

Iran's Ambassador to Austria Abbas Bagherpour Has Advised European Nations to Correct Their Mistakes And "Avoid Further Miscalculations" As a New International Order Is Being Shaped

IRAN NEWS

Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian Says Iran and the United States Have Reached an Initial Agreement to Exchange Prisoners and If Everything Goes Well, It would Take Place

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Iran-Saudi Deal, A New Era in PG Region

TEHRAN (PressTV) - A top military adviser to the Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei says a post-U.S. era has started in the Persian Gulf region in the wake of a China-brokered deal between Iran and Saudi Arabia to restore diplomatic ties.

Speaking on Sunday, Major General Yahya Rahim Safavi emphasized that the recent rapprochement between Tehran and Riyadh marks an end to the American hegemony in the region.

"Regarding the recent agreement, it ... was a tectonic shift in the political field and an end to the American hegemony in the region. The post-U.S. era in the Persian Gulf region has just started," he said.

"The Chinese have decided to become the world's first economy by 2030. The deal between Iran and Saudi Arabia, mediated by China, dealt the second biggest blow to the US by China. This is because Saudi Arabia is China's largest supplier of oil, and on the other hand, China's strategic partnership agreement with Iran to invest in the development of our infrastructure was a great agreement."

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Iran Standing Firm Despite Being Under Toughest Sanctions

TEHRAN (MNA) - IRGC Commander-in-Chief Major General Hossein Salami said that no other states including superpowers can tolerate the sanctions imposed on the Islamic Republic.

Salami made the remarks at the commemoration ceremony of the martyrs of Badr and Khaybar, which was held in Urmia's Tharallah Hosseiniyeh where he also said that "most of the world's powerful military and economic powers would have faced serious challenges, had they gone under even short-term embargo."

"Even a one-year war is enough to break apart many political systems in the world, but the Islamic Republic of Iran, with the support of the people and the vigilance of its Leader, did not give in to the pressures from the Global Arrogance and is continuing its path with might", added the IRGC chief.

Stating that the sanctions strengthened both the people and the Islamic establishment, Salami added that "If today Iran has been able to send satellites into space, produce vaccines, rockets, automobiles and any other scientific phenomena and put large construction projects into operation, it is all because of self-confidence, which in turn the result of the sanctions and standing up to Arrogance."

Exclusive Interview With Haj Hamid Reza Naghashian, The CEO of Sokhan Gostar Institute

44 Years of Opportunity Have Burned



Thousands Rage Against Netanyahu's Legal Reforms

TEL AVIV (Dispatches) - Tens of thousands hold fresh rallies across several cities throughout the occupied territories for a 10th straight week, blasting so-called "legal reforms" that are planned by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's extremist cabinet.

The biggest demonstration was held in the coastal city of Tel Aviv, attracting, what the Israeli regime's media estimated were, around 100,000 people.

Some 50,000 also rallied in the northern city of Haifa and 10,000 in Beersheba in the central part of the occupied territories. Media reports said the populations that gathered for the protests in the cities were the largest ever since early January when the demonstrations began.

The so-called reforms serve as the centerpiece of the policies of the Netanyahu-led cabinet, which he cobbled together late last year by wooing ultra-Orthodox and hard-right parties.

The reforms that have already received first-reading endorsement from Knesset (the Israeli regime's parliament), seek to enfeeble the regime's Supreme Court by robbing it of the power to strike down either the cabinet or the legislature's decisions.

Another element of the reforms would give the 120-member parliament the power to overrule the court's decisions with a simple majority of 61 votes.

The reforms would also empower the Knesset to amend the so-called Basic Laws -- the regime's quasi-constitution -- in any way it sees fit.

Observers say the reforms can potentially enable the Knesset to annul a set of corruption charges that Netanyahu is being tried on. The prime minister is being sued for bribery, fraud, and breach of trust.

On Thursday, the regime's President Issac Herzog called on the coalition to halt the legislation.

The cabinet is, however, preparing to press on with its legislative agenda next week, shunning calls for a pause to allow for negotiations on the divisive plan.

BBC Boss Says Will Stay Put as Lineker Removal Sparks Chaos

LONDON (Dispatches) - The BBC's director general, Tim Davie, has said he will not resign after the broadcaster's sports coverage was thrown into chaos following ex-England soccer captain Gary Lineker's removal of 'Match of the Day' program.

In an interview with BBC News, when asked if he should resign over the crisis, Davie replied, "Absolutely not."

"I honestly do not believe, despite a lot of the commentary, that this is about left or right," Davie said. "We made decisions, and I made decisions based on a real passion about what the BBC is and it is difficult -- it's this balance between free speech and impartiality," he added.

Lineker on Friday was forced to "step back" from his duties presenting the flagship Premier League highlights show after criticizing the British government's new asylum policy in a Twitter post, accusing the UK government of using Nazi-era rhetoric in tackling illegal immigration.

"Lineker will not present 'Match of the Day' until we've got an agreed and clear position on his use of social media," the BBC said in a statement on Friday adding it considered Lineker's recent social media activity to breach its guidelines.

However, the decision caused chaos to scheduled sports

programming across the BBC's television and radio output, since pundits, commentators, and even Premier League teams announced their intention to boycott the show in support of Lineker.

Former England strikers Ian Wright and Alan Shearer were among the first pundits who refused to take up their usual roles on Match of the Day, followed by the program's commentators.

As a result, Match of the Day, the longest-running football television program in the world, went ahead without a presenter, pundits, or any commentary on Saturday night and was reduced to a 20-minute edition.

Davie also apologized that audiences "have been affected" thanks to the huge backlash.

"To be clear, success for me is Gary gets back on air and together we are giving to the audiences that world-class sports coverage which, as I say, I'm sorry we haven't been able to deliver today," Davie said.

Lineker's criticism came on the heels of a new migration plan approved by the British government this week, which is aimed at detaining the migrants arriving in small boats across the English Channel and preventing them from claiming asylum and deporting them either back to their homeland or to so-called safe third countries.

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Iran Oil Exports Set Record High in 4 Years

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Iranian Oil Minister Javad Owji said the country's oil exports reached the highest level in four years including in the current Persian calendar year which will end on March 20.

Speaking at a ceremony on Sunday in Tehran, Owji said Iran exported 190 million barrels of oil more than it did two years ago and 83 million barrels more than the previous year.

Also, the amount of gas exports this year increased by 15 percent compared to the previous year, Owji said.

He added that the foreign exchange earnings of the country are higher than the amount needed.

Exports have risen despite the American sanctions, which were re-imposed on Iran following Washington's withdrawal from the 2015 Iran nuclear deal (JCPOA) in 2018. The sanctions have primarily been designed to paralyze Iran's oil exports and banking ties with abroad.

The increase in the Iranian oil sales came despite headwinds such as a stall in the talks on reviving the deal and competition in the market caused by discounted Russian crude.

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Riyadh-Tehran Restoration Of Ties to Accelerate Ceasefire in Yemen

NEW YORK (IRNA) - The Permanent Mission of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations has said that the restoration of the diplomatic relations between Saudi Arabia and the Islamic Republic of Iran can speed up the ceasefire in Yemen.

The Iranian mission in New York issued a statement on Saturday night local time, saying that the relations between Riyadh and Tehran are important at three bilateral, regional, and international levels.

The restoration of political ties between the two countries will be positive at all three levels, including West Asia and the Islamic world, the statement added.

According to the statement, it seems that the restoration of diplomatic ties between Saudi Arabia and Iran would accelerate the ceasefire, help start a national dialogue, and form an inclusive national government in Yemen.

Iran's Foreign Ministry issued a statement on Saturday on restoring ties with Saudi Arabia after seven years, saying that the move shows the Islamic Republic's determination in protecting the interests of the Iranian nation, as well as friendly countries in the region.

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Iran-SCO Trade Exchange Hits About \$39b in 11 Months

TEHRAN (Tasnim) - Iran's non-oil trade with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)'s member states in the first 11 months of the current year (from March 21, 2022 to February 20, 2023) exceeded \$38.8 billion, a spokesman said.

Concurrent with the SCO Summit held in India on Saturday, Seyed Rouhollah Latifi, the Spokesman for the Trade Promotion Commission of Iran Industry, Mine and Trade House, said that more than 50,603,000 tons of goods, valued at \$38,829,445,000, were exchanged between the Islamic Republic of Iran and 11 member states of the Organization.

Of the total amount of goods exchanged, 41,703,000 tons of commodities, valued at \$19.613 billion, are related to Iran's exports share, showing more than two percent and 6.4 percent hikes in weight and value respectively as compared to the last year's corresponding period, he maintained.

In this period, Iran imported 8.9 million tons of goods, valued at \$19,216,500,000, from SCO's member states, registering a 7.7 percent and 33.4 percent growth in weight and value respectively as compared to the same period of last year.

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Bagheri Kani Meets Omani FM in Muscat

TEHRAN (MNA) – Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister for Political Affairs Ali Bagheri Kani, in a visit to Muscat, met and held talks with the Omani Foreign Minister Sayyid Badr Albusaidi.

