

**Hailing the Turnout of the Iranians
In the Recent Pro-Establishment
Rallies, Tehran's Interim Friday
Prayers Assured That the Nation Will
Overcome the Economic Pressures
Imposed by Foreign Countries**

IRAN NEWS

**International Atomic Energy
Agency (IAEA) Director General
Rafael Grossi Arrived in Tehran
On Friday With Discussing the
Iranian Nuclear Program on
Agenda With Iranian Officials**

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2

DOMESTIC

**European Territories
Should Not Be Used as
Launch Pad For Anti-Iran**



> SEE PAGE 2

3

DOMESTIC

**President
Inaugurates South Pars
Phase 14 Refinery**



> SEE PAGE 3

4

INTERNATIONAL

**Ukraine Clings to
Bakhmut in Fierce Fight
With Russian Forces**



> SEE PAGE 4

8

SPORTS

**Suns Win in Kevin
Durant's Debut**



> SEE PAGE 8

Enemies Suffer From Iranians' Unity, Progress

ASSALOUYEH (IP) – President Ebrahim Raisi said that the enemies were suffering as they see the unity and progress of the Iranian nation.

Pointing out that the enemies got disappointed by the military invasion of Iran, Raisi referred to the recent unrest in the country as a part of the hybrid war to stop the country's progress.

The unrest and brawls were instigated under the pretext of Mahsa Amini, 22, who died due to a sudden heart attack in a police center in Tehran on Tuesday, September 13, after being taken there for violation of dress codes along with some other women.

Under the pretext of Mahsa's death, the anti-Iranian media and bloggers affiliated with the Western states have been fueling the unrest in Iran.

He said that the enemies imagined that Iran was like other countries they invade, so they launched street riots and a currency war in Iran to stop the production and scientific progress of the country.

President Raisi referred to a refinery opened with an investment of \$2 billion in Assalouyeh of Bushehr, the investor, engineers, and employees of which were Iranian.

See Page 7

Window for JCPOA Revival Not to Open Remain Forever



IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian has cautioned the United States that the window of opportunity for an agreement on reviving the 2015 Iran nuclear deal will not remain open forever, urging Washington to adopt a constructive approach to salvage the accord.

In an interview with CNN aired on Wednesday, Amirabdollahian said Iran has informed the US through mediators that the parties to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action are "on the path to reach an accord," but warned that this might change if the US side hangs back.

"Our relationship with the IAEA is on its correct, natural path, and we have said this to the US side through mediators that we are on the path to reach an accord but if the Iranian Parliament adopts a new law, then we'll have to abide by the parliamentary act," he said.

"So the window for an accord is still open but this window will not remain open forever," he added.

Amirabdollahian also made clear that the Islamic Republic of Iran has been and is the most committed of all the parties involved in the diplomatic endeavors to restore the JCPOA, which was abandoned by the United States in 2018.

"The party that left the JCPOA was [former US president Donald] Trump and the United States," he said. "The United States should not adopt a deceptive behavior and instead should return to the JCPOA and adopt a constructive approach."

"The US party has been sending us positive messages through diplomatic channels but in its media remarks, they made very deceptive remarks that are totally different, and really, as the Iranian foreign minister, sometimes I have serious doubts," he added.

The Iranian foreign minister noted that even though the administration of President Ebrahim Raisi sees some flaws and shortcomings in the JCPOA, it has decided to continue with the dialogue in order to restore the multilateral accord, provided that all the parties come back to the negotiating table and do their utmost to reach an agreement.

Iran showed to the world the peaceful nature of its nuclear program by signing the JCPOA with six world states — namely the US, Germany, France, Britain, Russia and China. But, Washington's unilateral withdrawal in May 2018 and its subsequent re-imposition of sanctions against Tehran left the future of the deal in limbo.

Elsewhere in his interview with CNN's Christiane Amanpour, Amirabdollahian criticized the United States for playing the blame game and accusing Iran of not having the "necessary resolve."

"I will tell you expressively that in the past few years, we saw that the US officials were unable to make a decision because of their own internal problems and the pressures they are under. They are still unable to make a courageous decision to return to the JCPOA," he said.

See Page 7

Tehran, Minsk to Sign Agreement on Permit-Free Shipping System Soon

MINSK (Dispatches) - Belarus and Iran will soon sign an agreement that will enable international freight transportation by road without permits, BelTA learned from Belarusian Transport and Communications Minister Aleksei Avramenko before a session of the ministry's board.

Belarus and Iran advance cooperation in transportation. A document on introducing permit-free international freight transportation by road is nearly ready for signing. The practice will allow logistic companies to more widely use the potential of automobile transport for building new schemes for shipping between Belarus and Iran.

Aleksei Avramenko said: "We have plans concerning permit-free transportation to four countries. We've held negotiations with Iran. I think the agreement will be signed within the next two weeks. It is going through the authorization procedure in Belarus. The Iranian side is also about to complete the relevant authorization granting procedure."

Iran Not to Hesitate To Respond Decisively To Israeli Action

TEHRAN (PressTV) - A senior Iranian diplomat has strongly condemned Israel's threat to use military force against the country's non-military and vital infrastructure as a blatant violation of international principles, emphasizing that Tehran will not hesitate to respond decisively to any threat or wrongful action by the Tel Aviv regime.

Iran's Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the United Nations Amir Saied Irvani made the remarks in a letter addressed to the rotating president of the UN Security Council Pedro Comissário Afonso and UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres.

Irvani wrote that Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu on February 21 had resorted to the regime's repeated lies and false claims in order to openly make threats of using military force against Iran's critical infrastructure, including peaceful nuclear facilities.

He said the Israeli regime's threats are in direct contravention of the international law and the United Nations Charter.

The Iranian ambassador pointed to similar remarks by Israeli minister of military affairs Yoav Gallant on February 17, in which he made threats of employing military force against Iran's civil sites and critical infrastructure.

See Page 7

U.S. Funded Iran War Plan

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - The U.S. military allocated funds for secret contingency operations related to a plan for war against Iran, according to a damning new report citing classified Pentagon documents.

An investigative report published by the Intercept on Wednesday noted that the plan - codenamed "Support Sentry" - was exposed after The Intercept, an American non-profit news organization, reviewed a classified Pentagon budget manual listing emergency and special programs.

According to the manual, which was produced for the 2019 fiscal year, the so-called Support Sentry plan was funded in 2018 and 2019, the report further read. The document further classified Support Sentry as an Iran "CONPLAN," or concept plan, a broad contingency plan for a war that the US Department of Defense develops in anticipation of a potential crisis.

"As a matter of policy, we do not comment on numbered plans. Iran remains the leading source of instability in the region and is a threat to the United States and our partners. We are constantly monitoring threat streams in coordination with our regional partners and will not hesitate to defend US national interests in the region," said Maj. John Moore, a spokesperson for U.S. Central Command, or CENTCOM, when asked about Support Sentry and whether it is still in place.

See Page 7

U.S. Mentions Oil Stolen From Iran in Its Imports Data

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - The U.S. Energy Department has mentioned illegally confiscated oil shipments from Iran in its 2022 imports data.

A Wednesday report by the official IRNA news agency showed that some 507,000 barrels of crude oil from Iran had been included in import tables released by the Energy Information Administration (EIA) for January-December 2022.

Iran has no official exports of crude oil to the U.S. That comes as Washington imposes sanctions on any country or entity that is engaged in trade of crude oil from Iran.

The U.S. government has also sought to confiscate Iranian oil shipments in territorial or international waters as part of its efforts to choke off Iran's oil revenues.

However, the campaign has largely failed because many countries have refused to comply with judicial orders issued by U.S. courts on the issue.

Iran has described attempts to confiscate its seaborne oil cargoes as act of piracy while warning that it would seize shipments bound for the U.S. to compensate for losses that could be incurred.

Nobody Wants a War With Iran

DOHA (Dispatches) - The official said Qatar, which has served as a heavyweight mediator among conflicting parties in recent years, should take the reins to push for dialogue.

Qatar's former Prime Minister Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim bin Jaber Al Thani spotlighted the urgency in findings means of solution, such as negotiations, to identified regional threats, saying no government wants to go to war with Iran.

"If we have challenges and if we agree Iran is our first enemy; how we can deal with this matter? Are we going to deal with it through direct negotiation? Through war, which nobody wants war because that's not in our benefit," the official, also known as HBJ, said in an exclusive interview with Bloomberg on Wednesday.

"The first fear for me is not Iran. The first fear is us in the region. The way how we behave," the Qatari official said. Referring to the types of behavior that should be adopted when dealing with challenges, the former prime minister said such manners are up to the "the leader," adding "I'm not one of them."

However, he said outlining a political stance would make a civilized outcome more inevitable. "I think if we can control our happiness and our frustration and when we are angry. To put it as a statement in a box and say, okay, we have some difference with 'X' country or that, but this different have to be discussed in a civilized way."

The official said Qatar, which has served as a heavyweight mediator among conflicting parties in recent years, should take the reins and say "okay, we have a problem with Iran. We sit with them and discuss the details, frankly, and reach a solution," because I believe we should live in the Persian Gulf area in harmony between Iran, Iraq and the PGCC countries."

Such an outcome would be beneficial on various fronts, he claimed. "If we can do that, I think this is a big achievement, not only for the peace, for the trade, for the business, for the economy of that," he noted.

HBJ also touch on the topic of Palestine during the same interview, in which he said solid leadership from within Occupied Palestine is needed to cement a peaceful coexistence, dismissing foreign interference unless for mediations efforts.

"Leadership in both sides would like to take a step. It's not a leadership in America to push them." He further noted that the United States could be a potential facilitator, though he added it is crucial to involve Arab countries too.

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New Shipment of Iranian Relief Aid Arrives in Syria

TEHRAN (IFP) - Iran sends a 15th shipment of humanitarian aid to quake-hit regions of Syria, which remains cut off from international assistance due to strict Western economic sanctions.

A plane carrying the relief supplies landed in the Syrian city of Aleppo with the aid items being delivered to authorities there. Syria has been slapped with sanctions by the West, namely the US and the EU, over alleged rights abuses. The bans were mostly announced following the onset of the civil war in Syria nearly a decade ago.

Iran, along with some other countries, has made an effort to push for the removal of the sanctions so that relief aid can be sent to Syria where it is urgently needed to alleviate the suffering of quake-stricken people in the quake zone. But the US and the EU have flatly rejected this.

European Territories Should Not Be Used as Launch Pad For Anti-Iran Plots

TEHRAN (President) - President Ebrahim Raisi warns European countries against allowing their territories to be used as a launch pad for plots targeting the Islamic Republic.

"The European countries' territories should not serve as a source of plot and threats against the Iranian nation's interests," the chief executive said on Wednesday as he was taking a telephone call from Belgium's Prime Minister Alexander De Croo.

