

Vice President for Science, Technology and Knowledge-Based Economy Roozollah Dehqani Firoozabadi Said That the Knowledge-Based Companies' Exports Have Reached One Billion Dollars

# IRAN NEWS

Health Ministry Announced on Saturday That the Number of Deaths From the Coronavirus Pandemic in Iran Increased to **144,835** With **Three** More Iranians Killed by the Virus Over the Past 24 Hours

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**2 DOMESTIC**

IRGC Developing Indigenous Hypersonic Cruise Missiles



> SEE PAGE 2

**3 DOMESTIC**

Iran-India Trade Hits \$2.5b in 2022



> SEE PAGE 3

**4 INTERNATIONAL**

Ukraine President Pledges Push For Victory On War Anniversary



> SEE PAGE 4

**8 SPORTS**

Celtics Escape Pacers In Overtime



> SEE PAGE 8

## Iran Building 2,000 MW Nuclear Power Plant

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's nuclear chief says a nuclear power plant in the southwestern province of Khuzestan aims to generate 2,000 megawatts of electricity, defying decades of sanctions that have targeted the country's peaceful nuclear program.

Head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) Mohammad Eslami said that the Karun nuclear power plant in Darkhovein District in the Shadegan County of the southwestern province of Khuzestan will produce 300 megawatts of electricity in the preliminary phase.

He said the AEOI will simultaneously follow other phases with the purpose of making utmost use of the capacity made in Darkhovein District.

"Enemies tried to break our will through sanctions and did not cooperate with us regarding the construction of nuclear power plant even after many years," the Iranian nuclear chief said. However, he said, the organization developed the project by relying on domestic capabilities. In December, Eslami inaugurated the construction operation of Karun, saying the government is moving towards the production of low-cost energy and fuel and the development of nuclear power plants is on the agenda of the AEOI.

See Page 7

## Iran Likely to Deliver Missile System to Syria

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iranian and Syrian military officials have reportedly agreed on the delivery of missile systems to Damascus to boost the Arab country's air defenses amid increased Israeli air raids.

In a report, IRIB News said Iran and Syria have reached an agreement for the delivery of equipment related to air defenses and electronic warfare.

The exact detail of the agreement has not been revealed. It was clinched during a recent visit of Syria's high-ranking military officials to Iran, including Defense Minister Lieutenant General Ali Mahmoud Abbas.

After years of fighting with terrorism, "Syria needs to reconstruct the network of its air defenses and also required precision bombs for its fighter jets," the report said. "It is very likely that we will witness the supply of Iran's radars and defense missiles, such as the Khordad 15 missile system, to reinforce Syria's air defenses."

Unveiled in June 2019, the homegrown missile system is capable of detecting fighter jets and combat drones from 150 kilometers away and tracking them within a range of 120 kilometers. The system can also detect stealth targets at a distance of 85 kilometers and engage and destroy them within a range of 45 kilometers.

See Page 7

## Top Commander Warns Europe Against Testing Iran



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - A senior Iranian commander has advised Europe not to test the Islamic Republic, saying the country has intentionally capped the range of its missiles "out of respect" for the continent.

Brigadier General Amir-Ali Hajizadeh, commander of the Aerospace Division of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC), made the remarks during a televised program.

"We are now capable of targeting American aircraft carriers at a 2,000-kilometer (1242-miles) distance," he said.

"Of course, we have [voluntarily] kept the distance [that can be reached by our missiles] at 2,000 kilometers out of respect for the Europeans," he said, adding, "We hope [then] that the Europeans [too] would preserve their dignity."

Europe has done its fair share of trying to antagonize Iran by closely aligning its policies concerning the Islamic Republic with those of the United States.

Elsewhere in his remarks, the IRGC commander cautioned that "the United States' benefit lies in creating regional insecurity."

He also considered the U.S. to be the root cause of several global conflicts, including the war in Ukraine and the dispute that the West has been trying to create concerning China's sovereignty over Chinese Taipei.

Returning to the issue of regional stability, Hajizadeh noted that "the region sits on a security fault line," citing the history of the past four decades' conflicts.

"If we fail to be strong, the enemy will bring the war inside Iran," he, therefore, urged, advising, "We should be very careful in order to be able to meet the security needs of our dear nation and country."

The commander, however, hailed that the Corps had always been aiming to render the American war machine ineffective, and had, accordingly, managed to bring all of the US's regional bases within the range of its defensive firepower.

Washington's bases in the region "have [thus] turned into the Americans' weak spot," he said, adding that the IRGC can strike the US outposts "whenever the need arises."

Hajizadeh, meanwhile, addressed the issue of Iran's growing missile power, enumerating the features of the country's hypersonic missile that was manufactured late last year, and announcing a new cruise missile's inclusion in the list of the IRGC's military hardware.

The hypersonic missile can travel at Mach 12-13 and is capable of exoatmospheric maneuvering, he remarked, saying the projectile is outfitted with an engine that starts within 500 kilometers (310 miles) or a shorter distance of the target's location to enable its maneuverability.

The projectile cannot be destroyed by any of the enemy's anti-missile systems, he said, adding, "I express confidently that the enemies will not be capable of developing a similar missile over many upcoming decades."

Hajizadeh announced "operationalization" of a new long-range cruise missile, codenamed Paveh, that can travel as far as 1,650 kilometers (1,025 miles).

"Our cruise missile with a range of 1,650 kilometers has been added to the missile arsenal of the Islamic Republic of Iran," he said.

He also stated that the country had managed to reduce the weight of its long-range missiles to one-fourth and the time needed for their preparation to a sixth.

## Israel Endorses Plan to Build 4,000 New Settler Units in West Bank, al-Quds

BEIRUT (Dispatches) - Israeli authorities have approved plans for the construction of thousands of new settler units in the occupied West Bank and al-Quds, defying international outcry over illegal settlement expansion and land grab activities in the occupied Palestinian territories.

The Palestinian Information Center reported that the so-called Israeli Supreme Planning and Building Council has given the green light for plans to build 4,000 units, only a few days after it endorsed another 3,000 units.

According to Israeli newspaper Haaretz, the plans for the construction of the 7,287 settlement units were approved within two days. It is the largest number of settler units that has been endorsed since 2021, the paper added.

The settlements in which the new settler units will be built are Ma'ale Adumim, Kokhav Ya'akov, Giv'at Ze'ev, Ma'ale Amos, and Eliezer. Spokesman for the United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres said the UN chief is deeply worried about the Israeli regime's announcement of plans to construct over 7,000 new settler units, stating that their implementation would cut the connection between the northern and southern sectors of the occupied West Bank.

"Settlements have no legal validity and constitute a flagrant violation of international law and United Nations resolutions. They further entrench Israel's military occupation of the Palestinian territory and undermine the possibility of a viable and contiguous Palestinian State as part of a negotiated two-state solution," Stéphane Dujarric said during a daily press briefing on Friday.

See Page 7

## ViewPoint U.S. the Real Warmonger

By: Hamid Reza Naghashian

On Thursday, Russia and Ukraine marked their first anniversary of their war with an eye on an end to the war but it seems the U.S. is the only country which does not like this war to end through different moves and decisions which enrage the Russians to continue war and also encourage Ukrainians not to start peace talks for ending the war.

On the anniversary of the war, the United Nations General Assembly voted in favor of a resolution that demands Russia withdraw its troops from Ukraine.

The United Nations General Assembly in the meeting asked Russia to withdraw its troops from Ukraine and prioritize on finding a diplomatic solution to the crisis in the former Soviet state as the U.S. slapped fresh sanctions on Moscow.

A two-thirds majority of the UN body, who met for a special session of the UN General Assembly on Thursday, voted -- 141 for and 7 against while the rest, including heavyweights China and India, chose abstention -- in favor of a resolution that demanded Russian troops' withdrawal from Ukraine.

The resolution called for Russia to "immediately, completely and unconditionally" pull out its forces from Ukraine, and shift the Russian government's focus on diplomatic means to establish a lasting peace between Moscow and Kiev.

The non-binding resolution, which was set forth by Germany, carries symbolic weight by signifying Russia's continued isolation on the world stage ahead of Friday's first anniversary of Russia's February 24, 2022 start of a special military operation in pro-Russia speaking regions of eastern Ukraine with the aim of de-Nazifying the Donbas and other pro-Moscow areas in the former Soviet country.

Iran's ambassador and permanent representative to the United Nations (UN) Amir Saeed Iravani addressing the meeting 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.

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 Becomes World 11th Largest Automaker in 2022

TEHRAN (MNA) - European Automobile Manufacturers' Association (ACEA), in its latest annual report, has ranked Iran as the world's 11th largest automaker in 2022, IRIB reported.

According to the ACEA report, Iran's position among the world's top automakers has improved by eight places in 2022 compared to the previous year. The Islamic Republic was ranked 19th in the ACEA list of the world's top automakers in 2021.

Based on the mentioned report, Iranian automakers managed to manufacture 1,085,859 vehicles in 2022 to register a 10.8-percent growth compared to 979,969 cars in 2021.

Based on the ACEA data, in 2022, more than 68 million cars were produced worldwide, indicating a 7.9 percent growth compared to 2021. About 63,200,000 cars were produced in the world in 2021.

See Page 7

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## Iran Envoy to Int'l Maritime Organization Dies in London

TEHRAN (IFP) - The Iranian Embassy in the UK says Tehran's envoy to the International Maritime Organization (IMO) passed away in London.

Mandana Mansourian died at a hospital following a long period of battling an illness, said the Embassy.

Mansourian had represented Iran at the UK-based organization for seven years and during her successful term, she served as the deputy of the technical committee of IMO for two years. The Embassy offered condolences to her family and colleagues.

## IRGC Developing Indigenous Hypersonic Cruise Missiles

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The chief commander of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) says military experts at his force are now developing and manufacturing hypersonic cruise missiles that are capable of intercepting and tracking satellites with radars on the ground.

"Since a cruise missile flies the major portion of its flight path on a low-altitude trajectory, it is no different from a fixed-wing aircraft which cannot travel at a high velocity. We are, therefore, developing cruise missiles capable of travelling at supersonic or hypersonic speeds. The process throughout which a hypersonic ballistic missile is guided to strike a moving target in the sea is a fairly complicated one, the likes of which have never been seen before," General Hossein Salami said at a ceremony in Tehran on Saturday.

"Today, we can intercept satellites with the help of radars positioned on the ground. Such great advances have been made by the Iranian youth. Young Iranian military forces can now hit any moving ship from a distance of thousands of kilometers away, and can even define the exact point of strike, so that the crew of the target ship would remain unharmed," he added.