Bagheri Kani also held a meeting with the Omani Deputy Foreign Minister Sheikh Khalifa Al Harthy on Sunday as well.

No details of the meetings were published so far.

Tehran, Tashkent Urged To Improve Ties Considering Capacities

IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN – President Seyed Ebrahim Raisi said that although Iran and Uzbekistan have taken good measures to develop relations, considering their mutual capacities, the level of relations should be improved with more efforts.

President Raisi made the remarks in the meeting with the Acting Minister of Foreign Affairs of Uzbekistan Bakhtiyor Saidov who traveled to Tehran.

The Iranian president considered strengthening the integration policy with neighboring countries as one of the important approaches of a popular and justice-oriented government. Referring to his recent visit to Uzbekistan, Raisi urged the relevant ministers to accelerate the implementation of the agreements of the two presidents in the cultural and economic fields, especially in the commercial, transit and agriculture sectors.

Bakhtiyor Saidov, for his part, stated that his country seeks to strengthen comprehensive ties with the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Referring to the historical commonalities and the deep civilizational and cultural relations between the two countries and the two nations, Saidov considered president Raisi's visit to Samarkand as the opening of a new page in the history of relations between the two countries.

Referring to the agreements made with Iran to develop and strengthen the activities of the Joint Commission for Economic Cooperation and the holding of a trade conference between the two countries, as well as the negotiations held in order to use the joint corridors, Saidov stressed, "Uzbekistan will use all its efforts to implement the resulting agreements."

Meanwhile on Saturday Iranian foreign minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian held talks with Saidov to stress the expanding bilateral relations between the two nations using the existing potentials.



In the meeting Amirabdollahian emphasized the importance of the relations between the two countries in various fields, especially aspects related to economic cooperation, transportation, transit and logistics.

The Iranian minister further called for developing bilateral relations between the two nations according to the requests of the two presidents. In order to promote relations, he stressed the necessity of using the existing capacities and potentials between the two countries.

The acting Uzbek minister, for his part, thanked the Islamic Republic of Iran for its support for the expansion of bilateral cooperation, especially in the fields of transit, cooperation in the framework of ECO, in fields of human rights and international organizations, and announced the planning to hold ECO member countries summit in Tashkent and emphasized the need to strengthen coordination between the two countries in that regard.

In this meeting, the parties also discussed and exchanged views on the latest political, economic, security and political relations between the two countries.

The conditions of Afghanistan as a neighbor of the two countries were also discussed and the two sides stressed the need for cooperation and assisting neighboring countries to strengthen peace and stability in that neighbor. They also conferred on international transport corridors including the North-South corridor, and the new preferential tariff agreement, and also emphasized the need to increase the volume of trade exchanges.

Iran-Russia Joint Economic Commission B2B Meetings to Be Held in May

TEHRAN (Tasnim) – The Iran-Russia Joint Economic Commission will hold business-to-business (B2B) meetings in May. Led by the Iranian Ministry of Oil's Department for International Affairs and Trading, the B2B meetings will be held concurrent with the 27th Iran International Oil, Gas, Refining and Petrochemical Exhibition, also known as Iran Oil Show, from May 17 to 20 this year.

According to the Secretariat of the Iran-Russia Joint Economic Commission, the two sides' delegations comprising four working groups for trading oil, gas, and petrochemical products, investment and export of technical and engineering services, manufacture, supply and repair of oil equipment and technological and knowledge-based cooperation will exchange views on boosting bilateral trade ties.

The meetings are aimed at familiarizing the Iranian and Russian delegations with each other's regulations, incentives for investment in Iran, and investment opportunities in its oil, gas, and petrochemical industries.

Interaction and cooperation between Iran and Russia, the two largest holders of the world's oil and gas reserves, have been put on a new track under President Ebrahim Raisi's administration, prompting the two countries to seek the development of their bilateral ties in different areas, including economic and energy sectors.

Iran Identifies, Arrests Over 100 for Poisoning Students

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Interior Ministry has announced that more than 100 people have been identified, arrested and investigated in connection with the recent poisoning of students across the country.

The ministry made the announcement on Saturday in its fourth statement issued about the recent events at the schools.

It said that more than 100 people had been identified, arrested and probed in the provinces of Tehran, Qom, Zanjan, Khuzestan, Hamedan, Fars, Gilan, West Azarbaijan,

East Azarbaijan, Kordestan, and Khorasan Razavi.

"Initial inquiries show that a number of these people, out of mischief or adventurism and with the aim of shutting down classrooms and influenced by the created psychological atmosphere, have taken measures such as using harmless and smelly substances", the statement said, adding that they were cautioned while they will remain under investigation until required assurances are achieved.

France Not Practices What It Preaches About Human Rights

TEHRAN (MNA) – Criticizing the French police for not respecting the rights of the protestors, Nasser Kanaani said that the lessons of the so-called advocates of human rights are solely for others and they do not practice what they preach.

Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesperson on Sunday in a tweet on the protests in France criticized the police of France for not respecting the human rights and the rights of the protestors in that country.

He said that it was a typical example of how human rights are respected in the "Garden of Europe!"

There is many an example of such things in the United States and Europe, the spokesman added.

Nationwide demonstrations were held in Paris and other French cities for the seventh time this year with thousands rejecting the government's pension reform plan. The protests started earlier in cities such as Nice and Toulouse, while thousands started rallying in Paris in the afternoon.

Pakistan National Day Reception Held in Tehran

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Ambassador of Pakistan in Tehran H.E. Mr. Rahim Hayat Qureshi hosted a reception at Esteghlal of Tehran on Saturday evening.

A number of Iranian dignitaries including members of Parliament, high ranking civil and military officials, diplomats, scholars, media persons and prominent citizens of both the countries participated in the reception. Iran's Energy Minister Mr. Mehrabian was the Chief Guest on the occasion, while from Pakistan side, Minister for Energy, Mr. Khurram Dastgir Khan was present as Guest of Honor.

Addressing the event and in his speech, Pakistan Ambassador Qureshi welcomed the guests and highlighted the historical significance of Pakistan National Day. He stressed that Pakistan and Iran always stood with each other. Both the countries understand and appreciate each other's position on different regional and international issues. Ambassador Qureshi emphasized the shared vision of the leadership of the two countries for enhanced regional connectivity and economic linkages. He added: "I am exceptionally pleased to observe that in the last three years, Pakistan's relations with Iran have been on a firmly positive trajectory."

He went on to say: "There has been regular interaction at the highest leadership level. These interactions provided the

required political impetus for determinate on-ground outcomes. Since 1947, our two countries had only one crossing point at Taftan-Mirjaveh. Within a short span of four months, we were able to formalize two new border points, at Gabd-Reemdan and Mand-Pishin. These have greatly facilitated cross-border movement, particularly for an estimated 800,000 Pakistani Zaireen that visit Iran every year."

In his remarks, the Guest of Honor, Minister Dastgir Khan said that Pakistan and Iran were two fraternal nations, with indissoluble bonds of common faith, cultural affinity and shared history. The Government of Pakistan is strongly committed to strengthen the upward trajectory of our political and economic relations. The two brotherly countries have a lot to offer to each other.

Speaking on the occasion, Iranian Energy Minister Mehrabian extended felicitations to the government and people of Pakistan on Pakistan's National Day and said Iran and Pakistan enjoy historical and cultural relations, which had grown stronger with time and pointed to the brotherly relation of the two countries and then pointed to major economic development between the two countries and said that the trade volume between the two countries has exceeded \$2b this year despite sanctions.

Pakistan National Day is observed on 23 March every year but since the date falls during Nouroz holidays in Iran, the Pakistan National day reception was held on 11 March, 2023.



(From L to R) Pakistan Energy Minister Khurram Dastgir Khan, Iranian Energy Minister Mr. Mehrabian and Pakistan Ambassador Hayat Qureshi listen to the national anthems of the two countries in the ceremony and later they were accompanied by other honorable guests for cutting the cake

Platform for Cooperative Business Clinic Unveiled



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – The CEO of Union of Cooperatives of Supporting Services and Public Affairs of Tehran announced unveiling of the platform for cooperative business clinic for the first time in the country and pointed to major services of this platform like investment, auditing, insurance and legal and financial issues.

In the unveiling ceremony, Mr. Mehdi Derakhshan Mehr said that the union entered the operational and executive work in 2019 and announced its existence. He added that in 2019, the union launched a system which was to some extent the sub-category of the cooperative business clinic under the name of cooperative system but since then, we had to develop the trend of the management to get out of the traditional structure and updating the union in the issue of digital marketing and management services in different fields of cooperative. He reiterated that they did it in the field of housing cooperatives in 2019 as this field is one of the most favorite and risky field in the cooperative section.

He then explained the properties of the unveiled platform and said that it has capabilities in issues like insurance and taxation as well as auditing, investment, insurance and legal and financial issues for its users.