Iran is inclined to preserve and enhance favorable and constructive relations with the rest of the world, including Europe, Raisi said.

He, however, cautioned foreign governments, including those in the continent, to avoid coming under the influence of false information that are propagated by anti-Iran movements.

"If a government chooses the path of confrontation under the influence of the false and misleading information [that are provided] by terrorist and mercenary movements, it stands to lose," Raisi said.

The Iranian president was referring to ongoing demonization and misinformation campaigns that have been led for decades by anti-Iran terrorist groups such as the Mujahedin-e-Khalq Organization (MKO).

The European Union has removed the name of the MKO from its list of terrorist organization and allows its ringleaders and members to roam freely across the continent and throw lavish conferences there.



This is while the group's acts of terror are responsible for killing thousands of Iranians since the victory of Iran's Islamic Revolution in 1979.

Raisi also expressed concern about some European countries' provision of support for Islamophobic activities.

Several European countries are accused of enabling "state-sponsored" Islamophobia by contributing to systematic suppression of their Muslim communities and tolerating sacrilegious insults against the Abrahamic religion.

"The Islamic Republic is inclined to resolve [its] issues [with others] through recourse to a cooperative approach, of course, on the condition that the other side opts for such an approach too," Raisi said.

The Belgian official, for his part, laid emphasis on the important development of relations between the two sides given their 130-year-old history of diplomatic relations.

"Belgium always chooses the path of dialogue towards the reinforcement of its relations with Iran, and is inclined to resolve various issues through [recourse to] an approach that is based on understanding and cooperation," he concluded.

Some European States Made Miscalculations About Recent Unrests in Iran

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian said on Thursday that some European states "unfortunately" made mistakes in analyzing the recent unrests in Iran as they were influenced by the propagandist campaign of the MKO terrorist group.

He made the remarks in a phone conversation with his Spanish counterpart José Manuel Albares in which they exchanged views on issues of bilateral importance.

The Iranian foreign minister appreciated the congratulatory message from the King of Spain to Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi on the occasion of the 44th victory anniversary of the Islamic Revolution.

The Spanish minister, for his part, hailed cordial relations between the two countries, underlining the need for giving a boost to bilateral cooperation.

The two sides exchanged views on the latest developments in Ukraine, the course of cooperation between Iran and the UN nuclear agency, and the lifting of sanctions on Tehran.

The Spanish foreign minister also discussed some consular issues with Amirabdollahian.

Media Terrorism Common Threat to Islamic Nations

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Minister of Culture Mohammad Mehdi Ismaili has described "media terrorism" as a common threat to the Islamic countries, calling on them to stand together to thwart enemies' plots.

"Today, media terrorism is regarded as a big threat and common danger to the Islamic world countries. Therefore, the Islamic nations despite differences of views should stand together not to allow enemies to implement their evil plans through creating discord among Muslims," the minister said during a meeting with his Lebanese counterpart Mohammad Wissam El-Mortada in Tehran.



Ismaili also said that Iran is and has been facing media warfare, with those involved trying to spread lies and distort facts to weaken the Iranian people's spirits.

The Lebanese culture minister, on his part, said that Iran and Lebanon are facing common challenges, and therefore, they need to expand cooperation in all fields.

He said that impacts of media terrorism is worse than military terrorism, proposing that a joint media committee is formed so that countries can use each other's experiences.

The two ministers discussed ways to expand cultural relations between Tehran and Beirut as well.

Sacred Defense Endless Treasury

TEHRAN (IP) - Majlis Speaker says the Sacred Defense is a precious model that can be enjoyed in all dimensions of governing the country.

During a speech at the Memorial Ceremony of Martyr Bakeri, Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf said the Sacred Defense was an arena for individual and collective ordeals including developing one's good soul, governance, teamwork, etc.

Qalibaf said that during the Sacred Defense, people of different walks of life and ages, from both inside the country and abroad, gathered and formed a coherent organization, the people-oriented feature of which was spectacular.

The parliament speaker said the Basiji and Sacred Defense culture, age, race, and education were not considered criteria, noting that the Sacred Defense by nature was an arena in which the capacities of the people flourished.

He referred to such a person as Martyr Mahdi Bakeri as one of the talents that flourished in the Sacred Defense era and influenced the people around him through his good behavior, saying if there was no Islamic Revolution of Sacred Defense such talents would not be realized.

Qalibaf concluded that the belief in God and endeavor as factors leading Iran to victory as they led Iran to defeat the Ba'athist regime of Saddam during the Sacred Defense against the 8-year imposed war in 1980.

Iranian, Indian Officials Ink Cultural Cooperation MoU

TEHRAN (MNA) - Iranian and Indian officials in the field of publication and international book exhibitions signed a memorandum of understanding.

The MoU was signed in the presence of the head of the National Book Union of India and the managing director of Iran Book and Literature House Ali Ramezani a report by the Iranian Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance's public relations department said.

According to the MoU, publishers of Iran and India will take part in the exhibitions of the two countries and will present their works, which will facilitate the cultural interactions between the two countries, according to Iran Book and Literature House director.

Translating Iranian and Persian books were another matter mentioned in the MoU.

According to the MoU, the booths needed by both sides in Tehran and New Delhi international book fairs will be provided for free.

The 31st edition of the New Delhi World Book Fair (NDWBF) officially began on Saturday (February 25) at Pragati Maidan, New Delhi. The literary event, which is scheduled to go on till March 5, has been organized by the National Book Trust (NBT) in collaboration with the India Trade Promotion Organisation (ITPO), according to Iran Press.

Iran has an active presence in the Book Fair with more than 600 books. Professors and students of India welcomed Iran's booth at NDWBF.

Ali Ramezani said, within the framework of the memorandum, Tehran and New Delhi will provide booths to Indian and Iranian publishers free of charge.

Shri Yuvraj Malik, Director of National Book Trust, India (under the Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Education, Government of India), also said that based on the memorandum of understanding, India and Iran participate in each other's book fairs which is a method of cultural communication between the people of the two countries.

Malik stated that the signing of the MoU is a good start and both countries are looking for more cooperation.

Value of Iran-Russia Trade Rose by 20% in 2022

TEHRAN (IFP) - A senior Russian economic official says the value of trade between his country and Iran increased by 20 percent in 2022 to reach \$4.9 billion.

Sergey Katiryin, head of the Russian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, praised growing bilateral cooperation with Iran in an interview with Tass news agency, saying that two states expect the value of their trade to hit \$40 billion in the years to come.

He said Russian companies are interested in entering the Iranian market, describing Iran as a bridge for trade with the Middle East, South and Southeast Asia.

The Russian official, whose country has been hit tough by Western sanctions over the past year due to the Ukraine war, said Iran has a unique experience in keeping up economic activities amid similar restrictions.

Katiryin stressed the need to bolster cooperation with Iran in all fields, from agriculture to advanced technologies, energy, engineering, textile and tourism.

The comments come as Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian is expected to visit Moscow later this month for talks on closer bilateral cooperation.

Foreign Policy Focusing on Maximum Interaction With All Nations

TEHRAN (IRNA) - President Ebrahim Raisi has said that his administration's foreign policy focuses on extensive interaction with all countries based on dignity, wisdom and expediency.

The president made the comment in Tehran on Wednesday during a meeting with the new Iranian ambassadors to ten countries ahead of their departure from Iran.

"Maximum and extensive interaction with all countries around the world based on three principles of dignity, wisdom and expediency is the main stance of the foreign policy of the government," Raisi said.

He also advised the ambassadors to prioritize the expansion of economic ties with the countries hosting their diplomatic missions, as "the first priority of the government is to enhance the economic power".

The president also called on the envoys to pay attention to the Islamic Revolution's values and make efforts to protect national interests.

The ambassadors stressed that they would make serious efforts to boost political, economic and cultural ties with their host countries.

The new envoys are set to launch their missions in Algeria, Burkina Faso, Japan and Kazakhstan, as well as the European states of Switzerland, Greece, Belarus, Croatia and Spain.

Safari Meets Azeri FM to Discuss Embassy Shooting

TEHRAN (MNA) - Mahdi Safari, Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister for Economic Diplomacy held a meeting with the foreign minister of Azerbaijan Jeyhun Bayramov and his deputy to discuss the case of the shooting in the Azeri embassy in Tehran.

In the meeting with Beyramov and his deputy Khalaf Khalafov, Mehdi Safari expressed deep sympathy and condolences to the government and people of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the family of the victims in the embassy incident and wished a speedy recovery for the injured.

In the meeting, Safari presented a report on the latest developments in the case of the attack on the Azerbaijani embassy and he asked the Azerbaijani authorities to speed up the completion of the case.

He called for exchanging travels between teams of relevant experts from the two countries on the matter.

The Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs announced the readiness of Iran's different political, judicial and law enforcement apparatuses in accordance with the order of the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran to clarify on all aspects of the incident and exercise justice and requested the cooperation of the relevant authorities in the Republic of Azerbaijan.

Ghadir Petrochemical Company Breaks 15-Year Output Record

TEHRAN (Shana) - Ghadir Petrochemical Company has broken a 15-year production record, according to a statement released by the company.

The Iranian petrochemical firm, based in Mahshahr, has surpassed its previous records and achieved new production milestones over the last 11 months.

Ghadir Petrochemical Company reported that it produced over 123,000 metric tons of polyvinyl chloride (PVC) in the month of Bahman, equivalent to January 20 to February 18, 2023 in the Iranian calendar. This amount of production marks a significant increase from the company's previous records and is unprecedented in its history.

In addition, the company has shown significant growth in comparison to the previous year, with a 125% increase in production. This has allowed Ghadir to reach a production capacity of 110% of its nominal capacity, as stated by the company. The company has also succeeded in expanding its production of vinyl chloride monomer (VCM) to 100% of its nominal capacity. This is a significant achievement, as it has taken Ghadir Petrochemical Company 11 years to reach this level of production. The company's daily production of VCM has also hit a new record of 460 tons per day.

These achievements have been made possible by the company's commitment to continuous improvement and its use of cutting-edge technology and innovative methods. Ghadir Petrochemical Company's six-month record of continuous and uninterrupted production in its PVC units is a testament to its dedication to maintaining the highest levels of operational excellence.

The company's consistent and reliable production has resulted in an impressive sales figure of 121,602 PVC products in the first 11 months of the Iranian calendar year. This represents a new sales record for Ghadir Petrochemical Company, which was founded in 2003.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	12:16
■ Evening (Maghreb)	18:19
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	05:06
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	06:29

55. Is it not (the case) that to Allah belongeth whatever is in the heavens and on earth?
Is it not (the case) that Allah's promise is assuredly true? Yet most of them understand not.

56. It is He Who giveth life and who taketh it, and to Him shall ye all be brought back.

Surah 10. Jonah (55 - 56)

President Inaugurates South Pars Phase 14 Refinery

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The 14th phase of the South Pars Refinery was inaugurated on Thursday in the presence of Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi.