The IRGC chief said the Americans are aggressively seeking to win the hearts and minds of the Iranian nation, and cherish it as a strategic dream.

"They have opted for the campaign after they noticed they could not emerge



victorious militarily. They have utilized all their strategic means against us. Firstly, they employed [deposed Iraqi dictator] Saddam Hussein and his allies. Later on, they spread the virus of Takfiri outfits in Muslim countries in order to bring them under their control. The plots were, however, thwarted due to endeavors made by [the iconic anti-terror commander, Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani. They subsequently embarked on an economic war," Salami said.

He pointed to the expansion of Iran's domain of action, saying the Islamic Republic is now present on the coasts of the Mediterranean Sea and the Red Sea and has "decomposed the enemy".

"The Islamic Revolution has kicked the enemy out of its strategic shelter and forced it into operational expansion," Salami stated, adding that the enemy suffers a lack of initiative.

He said the only way to deal with the arrogant powers is by means of the "language of force", because the enemy is unfamiliar with the power of logic, while it accepts the logic of power.

## IRGC Source of Peace, Security in Iran

TEHRAN (IP) - Majlis Speaker said that the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) is a source of encouragement for oppressed people all over the world. Speaking on the open session of the Parliament, Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf, congratulated the birth anniversary of Imam Hussain (PBUH) and said: "The IRGC, not only in the form of a military force but also as a huge social organization, without distinguishing between individuals, has rushed to help people.

He stated the successes of the committed IRGC guards have provoked the anger of the enemies of Iran and the Islamic Ummah and turned the schemes and plots of the rulers back to themselves.

He added that the IRGC forces have always sacrificed their lives and property to defend the ideals of the resistance axis.

We are proud of the IRGC forces and appreciate the bravery and selflessness of each one of them.

## IME Posts Higher Records For Weekly Trade

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Iran Mercantile Exchange (IME) last week witnessed trade of 1,970,854 tons of commodities and 10,000 vehicles with a total trading value of more than \$836m, posting growths of 4.56% in value of trades compared with the week before that.

According to a report by the IME's International Affairs and PR, the exchange saw on its metals and minerals trading floor trade of 1,509,259 tons of commodities worth more than \$551m.

On this floor the IME sold 1,080,744 tons of cement, 293,472 tons of steel, 88,000 tons of sponge iron, 29,000 tons of iron ore, 9,000 tons of copper, 8,225 tons of aluminum, 600 tons of zinc, 210 tons of molybdenum concentrate, 48 tons of precious metals concentrate, 15 kg of gold bars and 10,000 vehicles.

Furthermore, the IME witnessed on both domestic and export rings of its oil and petrochemical trading floor 435,585 tons of commodities valued at more than \$278m.

Commodities traded on this floor included 151,634 tons of bitumen, 112,555 tons of polymeric products, 87,000 tons of vacuum bottom, 41,220 tons of chemicals, 25,000 tons of lube cut, 15,800 tons of sulfur, 3,096 tons of base oil, 500 tons of petroleum products, 200 tons of insulation and 190 tons of feedstocks.

The IME also traded within the same week 29,515 tons of commodities on its side market.



## President Honors IRGC, General Soleimani



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - President Ebrahim Raisi has hailed the "brilliant record" of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) in the fight against terrorism, saying late commander Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani has become the hero of anti-terror battle in the region.

Marking the National Guards Day in a meeting with a number of IRGC forces in West Azerbaijan Province on Friday, Raisi said the Iranian forces have always created security and foiled the enemies' evil acts.

He added that enemies are fearful of the IRGC forces because they have always safeguarded divine values, the Iranian people, and the country.

Enemies have wrongly thought that they would be able to cause fear among the Iranian people and forces by assassinating the country's forces and commanders, Raisi said.

He noted that the IRGC forces are playing a role across the country while countries in the region owe their security to the bravery of the IRGC.

"The [global] arrogance has created Daesh and terrorist groups but the IRGC's presence leads to security," the Iranian president added.

"General Soleimani is the hero of the fight against terrorism in the region and battle against the insurgents and those who foment insecurity," he argued.

General Soleimani, Commander of the IRGC Quds Force, Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, the second-in-command of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Units (PMU), and their companions were assassinated in a US drone strike authorized by former US president Donald Trump near Baghdad International Airport on January 3, 2020.

Both commanders were highly revered across the Middle East because of their key role in fighting the Daesh Takfiri terrorist group in the region, particularly in Iraq and Syria.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Raisi said enemies have sustained numerous defeats from Iran in various sectors and "they themselves have announced it."

Pointing to the enemies' miscalculations in dealing with the Islamic establishment, the president emphasized that anyone who seeks to conduct an act of evil against the country or threaten it would be defeated.

## West Should Look in Mirror Before Accusing Iran

TEHRAN (MNA) - Defense cooperation between Russia and Iran is not directed against any other country, and the West should look in the mirror before hurling accusations against the Islamic Republic, Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman said.

"Military and defense ties between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Russian Federation exist in the framework of the common interests of the two countries and are not directed against any third state. The military and defense ties between Iran and Russia precede the start of the military crisis in Ukraine," Nasser Kanaani said in an interview with Sputnik Persian on Friday.

Kanaani dismissed claims made by Western officials and media that Iran is supporting Russia militarily in Ukraine as baseless "propaganda," saying anyone making such accusations should take a look at the billions in military support their own countries are sending.

"Countries that export tens of billions worth of weapons to one side in the conflict are not helping to end the conflict. Their actions do not support a political solution," the spokesman noted, pointing to Tehran's efforts to keep up contacts with both Russia and Ukraine in the interest of finding a political solution to the crisis.

U.S. and NATO officials and media have spent months alleging that Iran has been providing Russia with hundreds of drones for its military operation in Ukraine. Russian and Iranian officials have vocally dismissed these allegations, accusing Western countries of using them to justify their own illegal arms supplies to Kyiv.

Russia and Iran have "great, shared and complementary economic capacities," and their ever-expanding cooperation "is based on the common interests of the two nations in the economic, commercial, industrial, energy and transportation fields, as well as banking and finance," Kanaani said.

## Deputy FM Goes to Columbia for Talks on Bilateral Ties

TEHRAN (MNA) - Deputy Foreign Minister for Political Affairs Ali Bagheri Kani arrived in Bogota, the capital city of Colombia to discuss developing bilateral cooperation.

Bagheri Kani arrived in Bogota at the start of his regional tour to Latin America.

During his trip, he met with his Colombian counterpart and the two sides discussed and exchanged views on a variety of issues on the agenda of bilateral relations, including the consolidation of political cooperation,



trade development, cooperation in science and technology, culture, tourism and other issues of mutual interest.

Also, in the meeting, the deputy foreign ministers also discussed the positions of the two countries on international issues and the latest status of the nuclear

talks between Iran and the world powers.

In Bogota, Bagheri met with a number of other Colombian officials, including the Minister of Agriculture, and discussed the expansion of bilateral cooperation.

## Turkey Hails Iran's Aids to Earthquake Victims

MASHHAD (IRNA) - The Turkish consul general in Mashhad appreciated the efforts made by the Islamic Republic of Iran to rush to help the victims of the recent earthquake in his country.

On Saturday, Fatih Topcu opened a condolence book to pay homage to the victims of the recent powerful quake in that country.

Yaghub Ali Nazari, the governor-general of Khorasan Razavi Province, signed the condolence book and expressed his sympathy to the people and the government of Turkey on the tragic incident.

In the meeting with Nazari, Topcu said that this incident in Turkey is a great pain that cannot be described in words and praised the solidarity of countries to overcome these conditions.

The governor of Khorasan Razavi Province too in the meeting expressed his condolences on the occasion and death of a number of Turkish people.

Nazari in his remarks announced Iran's readiness for any cooperation with Turkiye.

## There Was Sinophobia in Iran Under Ex-Administration

TEHRAN (PressTV) - An Iranian lawmaker accuses the previous administration of "Sinophobia," saying it had distanced itself from the Eastern bloc in favor of ties with the West.

Ebrahim Rezaei, a member of the Iranian Parliament's National Security and Foreign Policy Commission, said the recent visit by President Ebrahim Raisi to China was a "prelude to normalization of ties" with the country.

He said China was an important country in our country's foreign policy. Raisi's trip, Rezaei added, will play a great role in the promotion of relations with China. "It is expected that we will see the improvement of relations with China in the future. God willing, the level of exports of oil and non-oil products to China will also see a boost," he said. The lawmaker elaborated on possible fields of cooperation with China.

"Our country is a good, cheap and safe route for the transit of Chinese goods to Europe and parts of Asia," he said.

"The Chinese can be our oil customers and help us bypass the sanctions and supply some of the commodities we need."

He said China can invest in Iran's transportation and energy sectors, adding, "We should welcome Chinese investment in our country."

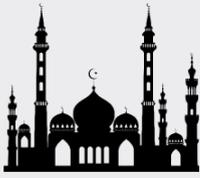
## Capacity of ECO, Shanghai Organizations Usable for Developing Petrochem Exports

TEHRAN (Shana) - The head of international affairs of the National Petrochemical Company (NPC) said the capacities of international organizations such as ECO and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization could be tapped for the development of Iran's petrochemical exports.

Hossein Alimorad underlined the growth of non-oil exports and the identification of new markets for petrochemical products in our country with the cooperation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, touching on the two-day visit of the executives and experts of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Asalouyeh region, southern Iran: "The visit of the executives and experts of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Asalouyeh region made the country's diplomacy familiar with the activities and achievements of the oil industry, especially the petrochemical industry as a value-creating sector."

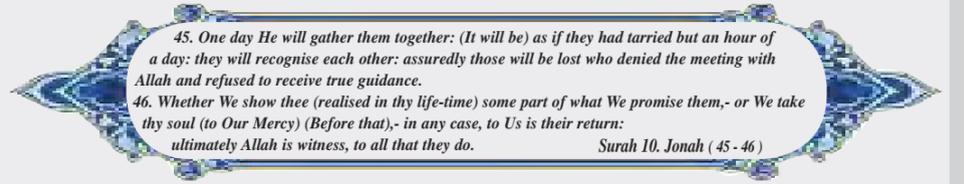
Referring to the need to remove obstacles for the export of petrochemical products, he said: "Iran's petrochemical industry is on the path of balanced development, and for this purpose, there are favorable capacities for the growth of exports, and the cooperation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs will be very effective in facilitating exports."