Derakhshan Mehr reiterated that for launching the platform, they did not receive even one rial from the state bodies and organization and in case they get financial support from the state budget, they can offer cheaper and even free services for those who are involved in the cooperative sector.

He reiterated that this clinic is for presence of all experts and participation of managers and shareholders of the economic enterprises especially in the cooperative sector for offering better services, reducing costs and creating ideals for economic activists of the country. He added that cooperative activists can get required information by logging on www.unionesesupu515455.ir.

Meanwhile in the ceremony, the CEO of union of development cooperatives of Tehran Mr. Khashayar Bagherpoor said that despite high capacities of cooperative sector, its stance has declined and as soon as one talks about cooperative, everybody brings housing cooperative as an example and they claim those cooperatives have taken their monies.

Full Support to Companies Active In the Marine Field

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Head of Industry, Mine and Trade Organization of Hormozgan Province says the organization is ready for full supporting the companies active in the field of marine activities of the province.

Speaking on the sidelines of ceremony for unveiling the floating metal wharf of Khamir Port, Mr. Khalil Qasemi pointed to the existence of reputed companies active in the field of marine in this province and said that problems of these companies for offering better services are monitored regularly. He noted that supporting these production companies are of the main goals of the organization and added that with the support of the organization they have witnessed 23% growth in the field of repairs and manufacture of vessels and sea structures in this province comparing to the same period last year.



Exclusive Interview With Haj **Hamid Reza Naghashian**,
The CEO of Sokhan Gostar Institute

44 Years of Opportunity Have Burned

Mr. Haj Hamid Reza Naghashian, the owner and the CEO of Sokhan Gostar Institute, publisher of two English and Persian dailies of **IRAN NEWS** and **Sobh-e Eghtesad**, despite his great role in the early days of the Islamic Revolution is less seen in the media and has decided to stay away from the state jobs and prefers to continue his activities in the cultural sector. There was a chance to encourage him for giving an interview to us and finally on March 2 we could seat with him at the office of Sokhan Gostar Institute for an exclusive warm and interesting interview.

The reporter of Sokhan Gostar Institute (publisher of Iran News English daily and Sobh-e Eghtesad Persian economic daily) talked with Mr. Naghashian in different fields which took four hours and actually its coverage in one issue of the newspaper is impossible and the whole interviews will be published in two issues of Iran News and priceless experiences of his excellency will be presented to our readers as follows:

PART I

Reporter: Mr. Naghashian, first I say hello and thank you for giving us this chance for interview after 28 years of ownership of these two newspapers and as my first question please tell us why you have not had any interview with your newspapers through these years.

Mr. Naghashian: Salamun ‘Alaikum (peace be upon you) for that you persevered in patience! Excellent indeed is the final home!” In the name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful, and in Him we seek help, for He is the best helper and helper. Praise be to Allah for guiding us to this. We would have never been guided if Allah had not guided us. My Lord! Cause me to enter wherever it be, with Truth, and cause me to exit, wherever it be, with Truth, and support me with authority from Yourself.

For my part, I thank endeavors of whom I had with them cultural and press cooperation and also you and all those colleagues who have worked with us and left us due to some reasons. I should say that I can answer to your question from creditable views. First: We established Sokhan Gostar Institute and started publishing its newspapers with the intention of work and endeavor on course to materialize the principles of the Islamic Revolution and since the first day, we have not intended to present ourselves and of course it is still the same. Secondly, in this institute, Iran News English is 10 years older than Sobh-e Eghtesad and of course, its readers both Iranian and non-Iranian needed to know English and it has been tried to reflect and express the views and stands of the Islamic Revolution and Islamic establishment by resorting to the effective and influential statesmen in running the country, and since I had no role in the establishment I have tried to stay on the margin rather than being in the text, although in all of my editorials I have expressed my views for advancing the policy and goals of the revolution which has been the main goal of the institute and the late Imam Khomeini (R) and prudent views of the Supreme Leader has been our policy in dealing with our readers.

Thirdly, in our religious and ethical culture, fame-seeking and self-righteousness is considered a reprobate adjective and behavior, and it has made me talk less about myself and more about others, so I had refrained from interviews with our newspapers. You know that we have no connection to and dependence on any political group, party and fraction but it does not mean that we are not political but we have not acted based on any political current because we did not find them pure and complete. Personal goals and West or East-oriented tendencies lead to stain and the amount of stain and contamination fluctuates from the lowest to the highest degree of mercenary. Political parties’ media in the Third World countries like the parties themselves have not taken shape without any relation with the aliens and sometimes with the foreign intelligence services, and the issue of independence-seeking in the past 120 years since the Persian Constitution Revolution has been very colorless and as long as you like, setting rails for certain goals has been common but we in our newspapers have not moved towards it and have not used any rent-seeking and the condition of the institute with tens of billions of tomans of accumulated debts confirms this claim.

Fourthly, in establishing Sokhan Gostar Institute, I have pursued the same path and intention that I had pursued before the Islamic Revolution in the underground structures of publications like Neday-e Eslam (Call of Islam) and Kanoon Nashr-e Nehzat (Center for Movement Publication) and Fajr-e Eslam (Dawn of Islam) and sometimes in monotheism Saf Group, and this institute has been formed 100 percent to serve the Islamic Revolution and I consider the cost for it as the cost for the reappearance of the world savior Hazrat Mahdi (AS). So this “self” is not in the framework of “selfishness”, and in the future May God give lifetime, it will never happen. Inshallah.

Reporter: What a comprehensive explanation. Even we as your colleagues in the institute were less aware of your intention and your view regarding the establishment of Sokhan Gostar Institute. The next question is that in the past you were active in the fields of security, logistic, organizing, formations, construction, information in the state and private sectors. First tell us whether you were spiritually satisfied and happy with working as the government staff or with working in the private sector. Secondly, during your life in your activities, which one of them have you liked more?



Mr. Naghashian: My claim is that I am political, economic and also cultural, and of course in some periods and due to needs, I was active in the security and military activities. In all fields, there has been one element dominating my mind which was managing myself in time and place when I want to make decision, If I were political, how to be political was important for me in time and place and I have decided on how to be, and if I were economic, it was important how to be economic in the time and place and you have heard this hundreds of time from me and people around me that I have never been after money and wealth and this is the money and wealth which is after me. In the view of behavioral society, I define money and wealth in the form of a stray dog. A stray dog is like this if one runs after the dog, it escapes and one cannot reach it, but if one does not give a damn at the dog, it follows the person and tries to get closer and sniff him, and even it licks the trouser leg of the person and the person should be aware not to be defiled. Yes, wealth has capability of becoming defiled. So I have not done anything below the dignity of my family or against my criteria and it is better to say this way that I have not been ready the wealth and capital either in volume and in reputation to decide for me and the rein of capital has always been in my control in the framework of my beliefs. In the western capital school (capitalism) one turns into the mercenary of the capital unknowingly and it drags you to any side and direction where it benefits and you do not have control over maintaining your belief and even political tendency, and by the way you do not have the dignities, as well. So I have not sought excessive-demand and will not do it. Calculation! Yes but in a direction that does not have any contradiction with my views and religious beliefs and goals. In a short sentence, I can say that to remain principalist even it inflicts materialistic loss has been a principle for me and therefore I have not done any trade or production with anybody. Even if I have made friends with somebody in some certain period of time I have cut my ties with him and left him immediately after realizing his unprincipled behavior and approach.

I have learned economy in the bazaar since the time I was working as the carpet-seller errandboy in Saraye Mahmoudieh in Abbas Abad Bazaar of Tehran and in competition with professional carpet sweepers and I got 1.5 rials wage instead of 2.5 rials from my master. Later in school and university, I pursued its documented basics based on the theories. To some extent, I know banking, accounting and professionally I can read balance and I know consumption sources. I feel figures and numbers and it is better to say that numbers are friends of mine. I know the importance of statistics and information. I can distinguish real loss and profit and I have studied the trade law and even I have taught it. I have studied the law of tax and I have taught it. I have gone through the international trade laws and learned some of its secrets. I have had marketing and I should say that how to be economic is defined this way. Some think that since they have gone to the bakery, grocery and have bought bread and yogurt since their childhood know the trade,

market, loss, profits and transportation but it is not so. Economy is the most mysterious technique in the world and some consider it as a science and it is wrong. Why it is wrong because there are many reasons and the most important of them is that theories do not work the same in all cases and economy has no certain formula for everywhere. Economy is a technique which is practical and applicable in the framework of a wisdom based on the time and place. Information and statistics in the field of security and above all cultural beliefs of the people in any climate are the wheels of economic locomotive of that region. Wealth production, managing livelihood, marketing, national participation, target evaluation, knowledge-based and monetary management, financial management, comparative advantage and many other small and big levers are the other wagons of this locomotive. I am cultural because for more than 60 years I have been familiar with writing in the social environments. Pen and its text are the contents of the culture. Speech and uttering it are the lessons. When I was 9, my hand was in hands of my uncle and witnessed many 15-Khordad events in Sabzeh Meydan and Shoemakers Bazaar and since then I have been preoccupied with understanding the beliefs of a self-giving and crusader people to the level of being killed and not fearing bullets. This means it has turned into the “yeast” of my religious culture lessons. So I believe when someone lets his mind to know the beliefs, he is cultural and of course this being cultural can be a culture adorned with religious belief, adorned with revolutionary belief and justice-seeking, adorned with cellology of social behavior from the outputs of beliefs. It is sixty years that I know any behavior as the result of sediment of lesson, and believe that men in their whole life are relatively cultural. We have a word or better to say a lexicon which is peasant as it has today turned into a swear while it is just a definition of simplicity and innocence, a definition of a belief which has not yet been contaminated with involvement in experience in the broaden social relations. The frame of belief of a peasant is those lessons which have been shaped for him in his restricted village but being an urban is different. Beliefs of an urban is sign of lessons which shapes the personal culture and on the whole social culture. -----to be Continued



Indonesia’s Merapi Volcano Erupts, Blankets Villages in Ash

JAKARTA (Dispatches) - Indonesia’s Mount Merapi has erupted, spewing out smoke and ash that blanketed villages near the crater and forcing authorities to halt tourism and mining activities on the slopes of the country’s most active volcano.