Iranian Oil Minister Javad Owji had recently told reporters that by exploiting this stage, the construction of South Pars refineries will be completed and this will be its last phase.

South Pars Phase 14 Refinery with the aim of producing 50 million cubic meters of gas for urban uses (methane) and 75,000 barrels of gas condensate and 400 tons of sulfur per day, as well as one million tons of LPG and one million tons of ethane per year in order to feed petrochemical units was inaugurated. The National Oil of Iran and Pars Oil and Gas Company in an all-Iranian consortium under the leadership of Iran Industries Development and Modernization Organization operated the massive national project.

More than 70% of the total goods required for the 14th phase of South Pars were supplied by domestic factories.



The huge offshore field covers an area of 9,700 square kilometers, 3,700 square kilometers of which are in Iran's territorial waters in the Persian Gulf. The remaining 6,000 square kilometers, called North Dome, are situated in Qatar's territorial waters.

The field is estimated to contain a significant reserve of natural gas, accounting for about eight percent of the world's reserves, and approximately 18 billion barrels of condensate.

Speaking to reporters in Kangan County in Bushehr Province, Javad owji, the Iranian oil minister said that the 14th phase of South Pars was the last dry refinery in South Pars gas field, voicing optimism that the Phase 11 of South Pars which is in the waters of Persian Gulf will be completed in the two months.

Bank of Russia Chief Expected to Visit Iran

TEHRAN (MNA) – Bank of Russia's Chief Elvira Nabiullina is expected to visit Iran in the near future, Ambassador of the Islamic Republic in Moscow, Kazem Jalali said.

"In the near future, we will also witness the visit of Bank of Russia's Chairman to Iran," Jalali said in a video interview at the press center of the Parliamentskaya gazeta newspaper, TASS reported.

The diplomat recalled that the Chairman of the Central Bank of Iran, Mohammad Reza Farzin visited Moscow in 2022.

In January, Farzin said that representatives of the central banks of Russia and Iran had signed an agreement on cooperation to facilitate financial and banking transactions between the countries.

Iran Shining in ICT Development in Region

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Minister of Information and Communications Technology Issa Zarepour has said that Iran is one of the leading countries in the region in communication and information technology and has made significant efforts



in the development of international relations among the members of this organization in the past year.

Zarepour made the remarks during a meeting in Tehran with Secretary General of the D-8 Organization for Economic Cooperation Isiaka Abdulqadir Imam.

Referring to the latest promotions in Iran's ICT, he added that the Islamic Republic of Iran has developed various domestically-developed platforms and messengers by relying on its experts.

He said that these platforms are now hosting millions of Iranian users and have been able to boost business activity in virtual space to a large extent, announcing that Iran is ready to transfer experience and technology in this field with the member states of the D-8 Economic Cooperation Organization.

Developing Eight (D-8) was established through the Istanbul Declaration, which was agreed upon at the First D-8 Summit on June 15, 1997, in Istanbul, Turkey.

D-8 consists of eight developing countries, namely Bangladesh, Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, Malaysia, Nigeria, Pakistan, and Turkey.

Minister Hopes D-8 Could Return to Its Core Missions



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Energy Minister Ali Akbar Mehrabian says politics has overshadowed the D-8 Organization for Economic Cooperation as he expresses hope that the organization could return to its core mission which is to foster economic growth in member states.

Mehrabian made the remarks in a meeting with D-8 Secretary-General Isiaka Abdulqadir Imam in Tehran. The minister said that Iran has been a key member of the D-8 since its inception in 1997 and has always supported the organization and its objectives.

"Other regional organizations have performed better than the D-8 in recent years. Thus it is necessary for the D-8 to return to its core missions," he said, adding that member states should seek to set aside their differences and commit to their responsibilities vis-à-vis the organization.

Mehrabian said he welcomes a proposal by Iranian Foreign Ministry to hold a summit of D-8 energy ministers in Tehran.

Imam, for his part, said the D-8 secretariat seeks to activate more trade potentials between members of the organization.

He said trade between D-8 members could reach some \$500 billion by 2030, up from a current figure of \$137 billion per year.

The D-8 is comprised of Bangladesh, Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, Malaysia, Nigeria, Pakistan, and Turkey.

Iran, Turkmenistan Call for Launching Joint Customs Gate

TEHRAN (IRNA) - The head of the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA) Mohammad Rezvani-Far, and the head of the State Customs Service of Turkmenistan Maksat Hudaykulyev in a meeting called for launching a joint custom gate.

The first round of the meeting was attended by Rezvani-Far, and Khudaikulyev, besides the accompanying delegation, this morning at Khorasan Razavi Customs, and the second round was held this afternoon at Hudan Customs of Turkmenistan.

Pointing out that the 13th government pays special attention to the development of economic and border interactions with neighboring countries, Rezvani-Far said that the development of economic interactions, especially



with neighboring countries, is a top priority for the incumbent government in Iran.

Calling for strengthening economic ties with Turkmenistan in line with the 13th government's policy in Iran, he highlighted that the two states' economic cooperation would multiply

the volume of trade between the two countries.

During the meeting, the two sides called for launching a joint custom gate.

Bolstering cooperation and trade in 4 customs borders, establishing a joint border gate, signing a memorandum on training, holding regular and joint meetings between the two sides, developing border markets, and removal of restrictions were among the significant items discussed.

Chabahar FZ Ready to Host Japanese Investors

ZAHEDAN (IRNA) - The managing director of the Chabahar Free Trade-Industrial Zone announced Iran's Chabahar Free Trade Zone's readiness to host Japanese investors and develop scientific and research relations with the country.

The managing director of the Chabahar Free Trade-Industrial Zone made the remarks at the meeting of the Japanese ambassador to Tehran, Kazutoshi Aikawa, on Wednesday evening.

Amir Moghaddam added in his remarks that this FTZ is ready to host Japanese investors and develop scientific and research relations with the country and demanded the use of Japanese knowledge and technology as an accelerator in the field of post-border infrastructure development.

He announced this region's readiness to host investors in the field of surface water management, recirculation of wastewater, completion of treatment plants, and water and sewage system based on social responsibilities.

After naming some of Chabahar's natural attractions, he considered hosting Japanese tourists as an opportunity for gaining experience and calling for more interactions in the field of tourism.

On Tuesday, Aikawa visited some tourist attractions in the Chabahar region of the southeastern Sistan-Baluchestan Province.

It is the Martian Mountains, Lipar Wetland, and numerous coastal capacities that make Chabahar one of the most popular tourist destinations in Iran, said the ambassador.



Iran Among 7 Gold Producing Countries in World

TEHRAN (IP) - The Head of Iran's Union of Gold, Silver, Jewelry, and Precious Stones announced that Iran is among the 7 gold-producing countries in the world.

Seyed Hojjat Shafahi said: There are about 10,000 gold and jewelry production units in the country. The head of the union also said: the quality of gold products has been improved and some countries are customers of Iranian products. Shafahi emphasized: Iran's gold can compete with other products.

Hyderabad Is the Most Famous Indian City in Iran

TEHRAN (Dispatches - An interactive meeting on 'Exploring Business Opportunities with Iran' was held on Thursday at FTCCI in Red Hills in the city.

It was organized by FTCCI (The Federation of Telangana Chambers of Commerce and Industry) in association with the Consulate General of the Islamic Republic of Iran-Hyderabad.

Addressing 200 plus audience His Excellency H.E. Dr. Iraj Elahi, Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran in India said "Hyderabad is a more famous city in Iran than any other Indian city. It is an even more popular city than New Delhi".

"I have been hearing a lot about Hyderabad since my childhood...India is the rising economy in the world. Iran can be a good companion to India in its journey. We can complement each other. Many nations, including India, have gone through sanctions at some stage or the other. We must learn to live and lead under sanctions, said the ambassador," he said.

The envoy also assured that the Iranian business delegation will visit Hyderabad in a few months.

He asked many businessmen, and exporters, in the hall to look at Iran as a good and potential market for Indian products. We have an 80 million population, together with our neighbouring nations we are 20 million and a big market which can be tapped.



H.E. Mahdi Shahrokhi, Consul General of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Hyderabad said that it was the maiden visit of the Ambassador to Hyderabad city. I have been living in Hyderabad for the past 22 months. We feel at home in Hyderabad.

Speaking further the Consul General said, the Cost of stay, study, and tuition fee is cheaper in Iran than in India. "Look at Iran for studying abroad. Nearly 20,000 Indians are studying in Iran," he told the gathering.

Giving his welcome remarks Anil Agarwal, President of FTCCI said India, Iran and Telangana are natural allies. We entered many MoUs with Iran. We are planning a business delegation to Iran soon and similarly an Iranian business delegation to India. The diplomatic relations between the two nations are about 70 years old.

AVPS Chakravarthi, Chairman of the International Relations Trade Committee, delivering introductory remarks. "We eat Hyderabad Biryani and drink Irani Chai, which is our connection between the two nations," he remarked.

Speaking further AVPS Chakravarthi added we are an agrarian society and the state being the Rice Bowl of India, both nations can have a lot of scope for cooperation. India is the capital of Medical Tourism.

Meela Jayadev, Suresh Kumar Singhal, Vice President Khyati Narawane, CEO of FTCCI also participated. Meela Jayadev proposed a vote of thanks, a press note informed.

New Greek Transport Minister Promises Train Crash Answers

ATHENS (Dispatches) - Greece's newly-appointed transport minister said he was taking over with a mandate to investigate the country's deadliest train crash, to modernize an ailing railway system and to restore safety in train travel.

"It is a very heavy responsibility," Giorgos Gerapetritis told reporters during handover at the ministry.

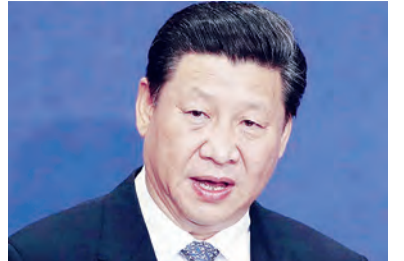
The government has faced harsh criticism for the state of its railway system since an intercity train collided head-on with a cargo train on Tuesday night, killing at least 46 people, many of them students in their 20s, and injuring dozens.



China's Annual Parliament to Implement Xi's Tightening Grip

BEIJING (Dispatches) - China's annual parliament opens on Sunday and will implement the biggest government reshuffle in a decade as Xi Jinping tightens control while contending with a host of challenges, from an uneven post-COVID economic recovery to cratering U.S. relations.

Nearly 3,000 delegates will gather in the Great Hall of the People west of Tiananmen Square for the first National People's Congress (NPC) of the post-zero-COVID era, although some precautions remain including testing and quarantine for journalists. The rubber-stamp NPC will confirm Xi's new economic team after China's most powerful leader since Mao Zedong cemented a norm-breaking third term and stacked the top of the ruling Communist Party with allies during its twice-a-decade congress in October.