NPC's head of international affairs added: "Face-to-face negotiations with the CEOs of petrochemical companies by the foreign policy custodians of the country, along with the managers of NPC as a supporter of the country's petrochemical industry, was a good opportunity to remove some bottlenecks in production or export and find out ways to overcome them."



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	12:17
■ Evening (Maghreb)	18:14
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	05:13
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	06:37



# Iran-India Trade Hits \$2.5b in 2022

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

**TEHRAN – The trade between Iran and India with 48% growth reached \$2.5b and India's imports of Iranian oil products became four fold.**



According to the data released by the Indian Ministry of Commerce, the total trade volume of Iran and India in 2022 was \$2.5b. So the trade volume between the two countries enjoyed 48% growth in 2022 comparing to the preceding year which was \$1.693b.

India's exports to Iran from January to December of 2022 has faced 44% growth and hit \$1.847b while the figure was \$1.284b in 2021.

Meanwhile at the same time India's imports from Iran in 2022 faced 60% growth and reached \$653m while the figure was \$409m in 2021.

According to this report, Rice has been the major export of India to Iran as rice accounted for 59% of the total export of India to Iran. India's rice export to Iran in 2022 witnessed 52% growth and jumped from \$719m to \$1.098b. Tea and sugar were the other major exports of India to Iran.

As reported, petroleum products have been the major goods imported by India

from Iran in the said months.

According to the mentioned data, the value of trade between Iran and India reached \$2.5 billion in 2022, rising 48 percent from \$1.693 billion in 2021.

In late May 2022, the Iranian ambassador to India said that Iran and India are trying to diversify the channels of payments to expand bilateral trade.

In an exclusive interview with Financial Express Online, Ali Chegeni said, "We are trying to diversify the channels of payments and accordingly wish to extend and expand an already existing mechanism in order to cover all of the goods and services including all of the non-oil goods and to achieve this".

During the past two years, because of Covid restrictions, we pursue the issue via virtual dialogues and currently, our officials are following the matter through the exchange of delegations, the envoy stated at the time.

## IDRO, SATBA Sign MoU on Sustainable Reducing Electricity Consumption in Industry

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Industrial Development and Renovation Organization of Iran (ISRO) and Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Organization (SATBA) signed a MoU on cooperation in coordination and synergy for optimizing, improving productivity and reducing energy-intensive in the industry sector.



According to the reports, the MoU which was signed between deputies of industry and energy ministers is aimed at sustainable reduction of at least 1000 megawatts of electricity consumption in the industry sector.

Creating requires grounds for interaction and coordination between producers, investments and applicants for implementing optimization projects, improving productivity and reducing energy-intensive consumption with priority on renovating and optimizing energy-intensive industrial electro motors, preparing technical and economic justification reports as well cooperation in implementing the national award of productivity award for managers in industries are of the other aims of this MoU.

In the ceremony, Head of IDRO Mr. Ali Nabavi said that last year industries and mines accounted for 36% of the total electricity consumption in the country that two-thirds of it was consumed by the electro motors and electro motors in different industries is one of the fields where saving electricity can happen.

He added that to save and reduce the high volume of electricity consumption and to improve productivity in the industry, replacement and upgrading the existing old electro motors should be put on the agenda.

Nabavi went on to say that cement, petrochemical, steel, textile, aluminum, sugar and shipbuilding are seven top electricity-intensive industries that with replacing the old electro motors with new ones in those industries, electricity equal to electricity produced by a 1000-megawatt power plant will be saved.

Then Head of SATBA Mahmoud Kamani said that since the beginning of the current government, a MoU was signed between the industry ministry with energy ministry for the 10,000-megawatt power plant and recent months some items in the field of renewable energies have been added to the list.

He added that so far 2,300 megawatts of power plant have been under construction by the industrial and mining units.

## Petchems, Refineries Offering Hard Currency Earnings on ICE

TEHRAN (Shana) – Oil Minister Javad Owji said all foreign currency obtained from the export of petrochemical and refining companies will be offered in the Iran Center of Exchange (ICE).



Addressing a special meeting attended by executives of major petrochemical and refining holdings in the Oil Ministry, Owji emphasized the importance of the full implementation of the government's foreign exchange policies, and stated that all government bodies are obliged to support the new package of the government's foreign exchange policies and implement them strictly.

Pointing out that a large part of the export currency is actually the currency from petrochemical and petroleum products, he added: "All the hard currency from the export of petrochemical and refining companies will be offered in the ICE."

The Oil Minister stated: "From now on, these companies and holdings are obliged to supply export earnings in the Central Bank's currency exchange system, and they are expected to perform well in line with the government's macro foreign exchange policies."

# Chinese Seek Broadening Ties With Iran

TEHRAN – Head of Institute for International Energy Studies

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

tension with the West.

believes the tie between Iran and China is strengthening, adding that the Chinese despite sanctions against Iran have always maintained their ties with Iran.

Mohammad Sadeq Jokar said that the Chinese believe that the West is entering the challenge stage with them and the obvious sign for this challenge is seen in the recent U.S.

National Security Document which was issued in October 2022 and U.S. President Joe Biden considered China and Russia as threats to his strategy.

He added that two years ago the U.S. Administration increased the ground for enmities with China with transfer of technology to Taiwan.

Jokar also noted that China has followed two key factors in its interaction with Iran since the past and one is the risk of cooperation with Iran is lowered in its signing international agreements with Ira in order to cooperate with Tehran without Western pressures or to increase risk of its cooperation with the West. He added that it seems China is at the critical point of



the current government tries to show the Chinese that this approach will not change and even in case of the JCPOA revival, Iran will not leave the Chinese.

He then said that China is keen to produce its products in its target countries to avoid possible future restrictions from the West on Chinese goods.

He added that if China has joint production in the target country, the target country will be unable to levy tariff on imports because the country is involved in the production.

Jokar went on to say that China is keen to broaden ties with Iran and it seems this time the cooperation is serious under the current government in Iran.

## NIDC Digs 93 Oil, Gas Wells in 11 Months

TEHRAN (MNA) - National Iranian Drilling Company (NIDC) dug and completed the digging operations of 93 oil and gas wells during the first 11 months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21, 2022-February 19, 2023), an official with the company said.

According to Masoud Afshar, the deputy head of NIDC for drilling operations, the drilled wells consisted of 14 development, five exploratory, and 74 workover ones, Shana reported.

The official stated that during the mentioned time span NIDC managed to dig 22 wells more than the figure for the previous year's same period.

As reported, 72 of the drilled wells were in the operational zone of the National Iranian South Oil Company (NISOC), eight wells were drilled in the fields under the supervision of the Iranian Offshore Oil Company (IOOC), seven in the fields under the operation of Petroleum Engineering and Development Company (PEDEC), four in the operational zone of the drilling management department of the National Iranian Oil company (NIOC) and two wells were dug in fields developed by private contractors.

Since the beginning of this year, the drilling area of the wells has reached 63,486 meters, he said and added that 19 drilling rigs are being relocated to the operational positions.

NIDC owns 70 light, heavy, and super-heavy drilling rigs, including 67 onshore drilling rigs and three offshore rigs, of which 62 were active in the first 11 months of the current year.

## Over 2.6m Tons of Steel Products Exported in 10 Months

TEHRAN (MNA) - As announced by Iranian Steel Producers Association (ISPA), 2.685 million tons of steel products were exported in the first ten months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21, 2022-January 20, 2023).

Based on the ISPA data, the 10-month steel products export indicates two percent fall from the figure for the same period of time in the past year, which was 2.727 million tons.

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

world's top producers.

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

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

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

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

## Iran Launches Domestic mRNA-Based COVID Vaccine Human Trial

TEHRAN (MNA) – Iran has launched the human trial of its first homegrown coronavirus vaccine developed and manufactured on the basis of the breakthrough messenger ribonucleic acid (mRNA) technology.

The Islamic Republic had already unveiled at least five other COVID-19 vaccines produced domestically based on a recombinant protein.

A volunteer received a dose of the new vaccine, dubbed CORENAPCIN and developed by Tehran-based and knowledge-based company ReNAP Group, during a Saturday ceremony attended by the head of ReNAP Group Dr. Vahid Khoddami, the director of the biotechnology department, at the Iranian Vice Presidency for Science and Technology Dr. Mostafa Qanei and other Iranian health officials.

Messenger RNA is a type of RNA that is necessary for protein production. In cells, mRNA uses the information in genes to create a blueprint for making proteins. Once cells finish making a protein, they quickly break down the mRNA. mRNA from vaccines does not enter the nucleus and does not alter DNA, Press TV reported.

Antibodies help protect the body against infection by recognizing individual viruses or other pathogens, attaching to them, and marking the pathogens for destruction.

Once produced, antibodies remain in the body, even after the body has rid itself of the pathogen, so that the immune system can quickly respond if exposed again.

If a person is exposed to a virus after receiving mRNA vaccination for it, antibodies can quickly recognize it, attach to it, and mark it for destruction before it can cause serious illness. Iran is reportedly the sixth country in the world and the first country in West Asia to acquire the ability to produce the coronavirus vaccine.

## Golgothar Co Wins National Excellence Award

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Golgothar Mining and Industrial Company won the crystal statue for its performance in the 20th National Award of Organizational Excellence which was held at the Industrial Management Institute.



According to the report, the jury of the event after evaluating the performance of Golgothar Mining and Industrial Company in the last fiscal year awarded it with the crystal statue in the manufacture and production category of the event.

The CEO of the company Mr. Mohammad Mahyapoor received the award for this achievement in the presence of the Head of IDRO.

Golgothar Mining and Industrial Company in last edition of the event last year could win the four-star certificate and this is another accolade and honor for the company.

The National Award for Organizational Excellence is held annually by the Industrial Management Institute and it is aimed at improving competition climate and organizational excellence of the companies.

In this edition 55 companies and organizations were qualified for competition for the award and 2 organizations won the golden statue and 17 more won crystal statues and 13 organizations also received letters of appreciation.

Companies participated in this event in the fields of mining and steel, auto making, rail transportation, commercial and investment, insurance, IT, engineering services, oil, gas and petrochemical and municipality.

## FATF Adds South Africa, Nigeria to Grey List

PARIS (Dispatches) - International financial crime watchdog the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) said it was adding South Africa and Nigeria to its so-called "grey list" of countries under special scrutiny to implement standards to prevent money laundering and terrorism financing.

The FATF is an inter-governmental organisation that underpins the fight against money laundering and terrorism financing by setting global standards and checking if countries respect them.