The volcano, located in Indonesia’s Yogyakarta special region, erupted at about 12pm (05:00 GMT) on Saturday and unleashed clouds of hot ash and a mixture of rock, lava and gas that travelled up to seven kilometres (4.3 miles) down its slopes. A column of hot clouds rose 100 metres into the air, said the National Disaster Management Agency’s spokesperson Abdul Muhari. There were no immediate reports of casualties.



Ukrainian Gunships Rain Rockets On Russian Targets Near Bakhmut



KYIV (Dispatches) - Three Mi-8 helicopter gunships rise up from a secret base in Ukraine and head at low altitude for the long-running battle for Bakhmut against Russian forces.

As the eastern city nears, one by one the helicopters suddenly rear up, unleash their rockets, bank sharply and return to base, skimming the ground.

The target is “an enemy fortification line made up of troops on the ground, armoured vehicles and a munitions depot,” pilot Petro tells AFP after the 30-minute mission.

The fortification lies near Severodonetsk, which the Russian army seized last spring, to the northeast of Bakhmut, where Ukrainian soldiers are almost encircled but still holding out amid heavy losses on both sides.

Since the Russian invasion just over a year ago, Ukrainian helicopter pilots have flown their ageing Mi-8s and larger Mi-24s on daily combat missions.

At just 23, Petro does not look much in his ill-fitting flak-jacket, but he has already flown about 50 combat missions. While his helicopter is refuelled and fitted with fresh rockets, he runs through the morning’s latest attack from a base that cannot be identified for security reasons.

“Before the flight, we select the flight path, using special apps to keep to the lowest altitude possible,” Petro says. “For example, if we see 180 metres altitude, it’s too high, then we look for lower places and we find 130 metres, 100 metres.

“The aim is to fly lower than the level of the general countryside so as not to be visible on Russian radars and they don’t know that we are coming,” says Petro, a hooded covering all but his eyes.

An AFP camera set up in the cockpit during the entire mission shoots impressive footage.

The earth flashes past at a speed of about 200 kilometres per hour (125 mph), just a few metres underneath the chassis.

The helicopter only bucks up at the moment the rockets are launched, programmed for a distance of 6,100 metres.

“When we are 6,200 metres from the target, we rear up 20 degrees ... then we launch the rockets, 15 each side,” Petro explains.

In the video, at the instant of firing, the rockets shoot forth from the Mi-8 leaving a plumes of black smoke in their wake.

The helicopter immediately dives into a tight turn to the left and drops down low for the flight back.

The Mi-8s, each with a pilot and co-pilot, open fire one after the other.

The return route is different to the outward one “so as not to fall in a trap” and attract Russian anti-aircraft systems.

On the frontline, infantry units were informed of the time of the strike, and they then send up a drone to check the result.

If the target has not been hit, another attack based on corrected data should follow.

“At the start of the war we didn’t have drones. Missions were more complicated and less effective,” Petro acknowledges.

“But in summer, we began to get drones and other equipment. Today, we are more effective.”

The out-of-date weapons system is neither guided nor equipped with targeting, meaning it is accurate only to within 100-200 metres.

The toughest mission so far came on March 6 last year, in the Mykolaiv region in the south.

“We were four helicopters and the target was a long convoy of military vehicles” heading for the Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant, the biggest in Europe and now occupied by Russia.

Colombia, ELN Rebels Hail Progress In Second Round of Peace Talks

BOGOTA (Dispatches) - Colombia’s government and the left-wing National Liberation Army (ELN) rebel group have hailed progress in their efforts to end decades of armed conflict in the South American nation, as a second round of peace talks concluded in Mexico City.

The negotiations come as part of an effort by President Gustavo Petro – the country’s first left-wing leader and former M-19 rebel – to reach peace or surrender deals with armed groups and bring “total peace” to Colombia.

The ELN, founded by Catholic priests in 1964, is the country’s largest remaining rebel organization.



Li Qiang Becomes China’s Premier

BEIJING (Dispatches) - Li Qiang, the former Communist Party chief of Shanghai, took office on Saturday as China’s premier, the country’s No.2 post, putting the close ally of President Xi Jinping in charge of reviving an economy battered by three years of Covid-19 curbs.

Widely perceived to be pragmatic and business-friendly, the 63-year-old Li faces the daunting task of shoring up China’s uneven recovery amid global headwinds and weak confidence among consumers and the private sector.

Li takes office as tensions rise with the West over a host of issues including US moves to block China’s access to key technologies and as many global companies diversify supply chains to hedge their China exposure due to political risks and the disruptions of the Covid era.

The career bureaucrat replaces Li Keqiang, who is retiring after two five-year terms during which his role was seen to be steadily diminished as Xi tightened his grip on power and steered the world’s second-largest economy in a more statist direction.

Li Qiang is the first premier since the founding of the People’s Republic never to have served previously in the



central government, meaning he may face a steep learning curve in the initial months on the job, analysts said.

Still, Li’s close ties with Xi - Li was Xi’s chief of staff between 2004 and 2007, when the latter was provincial party secretary of Zhejiang province — will empower him to get things done, leadership-watchers said.

“My reading of the situation is that Li Qiang will have a lot more leeway and authority within the system,” said Trey McArver, co-founder of consultancy Trivium China.

Xi, 69, is installing a slate of loyalists in key posts in the biggest government reshuffle in a decade as a generation of more reform-minded officials retires and he further consolidates power after being unanimously elected president, a largely ceremonial role, for an unprecedented third term on Friday.

On Saturday, Li received 2,936 votes, with three votes against and eight abstentions, according to totals projected on a screen inside the Great Hall of the People in central Beijing.

Japan Mourns 2011 Disaster as Nuclear Support Grows

TOKYO (Dispatches) - Japanese offered tearful prayers today on the anniversary of the deadly tsunami that triggered the Fukushima disaster, but public support for nuclear power is growing as memories of the 2011 meltdown fade.

The 9.0-magnitude quake — the fourth strongest in Earth’s recorded history — devastated northeastern Japan 12 years ago.

The undersea quake unleashed a tsunami that left around 18,500 people dead or missing and overwhelmed cooling systems at the Fukushima Daiichi plant, leading to the worst nuclear catastrophe since Chernobyl. All of Japan’s nuclear reactors were taken offline after the disaster and the majority remain out of action today.

But the global energy crisis sparked by the war in Ukraine has caused electricity bills to soar in Japan, inspiring a government push to reboot reactors as polls show that public views on nuclear power are softening.

Today, TV footage showed people who lost loved ones to the tsunami laying flowers, offering tearful prayers and bowing in front of graves.

“Hi guys, it’s been 12 years,” public broadcaster NHK showed Fumiko Sugawara, 73, telling the grave of her family members, including her husband.

“We’re surviving, so please watch over us,” said the resident of Kesennuma, a city flattened when huge waves rushed ashore. No deaths have been directly ascribed to the nuclear accident, after which around 165,000 people fled their homes in the area either under evacuation orders or voluntarily.

Most areas around the plant have since been declared safe after extensive decontamination work, but many former residents have chosen not to return.

With Japan now facing its most severe energy crunch in decades, the government wants to speed up the revival of its nuclear industry.

Prime Minister Fumio Kishida has called for seven reactors approved by Japan’s nuclear safety watchdog to resume operations, and for the nation to consider building “next-generation” reactors with new safety mechanisms.

French Protesters Back on Streets Against Macron’s Pension Plan

PARIS (Dispatches) - Demonstrators in France took to the streets Saturday for a seventh day of protest against President Emmanuel Macron’s pension reform plans, with police expecting up to a million people at rallies nationwide.

Unions hope they can still force Macron to back down as parliament debates the draft law, with the National Assembly and the Senate moving towards a final vote as early as this month.

“This is the final stretch,” said Marylise Leon, deputy leader of the CFDT union. “The endgame is now,” she told the franceinfo broadcaster Saturday.