Ukraine Clings to Bakhmut in Fierce Fight With Russian Forces



CHASIV YAR (Dispatches) - Ukrainian forces hung on to positions in the ruined eastern city of Bakhmut while Moscow said its security forces had battled Ukrainian saboteurs who had taken hostages in a cross-border raid.

Russia's FSB security force said the situation was now "under control" in Bryansk province just north of the Ukrainian border. Earlier Moscow had said armed Ukrainians had crossed the frontier, fired on a car killing one person and wounding a child, and held hostages in a shop.

In a brief television address, President Vladimir Putin said the attackers had fired deliberately on the car, knowing it held civilians.

"They won't achieve anything. We will crush them," he said, saying Russia was fighting "terrorists and neo-Nazis". An aide to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy called the reports a false provocation by Moscow, but also appeared to imply some form of incident had been carried out by partisans.

Near the front lines west of Bakhmut, in the Ukrainian-held town of Chasiv Yar, the thump of outgoing artillery fire could be heard.

In nearby towns and villages, new trenches had been dug on the roadside 20-40 metres (65-130 feet) apart, an apparent sign that Ukrainian forces were strengthening defensive positions west of the city.

Residents trickled out of the area, carrying bags.

"We remained until the very last. We wanted to stay. But we how can we? Our neighbor's flat has now been destroyed. It is time to go," said Svitlana, 47.

The boss of Russia's Wagner private army, Yevgeny Prigozhin, released video of his men waving a Wagner banner and musical instruments atop a ruined multi-storey building, which he said had been filmed near the centre of Bakhmut. Reuters was not immediately able to verify the location.

Bakhmut has been reduced to a blasted wasteland, with a few thousand of its 70,000 pre-war civilian population still inside as armies battle street-by-street.

Russian troops, bolstered by hundreds of thousands of reservists called up last year and thousands of convicts recruited by Wagner from prison, have been advancing north and south of the city to cut it off.

Moscow, which lost territory throughout the second half of 2022, says taking Bakhmut would be a step towards seizing the rest of the surrounding Donbas region. Kyiv says the city has limited strategic value but it is exhausting Russia's invasion force in what has become the bloodiest battle of the war.

"Sooner or later, we will probably have to leave Bakhmut. There is no sense in holding it at any cost," Ukrainian lawmaker Serhiy Rakhmanin said late on Wednesday. The aim was to "inflict as many Russian losses as possible."

The reported raid into the village of Lubechanye near the border in Russia's Bryansk province comes days after Moscow said Kyiv had attacked targets deep inside its territory with drones.

In videos circulating online, armed men calling themselves the "Russian Volunteer Corps" said they had crossed the border to fight "the bloody Putinite and Kremlin regime". Reuters could not immediately verify the authenticity of the footage.

Zelenskiy aide Mykhailo Podolyak called the Russian reports of the incident "a classic deliberate provocation". Moscow "wants to scare its people to justify the attack on another country & the growing poverty after the year of war," he tweeted.

Macron Says Era of French Interference in Africa Is Over

LIBREVILLE (Dispatches) - President Emmanuel Macron said the era of French interference in Africa was "well over" as he began a four-nation tour of the continent to renew frayed ties.

Anti-French sentiment runs high in some former African colonies as the continent becomes a renewed diplomatic battleground, with Russian and Chinese influence growing in the region.

Macron said France harbored no desire to return to past policies of interfering in Africa ahead of an environment summit in Gabon, the first leg of his trip.

"The age of Francafrrique is well over," Macron said in remarks to the French community in the capital Libreville, referring to France's post-colonization strategy of supporting authoritarian leaders to defend its interests.

"Sometimes I get the feeling that mindsets haven't moved along as much as we have, when I read, hear and see people ascribing intentions to France that it doesn't have," he added.

"Francafrrique" is a favorite target of pan-Africanists, who say that after the wave of decolonization in 1960

France propped up dictators in its former colonies in exchange for access to resources and military bases.

Macron and his predecessors, notably Francois Hollande, have previously declared that the policy is dead and that France has no intention of meddling in sovereign affairs.

Macron on Monday said there would be a "noticeable reduction" in France's troop presence in Africa "in the coming months" and a greater focus on training and equipping allied countries' forces.

France has in the past year withdrawn troops from former colonies Mali, Burkina Faso and the Central African Republic.

The pullout from Mali and Burkina Faso, where its soldiers were supporting the Sahel nations to battle a long-running jihadist insurgency, came on the back of a wave of local hostility.

In his remarks on Thursday, Macron insisted the planned reorganisation was "neither a withdrawal nor disengagement", defining it as adapting to the needs of partners.



Scholz Urges China Not to Arm Russia

BERLIN (Dispatches) - German Chancellor Olaf Scholz urged China not to send weapons to help Russia's war in Ukraine and instead asked Beijing to exert pressure on Moscow to pull back its forces.

In a speech to the German parliament, Scholz said it was disappointing that Beijing had refrained from condemning the Russian invasion, though he welcomed its efforts towards nuclear de-escalation. China has denied any intention to arm Russia and one of its senior diplomats told the United Nations on Feb. 23 that "sending weapons will not bring peace" but add "fuel to the fire". Scholz's remarks underscored how the international response to the war in Ukraine highlighted global divisions, as China and India have refrained from condemning the Russian invasion or joining the West in imposing sanctions.

The divisions have also reared their head at a series of G20 meetings in India that descended into wrangling over the war. Germany has said it planned to counter Russian "propaganda" at this week's talks, while Russia on Thursday accused Western countries of turning the event into a "farce".

The U.S. is sounding out close allies about the possibility of imposing new sanctions on China if Beijing provides military support to Russia for its war in Ukraine, sources told Reuters this week.

"My message to Beijing is clear: use your influence in Moscow to urge the withdrawal of Russian troops," Scholz said, to resounding applause from lawmakers. "And don't deliver any weapons to the aggressor Russia."

The U.S. consultations on sanctions, which are still at a preliminary stage, are intended to drum up support from a range of countries, especially those in the wealthy Group of Seven (G7), to coordinate support for any possible restrictions. It was not clear what specific sanctions Washington will propose.

China's role in the Russia-Ukraine war is expected to be among the topics discussed when U.S. President Joe Biden meets Scholz at the White House.

North Korea's Leader Demands More Farmland to Boost Food Production

SEOUL (Dispatches) - North Korean leader Kim Jong Un ordered improvements to infrastructure and expansion of farmland to ramp up food production, state media said, amid warnings of an impending food crisis.

Kim gave instructions to revamp irrigation systems, build modern farming machines and create more arable land as he wrapped up the seventh enlarged plenary meeting of the ruling Workers' Party's powerful Central Committee on Wednesday.

The meeting began on Sunday to discuss the "urgent" task of improving the agricultural sector.

South Korea has warned of a mounting food crisis in the isolated North, including a recent surge in deaths from hunger in some regions, due in part to what it said was a failure of a new grain policy limiting private crop transactions.

North Korea's economy has been battered by floods and typhoons, sanctions over its nuclear and missile programs, and a sharp decline in trade with China amid border closures and COVID-19 lockdowns.

South Korea's rural development agency estimated the North's crop production fell nearly 4% last year from the year before, citing heavy summer rains and other economic conditions.

Kim laid out plans and specific tasks to build "rich and highly-civilized socialist rural communities with advanced technology and modern civilization," the official KCNA news agency said. He ordered revamp of the irrigation system to cope with climate change, production of efficient

farming machines to modernize production, and reclamation of tidelands to expand farming areas, KCNA said.

A lack of adequate agricultural infrastructure, machinery and supplies including fertilizers and fuel have made North Korea more vulnerable to natural disasters, experts say.

The mountainous country has also sought to expand arable land through tideland reclamation along its west coast since the 1980s, but earlier efforts failed due partly to poor engineering and maintenance.

Under Kim, reclamation projects have been relatively more successful, but with slow progress in converting coastal mudflats into fertile farmland, they did little to ease food shortages, the U.S.-based 38 North project said in late 2021.

"The state media report said they set new goals and action plans, but I don't see anything new as all of the elements including irrigation and reclamation have already been raised before," said Lim Eul-chul, a professor of North Korean studies at Kyungnam University in South Korea.

Yang Moo-jin, a professor at the University of North Korean studies in Seoul, also noted the report did not suggest new ideas or a possible change in the grain policy which South Korea blamed for food shortages.

KCNA said Kim stressed the need to tighten discipline in implementing the economic plan, warning against "practices of weakening the organizational and executive power of the cabinet," and ordered all party units to "get their working efficiency verified."



Taiwan Military to Get \$619m U.S. Arms Boost

TAIPEI (Dispatches) - The United States has approved the potential sale of \$619 million in new weapons to Taiwan, including missiles for its F-16 fleet, as the island reported a second day of large-scale Chinese air force incursions nearby.

The arms sales are likely to further sour already tense ties between Washington and Beijing, which has repeatedly demanded such deals stop, viewing them as unwarranted support for democratically governed Taiwan, an island China claims as its own territory.

The Pentagon said the U.S. State Department has approved the potential sale to Taiwan of arms and equipment that includes 200 anti-aircraft Advanced Medium Range Air-to-Air Missiles (AMRAAM) and 100 AGM-88B HARM missiles that can take out land-based radar stations.

"The proposed sale will contribute to the recipient's capability to provide for the defense of its airspace, regional security, and interoperability with the United States," it said in a statement.

Taiwan's defense ministry said the missiles would help "effectively defend the airspace to deal with threats and provocations from the Communist military" and would bolster defense stockpiles.

Raytheon Technologies and Lockheed Martin are the principal contractors, it added. China has sanctioned both companies for selling Taiwan weapons.

China's Foreign Ministry said it was "firmly" opposed to the planned sale, adding that the United States should stop arms sales to and military contacts with Taiwan.

Taiwan has complained for the past three years or so of stepped-up Chinese military activities near the island as Beijing seeks to assert its sovereignty claims.

Taiwan reported on Thursday a second day of large-scale Chinese air force incursions into its air defense identification zone, with its defense ministry saying that during the last 24 hours it had spotted 21 aircraft.

China has said its activities in the area are justified as it seeks to defend its territorial integrity and to warn the United States against "colluding" with Taiwan, despite the anger this causes in Taipei.

Taiwan's defense ministry said the aircraft, 17 J-10 fighters and four J-16 fighters, had flown into the southwestern corner of Taiwan's air defense identification zone, according to a map the ministry released.



Impact of Food And Nutrition on Your Oral Health



LONDON (Dispatches) - Food habits and food components can have a profound impact on our oral and dental health. What we eat, how much we eat, and when we eat can affect oral status positively or negatively. While some foods can improve your teeth and gums, others can aggravate disease conditions like dental caries, gum infections, and oral cancers. Read on to learn how the foods we consume impact our oral health.