Paris-based FATF said the two countries were added to its list following a review. Being added to the grey list is a reputational setback for the South African government, which has been trying to address shortcomings identified by the FATF.



## FATF Suspends Russia's Membership Over Ukraine War

PARIS (Dispatches) - Global financial crime watchdog Financial Action Task Force (FATF) suspended Russia's membership, saying Moscow's war in Ukraine violated the organization's principles.

"The Russian Federation's actions unacceptably run counter to the FATF core principles aiming to promote security, safety, and the integrity of the global financial system", the Paris-based group said in a statement.

Ukraine over the past year made repeated calls to the group to exclude Russia altogether.

But while Russia has now been suspended, it remains a member. "The Russian Federation remains accountable for its obligation to implement the FATF Standards. The Russian Federation must continue to meet its financial obligations," the FATF said.



## Ukraine President Pledges Push For Victory on War Anniversary



KYIV (Dispatches) - Ukraine's president pledged to push for victory in 2023 as he and other Ukrainians marked the somber anniversary of the Russian invasion that he called "the longest day of our lives."

As morning broke on a day of commemorations and reflection, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy struck a tone of grim defiance and used the Feb. 24 anniversary to congratulate Ukrainians on their resilience in the face of Europe's biggest and deadliest war since World War II. He said they had proven themselves to be invincible in what he called "a year of pain, sorrow, faith and unity."

"We survived the first day of the full-scale war. We didn't know what tomorrow would bring, but we clearly understood that for each tomorrow, you need to fight. And we fought," he said in an early morning video address. It was "the longest day of our lives. The hardest day of our modern history. We woke up early and haven't fallen asleep since," he said.

Ukrainians attended memorials, held vigils and other remembrances for their tens of thousands of dead — a toll growing all the time as fighting rages in eastern Ukraine in particular. Although Friday marked the anniversary of the full-scale invasion, combat between Russian-backed forces and Ukrainian troops has raged in the country's east since 2014. New video from there shot with a drone for The Associated Press showed how the town of Marinka has been razed, along with others.

Lining up in the capital, Kyiv, to buy anniversary commemorative postage stamps, Tetiana Klimkova said that a year into the invasion, she's been unable to shake "the feeling that your heart is constantly falling, it is falling and hurting."

Still, "this day has become a symbol for me that we have survived for a whole year and will continue to live," she said. "On this day, our children and grandchildren will remember how strong Ukrainians are mentally, physically, and spiritually."

But peace is nowhere in sight. China called for a cease-fire — an idea previously rejected by Ukraine for fear it would allow Russia to regroup militarily after bruising battlefield setbacks.

A 12-point paper issued Friday by China's Foreign Ministry also urged the end of Western sanctions that are squeezing Russia's economy.

That suggestion also looks like a non-starter, given that Western nations are working to further tighten the sanctions noose, not loosen it. The U.K. government imposed more sanctions Friday on firms supplying military equipment to Moscow and said it would bar exports to Russia of aircraft parts and other components.

Ukraine also is readying another military push to roll back Russian forces — with weaponry that has been pouring in from the West.

"Ukraine is entering a new period, with a new task — to win," Ukrainian Defense Minister Oleksiy Reznikov said on Facebook.

"It will not be easy. But we will manage," he said. "There is rage and a desire to avenge the fallen."

Mercifully, air raid alarms didn't sound overnight in Kyiv and the morning started quietly, allaying concerns that Russia might unleash another barrage of missiles to pile yet more sadness on Ukraine on the date of the anniversary.

## North Korea Test-Fires Cruise Missiles To Demonstrate Nuclear Counterattack

SEOUL (Dispatches) - North Korea test-fired four strategic cruise missiles during a drill designed to demonstrate its ability to conduct a nuclear counterattack against hostile forces, its state media said.

The exercise on Thursday involved an apparently operational strategic cruise missile unit of the Korean People's Army, which fired the four "Hwasal-2" missiles in the area of Kim Chaek City, North Hamgyong Province, towards the sea off the east coast of the Korean Peninsula, state news agency KCNA said.

Other units conducted firepower training at hardened sites without live firing, it added. The four strategic cruise missiles hit a preset target after travelling the "2,000km-long (1,243 mile) elliptical and eight-shaped flight orbits for 10,208 seconds to 10,224 seconds," the report said.

The drill demonstrated "the war posture of the DPRK nuclear combat force bolstering up in every way its deadly nuclear counterattack capability against the hostile forces," KCNA said, using the initials of North Korea's official name, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. The missile launches were not announced by South Korea or Japan, which are often the first to detect and publicly report such launches.

South Korea's defense ministry said the launch was monitored but there were "differences" between what it and the United States detected and the North's statement, without elaborating.

The launch came as U.S. and South Korean officials took part in a tabletop, or simulated, exercise that focused on the possibility of North Korea using a nuclear weapon. In a separate dispatch, Pyongyang's foreign ministry criticised Washington and its allies for calling a meeting of the UN Security Council over its spate of recent missile tests.

North Korea has accused the United Nations has been "unfair" on its military activities while keeping mum about U.S. and South Korean joint military exercises. Kwon Jong Gun, the ministry's director general for U.S. affairs, reiterated North Korea would consider "strong countermeasures" if the United Nations continues to serve as a "U.S. tool to pressure" Pyongyang.

Even as the world population has crossed eight billion, progress on sustainable development goals seems to be slowing down. We need to collectively work to strengthen multilateral development banks for meeting global challenges like climate change and high debt levels," he said.

The remarks echoed calls by others for the World Bank to boost lending and widen its remit beyond tackling poverty, although this has raised concerns that it could lose its top-notch credit rating. US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said on Thursday in Bengaluru it was "critical that they integrate work on global challenges into their core mission to sustain progress on these priorities".

World Bank chief David Malpass earlier this month said he was stepping down a year early and on Thursday Washington nominated Indian-American former Mastercard CEO Ajay Banga as his successor.

Nominated by former US president Donald Trump, Malpass came under fire last year after he refused multiple times to say if he believed man-made emissions contributed to global warming. It was unclear if delegates in Bengaluru would manage to agree a joint statement, in particular because of differences over the Ukraine war. The last three meetings have failed to do so.

The International Monetary Fund said ahead of the meeting that around 15 percent of low-income countries are in debt distress and an additional 45 percent are at high risk.

## Modi Calls for World Bank Reform at G20 Finance Meet

BENGALURU (Dispatches) - Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi added his voice to calls for the reform of global lenders such as the World Bank, as G20 finance ministers and central bank heads met.

The talks in Bengaluru were expected to focus on the continuing damaging effects of the Covid pandemic and the Ukraine war, as well as debt relief for poorer nations reeling from high food and fuel prices.

"Trust in international financial institutions has eroded. This is partly because they have been slow to reform themselves," Modi said by video link as the two-day gathering began.

"Even as the world population has crossed eight billion, progress on sustainable development goals seems to be slowing down. We need to collectively work to strengthen multilateral development banks for meeting global challenges like climate change and high debt levels," he said.

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## Hungary Says More Talks Needed on Finland, Sweden NATO Bids

BUDAPEST (Dispatches) - Hungary's Prime Minister Viktor Orban said that more talks between parliamentary groups were needed before lawmakers vote on the ratification of Finland and Sweden's NATO membership bids which they will begin debating next Wednesday.

Speaking on public radio, Orban said he had asked lawmakers of his nationalist Fidesz party to support their bid, adding however that some deputies were "not very enthusiastic" about the expansion and sought further discussions on the matter.

The parliaments of all 30 members of NATO have to ratify any membership bids for the alliance. Hungary's lawmakers are scheduled to vote on the matter on March 6, according to the parliament's agenda published online.

Orban added that in the end, it should be made clear that Hungary supports Finland and Sweden's NATO membership, but said Turkey's concerns regarding Sweden's entry should also be heard, otherwise the expansion effort could fail.

"Regarding Turkey, they are also our allies, and therefore we need to hear their voice," Orban said.

Ankara says Stockholm has harbored what Ankara calls members of terrorist groups. Turkey recently indicated it would approve only Finland for NATO membership, while Hungary says it has been delayed by a flurry of legislation required to unlock European Union funds.

"We need to pay attention to Turkey as in the end,

the entire process will stall. Unless there is a solution to Turkey's problem, then the expansion could fail."

German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock last week called on Turkey and Hungary to allow Finland and Sweden to join NATO, stating she expects all NATO members to ratify their bids to join the defence alliance "without further delay".

Orban said some ruling party lawmakers were concerned over NATO's shared border with Russia extending by over 1,000 kms (620 miles), pointing to potential geopolitical risks arising from Finland's entry.

Other lawmakers took issue with what Orban described as Finland and Sweden spreading "outright lies" about the health of democracy and the rule of law in Hungary.

He added however that Hungary, dominated by Moscow for decades before the collapse of communism, had a "moral obligation" to support the bid of the Nordic countries.

Earlier this week, Hungary's European Union funds negotiator flagged a further possible delay in access to billions of euros of recovery money, saying ironing out remaining issues with Brussels over democratic reforms could last until the summer.

The bloc has suspended any payments until Budapest's nationalist government implements reforms to improve judicial independence and tackle corruption.



## Medvedev Floats Idea of Pushing Back Poland's Borders

LONDON (Dispatches) - Former Russian president Dmitry Medvedev said that the only way for Moscow to ensure a lasting peace with Ukraine was to push back the borders of hostile states as far as possible, even if that meant the frontiers of NATO member Poland.

Medvedev, who is now deputy chairman of Russia's Security Council, made the comments in a message on his Telegram account exactly a year after Russia sent tens of thousands of troops into Ukraine in what it called a "special military operation" to protect Russian speakers and ensure its own security.

Ukraine says it is defending itself from an unprovoked colonial-style war of aggression and has vowed to retake all of its own territory by force, including Crimea, which Russia annexed in 2014.

Medvedev, an ally of President Vladimir Putin, forecast on Friday that Russia would be victorious and that some kind of loose agreement would eventually end the fighting.

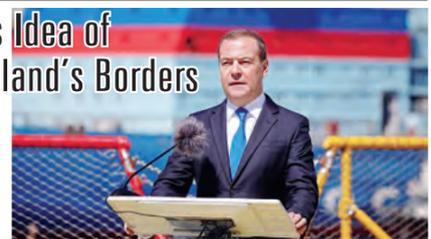
"Victory will be achieved. We all want it to happen as soon as possible. And that day will come," said Medvedev. He predicted that tough negotiations with Ukraine and the West would follow that would culminate in "some kind of agreement."