This week, Macron twice turned down urgent calls by unions to meet with him in a last-ditch attempt to get him to change his mind.

“When there are millions of people in the streets, when there are strikes and all we get from the other side is silence, people wonder: What more do we need to do to be heard?”, said Philippe Martinez, boss of the hard-left CGT union.

“This country’s leaders need to stop being in denial of this social movement,” said CFDT head Laurent Berger on Saturday.

Police said they expect between 800,000 and one million people at 230 planned demonstrations across France, of which up to 100,000 were likely to march in Paris.

It was the second protest day called on a weekend, with unions hoping that demonstrators would show up in greater numbers if they did not have to take a day off work.

“I’m here to fight for my colleagues and for our young people,” said Claude Jeanvoine, 63, a retired train driver demonstrating in Strasbourg, eastern France.

“People shouldn’t let the government get away with this, this is about the future of their children and grandchildren,” he told AFP.

At the last big strike and protest day on Tuesday, turnout was just under 1.3 million people, according to police, and more than three million according to unions.

Several sectors in the French economy have been targeted by union calls for indefinite strikes, including in rail and air transport, power stations, natural gas terminals and rubbish collection.

On Saturday in Paris, early indications were that urban transit was little affected by stoppages, except for some suburban train lines.

The French Senate, meanwhile, early Saturday resumed debate of the reform whose headline measure is a hike in the minimum retirement age to 64 from 62.

Senators have until Sunday evening to conclude their discussions, and a commission is then to elaborate a final version of the draft law which will be submitted to both houses of parliament for a final vote.

Should Macron’s government fail to assemble a majority ahead of the vote, Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne could deploy a rarely-used constitutional tool, known as article 49/3, to push the legislation through without a vote.



More Migrants Brought Ashore to Italy

ROME (Dispatches) - Three boats overcrowded with migrants were brought safely to Italian ports on Saturday, the coastguard said, as thousands of marchers remembered the victims of last month’s deadly shipwreck off Calabria’s coast.

The rescue of more than 1,000 migrants came the same day as the body of the 74th victim of the deadly shipwreck nearly two weeks ago was found -- that of a female child between five and six years of age, according to Italian news agency AGI.

The February 26 shipwreck, which occurred just off the shore of Calabria, has drawn sharp criticism of the right-wing government led by Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni for its failure to intervene timely to save the migrants.

In Cutro on Saturday, near the site of the disaster, thousands of marchers carried a cross made of splintered wood from the shipwreck through the streets.

“This cross is a symbol of suffering today,” said Domenico “Mimmo” Lucano, a former Calabrian mayor known for his activism on behalf of migrants, as quoted by news agency ANSA.

“During these emergencies, Calabrian communities are shaken, and what prevails is a spirit of solidarity that the government doesn’t show,” he said.

On Friday, the coastguard began a rescue operation of three boats, one south of the Calabrian city of Crotone and two further south off Roccella Ionica.

Coastguard videos showed a large fishing boat pitching violently back and forth in nighttime rough seas with dozens of people visible on the deck. Other images showed inflatable rescue boats approaching another fishing vessel packed with people.

Those 487 migrants onboard the first boat were safely brought to the port of Crotone at about 0200 GMT Saturday morning, the coastguard said.

Another operation in which 500 migrants were brought to safety aboard a coastguard ship was wrapping up, it said. News agency ANSA had earlier reported that the ship had docked at the port of Reggio Calabria.

A third boat carrying 379 people was rescued by two coastguard patrol boats and the migrants transferred to a Navy ship headed to the Sicilian port of Augusta, it said.



Rise in Ocean Plastic Pollution Unprecedented Since 2005

PARIS (Dispatches) - Plastic pollution in the world's oceans has reached "unprecedented levels" over the past 15 years, a new study has found, calling for a legally binding international treaty to stop the harmful waste.

Ocean plastic pollution is a persistent problem around the globe -- animals may become entangled in larger pieces of plastic like fishing nets, or ingest microplastics that eventually enter the food chain to be consumed by humans.

Research published on Wednesday found that there are an estimated 170 trillion pieces of plastic, mainly microplastics, on the surface of the world's oceans today, much of it discarded since 2005.

"Plastic pollution in the world's oceans during the past 15 years has reached unprecedented levels," said the study, published in open-access journal PLOS One.

The amounts were higher than previous estimates, and the study found that the rate of plastic entering the oceans could accelerate several-fold in the coming decades if left unchecked.

Researchers took plastic samples from over 11,000 stations around the world focusing on a 40-year period between 1979 and 2019.

They found no trends until 1990, then a fluctuation in trends between 1990 and 2005. After that, the samples skyrocket.

"We see a really rapid increase since 2005 because there is a rapid increase in production and also a limited number of policies that are controlling the release of plastic into the ocean," contributing author Lisa Erdle told AFP.

The sources of plastic pollution in the ocean are numerous.

Fishing gear like nets and buoys often end up in the middle of the ocean, dumped or dropped by accident, while things like clothing, car tyres and single-use plastics often pollute nearer to the coast.

They eventually break down into microplastics, which Erdle said can look like "confetti on the surface of the ocean".

On current trends, plastic use will nearly double from 2019 across G20 countries by 2050, reaching 451 million tonnes each year, according to the report, jointly produced by Economist Impact and The Nippon Foundation.

In 1950, only two million tons of plastic were produced worldwide.

Recycling, even in countries with advanced waste management systems, has done little to help the pollution problem since just a small percentage of plastics are properly recycled and much often ending up in landfills instead.

If landfills are not properly managed, plastic waste can leech into the environment, eventually making its way to oceans.

"We really we see a lack of recycling, a flood of toxic products and packaging," Erdle said.

The rates of plastic waste were seen to recede at some points between 1990 and 2005, in part because there were some effective policies in place to control pollution.

That includes the 1988 MARPOL treaty, a legally binding agreement among 154 countries to end the discharge of plastics from naval, fishing and shipping fleets.

But with so much more plastic being produced today, the study's authors said a new, wide-ranging treaty is needed to not only reduce plastic production and use but also better manage its disposal.

"Environmental recovery of plastic has limited merit, so solution strategies must address those systems that restrict emissions of plastic pollution in the first place," the study said.



Latin America Poised To Become Renewable Energy Giant

RIO DE JANEIRO (Dispatches) - Latin America is poised to become a major renewable energy producer, with nearly a billion solar panels' worth of large-scale clean-electricity projects slated to come online in the next seven years, a report found.

In welcome good news for the climate-change race, researchers said Latin American countries had more than 319 gigawatts of utility-scale solar- and wind-power projects due to be launched by 2030 -- equal to nearly 70 percent of the region's total current electrical capacity from all sources combined.

"Rich in wind and solar resources, Latin America has the potential to be a global leader for renewable energy," said the report by the Global Energy Monitor (GEM), a US-based non-profit that tracks clean-energy development.

The new projects -- which include planned installations and those already under construction -- would expand Latin America's current utility-scale solar- and wind-power capacity by more than 460 percent, it found.

That makes the region a "global standout" on renewables, said Kasandra O'Malia, project manager at GEM.

"We're already seeing a big upswing. And if you look at all the projects that are planned, it's just this big, exponential-looking explosion," she told AFP.

Even if not every planned project gets built, the region appears to be at an inflexion point, with even more projects likely to be announced in the coming years, she said.

Brazil, Latin America's biggest economy, is leading the green-energy boom, with 27 gigawatts of utility-scale solar and wind plants already operating, and another 217 gigawatts of capacity slated to come online by 2030.

President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, who took office in January, has vowed to expand clean energy and restore Brazil's leadership role on climate change, after four years under far-right predecessor Jair Bolsonaro.

But the roots of the boom go back further, to a 2012 law that incentivized solar energy in Brazil by allowing private producers to sell electricity directly to the grid, according to energy expert Roberto Zilles.

"Today, it's cheaper to produce your own energy" than buy electricity, Zilles, the director of the University of Sao Paulo's Energy and Environment Institute, told AFP.

The report also highlighted developments in Chile -- traditionally a fossil-fuel importer, where wind and solar now represent 37 percent of total installed electricity capacity -- and Colombia, which has 37 gigawatts of new solar and wind capacity slated to come online by 2030.

However, Mexico, the region's second-biggest economy, was singled out as a case for concern.

Mexico, an early adopter of renewable energy, is currently home to Latin America's largest solar and wind projects.

But progress has declined since 2021 energy reforms pushed by President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, a fossil-fuels champion who has made revitalizing state oil company Pemex a cornerstone of his administration.

"Mexico has stalled," the report said.

"Even if all prospective projects were to come online, the country would only reach approximately 70 percent of its pledge to bring 40 gigawatts of solar and wind by 2030."

The report found Latin America has especially big potential as a producer of offshore wind energy.

It also said green energy exports could be a potential economic windfall, whether by sending surplus electricity to other countries or using renewable energy to produce green hydrogen for export.