Food has a substantial impact on oral health. It influences the initiation and progression of oral diseases like caries, gingivitis, periodontal disease, teeth erosion, and even oral cancers.

Besides the nutritional values of food, the form and frequency of our eating habits influence the final oral effects. Sticky forms of sugars are the main culprit in dental caries. Limiting frequent snacking on sugary beverages and acidic drinks helps prevent damage to your teeth.

A balanced and nutritious diet is key to maintaining a healthy oral status.

Different food classes like fruits, vegetables, and dairy products help to keep your teeth strong and your gums healthy.

Foods can affect your teeth and gums in 2 ways — directly via contact with harmful ingredients when we eat (local effects) — and indirectly via the absorption of ingredients into the blood (systemic effects). The types of food you take, their amount, frequency, the timing of intake, and your eating habits can add up and reflect in your oral health.

Type of foods. Foods are nutritional or empty — with minimum or no nutritional value. We must know the contents of whatever we eat in a day.

Sugars. All sugars, in different forms, have a long-time association with teeth cavities. The milestone Vipeholm study concluded that sugars in sticky foods, ingested between meals, were linked to a significant rise in cavities.

Amount and frequency of food intake. Consuming sugary drinks and snacks regularly without taking the time to brush your teeth might lead to cavities. The World Health Organization (WHO) recognizes the danger and advises that free sugars account for no more than 10% of total calories consumed. Every time you have sugar, your teeth come under acid attack.

Eating habits. Eating patterns also dictate the harms caused to teeth. Taking sugars in between meals is linked to more caries risk than with meals. Experts recommend avoiding binge eating.

Research shows that nutritional deficiency and malnutrition are fundamental causes of early teeth loss. Fruits and vegetables are rich in antioxidants, essential nutrients, vitamins, minerals, and fibers. Consuming a varied diet loaded with veggies and fruits, decreasing the fat intake, and including fiber-rich foods in meals is a great way to get the necessary nutrients from foods.

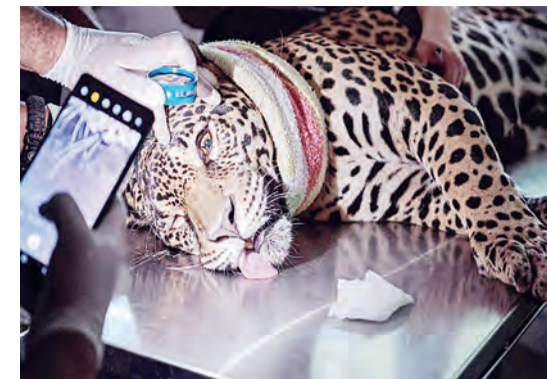
Vitamin A, C, E. Vitamins A, C, E, and folate deficiencies can damage periodontal health. Vitamin A deficiency leads to gum infections, gingivitis, gingival hypoplasia, and supporting bone loss. Bleeding gums are often due to a lack of Vitamin C.

Vitamin B. Vitamin B-complex deficiency is linked to lower host defense against bacterial irritants. Adequate folic acid aids in the prevention of gum inflammation. Taking sufficient vitamins helps to avoid gum-related issues.

Calcium. Calcium is an important component of jaw bones and teeth — it helps increase bone density.

Vitamin D. Vitamin D aids in calcium absorption — you must monitor your Vitamin D levels to maintain optimal calcium uptake.

Fighting for Their Lives: The World's Forests In Figures



PARIS (Dispatches) - Forests are central to biodiversity and the fight against climate change, as well as being a big money spinner for national economies.

But they are in critical danger.

As politicians, including French President Emmanuel Macron, prepare to descend on the West African nation of Gabon for an international summit on forests, AFP looks at how green our globe really is.

Forests cover almost a third, or 31 percent, of the global land area, according to a 2022 report by the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

They span some four billion hectares (9.9 billion acres), or close to the combined surface area of Canada, Russia, the United States and all 27 members of the European Union.

More than one-third is primary forest, which the FAO defines as being "naturally regenerated forests of native species, where there are no visible indications of human activities and the ecological processes are not significantly disturbed".

Brazil, Canada, China, Russia and the United States account for more than half of all forest area.

Seven percent of the world's forests have been planted by humans.

Forests can be found in many climates but three-quarters are either in the tropics (45 percent) or in a ring around the North Pole (27 percent).

Forests, especially rainforests, are critical for biodiversity on land.

Four-fifths of the world's amphibian species live in forests, as do three-quarters of bird species, 68 percent of mammal species and many of the 60,000 kinds of trees found on Earth.

Three-quarters of the fungi species, two-thirds of the plant species and nearly half (45 percent) of the animal species considered vulnerable, endangered or extinct are found in forests.

Among the amphibians in critical danger of extinction are the Montseny brook newt in Spain and Lanza's Alpine salamander, which lives in the Franco-Italian Alps.

Forests typically act as carbon sinks, absorbing more carbon from the atmosphere than they emit.

They contain 662 billion tons of carbon, more than half of all the carbon found in soil and vegetation.

Deforestation and climate change have had some impact on that function, though replanting and better forest management have helped.

According to the FAO, forests absorbed more carbon than they emitted in 2011–2020, thanks to reforestation, improved management and other factors.

But it warns in its latest report on forests (2022) that they could start emitting carbon rather than absorbing it if deforestation is not halted.

"Unless additional action is taken, an estimated 289 million hectares of forests would be deforested between 2016 and 2050 in the tropics alone, resulting in the emission of 169 gigatons of CO2 equivalent."

The forestry sector pumped more than \$1.52 trillion into the world economy in 2015, directly and indirectly.

Whether working in wood putty and paper industries, forestry or solid wood products such as furniture, around 33 million people, or one percent of the world's workforce, are dependent on forests for a livelihood.

Even though the rate of deforestation has slowed, it continues to occur "at an alarming rate" according to the FAO, which says 10 million hectares of forests were wiped out each year between 2015 and 2020.

The losses were not compensated by replanting and natural forest expansion, which is estimated at five million hectares per year.



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Portugal Economy Grows 6.7% in 2022

LISBON (Dispatches) - Portugal's economy grew 6.7% in 2022, its strongest pace in 35 years, fuelled by domestic demand and booming tourism, but inflation put the brakes on private consumption in the fourth quarter, presaging a sharp slowdown this year.

In its second reading of gross domestic product released, the National Statistics Institute (INE) revised fourth-quarter growth slightly higher yet kept the annual figure unchanged.

It said the economy grew 0.3% in the last quarter of 2022, up from 0.2% estimated a month ago and the same as in the third quarter. Year-on-year growth reached 3.2%, up from its flash estimate of 3.1%.

However, INE said the contribution of domestic demand to year-on-year GDP was only 1.9 percentage points (pp) after 3.2 pp in the previous quarter, while external demand contributed with 1.1 pp compared to 1.6 pp in the third quarter.



Turkish Economy Logs Better-Than-Expected 5.6% Growth in 2022

ANKARA (Dispatches) - Turkey's economy expanded by more than expected in the last quarter and the whole of 2022, official data showed Tuesday, yet the pace is clouded by the devastating earthquakes this month that caused widespread destruction in the southeast of the country.

The gross domestic product (GDP) grew 5.6% on an annual basis in 2022, the Turkish Statistical Institute (TurkStat) said, above market expectations that stood at around 5.2%.

The economy started cooling in the second half of 2022 with a decline in domestic and foreign demand, partly due to a slowdown in Turkey's main trading partners because of the war in Ukraine, which hurt exports.

The GDP expanded by 3.5% in the fourth quarter of 2022, the TurkStat said, down from a revised 4% in the third quarter and 7.8% in the second quarter.

In 2022, the country's gross domestic product (GDP) reached TL 15 trillion (\$905.5 billion) last year, the data showed.

The GDP per capita was TL 176,589 (\$10,655) in 2022.

Finance and insurance activities grew 21.8%, followed by the services sector, which rose 11.7%, according to the data. The only contraction was in the construction sector, which shrank 8.4%, the data showed.

Overall consumption contributed 11.5 points to annual growth, according to economists' calculations. Net foreign trade and stocks lowered it by 3 and 5.5 percentage points, respectively.

Household spending, which is estimated to account for more than half the economy, grew an annual 19.7% in 2022, the data showed.

The spending expanded by 16.1% year-over-year during the October-December period. Government spending rose 9%, the fastest pace of growth since the presidential elections in 2018.

Exports of goods and services increased by 9.1% on annual basis, while imports rose by 7.9% compared to the previous year. Outbound shipments were down 3.3% in the last quarter, while imports jumped 10.2%, the TurkStat said.

In contrast, the average GDP growth rate was 1.1% in the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) area in the last quarter of 2022. The rate was 1.8% for the European Union, 1.9% for the eurozone and 1% for G-7 countries.

The economy is expected to cool further this year, mainly due to catastrophic earthquakes that flattened a swathe of Turkey's southeastern region in early February, which could keep pressure on inflation and stretch the government's budget.

Indicators before the quakes suggested that GDP growth had revived with the help of domestic demand, but risks to annual growth were now on the downside after the disaster, said Haluk Bűrümcekçi, of Bűrümcekçi Consulting.

"The size and duration of the earthquake zone's contribution to all sectors, particularly the manufacturing industry... will be critical in shaping the magnitude of the expected slowdown in growth this year," he said.

The likelihood of a slowdown in January was "quite high," but more robust growth may be seen in the following quarters as production gains compensate for losses in other areas, Bűrümcekçi said.

To counter the slowdown, the central bank cut its policy rate by 500 basis points at the end of last year and then by a further 50 basis points to 8.5% last week to support growth after the earthquakes killed more than 50,000 in Turkey and neighboring Syria.

China's Urban Employment Sees Rare Decline Due to COVID-19 Curbs

BEIJING (Dispatches) - China's urban employment experienced a decline in 2022 for the first time in 60 years, and there was also an unusual decrease in per capita spending. This was caused by the strict measures imposed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which devastated the country's economy, the second largest in the world.

The new National Bureau of Statistics data also showed the smallest income growth over three decades.

China's urban jobs dropped by 8.4 million to 459.31 million, the first drop since 1962.

"The decline of the urban labor force reflects the severe economic challenge China faced last year," Zhiwei Zhang, president at Pinpoint Asset Management, wrote in a note to clients.

He cited the shrinking size of China's labor force, job losses due to the pandemic, and the deceleration of rural workers migrating to cities as the main reasons for the decline.

Zhang added he expects this to be a temporary drop now that China has abandoned draconian zero-COVID policies aimed at stamping out every outbreak.

China had an economic growth of just 3% in 2022 - one of the weakest levels in nearly half a century.