But he said that deal would lack what he called "fundamental agreements on real borders" and not amount to an over-arching European security pact, making it vital for Russia to extend its own borders now.

"That is why it is so important to achieve all the goals of the special military operation. To push back the borders that threaten our country as far as possible, even if they are the borders of Poland," said Medvedev.

Poland shares long eastern borders with Ukraine and with Russia's ally Belarus, and a frontier of some 200 km (125 miles) in its northeastern corner with the Russian exclave of Kaliningrad.

Any encroachment on Poland's borders would bring Russia for the first time into direct conflict with NATO. U.S. President Joe Biden pledged in a speech in Warsaw this week to defend "every inch" of NATO territory if it was attacked.



## Chronic Pain Increases The Risk of Dementia

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - People experiencing chronic pain at multiple body locations are at higher risk of dementia and faster cognitive decline, a new study finds.

About 50 million United States adults suffer from chronic pain. It can limit their quality of life and may be difficult to manage, depending on the issue. Chronic pain has many causes, including autoimmune diseases, chronic conditions, and past injuries.

Nearly half of chronic pain patients experience multisite chronic pain (MCP), defined as pain at multiple anatomical locations. Researchers at the Institute of Psychology at the Chinese Academy of Sciences analyzed longitudinal data of 354,943 people from the United Kingdom biobank to learn more about its impact on cognitive functioning.

The study, published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, discovered that chronic pain patients with MPC are at greater risk of dementia than pain-free individuals and those experiencing chronic pain at a single site (SCP). In addition, people with chronic pain in multiple body parts experience broader and faster cognitive decline, including memory, executive function, learning, and attention.

According to the researchers, the risk of neurocognitive abnormality increases with each additional pain site and is mediated by atrophy in



the hippocampus, the part of the brain responsible for memory, the volume of which decreases with age. The study authors equate the effects of multisite chronic pain to the effect of aging in healthy people with an average age of 60.

"Multisite chronic pain may lead to up to eight years of accelerated hippocampal aging, an effect that may underlie a series of cognitive burdens," says Yiheng Tu, corresponding author of the study.

Dementia is a broad term for the decline of brain functioning, such as loss of memory, language, problem-solving, and other thinking abilities, severe enough to interfere with daily life. While dementia primarily affects older individuals, it is not a part of normal aging.

### The known risk factors for dementia include:

- \*Age 65 years and older
- \*Having parents or siblings with dementia
- \*Being Black or Hispanic
- \*Having high blood pressure and high cholesterol
- \*Smoking
- \*Experiencing a traumatic brain injury

## Laser-Assisted 4D Printing Could Open New Avenues In Science and Technology

LONDON (Dispatches) – 4D printing of metallic shape-morphing systems can be applied in many fields, including aerospace, smart manufacturing, naval equipment, and biomedical engineering.

3D printing, in which 3D structures are created layer by layer, has significantly influenced many branches of technology and industry, from pharmacology to electronics. This technique is widely used because it can significantly reduce the time required to create a product without compromising its quality.

4D printing takes this to the next level, where the resulting parts not only have a non-trivial 3D structure but after printing, change their shape or configuration over time.

"4D printing refers to 3D printing of responsive parts that can change their shapes or properties in a programmed way under external stimulations, such as humidity, light, heat, electric fields, magnetic fields, and so on," said Wenzheng Wu, a professor at Jilin University in China.

"This technique is a novel manufacturing technology, which can save process time, energy and materials," said Luquan Ren, a professor at the same university. "It can be used to repair equipment in the aerospace industry, such as damage to satellite parts or space stations. Generally, the damage of parts is random, and the size and shape are irregular and not uniform, which often increases the risk of satellite malfunction. This method can be employed to control the shape transformation of the parts, which can therefore be used in space."

However, these new features bring new manufacturing challenges. So far, the only materials used for 4D printing have been polymers — substances made up of large molecules composed of many repeating subunits — and special shape-memory alloys that deform when cooled but return to their original shape when heated.

"4D printing is currently limited to these two types of materials, which limits its applications," explained Guiwei Li, a doctor at Jilin University. "Therefore, it is of great significance to break through the restrictions of materials for 4D printing."

In order to extend 4D printing to a wider class of materials, Li, Ren, Wu, and their collaborators proposed introducing a laser during the printing process to obtain stronger and more versatile parts.

In their study published in Advanced Science, they were able to achieve a significant improvement upon a technique known as laser powder bed diffusion used in 3D printing in which metal powders are melted and then solidified layer by layer.

"During the usual 3D printing process, residual stresses are often generated due to the high cooling rates and large temperature gradients, which in turn cause processing defects such as delamination, cracks, and deformations," explained professor Qingping Liu, a co-author of the article. "In contrast, the deformability caused by laser-induced thermal stress can be controlled to reshape 3D printed structures, which can create a new 4D printing method via the laser stimulation."

In order to produce shape-morphing part with the required mechanical properties, the scientists started with a flat sample of stainless-steel powder. Certain regions of this sample were exposed to a specially programmed sequence of laser pulses, which led to controlled mechanical stress.

Upon subsequent cooling of the sample, this stress is released, leading to the prescribed deformation and the formation of a strong three-dimensional part (see image above).

"The printed parts can realize the shape changing of selected areas during or after forming process due to stress release," said Wu. "The high-performance, complex metallic shape-morphing structures can be manufactured by this method."



## People Who Travel More Are Healthier

LONDON (Dispatches) - A new study by researchers from University College London's Centre for Transport Studies reveals that individuals who travel tend to have better health.

Whether it's driving to your state's impeccable beach or taking a flight to Switzerland, traveling is always exciting and adventurous. The research, published in the Journal of Transport & Health, found that there was a difference in overall health of those who travel and those who do not.

Individuals who were limited to get out of their hometown, or even had limited exposure to traveling than they preferred, had inferior health. The research team set traveling as getting outside at least 15 miles away from one's local region. They gathered 2,747 individuals from the North of England and studied their overall health and relationship with traveling.

The particular region of England is known for having one of nation's worst health results, reason being its lack of sufficient transportation system.



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## Germany's Inflation Remains High on Energy Costs

BERLIN (Dispatches) - Germany's inflation rate showed no signs of easing at the start of the year, as energy and food price pressures remained high due to the war in Ukraine.

German consumer prices, harmonized to compare with other European Union countries, rose by 9.2% on the year in January, data from the federal statistics office showed.

Compared with December, prices increased by 0.5%, it added, confirming preliminary data on both a monthly and annual basis. According to non-harmonized standards, German consumer prices rose 8.7% on the year in January and 1.0% in the month. This follows revised inflation rates of 8.1% in December and 8.8% in November.



## G7 Presses IMF for Ukraine Aid As Yellen Says Russia Hurting

NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - G7 finance chiefs pressed the IMF to urgently provide more aid to war-stricken Ukraine on the eve of the first anniversary of Russia's invasion.

"On February 24 last year, Russia launched its illegal, unjustifiable, and unprovoked war of aggression against Ukraine, which is also an attack on the rule of law and the principles of the UN Charter," the G7 said in a statement issued by current chair Japan.

After talks in India the group urged the International Monetary Fund "to deliver a credible, ambitious, fully financed and appropriately conditioned IMF program by the end of March 2023".

French Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire previously said he wanted the IMF to provide \$15 billion over four years.

"We need additional support for Ukraine not only militarily but also when it comes to upholding the functioning of the Ukrainian state," German counterpart Christian Lindner told reporters Thursday.

The G7 said that for 2023, based on Ukraine's needs, it had increased its commitment of budget and economic support to \$39 billion.

It added that sanctions so far have "significantly undermined Russia's capacity to wage its illegal war" and that the G7 would "take further actions as needed".

US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen, who attended the meeting in Bengaluru, said sanctions were having a "very significant negative effect".

"While by some measures the Russian economy has held up better than might initially have been expected, Russia is now running a significant budget deficit," she said.

Export controls were making it "extremely difficult" for Moscow to replenish its munitions and were contributing to an "exodus" of Russian scientists and entrepreneurs as well as foreign investment.

"Russia is running down its holdings in its sovereign wealth fund so... the price cap that we have put on Russian oil is clearly substantially reducing Russia's revenues," Yellen added.

Several countries, in particular China and India, have helped Moscow lessen the effect of sanctions by ramping up their purchases of Russian oil.

Moscow has also been able to sidestep some sanctions by importing goods from third countries. Russia's GDP contracted by 2.1 percent in 2022 according to official figures -- far from the apocalyptic predictions from last year -- although some Western countries say the statistics are fake.

"The Russian economy and management system turned out to be much stronger than the West believed," President Vladimir Putin said Tuesday, adding that the West wants to make ordinary Russians "suffer".

Yellen said the global economy was "in a better place" than predicted a few months ago in the wake of Russia's invasion and the resulting explosion in prices for fuel, food and other essentials. G20 finance chiefs and central bank heads are also due to meet on Friday and Saturday in Bengaluru to discuss the dire economic effects of the war and possible debt relief for poorer nations.

## Eurozone Inflation Marginally Higher in Jan.

LONDON (Dispatches) - Eurostat said on Thursday that eurozone inflation was only a touch higher in January than earlier estimated, confirming that price growth is now well past its peak, even if underlying price pressures still show no signs of abating.

Consumer price inflation in the 20 nations sharing the euro eased to 8.6% in January from 9.2% a month earlier, coming in just above the 8.5% estimated earlier this month, when figures from Germany, the bloc's biggest economy, were not yet included.

The data will likely make for grim reading at the European Central Bank (ECB) as revisions show core inflation, or price growth excluding volatile food and fuel products, accelerating to 5.3% from 5.2%, confounding initial data for a steady pace.

The ECB has raised rates by a combined 3% points since July to tame inflation, and policymakers are now concerned that what was initially an energy cost-driven surge is now broadening out to impact all sectors.

Indeed, worries about underlying inflation have dominated public commentary from policymakers in recent weeks. As a result, some have argued that rate hikes should not stop until there is an apparent turnaround in core price developments.

Services inflation, the most significant chunk of core inflation, was revised to 4.4% from 4.2%, likely worrying some because services primarily reflect wage growth. Employee earnings are now rising at their fastest pace in years, even if real or inflation-adjusted growth is still negative.

The issue is that underlying inflation better reflects future price developments, so a rate above the ECB's own 2% target raises the risk of a persistent overshooting.