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South Korea Jan. Current Account Logs Record Monthly Deficit

SEOUL (Dispatches) - South Korea's current account logged a record deficit in January, central bank data showed, as exports of goods slumped and overseas travel increased.

The country's current account balance logged a deficit of \$4.52 billion in January, after a \$2.68 billion surplus in December, according to the Bank of Korea (BOK). It was the biggest monthly deficit since the data series started in 1980.

The balances of goods and services each posted a deficit of \$7.46 billion and \$3.27 billion, with a drop in exports and jump in travel outflows, although the surplus in primary income widened to \$6.48 billion.



Slower, But Still Solid U.S. Job Growth Expected in February

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) – U.S. job growth likely slowed to a still-solid pace in February, with the unemployment rate expected to hold at a more than five — decade low, which could see the Federal Reserve raising interest rates for longer and to a higher level to tame inflation.

The Labor Department's closely watched employment report today is also expected to show wage gains maintaining their upward trend, underscoring a persistently tight jobs market. The anticipated slowdown in job gains follows January's torrid pace, which led financial markets to expect that the Fed would sustain its monetary policy tightening campaign into summer.

Fed Chair Jerome Powell told lawmakers this week that the US central bank would likely need to increase rates more than expected, opening the door to a 50-basis-point hike this month.

"There is no question that the labor market is still tight, probably hot, but I think it has begun to cool and the cooling trend should continue going forward," said Sung Won Sohn, finance and economics professor at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles.

Nonfarm payrolls likely increased by 205,000 jobs last month, less than half of the eye-popping 517,000 added in January, according to a Reuters survey of economists. While that would be the smallest gain since December 2020, it would be double the 100,000 jobs per month that economists say is needed to keep up with growth in the working-age population.

Economists also argue that job growth in January was flattered by a host of factors, including unseasonably warm weather, annual benchmark revisions to the data as well as overly generous seasonal adjustment factors, the model the government uses to strip out seasonal fluctuations from the data. Robust consumer spending growth in January was also partially attributed to seasonal factors.

Estimates for February payrolls growth ranged from as low as 78,000 to as high as 325,000. Average hourly earnings are forecast rising 0.3 per cent, matching January's gain. That would raise the year-on-year increase in wages to 4.7 per cent from 4.4 per cent, in part as last year's low readings drop out of the calculation.

"January payrolls benefited from an extremely low seasonal hurdle, minus 3 million jobs, while February requires the addition of at least 770,000 jobs in order to record a positive payroll number," said Ellen Zentner, chief US economist at Morgan Stanley in New York. "With labour market indicators pointing towards labor hoarding, less seasonal fluctuation in hiring should be a drag on February jobs numbers."

Economists recommended looking at the three — and six-month averages of payrolls, to get a better picture of the labor market. Should February payrolls meet expectations, the three — and six-month averages for job gains would be above 300,000.

"This would indicate the anticipated normalization in the labour market is taking longer than expected," said Jan Groen, chief US macro strategist at TD Securities in New York.

BOJ Keeps Low Rates as Kuroda Sticks to Script

TOKYO (Dispatches) - The Bank of Japan (BOJ) maintained ultra-low interest rates and held off making changes to its controversial bond yield control policy, leaving options open ahead of a leadership transition in April.

Though widely expected by most analysts, the decision sent the yen and local bond yields tumbling as some investors unwound bets that retiring central bank governor Haruhiko Kuroda would tweak the yield curve control (YCC) at his last policy meeting.

Kuroda leaves the bank with a mixed legacy: his massive stimulus is praised for pulling the economy out of deflation, but has strained bank profits and distorted market function with prolonged low interest rates. And the country's economic growth has remained tepid.

"The BOJ has been taking various steps to mitigate the side effects of its monetary easing. I can say that the benefits of our monetary easing have far exceeded the demerits," Kuroda told a post-meeting briefing, defending his decade-long stimulus programme.

At its two-day meeting that ended on Friday, the BOJ maintained its short-term interest rate target at -0.1% and that for the 10-year bond yield around 0%.

It also left unchanged a band set around the 10-year yield target that allows the yield to fall or rise up to 0.5%. Markets have been increasingly testing the upper end of that cap as investors bet that the BOJ will have to change course soon.

"The decision to uphold policy rates comes at a cost. The BOJ will be forced to continue its massive JGB purchases to stem speculation of additional YCC tweaks, which will worsen market liquidity," said Norihiro Yamaguchi, senior economist at Oxford Economics.

The yen was last down 0.4% at 136.66 per dollar, trimming losses after a knee-jerk plunge of as much as 0.6% after the no-surprises decision. The Nikkei average slumped the most in almost three months as bank shares tumbled.

The benchmark 10-year Japanese government bond (JGB) yield pulled back sharply from the BOJ's 0.5% ceiling to hit 0.385%, its lowest since Jan. 24. The yield on the 368th 10-year note turned negative in a fresh sign of the severe market distortion caused by YCC.

Many investors expect the central bank to phase out the yield cap when Kuroda's successor, Kazuo Ueda, takes the helm in April.

A majority of economists polled by Reuters expect the BOJ to end the yield control policy this year, with half saying Ueda will carry out tweaks to the policy within three months.



European Bank to Invest Up to \$1.6b in Turkey's Quake-Hit Region

ANKARA (Dispatches) - The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) will invest up to 1.5 billion euros (\$1.6 billion) in southern Turkey over the next two years after powerful earthquakes shook the region on Feb. 6.

The EBRD aims to support the recovery, reconstruction and reintegration of the region's economy to preserve human capital, livelihoods and jobs in the affected cities, the bank said in a statement Thursday.

The bank provides 600 million euros in credit lines to local lenders for businesses and individuals directly affected by the earthquakes, as well as new lending to companies participating in recovery and reconstruction efforts in the area.

It will also support the reconstruction of sustainable infrastructure in the affected cities, cooperating with municipalities such as Hatay and Gaziantep.

The bank will also focus funds on the reconstruction of the railway network to reestablish connectivity between the southeastern region and the rest of the country.

The bank will expand its strong private-sector partnerships and work with companies in various sectors to enable them to continue operating and withstand disruptions to local value chains. It will also help the private sector to adopt new technologies and green principles in planned rebuilding projects.

A key focus of the response package will be small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the region. The bank will provide funding, advisory services and mentorship to repair the damage, build resilience and rebuild supply chains for businesses in the affected cities.

India's Inflation Seen Easing Slightly in February

BENGALURU (Dispatches) - Retail inflation in India likely eased a bit last month but stayed above the Reserve Bank of India's upper threshold for a second straight month, keeping the central bank on course for further policy tightening, a Reuters poll found.

Rises in food prices, which account for nearly half of the Consumer Price Index (CPI) basket, likely moderated last month. However, the bulk of the slowdown probably came from easing international prices and the government's

efforts to provide additional supplies of wheat.

Despite those temporary measures, lower crop yields because of warmer-than-usual temperatures last year and this year were likely to keep inflation elevated in the near-term period.

The March 2-9 Reuters poll of 43 economists showed inflation, as measured by the CPI, likely fell to an annual 6.35% in February from 6.52% in January.

Only one economist expected inflation to fall below the 6.00% mark, the upper limit of the RBI's tolerance band. Forecasts ranged from 5.89% to 6.70% for the data, which are due to be released at 1200 GMT on March 13.

"With vegetable prices normalising, inflation has started to harden as the inherent price pressures have barely shown any meaningful signs of moderation. In fact, food inflation ex-pulses and vegetables has now reached a nine-and-a-half-year high," wrote Kunal Kundu, India economist at Societe Generale.

"While we do not expect a sharp rise in inflation over the next few quarters, the pace of easing would be much slower than expected, especially given the likely impact of El Nino weather condition on food prices. We cannot rule out (a) further upside surprise to inflation."

An El Nino weather pattern usually results in below-average rainfall, cutting yields and pushing up food prices.

A weaker rupee, which fell around 10% last year and is expected to recover only some of those losses in the coming months, is also adding to upward price pressures.

Core inflation, which excludes volatile food and energy components, was also expected to remain sticky.

While data for core inflation is not released by the government, some economists said it likely remained above 6.0% in February.

Minutes from the RBI's latest meeting showed the central bank was concerned about persistently high core inflation, leaving the door open for more policy tightening.

UK Economy Returns To Growth in Jan

LONDON (Dispatches) - The UK economy rebounded to grow by 0.3% in January, according to official figures, potentially giving chancellor Jeremy Hunt more headroom ahead of next week's spring budget.

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) reported a recovery for output last month after the bigger than expected contraction of 0.5% witnessed in December, as activity recovered from crippling strikes that month.

The main contributing sectors were education (2.5%), as school attendance returned to November 2022 levels, and arts, entertainment and recreation.

However, the UK's production sector shrank by 0.3% while construction output decreased by 1.7%. Gross domestic product (GDP) remained at 0% in the three months to January, the ONS said.

ONS director of economic statistics Darren Morgan said: "The economy partially bounced back from the large fall seen in December."