The statistics bureau data showed that per capita spending fell 0.2% in real terms. That followed a jump of 12.6% in 2021 and marked only the third such decline since records for that data point began in 1980. Retail sales also fell 0.2%, the second-worst performance since 1968.

Xu Tianchen, an economist at the Economist Intelligence Unit, said a steep drop in income growth for China's lowest-income earners was a key factor behind the weak spending data.

"Before the pandemic, the lowest income group was one of the fastest growing, but now, quite remarkably, it has become the slowest income group, dropping from 10.1% (income growth) to 5.2%."

Disposable income per capita in China grew by just 2.9% in real terms, the second smallest rise since 1989.

Unadjusted, disposable income per capita grew to 36,883 yuan (\$5,310) last year, while spending per capita increased to 24,538 yuan.

Rural areas performed better than urbanized zones, with the disposable incomes of rural households growing 4.2% in real terms, compared with 1.9% growth for urban residents.



Unexpected Inflation Jump Adds to ECB Headache

PARIS (Dispatches) - Inflation in two of the euro zone's biggest economies rose unexpectedly this month, data showed, pushing up European Central Bank rate hike expectations and challenging the narrative that a rapid easing in price growth is now underway.

The ECB plans to raise its key rate by 50 basis points in March to 3% but some policymakers have called for more cautious steps thereafter as past rate hikes are now taking hold and the economy is starting to respond.

Inflation in France rose to 7.2% from 7.0%, beating forecasts for 7.0%, while in Spain, it jumped to 6.1% from 5.9% and ahead of the 5.5% seen in a Reuters survey.

The figures also raise doubts that the euro zone's combined figure, due on Thursday, will show a fall to 8.2% from 8.6% but economists say that the German number, due on Wednesday, will be more crucial than Tuesday's releases.

Markets now fully price in another 150 basis points of rate hikes by the end of the year, taking the peak in the ECB's deposit rate to 4%, reflecting the view that it will take longer for the ECB to get price growth back to its 2% target.

Germany's 10-year bond yield, the benchmark for the euro zone, jumped to its highest level since 2011 at 2.66% as traders ramped up bets that ECB rates will peak around 4% at year-end.

Expectations for the peak in ECB rates have risen by over 40 basis points this month on fears that inflation will be more persistent than expected, particularly for core goods that exclude volatile fuel and food prices.

Some investors even think there is a risk of the ECB raising rates by more than 50 basis points in March, despite its explicit guidance for the move.

"Both reports were firmer than we had expected, suggesting more inflation persistence... hence, we flag some upside risk for (the euro zone release on) Thursday," JPMorgan economist Greg Fuzesi said.

In France, inflation still has some way to rise after its figures were among the lowest in the 20-nation euro area for the past year.

"The February data shows that French inflation has not reached its peak yet," ING economist Charlotte de Montpellier said. "Given how underlying global inflation will probably continue to go up in the coming months, that will give further arguments to the European Central Bank to continue to raise rates beyond the first quarter."

In Spain, core inflation also accelerated, adding to the ECB's worries that price growth is becoming persistent.

Canada's Economy Surprises With Q4 Flat Line



OTTAWA (Dispatches) - The Canadian economy unexpectedly stalled in the final three months of 2022, but likely rebounded in January, data showed, a result that backs up the Bank of Canada's aim to keep interest rates on hold at its next policy meeting in March.

Annualized fourth-quarter gross domestic product (GDP) was flat versus the previous quarter, Statistics Canada said, ending a streak of five consecutive quarterly increases. It was far below analysts' median forecast for a 1.5% increase.

The result also came in below the Bank of Canada's Q4 forecast for 1.3% annualized GDP growth. The central bank has raised its benchmark interest rate at a record pace to tame high inflation, but last month it said it wanted to pause its tightening campaign.

The Q4 figures give "the BoC just a little bit of comfort that higher interest rates are working to slow demand, especially with the conflicting signals from the labor market over the last couple of months," said Robert Both, macro strategist at TD Securities.

Canada added 10 times more jobs than expected in January, and both manufacturing activity and retail sales picked up the same month. The economy likely bounced back in January, expanding 0.3%, Statscan said.

"Some of the indicators are going in multiple directions and so the Bank of Canada will remain cautious evaluating the data after this meeting" next week, for which no action is a "done deal," said Derek Holt, vice president of capital markets economics at Scotiabank.

Money markets still expect that the central bank will hold its benchmark rate at 4.50% at the March 8 policy announcement, and they trimmed bets that it will be forced to tighten again later this year.

The economy contracted 0.1% in December from November, also below analysts' expectations that GDP would be unchanged in the month. Real GDP slowed in 2022 to 3.5% from 5% in 2021, after shrinking 5.1% in 2020 during COVID-19 pandemic restrictions.

Lebanon Plans to Hike Import Tariffs for Second Time in Three Months

BEIRUT (Dispatches) - Lebanon will triple the tariffs it charges on imports in local currency, according to copies of government decisions seen by Reuters, as the state seeks to boost its revenues amid a worsening economic crisis.

Caretaker finance minister Youssef Khalil requested to change the rate at which customs fees are calculated from 15,000 pounds per U.S. dollar to 45,000 pounds, according to correspondence seen by Reuters.

Cabinet responded with a letter saying it had no objections given the move would "secure additional revenues to help revive the public sector".

Lebanon's local currency has lost more than 98% of its value since its economic collapse began in 2019, trading at an all-time high of 87,000 per U.S. dollar on Tuesday on the parallel market.

State coffers have been drained and public services have suffered as a result, with school teachers on strike for weeks. Lebanon's government had already effectively increased tariffs on imported goods about 10-fold at the end of last year by changing the rate at which they were calculated to 15,000 per U.S. dollar from the then-official rate of 1,507.5.

In February, it amended the exchange rate to match, so that the official government rate was 15,000 to the U.S. dollar. Unifying Lebanon's various exchange rates is among pre-conditions set by the International Monetary Fund nearly a year ago for Lebanon to get a \$3 billion bailout, but the lender of last resort says reforms have been too slow.

The country has been moving towards a cash-based and dollarized economy given spiralling inflation and restrictions by banks on transactions.

India's Growth Slowed in December Quarter on Weakness in Manufacturing

NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - India's economic growth slowed further in the December quarter as pent up demand eased and weakness in the manufacturing sector continued.

Asia's third largest economy recorded year-on-year growth of 4.4% in October-December, down from 6.3% in July-September, data released by the government on Tuesday showed. The sharp fall in the year-on-year growth rate is also partly due to a fading of pandemic-induced base effects and revision

to last year's growth, economists said.

October-December growth was below a Reuters forecast of 4.6%.

The government, however, retained its growth forecast of 7% for 2022/23 while revising higher growth for the previous year to 9.1% from the earlier 8.7%.

"We are likely to hit the 7% GDP growth target for the year," said India's chief economic advisor V. Anantha Nageswaran at a press briefing. Growth of 4-4.1% is possible in the January-March quarter, he said.

Even though a weaker global economy is likely to pull down India's growth to near 6.4% next year, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank project India to be the fastest-growing major economy in 2023.

India's manufacturing sector shrank by 1.1% year-on-year in the third quarter, a second straight contraction reflecting lower profit margins and weaker exports.

External demand was weak as central banks globally continued monetary tightening to tame inflation.

"The major disappointment is negative growth in manufacturing," said Madan Sabnavis, economist at state-run Bank of Baroda. He said 2022/23 growth will be at 6.8% against a government estimate of 7%.

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI), has raised its benchmark repo rate by 250 basis points since May last year and economists expect a further rate hike of 25 basis points to 6.75% in April, which could hurt growth in the coming quarters.

India's private consumer spending, contributing around 60% of GDP, rose just 2.1% year-on-year in December quarter, compared to downwardly revised 8.8% increase in the previous quarter, while capital investment rose 8.3% year-on-year compared to revised 9.7% growth in the same period.

Private investment activity is recovering, said Nageswaran.

Government spending declined 0.8% year-on-year in the December quarter compared to revised 4.1% contraction in the previous quarter.

Iran to Host 2023 West Asia Chess Championship

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Asian Chess Federation agreed with Iran Chess Federation's proposal to host the Old Continent's West Asia Chess Championship this year.

Thanks to consultation of Shadi Prider, deputy head of the Asia Chess Federation, Iran's hosting of the 2023 West Asia Chess Championship was finalized. The games will be played in June, 2023 in two fields of women and men and the winners will qualify also for the World Chess Championship.

Iran is also hosting this year's Asian teenage chess players, or the high school players' games.



Aviation Industry Turns to Childcare, Free iPhones to Lure Workers

LONDON (Dispatches) - The North American aviation industry is wooing workers with daycare centers, cheaper transport and free iPhones to compete in a tight market where salaries for entry-level, low-skilled jobs often lag those at e-commerce companies like Amazon.

Shortages of workers like baggage handlers and customer service agents led to long lines and delayed luggage during the peak summer travel season last year, marring the industry's recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and spurring demand for new initiatives to attract workers.

"If you want people to work crazy shifts, in the middle of the night, in the middle of the day, you need to be able to accommodate their family life too," Thomas Romig, vice president at airport trade group Airports Council International, or ACI World, said of services like daycare.

"Airports are taking more actions to try and recruit, retain and train (or) upskill workers."

ACI, which has member airports around the world, is now preparing guidance for them on making jobs at 24-hour centers outside city cores more friendly to workers.

Part of the issue for the aviation industry is that low wages and taxing work have long made retaining staff at airports a challenge, a problem exacerbated by the pandemic and now, historically low unemployment rates. In the United States, the unemployment rate is at its lowest level in more than 53 years.

U.S. air transportation employment has recovered over the past year to above pre-pandemic levels. But the sector still needs to add jobs as U.S. air travel also rebounds - forecasts show it is set to rise again this year from pre-pandemic levels hit in 2022.

Job sweeteners are necessary because average pay for U.S. airport workers at just under \$18 an hour drastically lags that of e-commerce employers like Amazon (AMZN.O), which pay almost \$33 an hour on average, according to ZipRecruiter.

Childcare programs have been one response. Apart from airports in California, they are not usually offered at North American airports. But that is changing.

The city of Phoenix's aviation department, which runs the Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport, has launched a childcare program for airport workers and plans to build a childcare facility on airport property. The department currently has 133 of 171 jobs vacant.

Since its launch, 37 airport workers have joined the program, which covers daycare costs partially. The city of Phoenix is also spending \$1 million to develop a separate childcare facility next to the airport.

The effort is aimed at getting people back to work after the pandemic and helping the airport run smoothly, said Matthew Heil, the city department's special projects administrator.

At Kelowna International Airport in British Columbia, Canada, construction is underway for a daycare primarily for children of employees who work on airport property.

The project already helped retain one customer service agent, a single father who had considered leaving, said Phillip Elchitz, senior manager of airport operations.