Markets currently price longer-term inflation at just over 2.4%. However, ECB board member Isabel Schnabel has already said that markets may still be underestimating the persistence of inflation as "broad disinflation" has not yet started.

Schnabel also said that even a turnaround in underlying inflation is insufficient to stop monetary tightening as the decline in energy costs rather than more persistent components would likely account for the shift.

The ECB promised another 50-basis point interest rate hike in March, and markets saw another 75 basis points of moves after that, putting the rate peak at 3.75%.

Energy price inflation was revised to 18.9% in January from an initial 17.2%, which is still down from 25.5% in December.

Latvia had the highest inflation rate in the eurozone, above 21%, while Luxembourg and Spain had the slowest at just under 6%.



## U.S. Manufacturers See Big Boost From Gov't Subsidies

NEW PHILADELPHIA (Dispatches) - A 77-year-old factory in a hard-luck Ohio town sputtered into high gear to produce a new line of electric garbage trucks. A short drive away, construction began on a \$20 billion plant that will take pizza-sized silicon wafers and make them into computer chips used in everything from data centers to cars.

The two Ohio factories -- niche truck maker Battle Motors and global giant Intel Corp -- show a new readiness by U.S. President Joe Biden's administration to offer subsidies and other incentives to strategic industries such as electric vehicles and semiconductors in a coordinated effort to help American businesses compete in a global economy.

Tesla Inc said Wednesday it would shift some vehicle battery production from Germany to the United States. While the Biden administration push, described by economists as an industrial policy, has opened opportunities for some companies, significant hurdles remain.

Reuters toured both Ohio sites and spoke to over a dozen outside experts and political leaders about those challenges, which include potential worker shortages and a growing backlash from foreign governments rushing to boost competing companies.

Once criticized by conservatives as "picking winners and losers" and by progressives as corporate welfare, a U.S. industrial policy is enjoying a rare bipartisan consensus, even in staunchly Republican states like Ohio.

Projects like Intel are a chance to "hit the reset button" on the U.S. approach to fostering key industries, said Jon Husted, Ohio's Republican lieutenant governor, speaking as earth movers rumbled behind him at Intel's 1,000-acre site.

Eight out of 12 Republican representatives in Ohio's congressional delegation voted in favor of federal subsidies for semiconductor production, including the funds that will go to Intel.

## Indian Shares Fall in Volatile Session on Rate-Hike Worries

BENGALURU (Dispatches) - Indian shares swung between gains and losses, before settling lower as investors continued to fret over the likelihood that global central banks would have to keep raising interest rates to tackle inflation.

Volatility remained high with the expiration of the February derivatives series.

The Nifty 50 index closed 0.25% lower to 17,511.25, while the S&P BSE Sensex fell 0.23% to 59,605.80. Both the benchmarks traded in a range between 0.4% gains and 0.6% losses.

The volatility index settled at 15.08, hovering near a three-week high. Also known as the fear gauge, it had risen to 15.59 on Wednesday, highest since Feb. 2, the day after the union budget.

Twenty-six of the Nifty 50 stocks declined, with Asian Paints losing over 3% after Jefferies flagged demand-related concerns over demand after the recent price hikes.

Larsen & Toubro, Titan and Divi's Laboratories were among the other top losers.

A majority of the RBI's policy committee members reiterated that it would be premature to lower the guard against inflation.

"Only value stocks are likely to do well, in the near term," said Anita Gandhi, director at Arianth Capital Markets.

Analysts had anticipated high volatility in Thursday's session ahead of the February series derivatives expiry.

The U.S. Federal Reserve's latest minutes indicated that a majority of the members favoured smaller rate hikes in subsequent meetings.

However, markets declined as a slew of macroeconomic data since then have kept fears of an aggressive rate hike path intact.

Zee Entertainment tumbled nearly 4% after the National Company Law Tribunal admitted the company to corporate insolvency resolution process, in a petition filed by IndusInd Bank.

The media index fell 1.77% and was among the top sectorial losers.

Consumer major ITC rose to an all-time high as analysts hinted at a potential growth in volumes due to a stable tax regime.

## Global Debt Sees First Annual Drop Since 2015

LONDON (Dispatches) - The post-pandemic rebound in world growth and inflation last year meant the amount of debt sloshing around the global economy saw its first annual fall in dollar terms since 2015, a widely tracked study has shown.

The Institute of International Finance report published on Wednesday estimated that the nominal value of global debt declined by some \$4 trillion, bringing it fractionally back under the \$300 trillion threshold breached in 2021.

With borrowing costs on the rise, particularly for emerging markets, the retrenchment was driven entirely by wealthier countries though, which as a group saw total debt decline roughly \$6 trillion to \$200 trillion.

In contrast, the amount of developing world debt hit a new record high of \$98 trillion with Russia, Singapore, India, Mexico, and Vietnam seeing the largest individual rises.

Stronger economic activity and higher inflation meanwhile, both of which erode debt levels, saw the global debt-to-GDP ratio drop over 12 percentage points to 338% of GDP, marking the second annual drop in a row.

Again, though, the improvement was driven by developed markets which saw an overall 20 percentage points fall to 390%. The emerging market debt ratio rose by 2 percentage points meanwhile to 250% of GDP, largely driven by China and Singapore.

Breaking the numbers down further, the IIF, a global banking trade group, estimated that the emerging market government debt-to-GDP ratio climbed to almost 65% of GDP in 2022 from just under 64%.

"The external public debt burden of many developing countries worsened due to sharp losses in local currencies (in 2022) against the dollar," the IIF said, adding that it had pushed international investor demand for local currency EM debt to multi-year lows, "with no sign of imminent recovery".

Investment bank JPMorgan (JPM.N) had a different take on the global debt situation, highlighting in an analysis published on Wednesday that despite last year's modest falls in developed market debt, the rise since the global financial crash fifteen years ago has been nothing short of explosive.

JPMorgan calculated that developed market public sector debt as a share of GDP has surged to 122% from 73% just before the crash and by over 30 percentage points of GDP in 13 of 21 major economies and over 45%-pts in nine of them.

What makes the nearly 50%-point jump even more remarkable is that debt had risen just 40 percentage points in the 40 years leading up to the financial crisis -- a period that also had significant shocks, including stagflation in the 1970s and a fiscal spending boom in the 1980s.

## Turkish Central Bank Cuts Rate to 8.5%



ANKARA (Dispatches) - The Central Bank of the Republic of Turkey (CBRT) slashed its benchmark policy rate by 50 basis points after keeping it unchanged for two consecutive months.

The central bank lowered its one-week repo rate to 8.5% from 9%.

The decision was made at the year's second Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) meeting.

"The committee assessed that the current monetary policy stance after the measured reduction is adequate to support the necessary recovery in the aftermath of the earthquake by maintaining price stability and financial stability," the bank said in a statement, referring to two powerful earthquakes that struck 11 provinces in southern Turkey on Feb. 6, causing extensive damage and killing and injuring tens of thousands.

Over the last year, the bank gradually lowered the interest rate from 14% to 9% and then at its last two monetary policy meetings kept the rate steady.

The median forecast by economists surveyed by Anadolu Agency (AA) was a decrease in the one-week repo rate of 100 basis points, for example, a total percentage point.

While 10 economists forecast, the bank will cut rates by 100 basis points, one expected a 150-basis-point decrease, and six projected no change.

The bank statement noted that while economic activity data exceeded expectations, concerns about a recession in developed countries persisted due to the impact of geopolitical risks and interest rate hikes. Although supply constraints in some sectors, particularly basic food, have decreased due to Turkey's strategic solution tools, the impact of high global inflation on inflation expectations and international financial markets is being closely monitored, it said.

## Iranian Actor Shahram Abdoli Passes Away at 46

TEHRAN (IFP) - Actor Shahram Abdoli passes away at a hospital in Mashhad, days after he slipped into a deep coma due to cerebral hemorrhage.

According to Iranian media, Abdoli, 46, suffered a brain hemorrhage and suddenly lost consciousness days earlier in the northeastern city of Mashhad, where he was acting in a TV series.

The actor passed away on Saturday morning. He first rose to fame in Iran in the early 2000s with a role in a highly popular TV series titled "The Red Line." Abdoli had since played roles in many TV shows and movies.



## Healthy Gas Storage Warms Europe, But Not Enough

OSLO (Dispatches) - As Europe emerges from a mild winter with gas storage close to record levels, it must brace for another costly race to replenish its reserves on the international market.

European gas prices rallied in the run-up to Moscow's invasion of Ukraine begun almost exactly a year ago and they leapt to record highs when Russia subsequently cut supplies of relatively cheap pipeline gas.

Although European prices have eased to around 50 euros (\$53) per megawatt hour (MWh) from last August's peak of more than 340 euros, they remain above historic averages.

That means European governments face another huge bill to refill storages before peak winter demand.

To ward off market volatility and protect against shortage, they will have to repeat the exercise annually until the continent has developed a more permanent alternative to the Russian pipeline gas on which it depended for decades.

Analysts and executives say the amounts already in storage will help, as will an increase in French nuclear generation following unusually extensive maintenance.

"The situation on the gas market is currently no longer so tense," Markus Krebber, CEO of RWE, Germany's biggest utility, told Reuters.

He did not expect any repeat of last year's record price spike, but also said "one must not null oneself into a false sense of security".

Similarly, analysts cautioned against leaving it too late to buy for future delivery.

"We do not expect filling storage to be as costly next summer as it was this past year," Jacob Mandel, senior analyst at Aurora Energy Research, said.

"That said, firms that rely on spot supply to fill storage, rather than hedge against future price jumps, will risk paying similar costs to last summer."

He estimated buying gas over the summer months would cost "2-2.5 times more on a per unit basis than it had been pre-crisis" and that European governments last year spent tens of billions of euros on supplies.

That was even when they had received significant levels of Russian gas on long-term contracts prior to the shutdown of the Nord Stream pipeline to Germany in August.

Nord Stream's closure drove up European gas prices, as well as liquefied natural gas (LNG) prices, which also hit record levels of around 70 million British thermal units (mmBtu), compared with around \$16 now.

Russia's long-term contract prices, based on complex calculations, are not public but are much cheaper than the spot market rate, industry sources say.

In all, last year's European imports of Russian pipeline gas were 62 billion cubic metres (bcm), 60% below the average of the previous five years, European Commission data showed.

This year, Russian deliveries to the EU are expected to fall to 25 bcm, assuming flows via the TurkStream pipeline and through Ukraine are in line with December 2022 volumes, the International Energy Agency (IEA) forecasts.