"Across the last three months as a whole and, indeed over the last 12 months, the economy has, though, showed zero growth."

"The main drivers of January's growth were the return of children to classrooms, following unusually high absences in the run-up to Christmas, the Premier League clubs returned to a full schedule after the end of the World Cup and private health providers also had a strong month."

"Postal services also partially recovered from the effects of December's strikes."

The latest GDP figure could give chancellor Hunt a slight boost before next week's budget announcement, when he will set out the government's tax and spending policies.

Hunt said: "In the face of severe global challenges, the UK economy has proved more resilient than many expected, but there is a long way to go."

"Next week, I will set out the next stage of our plan to halve inflation, reduce debt and grow the economy — so we can improve living standards for everyone."

Despite the resilience of the UK economy in the face of a cost of living squeeze and widespread industrial unrest, analysts warn that the country is still "flirting" with a recession.

Alice Haine, personal finance analyst at Bestinvest, said: "The economy may have escaped a recession in 2022 — albeit by the skin of its teeth — but it's too early to say whether the same will happen in 2023."

"The slight growth in January is certainly a better-than-expected start to the year, considering the multiple challenges hitting output from double-digit inflation and rapidly rising borrowing costs to falling real incomes and perpetual strike action." Suren Thiru, economics director at ICAEW, said: "This modest rebound suggests that the economy is still on a downbeat path as eye-watering inflation bites into household incomes and curbs business activity."

OPEC Does Not Need to Make Up For Russia Oil Output Cut

HOUSTON (Dispatches) - There is no need for the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries to increase oil output to make up for Russia's 500,000 barrel per day cut, Angola's secretary of state for oil and gas told Reuters.

"We believe the Russian oil is still there," Angola's Jose Barroso said on the sidelines of an energy conference in Houston. "They find a way, they find new markets... There is a balance in the market."

Russia said it would cut 500,000 bpd of supply from March. The Group of Seven countries, the European Union and Australia implemented the price cap on seaborne cargoes of Russian oil on Dec. 5, setting it at USD 60 a barrel.

Russian oil has found buyers in countries such as China and India that have not imposed sanctions. If China is importing more oil from Russia, then perhaps it is importing less from other countries, Barroso said.

"We believe for the time being there is no need for the OPEC member countries to increase their production," he added.

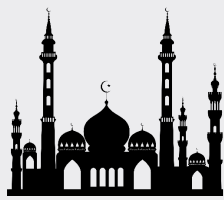
Barroso could not say whether Angola was losing market share in China to Russia, adding he lacks data on that. Energy demand in China is rising as Beijing loosens coronavirus restrictions.

Asked whether Angola would favor an increase in OPEC output quotas if it could produce more, Barroso said the country has a long way to go before reaching its current quota.

OPEC and allies, known as OPEC+, agreed to cut their output target by 2 million barrels per day from last November through 2023. As part of this, the 10 OPEC members bound by the deal have a target to produce 25.416 million bpd.

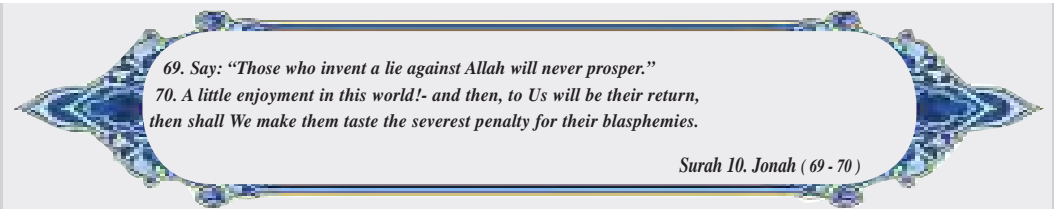
Angola's output was 1.050 million barrels per day (bpd) in February, and its OPEC target was 1.455 million bpd. OPEC output is significantly undershooting targeted amounts because many producers - notably Nigeria and Angola - lack the capacity to pump at the agreed levels.

U.S. energy envoy Amos Hochstein said this week during the CERAWEEK conference that the price cap - designed to reduce Russian revenues without slowing its exports - was working well, as Russian oil was still finding its way to market.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	12:13
■ Evening (Maghreb)	18:27
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	04:53
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	06:16



UK Tells Small-Boat Migrants: We Will Detain and Deport You

LONDON (Dispatches) - Britain has set out details of a new law barring the entry of asylum seekers arriving in small boats across the Channel, a proposal some charities say could be impractical and criminalize the efforts of thousands of genuine refugees.

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has made stopping boat arrivals one of his five key priorities after the number of migrants arriving on the south coast of England soared to more than 45,000 last year, up 500% in the last two years.

The new legislation will mean anyone who arrives this way will be prevented from claiming asylum and deported either back to their homeland or to so-called safe third countries.

Anger over immigration has played a defining role in British politics over the last decade and Sunak's Conservatives hope that by taking a hard line they can rebuild their popularity as they trail the main opposition Labor party by around 20 percentage points in opinion polls.

The U.N.'s refugee agency said it was "profoundly concerned" by the proposals, which would deny people the right to asylum "no matter how genuine and compelling" individual cases may be.

The government said on the first page of the draft legislation that it may not be compatible with Britain's obligations under the European Convention on Human Rights, meaning it could face legal challenges if made into law.

Sunak said he would do "whatever is necessary" to stop the small boats and was ready to fight any legal challenges.

"We're up for the fight, I wouldn't be standing here if we weren't - but we're actually confident that we will win," he told a press conference.

The legislation will allow the detention of migrants without bail until they can be removed, interior minister Suella Braverman said, and those entering Britain illegally would no longer be able to use anti-slavery laws to try to block removal.

British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak speaks during a news conference in London [1/3] British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak speaks during a press conference following the launch of new legislation on migrant channel crossings at Downing Street on March 7, 2023 in London, United Kingdom. Leon Neal/Pool via REUTERS

Only children, people who are considered too ill to fly or those at a "real risk of serious and irreversible harm" will be allowed to claim asylum in Britain.

Just under two-thirds of those who arrive on small boats are currently granted asylum or another form of humanitarian protection, interior ministry figures show.

While the number of applications for asylum in the UK hit a 20-year high of nearly 75,000 in 2022, it is still below the European Union average. Germany



received more than 240,000 asylum applications last year.

Opposition politicians and charities have questioned whether the latest plans would be any more effective than previous attempts in the last five years to deter people from making the crossing.

Labor's home affairs spokesperson Yvette Cooper described the government's announcement as another "Groundhog Day" and said it should be working with other countries to address the matter.

Last year, Britain agreed a deal to send tens of thousands of migrants more than 4,000 miles away (6,400 km) to Rwanda.

The first deportation flight was blocked by an injunction from the European Court of Human Rights. London's High Court then ruled it lawful in December, but opponents are seeking to appeal that verdict.

Braverman said she was in discussions with the European human rights court to halt the use of injunctions to prevent the future deportation of migrants.

She suggested to parliament that without changes to the law, 100 million asylum seekers could qualify for protection in Britain, but didn't provide supporting evidence for that figure.

South Korea's Birthrate Sinks To Fresh Record Low as Population Crisis Deepens



SOUTH KOREA (Dispatches) – South Korea's demographic crisis has deepened after new data showed the number of babies born last year reached another record low.

According to figures released by Statistics Korea, 249,000 babies were born in 2022, a fall of 4.4% from the previous year and the third year in a row that deaths have exceeded births in Asia's fourth-biggest economy.

The birthrate also dropped to a record low, dealing a blow to government efforts to encourage couples to have more children.

A South Korean woman can now expect to have an average of 0.78 children in her lifetime – the lowest level since records were first kept in 1970 – making South Korea the only country in the world with a fertility rate below one.

Experts say the rate needs to be at least 2.1 to keep the country's population stable at 52 million.

It is not the only country battling declining birthrates – Japan's government recently warned that population decline was taking the country "to the brink of social dysfunction" – but the trend in South Korea is particularly alarming for policymakers.

More young people are choosing to delay starting families or giving up on having children altogether.

They cite the high cost of raising children, poor job prospects amid an economic slowdown, and rising real estate prices, while some women say they prefer to prioritize their personal freedom and have ruled out finding a marriage partner.

As a result, the number of marriages in South Korea reached an all-time low of 193,000 in 2021.

The average age at which women give birth was 33.5 in 2022, according to the new data, up 0.2 from a year earlier. On average, women gave birth to their first child at 33. Just 24 babies were born for every 1,000 women in their late 20s – down 3.5% from a year earlier – the Yonhap news agency reported.

With the world's lowest fertility rate and a rapidly ageing population, concern is growing about the strain on South Korea's economy and the pension system, which may become depleted in the coming decades.

The population shrank for the first time on record in 2021, and is projected to fall further, to 38 million, by 2070.

India's Oil Deals With Russia Dent Decades-Old Dollar Dominance

NEW DELHI (Dispatches)

- U.S.-led international sanctions on Russia have begun to erode the dollar's decades-old dominance of international oil trade as most deals with India - Russia's top outlet for seaborne crude - have been settled in other currencies.

