Fabio Fognini of Italy Thursday in the round of 16.

“It was a complicated match, as the final result shows,” said Alcaraz, who lost the first two games.

Untroubled Swiatek Into Dubai Semis

DUBAI (Dispatches) - World number one Iga Swiatek swept past Liudmila Samsonova for the loss of just one game in the last 16 of the Dubai WTA tournament, earning praise from fellow three-time major winner Andy Murray.

The 21-year-old Pole was then handed a walkover into the semi-finals when scheduled quarter-final opponent Karolina Pliskova pulled out with an injury.

Yesterday, Swiatek triumphed 6-1, 6-0 over Samsonova to follow her opening 6-1, 6-1 win over Leylah Fernandez.

Swiatek has dropped only eight games in her last six matches, a stretch which saw her lift the Doha title last weekend.

“She is different,” tweeted men’s former world number one Murray in appreciation.

Reigning French and US Open champion Swiatek was to have faced former Dubai finalist Pliskova in Thursday’s quarter-finals but the Czech said a virus would force her withdrawal.

“After playing the finals here a few years ago and doing very well this year, it’s very disappointing for me,” tweeted Pliskova.

“But after struggling with a virus and cramps for a couple hours right after my match, I’m not able to continue.”

Pliskova had booked her last-eight spot with a 7-5, 6-7 (6/8), 6-2 victory over Ukraine’s Anhelina Kalinina.

Australian Open champion Aryna Sabalenka made it 13 wins in 13 matches in 2023 by dethroning defending champion Jelena Ostapenko 2-6, 6-1, 6-1.

“In the first set, she played unbelievable tennis and I couldn’t do anything,” world number two Sabalenka said.

“I was looking at my team asking like, ‘What can I do?’ but somehow, I turned around this game, and started playing really incredible tennis.”

Coco Gauff and Madison Keys will meet in an all-American quarter-final.

Fifth-seeded Gauff advanced when Wimbledon champion Elena Rybakina withdrew from their last 16 clash due to a lower back injury.

Keys booked her quarter-final spot with a 6-2, 6-1 win over former world number one Victoria Azarenka in just 57 minutes.



Nagelsmann Escapes Suspension After Referee Rant

LEIPZIG (Dispatches) - Bayern Munich manager Julian Nagelsmann dodged suspension but was handed a large fine today for “unsportsmanlike” comments made to referees after his side’s 3-2 loss at Borussia Moenchengladbach.

The €50,000 fine, handed down by the German FA (DFB), means Nagelsmann is free to take his place on the touchline for the top-of-the-table home clash with Union Berlin.

According to the DFB, Nagelsmann has already agreed to the fine.

The DFB opened an investigation Sunday after Nagelsmann stormed into the referee

dressings room in Gladbach after the full-time whistle on Saturday.

Aggrieved by a contentious red card decision against Dayot Upamecano — which reduced Bayern to ten men early in the game — Nagelsmann reportedly used heated language as he confronted referee Tobias Welz.

Journalists outside heard Nagelsmann say “that’s a joke, they’re taking the piss”, before leaving the room calling the officials “spineless”.

The Bayern boss later apologized and admitted he had “gone too far”, but still insisted the red card was unfair.

Welz defended his decision on Germany’s Sport1 network on Sunday morning, and said there was no bad blood between him and Nagelsmann.

Murray Advances in Doha With Marathon Win Over Zverev



DOHA (Dispatches) - Andy Murray teetered on the brink before beating Alexander Zverev in a marathon that lasted more than three hours to reach the quarter-finals of the Qatar Open.

Murray won 7-6 (7/5), 2-6, 7-5 after he was twice two points from defeat on his serve in the third set.

In his on-court interview after the victory, Murray said the crowd helped him.

“It makes a big difference for the players when we come and get a lot of energy and a great atmosphere from the crowd,” Murray said. “I obviously enjoyed playing in that atmosphere tonight.”

The British former World No. 1, will face French qualifier Alexandre Muller, who upset Dutch eighth seed Botic van de Zandschulp 6-2, 6-4.

Murray and Muller have never met.

“Not so familiar,” said Murray. “But he’s obviously had a good week this week coming through qualifying. He will have played four matches now, so obviously likes these conditions,”

“My coach will obviously watch video and stuff tonight to get a bit more familiar with his game, but it’s an opportunity for me in the quarters tomorrow.”

Top-seeded Andrey Rublev, the Doha winner in 2020, was in danger of suffering a fourth opening-match exit in five tournaments this year before fighting his way back from 2-5 in the third set to edge Dutchman Tallon Griekspoor 1-6, 6-1, 7-6 (8/6).

Griekspoor squandered three match points on his serve in the ninth game of the third set. He then saved two match points in the tie-break before Rublev won in one hour 54 minutes.

Rublev will face Jiri Lehecka, a 21-year-old Czech, who beat Finn Emil Ruusuvuori, 6-2, 7-6 (7-2).

Canadian second seed Felix Auger-Aliassime struggled against Jason Kubler’s serve in the first set but recovered to overcome the Australian 4-6, 6-1, 6-4 after two hours and 16 minutes.

Kubler had won the only previous meeting in Newport last year.

Liverpool Face Almost Impossible Job in Madrid



LONDON (Dispatches) - Virgil van Dijk admits Liverpool face an “almost impossible” task to keep their Champions League hopes alive after a 5-2 hammering in the first leg of their last-16 tie against ruthless Real Madrid.

Jurgen Klopp’s men raced into a 2-0 lead at Anfield but then conceded five times in the clash against the 14-time champions, collapsing to their heaviest loss at home in Europe.

“We have almost an impossible job in Madrid in three weeks’ time, but when the time is right, we’ll focus and we’ll give everything to represent the club as good as we can,” said defender Van Dijk.

“The only thing we can do is watch it, learn from it and make sure it doesn’t happen in the next game we play, which is Crystal Palace (on Saturday). It sounds pretty easy but it isn’t — that’s the hard reality.”

“If you look back in the last two games, we played well (beating Everton and Newcastle) and that’s something we should focus on as well and don’t be in a panic.”

Liverpool made a dream start yesterday, with Darwin Nunez and Mohamed Salah putting the home side 2-0 up within a quarter of an hour as Klopp’s side sought revenge for their defeat by Real in last season’s final in Paris.

But Vinicius Junior scored twice to make it 2-2 at half-time and Klopp’s men collapsed after the break. Eder Militao put the visitors ahead and two goals from Karim Benzema made it a rout.

“They have quality players all over the team, they can punish you and punish mistakes that you make and that’s what they did, especially in the second half,” said Netherlands captain Van Dijk.

“It’s pretty clear to see (we made) mistakes that we shouldn’t make but it happens in football. We’re not robots.”