"Now he knows the daycare is coming and he's not looking for (other) work anymore," Elchitz said. "That is exactly why we are doing this."

Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky International Airport is similarly weighing offering childcare on-site or nearby in a bid to offer attractive benefits to workers, said airport spokesperson Mindy Kershner.

Some California airports, which already offer daycare, are adding other services to make life easier for employees.

San Francisco in July will increase monthly subsidies offered to employees using public transit by more than 50% to \$200, while a free shuttle is being piloted for workers who live further away, an airport spokesperson said.

Kelowna's airport is also considering shuttle service for hard-to-fill night or pre-dawn shifts when public transit is not available.

Airlines are facing similar struggles on the hiring front.



Delta Air Lines is offering a \$5,000 sign-on bonus for a ramp agent position - among the more taxing jobs in aviation - in Minneapolis. Other carriers such as United Airlines and Alaska Airlines are also trying to attract workers for ramp operations with signing bonuses, according to job postings.

Ground handling company Unifi, which provides labor and equipment to Delta, United, and Alaska Airlines, has seen costs to bring on new workers in tight labor markets rise as much as 60% from pre-pandemic levels, Unifi Chief Strategy Officer Ying McPherson said.

With Unifi's staff turnover rate above pre-pandemic levels, it has turned to incentive programs to retain talent, McPherson said.

For example, it last year gave away brand new cars to three employees and smartphones, including iPhones, to over 3,000 workers who met performance targets, a company spokesperson said. It is now offering emergency funds and sponsoring a program that allows employees to pay for purchases such as appliances and computers over time, the spokesperson added.

In some cases, airlines and aviation services companies are flying in workers and hosting them at local hotels for temporary assignments to avoid the costs of hiring additional staff in tighter labor markets, McPherson said.

Facility services and management specialist Grupo Eulen, which works with carriers like American Airlines, estimates wages for ground handlers will rise around 6% to 8% this year, although fewer hiring bonuses are being offered.

Unions argue the industry needs to do more to attract and retain workers, especially given practices like contract-flipping - work being transferred from one company to another - are common.

Yavar Qadri, a representative for Unifor, Canada's largest private sector union, says his salary was cut by 5% and he then lost dental benefits during two separate flips over the last 15 years while working as a security guard overnight for a contractor at Canada's largest airport in Toronto.

A security guard like Qadri would normally start on wages of C\$15.55 an hour and hit just C\$16.14 hourly after six years, according to Unifor, underscoring the dim pay rise prospects.

"People are working multiple jobs. Or they are trying to get a lot of overtime hours," added Qadri. "The whole scenario creates a very toxic atmosphere. Everybody is tired."

And then there are others - like Jared Barker, a 33-year-old baggage handler at Minneapolis-Saint Paul International Airport who quit and left the industry altogether last year after mass departures during the pandemic led to a heavier workload.

"It just burned me out," said Barker, who now works in insurance sales.

Window for JCPOA...

FROM PAGE 1

The Iranian foreign minister added that the country has shown its initiative on many occasions and "the fact is that we are still on the path of dialogue and we still want to reach an accord."

Amirabdollahian, however, emphasized that the Iranian government has faced a lot of pressure internally since the United States and three European parties to the JCPOA - Britain, France and Germany - interfered in Iran's internal affairs when protests erupted in the country back in September.

"I was in Parliament last week and they said 'who do you want to make an agreement with? With the United States and three European countries that have been trying to change the system during the riots in the fall? Why are you negotiating with them? How can you trust them?'"

Elsewhere in the interview, Amirabdollahian said Iran has a roadmap with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) regarding bilateral cooperation, adding that Massimo Aparo, the agency's deputy director general and the head of the Department of Safeguards, visited Iran in the past two weeks on two occasions.

He noted that Aparo held "constructive and productive" negotiations with Iranian officials while Iran also invited the IAEA Director General Rafael Mariano Grossi to come to Tehran soon.

Meanwhile he called out CNN's misinformation on Iran, including a report about alleged sexual abuse of female detainees, noting that the American broadcaster published "biased and false" reports related to recent riots in Iran.

When the anchor referred to CNN's report that claims some Iranian women were tortured and raped under arrest, the Iranian minister said that "there have been so many such baseless claims made in social media and the media".

"We have seen some of CNN's reports that are biased and false," the top Iranian diplomat said, calling out CNN's fake news campaign against Iran.

He also noted that "no one was arrested in peaceful demonstrations," adding, "however, in those protests that had turned violent, some individuals who had come from outside the country and were using firearms and killing the police were arrested."

The remarks come as on November 21, 2022, CNN published a detailed report on Iran's security forces "using rape to quell protests."

Enemies Suffer From...

FROM PAGE 1

He highlighted the 5% growth of production in the country despite the enemies' attempts to keep it below zero and recalled that they sought to cut off Iran's ties with the neighboring countries and other Asian countries but Iran's trade with them shored up 40% and achieved the Asian economic infrastructure through its membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO).

Iran Not to Hesitate...

FROM PAGE 1

Iravani underscored that any Israeli military attack on Iran's infrastructural facilities would have devastating effects on regional and international peace and security.

He urged the Security Council to shoulder its responsibilities in this regard, and unequivocally condemn the Israeli regime's warmongering statements and malevolent activities, which pose a real threat to international peace and security.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran has made it clear time and again that it will not hesitate to take necessary measures, in accordance with international law and the UN Charter, to respond decisively to any threat posed by the Israeli regime wherever and whenever deemed necessary, and to defend its national and security interests as well as to protect its people," Iravani emphasized.

The ambassador said all those who aid, abet or otherwise assist, support and facilitate the Israeli regime to carry out a military action against Iran must bear responsibility and accountability for their role in such an internationally wrongful act.

Iravani made the remarks in a February 1 letter to the president of the Security Council and UN secretary general, days after Iran's air defense system successfully intercepted and brought down two of the three Micro Aerial Vehicles (MAVs) used by the Israeli regime in its aggression against the complex, effectively thwarting the attack.

He said that based on early investigations, the Israeli regime was responsible for the attempted act of aggression in Isfahan.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran reserves its legitimate and inherent right, in accordance with international law and the United Nations Charter, to defend its national security and respond resolutely to any threats or wrongful actions by the Israeli regime, wherever and whenever deemed necessary," the envoy said.

Iran, Senegal Discuss Trade Cooperation

TEHRAN (MNA) - The Islamic Republic and Senegal have reviewed mutual ties in the field of trade.

Senegalese president's high economic advisor Shaykh Cisse and a number of Iranian figures in the sphere of economy held a meeting at Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture.

Transit challenges and money transferring in financial transactions are barriers to the expansion of bilateral relations, Shaykh Cisse said. The two problems are the consequences of the imposed sanctions, he added.

The Iranian companies have found some solutions to deal with the problems, he pointed out.

Iran can be a destination for Senegalese goods and minerals, he underlined. For his part, Rouhollah Latifi, a member of the Iranian international and foreign trade committee, estimated that Iran's exports to Senegal will exceed \$40 million this year.

Also, in the meeting, Masoud Barahman, the head of Iran and East Africa's joint chamber of commerce said that an international economic cooperation conference will be held between Iran and 15 West African countries March 6-8 at the level of heads of state and ministers in Tehran.

According to Barahman, on the second day of this meeting, the chamber of commerce along with the joint chamber of Iran and eastern Africa will host 50 African business people.

Lukoil Looks to Sell Stake in Offshore Oil and Gas Field

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russian oil firm Lukoil is in direct talks with Indian companies to sell its 38% stake in a deepwater oil and gas field offshore Ghana, Reuters reported on Monday, quoting Russian and Ghanaian sources with knowledge of the matter.

The potential sale could unblock the suspension of the field development plan, which the operator of the Pecan field, Norway's Aker Energy, hasn't submitted yet.

Aker Energy holds a 50% participating interest in the Deepwater Tano Cape Three Points block in Ghana, including the Pecan development project. Lukoil owns 38%, Fueltrade has 2%, and Ghana National Petroleum Corporation holds the remaining 10%. Seven successful exploration wells and eight appraisal wells on the block have proved a significant resource base as well as offering a high upside, Aker Energy says.

However, the company has been wary of the involvement of Lukoil as a partner in the block due to the Western sanctions on Russia and has said it would wait to see the issue resolved until it files a field development plan.

Aker Energy has completed FEED and prepared a revised Plan of Development for the Deepwater Tano/Cape Three Points block, Aker said in August 2022.

Earlier this month the Q4 earnings release, Aker said that the filing of the development plan "has been delayed due to the uncertainties and risks caused by the war in Ukraine and Lukoil Overseas Ghana Tano Ltd.'s 38 percent interest in the license, as well as supply chain disruptions and inflation." The current deadline for submitting the plan has been extended to April 2023.

Interior Minister Forms a Joint Task Force for Students Poisoning

TEHRAN (IP) - Interior Minister rejected rumors on arrest of suspects in connection with the gas poisoning of students.

In the past few days, a number of school girls suffered gas poisoning in some Iranian cities.

Ahmad Vahidi on the sideline of the cabinet meeting said: Following the recent incidents related to the poisoning of students, which caused public concern, a meeting was held with the presence of the Minister of Education, Health Ministry officials, experts from Civil Defense Organization, security agencies, and some governors.

The Minister added: The news that people have been arrested as the perpetrators of this sabotage is not true.

He also refuted the rumors related to students being paralyzed due to gas inhalation and said: A large number of students were stressed due to the release of gas in schools, which was not due to gas inhalation. According to the Minister of Interior, the issue is under investigation.

U.S. Funded...

FROM PAGE 1

Such a program, the report noted, is just one example of the Pentagon's increasing comfort with, and support for Israel's aggressive stance toward Iran.

Last month, US Ambassador to Israel Tom Nides encouragingly said that "Israel can and should do whatever they need to deal with [Iran] and we've got their back."

The report went on to say that due to the collapse of diplomacy with Iran despite Washington's attempts

under former American president Donald Trump, the Pentagon quietly moved Israel into its Central Command area of responsibility, officially grouping it with the main Arab countries of the Middle East, adding that the reshuffling has remained under President Joe Biden.

What Trump did through the so-called Abraham Accords - normalizing ties between Israel and the two

Persian Gulf Arab states of Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) - was in fact aimed at aligning these countries against a common enemy: Iran, rather than peace deals, as they are touted, it said.

Furthermore, the report added, the US and Israel have embarked upon conducting a growing number of joint military drills in recent months that Israeli leaders say are designed to test potential attack plans with Iran.

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Raducanu, Thiem Get Miami Open Wild Cards

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Former-U.S. Open champions Emma Raducanu and Dominic Thiem have been handed wild card entries into the Miami Open, the tournament said. Raducanu, winner at Flushing Meadows in 2021, also required a wild card to get into next week's event in Indian Wells after an injury plagued start to the season. The British number one has not played since injuring her ankle at the Australian Open and was forced out of the ATX Open in Austin after contracting tonsillitis.