Even when filled to the brim, Europe's storage caverns, capable of holding some 100 bcm, can only meet around a quarter of European demand.

Think-tank Bruegel, which provides analysis to EU policymakers, has called for a 13% demand curb this summer, compared with the EU agreement last year for a voluntary reduction of 15%.

That could be tricky as the fall in gas prices this year has reduced the incentive to avoid the fuel.

One of the reasons for less gas use last year was increased use of coal, which was cheaper, although bad for carbon emissions.

James Waddell, head of European Gas and global LNG at Energy Aspects, said gas was becoming competitive against coal in the power sector and other industry, which switched to alternative fuels to gas, may also switch back.

"If you're pricing somewhere below 60 euros/MWh and you move down to 40 euros/MWh, you get quite a lot of that gas coming back into the industrial sector," he said.

More French nuclear production will help Europe's overall situation as output rises to about 310 Terwatt-hours (TWh) from 280 TWh last year, Waddell said.

But he said it was still lower than the five-year average and the gain would be eroded by losses elsewhere, notably in Germany.

Industry analysts say eventually the solution to the gas shortfall needs to be more renewable energy as the EU seeks to achieve its goal of zero net greenhouse emissions by 2050 and that the energy crisis will accelerate progress.

Until then, even full storages are no guarantee, Helge Haugane, head of gas and power trading at Equinor, Europe's biggest gas supplier, said.

As long as global supplies remain tight, he said, the market would be very vulnerable to any disruptions or "weather events".

After a Herculean EU effort, gas storages were 96% full at last year's November peak.

They have dropped to 64%, according to Gas Infrastructure Europe (GIE) data.

Analysts forecast a further fall to around 55% by the end of the official heating season, on March 31.

Levels have held up following a mild winter that, combined with reduced demand, led the IEA to lower its forecast for the EU gas shortfall.

Earlier this month, it put the supply-demand gap at 40 bcm this year, down from its previous estimate of 57 bcm.

It said energy efficiency and speedy deployment of renewable energy and heat pumps could help plug 37 bcm of that gap in 2023, while warning of an "unusually wide range of uncertainties and exogenous risk factors".

These include the possible complete halt of Russian gas through the pipelines still supplying Europe and a post-lockdown demand recovery in China that could increase competition on the international LNG market, making it harder for Europe to buy there.

The IEA said European LNG imports could provide an extra 11 bcm to 140 bcm this year, in addition to an additional 55 bcm in 2022.

As one of Russia's most loyal gas customers until last year's invasion of Ukraine, Germany previously had no import capacity for LNG. Now at a record pace, it is bringing online six floating storage and regasification units (FSRUs) by the end of this year.

The industry says this needs to be matched with more terminals to liquefy and ship LNG, but strong global demand means that will be difficult to achieve over the next 24 months, Luke Cottell, senior analyst at Timera Energy consultancy, said.

Other European countries are also increasing their LNG capacity, while environmental campaigners and green politicians question the amounts being invested in the infrastructure that should become irrelevant in a low-carbon economy.

Germany has also been at the forefront of demand for heat pumps, which do not rely on fossil fuel to heat buildings, although their installation last year was still outpaced by gas-based systems.

U.S. the Real Warmonger

FROM PAGE 1

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.

While independent countries seek ways for encouraging Russia and Ukraine to start talks for ending war, the U.S. continues its financial and military support for Ukraine and it seems Washington does not the war to end or at least it does not want immediate end of war in Ukraine.

At the same time the United States is reportedly preparing a fresh military aid package to Ukraine worth \$2 billion, a senior US official has said, defying repeated warnings from Moscow as the war completes one year.

President Joe Biden's national security adviser Jake Sullivan made the disclosure on CNN Thursday night, asserting that Washington is ready to support Kiev for the long haul in the war against Russia.

"We're going to continue to look at what is necessary, and make sure that we provide what is necessary that Ukraine has what it needs to succeed on the battlefield," Sullivan said while announcing new aid.

Sullivan, who accompanied Biden on an unannounced trip to Kiev earlier this week, said US officials are constantly looking to give Volodymyr Zelensky's administration the tools it needs to win against Russia.

He did not reveal details of the new military package, which is expected to be officially announced on Friday, but Western media reports said it builds on previous packages to aid Kiev's defense.

The CNN report said the \$2 billion package includes new funding for contracts including HIMARS rockets, 155-millimeter artillery ammunition, drones, counter-drone equipment, mine-clearing equipment and secure communications equipment.

"Russia's aims in this war were to wipe Ukraine off the map, to take the capital and to eliminate Ukraine, to absorb it into Russia," Sullivan said. "They failed at doing that and they are in no position to be able to do that as we go forward."

Sullivan said the US has provided Kiev with the assistance it needs for each phase of the war, but acknowledged that the Ukrainians have "often asked for more than the US is willing to give".

The top US security official reiterated the Biden administration's position that it's not currently providing F-16 fighter jets to Ukraine, much to the chagrin of Ukrainian officials.

Unfortunately other Western countries also follow blindly the path of the U.S. in provoking Russia to continue the war at the same time encouraging Ukraine to resist.

By the way German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said whether or not to arm Ukraine with drones doesn't make any sense at the moment.

Scholz, who has previously faced criticism for pulling back on sending tanks to Ukraine, said difficulties faced by other countries in meeting Ukraine's military demands vindicated his decision to move to lock them down.

Earlier this month, Germany agreed to send heavy battle tanks to help Ukraine attack Russian forces in the east of the country, allowing other countries to send them. However, the delivery has so far been slow due to limited donor resources.

"Maybe this is an indication of why it's so important to coordinate with each other, with the U.S., for example, and to prepare these decisions carefully so they work," he was quoted as saying.

The German magazine Der Spiegel wrote in a report on Thursday that Russia is negotiating with a Chinese manufacturer to buy 100 drones with an April delivery date.

So we can see that the West is not interested in an end to the war despite the economic crisis in the world because of this war, and the UNSC unfortunately acts in favor of the West rather than focusing on restoring peace in the region and the world.

With recent developments, one can see the U.S. makes the most of this war at the expense of economic crisis in other states and such meetings in the UN is nothing but waste of time and Russia and Ukraine seem to continue their fight till the last bullet unless both sides make logical decision for ending war which will be to the benefit of the two nations that currently the U.S. makes most of this war economically and politically.

As the past experiences shown us, the U.S. is the real warmonger or inciter of any international conflict and Ukraine war is another sign of the U.S.'s warmongering policy.



## Germany Bids to Clear the Rocky Path for Foreign Talent

BERLIN (Dispatches) - Costa Rican Alex Madrigal, a trained economist, had his visa approved in May last year in just six hours, although that was just the beginning of the hurdles he faced in settling in Germany, despite the country's chronic skills shortage.

Like all migrants, he then had to contend with obstacles ranging from the paper chase needed for a bank account and apartment, through to just getting an appointment to have his work permit approved.

"It's a circle without exit in which one thing depends on the other and there is no logical order," said Madrigal.

"Germany wants to attract workers, but they need

to establish some logical steps to follow," added the 33-year-old, who after taking a crash course in German and navigating all the red tape landed a job with the Berlin arm of tech consultancy InterWorks.

Germany, like industrialised countries around the world, is facing deep labour shortages, particularly in skilled high-growth sectors, which are taking their toll on an economy that could yet face a recession this year.

More than half of Germany's companies are struggling to fill vacancies, according to a survey by the German Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DIHK). It estimates that two million posts remain

unfilled, worth nearly 100 billion euros (\$106.03 billion) of lost output.

"It is too difficult to come to Germany," Hagen Wolfstetter, a labor expert at the BVMW association for small- and medium-sized businesses, told Reuters, citing in particular under-resourced consulates and excessive paperwork.

Aware of the difficulties, the German government is looking to speed up the issuance of visas and is drawing up new legislation to help foreign workers establish themselves in Germany. The draft law was submitted to the states and relevant associations on Monday for comments until March 8.

### Iran Likely to...

FROM PAGE 1

Using Sayyad missiles, the system is capable of simultaneously detecting, intercepting, and shooting down six targets and it can be prepared to engage hostile targets in less than five minutes.

Speaking in a meeting with a visiting Syrian delegation led by the country's commander of air defenses, Iranian Defense Minister Brigadier General Mohammad Reza Gharaei Ashtiani said Tehran uses "all capacities" to establish security in Syria.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran has always used all its capacities to fully establish security and foil plots of transregional countries and will continue to do so; accordingly, we deem strengthening military and defense cooperation necessary because Iran is Syria's strategic depth and Syria is Iran's strategic depth."

### Iran Becomes World 11th...

FROM PAGE 1

According to the data released by the Iranian Ministry of Industry, Mining, and Trade, 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.

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

Officials from the Industry, Mining, and Trade Ministry have repeatedly emphasized that car production will reach 1.6 million vehicles in the current year, however, the 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.

### Iran Building...

FROM PAGE 1

According to reports, the power plant is of a pressurized water reactor (PWR) type and, with the capacity of producing 300 megawatts of electricity, it is to be built on a land of approximately 50 hectares in the vicinity of the Karun River.

In recent years, Iranian scientists have made remarkable progress in the field of peaceful nuclear technology despite the tough sanctions imposed by the West.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Eslami said global arrogance has imposed sanctions in the atomic energy sector since the victory of the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran to hinder the country's nuclear technology progress. He said the AEIOI has in recent years decided to pursue the construction of a 360-megawatt power plant which was registered by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). Foreign firms had plans to design and build it but it was not implemented due to sanctions against Iran, he said.

### Israel Endorses Plan...

FROM PAGE 1

More than 600,000 Israelis live in over 230 settlements built since the 1967 Israeli occupation of the West Bank and East al-Quds.

The international community views the settlements – hundreds of which have been built across the West Bank since Tel Aviv's occupation of the territory in 1967 – as illegal under international law and the Geneva Conventions due to their construction on the occupied territories.

The UN Security Council has condemned Israel's settlement activities in the occupied territories in several resolutions. The regime's unabated construction campaign comes while the Palestinians have historically demanded that the West Bank serve as part of their future state with East al-Quds, which is located inside the territory, as its capital.

## Southampton Appoint Ruben Selles as Manager

LONDON (Dispatches) - Premier League strugglers Southampton named Ruben Selles as their manager until the end of the season.

The appointment of the 39-year-old Spaniard follows the sacking earlier this month of Nathan Jones, who was in charge for just three months.