Former France Football Legend Fontaine Dies Age 89

PARIS (Dispatches) - Former France football great Just Fontaine, who in 1958 scored a record 13 goals in a single edition of the World Cup, has died, triggering an outpouring of tributes. Fontaine, 89, netted 30 goals from 21 caps for France between 1953-1960. In 1958, he was instrumental in Les Bleus reaching the semi-finals in Sweden. A prolific striker with 259 goals from 283 matches in his club career, Fontaine was one of the key players of the great Stade de Reims team who reached the European Cup final in 1959.

Suns Win in Kevin Durant's Debut

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Devin Booker scored 37 points and Kevin Durant added 23 in his Phoenix debut as the Suns beat the host Charlotte Hornets 105-91. Durant, who was in the starting lineup for his first action since Jan. 8 with the Brooklyn Nets, racked up 23 points and six rebounds. He missed almost two months because of a ligament strain in his right knee, during which time he was traded to the Western Conference contenders. Booker was 15-for-26 from the field, while Deandre Ayton supplied 16 points and 16 rebounds. With LaMelo Ball lost for the season following ankle surgery earlier in the day, Kelly Oubre Jr. scored 22 points in the second half to lead Charlotte with 26 points. The loss ended the Hornets' season-best five-game winning streak.

Bucks 139, Magic 117

Giannis Antetokounmpo collected 31 points, seven rebounds and six assists to fuel streaking Milwaukee's victory over visiting Orlando. Antetokounmpo made 10 of 14 shots from the floor to send the Bucks to their 16th win in a row overall and 11th straight victory at home. Milwaukee sits four wins shy of matching its franchise record overall win streak, set during the 1970-71 season. Jrue Holiday contributed 23 points and nine assists and Brook Lopez added 18 points for the Bucks, who made a season-high 26 3-pointers. Orlando's Cole Anthony scored a season-high 28 points off the bench and Markelle Fultz recorded 21 points, seven rebounds and five assists. Wendell Carter Jr. had 19 points and 10 rebounds and Franz Wagner added 18 points for the Magic, who have lost 13 in a row to the Bucks.

Lakers 123, Thunder 117

With LeBron James and Anthony Davis out, Dennis Schroder scored 26 points to lift Los Angeles over host Oklahoma City for its fifth win in its last seven games. Also missing D'Angelo Russell (sprained right ankle), the Lakers got a balanced offensive effort, as five other players scored in double figures, and four Lakers players hit at least three 3-pointers, including four from Troy Brown Jr. James missed his second consecutive game with a



foot injury, and Davis sat out with a stress injury in his right foot.

Jalen Williams led Oklahoma City with 24 points and chipped in seven assists, while Josh Giddey added 22 points, 11 assists and nine rebounds. The Thunder were without All-Star Shai Gilgeous-Alexander for the fourth consecutive game with an abdominal strain. Gilgeous-Alexander also remains in the league's health and safety protocol.

Knicks 142, Nets 118

Jalen Brunson scored 30 of his 39 points during a blistering first half for New York, which continued its surge with a rout of visiting Brooklyn. The Knicks, who have won seven straight to move into fifth place in the Eastern Conference, scored 47 points in the first quarter, one shy of the franchise record for an opening period. New York tied a franchise record by hitting 14 3-pointers in the first half, and its 142 points were a season high. Mitchell Robinson (13 points, 10 rebounds) posted his fourth consecutive double-double while Julius Randle added 21 points, eight rebounds and eight assists for the Knicks. Cameron Johnson scored 33 points for the Nets, who have lost four straight and are 2-8 since dealing Kyrie Irving to the Dallas Mavericks on Feb. 6, shortly before Kevin Durant was traded to the Phoenix Suns.

Bulls 117, Pistons 115

Zach LaVine poured in 41 points and DeMar DeRozan added 21 as Chicago won thanks in part to a strange finish to beat host Detroit for the 14th consecutive time. Bojan Bogdanovic pumped in 34 points for the Pistons, who have lost six straight. Hamidou Diallo had 19 points and Jaden Ivey contributed 18, but Ivey called an illegal timeout in the closing seconds, stifling Detroit's comeback bid. With the Pistons trailing 114-112 and just under 10 seconds left in the game, Ivey called timeout when Detroit had none left. LaVine hit a technical free throw with 9.7 seconds left, then DeRozan made two free throws with 8.8 seconds to play to put the game away. Cory Joseph hit a 3-pointer in the closing seconds for the game's final points.

Mourinho Given Two-Game Suspension

ROME (Dispatches) - AS Roma coach Jose Mourinho will be banned for two games and fined €10,000 for his explosive reaction to being sent off in his side's 2-1 defeat by relegation-threatened Cremonese, an Italian sports judge ruled.

Cremonese claimed their first win of the Serie A season yesterday as Daniel Ciofani's late penalty left Mourinho's side out of the Champions League places in fifth place in the standings.

Mourinho, who was given his marching orders by referee Marco Piccinini at the start of the second half for dissent, said yesterday his reaction was caused by his treatment from the fourth official.

The 60-year-old added that he would seek legal advice.

Mourinho's punishment was for "having vehemently and provocatively contested a referee's decision in the second half, and repeating such behaviour at the time of the expulsion," a Serie A statement said.

"For having also, at the end of the match, entered the referee's dressing room, although authorised to do so, and having addressed seriously offensive expressions and inferences to the fourth official," the statement added.

Mourinho is set to miss Roma's home league games against Juventus on Sunday and Sassuolo on March 12.

Roma are fifth in the table with 44 points, one point behind fourth-placed Lazio.

Van Dijk, Salah Steer Liverpool to 2-0 Win Over Wolves

LIVERPOOL (Dispatches) - Virgil van Dijk and forward Mohamed Salah scored second-half goals as Liverpool battled to a 2-0 Premier League home win over Wolverhampton Wanderers to boost their hopes of European football next season. Liverpool climbed into sixth spot in the table on 39 points, ahead of Fulham on goal difference and with a game in hand, but the home side were forced to work hard on a rainy night at Anfield. "We controlled the game without creating massively, but we found our rhythm back," Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp said in a TV interview as his side claimed their third win in an unbeaten four-game Premier League run.

Despite fashioning the first effort on goal in the game, the visitors suffered an early blow when left back Hugo Bueno went down clutching his hamstring midway through the first half and was replaced by Rayan Ait-Nouri.

The best chances of the opening 45 minutes fell to teenaged Liverpool midfielder Harvey Elliott, who steered a header just wide in the 39th minute and followed that up with a bouncing stoppage-time shot that was turned away for a corner.

The 19-year-old was in the thick of things again 10 minutes into the second half, controlling a firm pass from Darwin Nunez and firing another shot goalwards, but again it lacked the necessary power and precision and was easily saved by Jose Sa.

Nunez had the ball in the net for the home side in the 66th minute after a surging run by Diogo Jota, but the Portuguese striker was deemed to have fouled Max Kilman in the build-up after a VAR review and the goal was chalked off.

Van Dijk finally broke the deadlock in the 73rd minute, forcing a save with his initial header from a set-piece, before Jota put the rebound back across the goal for the Dutchman to head home from close range.

Falcao Linked to JDT



KUALA LUMPUR (Dispatches) - Former Manchester United striker and Colombian national player Radamel Falcao has been linked with a 'surprising' move as he is in negotiations to join nine-time Super League champions Johor Darul Ta'zim (JDT).

According to a report in Spanish newspaper, Marca, Falcao, who still has a contract with Rayo Vallecano which competes in the LaLiga until this June, is evaluating an offer to sign a contract with the Southern Tigers.

The report stated that Esteban Solari's squad wanted Falcao for the next two seasons before making the 37-year-old striker nicknamed 'El Tigre' a post-retirement ambassador for the club and the state of Johor.

"Pending final negotiations with the team, the striker (Falcao) has already shown himself to be willing to face a new professional journey even though he is also on Peter Lim's shortlist to strengthen Valencia," said the report.

Valencia, who are owned by Singaporean business magnate Peter Lim, are also reported to be interested in signing Falcao, who had donned the Manchester United jersey in the 2014-2015 season. He was on loan from AS Monaco then.

If he joins JDT, it will be the tenth club in his career after making a name for himself with several world-famous clubs including River Plate, FC Porto, Atletico Madrid, AS Monaco, Chelsea and Galatasaray.

Among the championships Falcao has won are two Europa League titles with Porto in the 2010-2011 season and Atletico Madrid (2011-2012) in addition to helping Atletico Madrid win the Uefa Super Cup in 2012.

However, Falcao can only make an appearance in the Super League after the second registration window opens from July 5 to Aug 1.

Djokovic Downs Machac In Dubai Opener

DUBAI (Dispatches) - Novak Djokovic was made to work in his first match since winning the Australian Open last month, needing three close sets to move past world No.130 Tomas Machac in Dubai.

Undefeated so far in 2023, and carrying a 17-match winning streak coming into the UAE, dating back to last year's ATP Finals, Djokovic showed signs of rustiness in his 6-3, 3-6, 7-6 (7/1) win over the Czech qualifier.

Djokovic, who this week has broken Steffi Graf's all-time record of 377 weeks at world number one, recently recovered from a muscle tear in his left hamstring, which he sustained in Australia on his way to a record-equalling 22nd Grand Slam title.

It was an impressive performance from Machac, who was facing a top-10 opponent for just the fourth time in his career.

The two players hit a combined 78 winners during the two-hour 27-minute affair. But it was Djokovic's 28 unforced errors that at times proved costly.

"Tomas definitely didn't play like 130 in the world today," said the 35-year-old Djokovic. "He was giving me all kinds of trouble, but I guess when it mattered, I found another gear."



Man Utd Reach FA Cup Quarters as Spurs Crash Out

LONDON (Dispatches) - Alejandro Garnacho and Fred struck late as Manchester United came from behind to beat West Ham 3-1 and reach the FA Cup quarterfinals but Tottenham were stunned by Championship side Sheffield United.

In the evening's other fifth-round ties, fourth-tier Grimsby embarrassed Premier League strugglers Southampton 2-1 and Burnley beat 10-man Fleetwood 1-0.

Manchester United, who made six changes to the team that started Sunday's League Cup final win against Newcastle, lacked fluency in front of an expectant Old Trafford crowd.

United goalkeeper David de Gea thwarted Michail Antonio when the West Ham forward bore down on goal midway through the opening period and Emerson Palmieri flashed an inviting ball across the box.

United manager Erik ten Hag brought on Casemiro for Scott McTominay at half-time but the home side remained sluggish.

Said Benrahma made them pay in the 54th minute, rifling the ball past De Gea after the home defenders stopped, thinking the ball had gone out for a throw-in.