Southampton are bottom of the English top flight, with five wins in their 23 league games so far this season.

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## Pickford Agrees New Everton Deal

LONDON (Dispatches) - England goalkeeper Jordan Pickford has reportedly agreed a new deal with Everton. The 28-year-old, who had been linked with a move away from Goodison Park, is set to sign his contract extension this week, reports The Athletic. Pickford joined the Toffees from Sunderland in 2017 and has been England's number one through the last two World Cup finals.

# Celtics Escape Pacers In Overtime

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - NBA conference leaders Boston and Denver were pushed to the limit on Thursday, the Celtics escaping in a 142-138 overtime triumph over Indiana and the Nuggets edging the Cavaliers in Cleveland.

Boston star Jayson Tatum, coming off a record-setting 55-point performance in the All-Star Game, scored 31 points, including the Celtics' last four in overtime.

Denver, meanwhile, held off the tenacious Cavaliers 115-109, while the Philadelphia 76ers erased a 17-point deficit to beat the Memphis Grizzlies 110-105.

Tatum got off to a slow start as NBA action resumed after the All-Star break, but finished with a double-double that included 12 rebounds.

Jaylen Brown added 30 points for the Celtics, who improved their league-leading record to 43-17, but are just one game ahead of the surging Milwaukee Bucks atop the East.

The Pacers, led by 40 points and 10 rebounds from Myles Turner, erased a 10-point halftime deficit.

It was tied at 125-125 with 1:41 left in regulation. Both Tatum and Brown coughed up turnovers from there, but Indiana's Tyrese Haliburton missed a jump shot in the waning seconds as they went to overtime.

It was knotted at 138-138 with 56.2 seconds left in the extra session, but Tatum drained two free throws and sealed the win with a tip-in with 10.4 seconds remaining.

Brown said the victory bodes well for the Celtics' stretch run to the playoffs.

"The more we are tested in those moments, I think it helps for the long run. We were able to weather the storm, figure out a way to win the game."

## Sabalenka's Perfect Run Ends in Dubai

DUBAI (Dispatches) - Australian Open champion Aryna Sabalenka saw her 13-0 undefeated start to the season come to an end as she squandered a 6-0, 3-1 lead in a Dubai quarter-final defeat to Barbora Krejickova.

Sabalenka had not lost a match in 2023 coming into the clash, winning two titles in Australia in January, including a maiden Grand Slam trophy.

But that streak was snapped as Krejickova scooped a 0-6, 7-6(7/2), 6-1 victory to set up a semi-final clash with American No.3 seed Jessica Pegula.

The 24-year-old Belarusian will now fly home to Miami before heading to Indian Wells, where she hopes to recapture her title-winning form.

"Probably there will be less attention (now that the streak is over). It doesn't matter, I lost it," Sabalenka told AFP after her defeat.

"Barbora deserved it, she played great tennis and I will just keep working and keep getting better; make sure that Indian Wells will be a better result."

Many were predicting a Dubai final between the world's top two, Iga Swiatek and Sabalenka, who has openly declared her ambition to dethrone the top-ranked Pole.

"I really would like to see that happening (playing finals against Swiatek) but first of all I have to work hard and I have to focus on myself," said Sabalenka.

"You cannot predict anything in tennis, especially women's tennis, but I really want to see that I'll work really hard to make sure that this is going to happen."

## Verstappen Back on Top as F1 Testing Starts

MANAMA (Dispatches) - Formula One kicked off three days of pre-season testing in Bahrain with Red Bull's double world champion Max Verstappen starting as he means to carry on.

The Dutch 25-year-old was top of the morning timesheets at Sakhir, although teams were focused on aerodynamic testing with prominent rakes attached to the cars in their first proper running.



Jamal Murray returned from a six-game injury absence to score 16 points for the Nuggets, who won their fourth straight.

The Cavs made them work for it, dominating inside in a game that featured 24 lead changes.

Cleveland were up by five when Reggie Jackson, making his Nuggets debut, drained a three-pointer from well beyond the halfcourt line to pull Denver within 91-89 heading into the final period.

Evan Mobley scored 31 points and Donovan Mitchell and Darius Garland added 22 each for Cleveland, but Mobley didn't score in the fourth period and the Cavs didn't score again after Garland's basket pulled them within two with 2:38 to play.

In Philadelphia, Tobias Harris drained a three-pointer with 39.1 seconds remaining to put the 76ers up for the first time since the opening minutes, 106-105.

The Sixers, fueled by 31 points from James Harden and 27 points and 19 rebounds from Joel Embiid, pulled away from there.

The Grizzlies had set the tone early, out-scoring the Sixers 37-22 in the first quarter thanks largely to Desmond Bane's 19 points.

Philadelphia trailed by 11 midway through the fourth, but Bane went cold, finishing with 25 points while Jaren Jackson Jr. added 18 and Ja Morant 15 for the Grizzlies.

Philadelphia closed the game with a 10-1 scoring run that included a thundering dunk from Embiid -- who also blocked six shots.

The Los Angeles Lakers launched their final push for a playoff berth with a 124-111 victory over the reigning champion Golden State Warriors.

LeBron James scored just 13 points and Anthony Davis added 12 for the Lakers, who were led by Malik Beasley's 25 and had a combined 68 from their bench in the comfortable win over a Warriors team missing Stephen Curry and Andrew Wiggins.

While James and Davis were able to get some welcome rest in the fourth quarter, there was bad news for the Lakers early as recent arrival D'Angelo Russell exited in the first quarter with a sprained ankle.

Elsewhere, Utah's Lauri Markkanen scored 43 points -- including three free-throws with 4.6 seconds left to seal the Jazz's 120-119 overtime victory over Oklahoma City.



RIO DE JANEIRO (Dispatches) - World number two Carlos Alcaraz beat 86th-ranked Fabio Fognini of Italy in a thriller to advance to the quarterfinals of the ATP Rio Open.

The 19-year-old Spanish phenom battled back after losing the first set, going on to win 6-7 (5-7), 6-2, 6-4.

"It's a challenge facing a player like Fabio. He's a great player with a lot of talent," Alcaraz said after the dramatic clay court duel.

"You never know what he might have in store for you."

Fognini, a 35-year-old veteran with nine singles titles, went down 3-0 to the defending champion in the opening set, before battling back with a string of masterful rallies.

He broke Alcaraz's serve to equalize at 5-5, then won the set in a tie-breaker.

But Alcaraz roared back in the second, going up 4-0, and carried his momentum through the final set to take the match.

The dramatic display had the crowd at stadium court fired up.

"You energized both Fabio and me from the start, thank you so much," Alcaraz told the fans.

"We played a great match. I'm very happy I managed to win."

Alcaraz will face Dusan Lajovic in the quarterfinals. The 80th-ranked Lajovic beat 57th-ranked Laslo Djere 6-2, 6-4 in an all-Serbian showdown.



# Lovren Retires From Int'l Competition

ZAGREB (Dispatches) - Croatian defender Dejan Lovren announced his international retirement, following a storied run with the "Fiery Ones" that included second and third place finishes at the World Cup.

"The time has come to say my final goodbye to the Croatian national team," said Lovren in a message published by the Croatian Football Federation.

Lovren added that he had made this decision "with an open heart and after a lot of consideration".

The 33-year-old's international career spanned for 14 years. The defender was instrumental to Croatia's World Cup underdog runs, including the second place finish in Russia in 2018 and the third place win in Qatar last year.

"As a child, I dreamt of playing at major tournaments and getting to put on that red-and-white shirt. I put on the Croatian checkers for the first time when I was nine years old and I will

never forget that special feeling -- like putting on Superman's cape," said Lovren.

The coach of Croatia's national team Zlatko Dalic hailed Lovren as "one of the locker room leaders" capable of "motivating the whole team" who was "a real fighter" and "the player you want to have in your ranks in every battle".

"In his career, he faced a lot of criticism and mistrust, but he was always a formidable fighter who can ... be very proud of what he has achieved," said Dalic in a statement.

The center-back was heavily criticized last year, after he was filmed singing a Croatian song that features a pro-Nazi slogan from World War Two, but Lovren insisted that the tune was "not fascist at all".

The player also claimed to be misunderstood after he tweeted a photo which seemed to show him cancelling his Disney+ subscription just after the American media company had made clear its opposition to Florida's 'Don't Say Gay' legislation.

Lovren started his career in Dinamo Zagreb before moving abroad -- first to Lyon and later Southampton, before a memorable stint at Liverpool, where he won titles in the Premier League and Champions League.

## Fernandes Hails Special Connection With Man United Fans

MANCHESTER (Dispatches) - Bruno Fernandes highlighted the connection between Manchester United players and fans as key to a famous fightback to beat Barcelona 2-1 and progress to the last 16 of the Europa League.

United fell behind to Robert Lewandowski's early penalty, but second half goals from Brazilian duo Fred and Antony earned a 4-3 aggregate win for the Red Devils.

"The belief of the team is always there and the belief of the fans is amazing," Fernandes told BT Sport.

"They pushed us through difficult moments for great comebacks. It is a great result."

United remain in the hunt for trophies in four competitions and could end a six-year drought without silverware in the League Cup final against Newcastle on Sunday.

"The fans have been with us in the toughest moments, this season we have been really good because they are always behind us but this is something different," added Fernandes.

"You can feel between them and us there is something special, Old Trafford was bouncing that is why we got the result."

"When we got the goal right at the start of the second half we knew they were going to be right behind us."



## Murray Seals Qatar Open Semis Place

DOHA (Dispatches) - Former tennis world number one Andy Murray staged another defiant fightback to beat French qualifier Alexandre Muller and reach the Qatar Open semi-finals.

Murray struggled with heat as he lost the first set 4-6 to Muller but then produced a sizzling masterclass performance to wrap up the next two 6-1, 6-2.

The 35-year-old Scot, slowed by surgery on both of his hips, must now take on rising ATP Tour powerhitter Jiri Lehecka, aged 21, who also fought back from a set down to beat top seeded Russian Andrey Rublev.

Murray has had a gruelling time in Doha, where he is a two-time winner but a wild card this year.

On Monday, he saved three match points before winning a final-set tie-break against Italian Lorenzo Sonego.

In the second round, Murray was only two points from defeat in the deciding set before surging back to beat Alexander Zverev 7-6 (7/5), 2-6, 7-5.

Against Muller, Murray won the first game without giving away a point and broke his 26-year-old opponent's first serve, then lost two straight service games as the Frenchman took the first set in 54 minutes.