The dollar's pre-eminence has periodically been called into question and yet it has continued because of the overwhelming advantages of using the most widely-accepted currency for business.

India's oil trade, in response to the turmoil of sanctions and the Ukraine war, provides the strongest evidence so far of a shift into other currencies that could prove lasting.

The country is the world's number three importer of oil and Russia became its leading supplier after Europe shunned Moscow's supplies following its invasion of Ukraine begun in February last year.

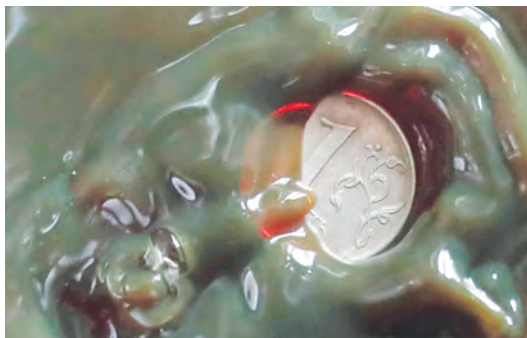
After a coalition opposed to the war imposed an oil price cap on Russia on Dec. 5, Indian customers have paid for most Russian oil in non-dollar currencies, including the United Arab Emirates dirham and more recently the Russian rouble, multiple oil trading and banking sources said.

The transactions in the last three months total the equivalent of several hundred million dollars, the sources added, in a shift that has not previously been reported.

The Group of Seven economies, the European Union and Australia, agreed the price cap late last year to bar Western services and shipping from trading Russian oil unless sold at an enforced low price to deprive Moscow of funds for its war.

Some Dubai-based traders, and Russian energy companies Gazprom and Rosneft are seeking non-dollar payments for certain niche grades of Russian oil that have in recent weeks been sold above the \$60 a barrel price cap, three sources with direct knowledge said.

The sources asked not to be named because of the sensitivity of the issue.



Those sales represent a small share of Russia's total sales to India and do not appear to violate the sanctions, which U.S. officials and analysts predicted could be skirted by non-Western services, such as Russian shipping and insurance.

Three Indian banks backed some of the transactions, as Moscow seeks to de-dollarise its economy and traders to avoid sanctions, the trade sources, as well as former Russian and U.S. economic officials, told Reuters.

But continued payment in dirhams for Russian oil could become harder after the United States and Britain last month added Moscow and Abu Dhabi-based Russian bank MTS to the Russian financial institutions on the sanctions list.

MTS had facilitated some Indian oil non-dollar payments, the trade sources said. Neither MTS nor the U.S. Treasury immediately responded to a Reuters request for comment.

An Indian refining source said most Russian banks have faced sanctions since the war but Indian customers and Russian suppliers are determined to keep trading Russian oil.

"Russian suppliers will find some other banks for receiving payments," the source told Reuters.

"As it is, the government is not asking us to stop buying Russian oil, so we are hopeful that an alternative payment mechanism will be found in case the current system is blocked."

Paying for oil in dollars has been the nearly universal practice for decades. By comparison, the currency's share of overall international payments is much smaller at 40%, according to January figures from payment system SWIFT.

Daniel Ahn, a former chief economist at the U.S. State Department and now a global fellow at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, says the dollar's strength is unmatched, but the sanctions could undermine the West's financial systems while failing to achieve their aim.

Iran-SCO...

FROM PAGE 1

Elsewhere in his remarks, Latifi pointed out that Iran's non-oil trade with the member states of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization has seen a growth of about \$6 billion, registering 18.3 percent rise as compared to last year's corresponding period.

Turning to Iran's export destinations to SCO's member states, he said that China, India, Afghanistan, Pakistan and the Russian Federation imported \$13.562 billion, \$1.919 billion, \$1.481 billion, \$1.315 billion and \$673 million worth of products from Iran from March 21, 2022 to February 20, 2023 respectively, which accounted for Iran's first five export target markets.

The Islamic Republic of Iran joined the Shanghai Cooperation Organization officially at the Samarkand Summit in Uzbekistan on September 16, 2022. Iran's membership request had been presented to the Secretariat of the Organization in February 2005.

Iran-Saudi Deal...

FROM PAGE 1

The remarks came two days after Iran and Saudi Arabia agreed to resume their diplomatic relations and reopen their embassies and diplomatic missions within the next two months. The pact followed days of intensive talks in Beijing.

In a joint statement issued by Iran, Saudi Arabia, and China, Tehran, and Riyadh highlighted the need to respect each others' national sovereignty and refrain from interfering in the internal affairs of one another.

They agreed to implement a security cooperation agreement signed in April 2001 and another accord reached in May 1998 to boost economic, commercial, investment, technical, scientific, cultural, sports, and youth affairs cooperation.

General Rahim Safavi, who is also a former chief commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC), expressed hope that the region will move towards sustainable security and peace through the Iran-Saudi détente, noting that the power of the US and the Zionists is on the sharp decline.

"In my opinion, the agreement is in the interests of the two countries and the Western Asia region. It is not against any regional countries. Of course, it is natural for the arrogant powers to be upset about this issue and [try to] sabotage it," he said.

Highlighting the expansion of China's geo-economic sphere to the Persian Gulf, the senior commander predicted that Beijing and Moscow will help Saudi Arabia become a member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO).

"The alliance can play the role of a barrier against the US-led NATO and the West's military power in the future," General Rahim Safavi added.

Iran Oil Exports...

FROM PAGE 1

Meanwhile Owji talked of good agreements with giant Chinese companies, record annual production of sour gas, and the launch of Phase 11 of South Pars (SP) gas field.

Talking to reporters on the sidelines of a ceremony on the construction operation of the Torbat-e Jam 16-inch gas transmission pipeline project, Owji added that Iran and China have reached good agreements that will serve the two nations' interests.

He also pointed to the trade between Iran and its neighboring states in the sector of oil products.

Touching upon the country's sour gas production, the minister announced one billion cubic meters (bcm) have been produced in the current Iranian calendar year (starting March 21, 2022), hitting a record high.

During the yearlong period, Owji added, 1.8 bcm of oil products were produced and distributed and the daily production of natural gas witnessed an increase of 20 million cubic meters (mcm) when compared with that of the preceding year.

Asked about the progress in the project of Phase 11 of the South Pars gas field, the minister said the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) has done great planning since 18 months ago, regretting that nothing had been done in 20 years before that.

He expressed hope that SP Phase 11 will become operational within the next two months after relocating Platform C of Phase 12 and drilling a well in Phase 11.

Riyadh-Tehran...

FROM PAGE 1

"With this move, the Iranian government showed that it is determined and has designed steps forward to protect the interests of the Iranian nation as well as Muslim, friendly and neighboring countries and to use regional capacities to promote peace and inclusive stability, and to safeguard common interests of the regional governments and nations."

It expressed assurance on the "positive consequences" of the deal in safeguarding the common interests of Iran and Saudi Arabia, as well as other countries in West Asia.

The agreement was signed in the Chinese capital Beijing on Friday, March 10, by Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council Ali Shamkhani and his Saudi counterpart Musaad bin Mohammed Al Aiban.

Under the agreement, which followed several days of intense talks in Beijing, Riyadh and Tehran would reopen embassies and missions within two months and implement security and economic cooperation agreements signed more than 20 years ago.

Saudi Arabia cut ties with Iran in 2016 after the Saudi embassy in Tehran was stormed by some angry Iranian citizens after Riyadh executed a prominent Shia cleric.

Griffin Leads Players As Play Suspended

PONTE VEDRA BEACH (Dispatches) - Ben Griffin double-bogeyed the final hole but still held the second-round clubhouse lead at The Players Championship in Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida, when play was suspended for the day due to inclement weather with Rory McIlroy poised to miss the cut.

Griffin, who started out yesterday three shots back of first-round leader Chad Ramey, shot a one-under-par 71 that brought him to six under on the week and gave him a two-shot clubhouse lead over fellow American Will Gordon (67).

LICENCE HOLDER: SOKHAN GOSTAR INSTITUTE

Switchboard:
(+98) (21) 44253448
Public Relations Tel:
(+98)(21) 44253450
Editorial Board: 44253449
Public Relations Fax:
(+98)(21) 44253395
Advertising Department:
Tel/Fax:(+98) (21) 44253335-9/44253234
Website:
http://www.irannewsdaily.com

E-Mail Address:
info@irannewsdaily.com
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Japan Claim Baseball Win On Disaster Anniversary

TOKYO (Dispatches) - Japan's World Baseball Classic manager said pitcher Roki Sasaki put his "soul" into the win over the Czech Republic on the anniversary of the devastating 2011 earthquake and tsunami that killed his father and grandparents.

Sasaki's house in the northern Japanese city of Rikuzentakata was swept away when the devastating 2011 earthquake unleashed a tsunami that left around 18,500 people dead or missing, and triggered a meltdown at Fukushima nuclear plant.

Tsitsipas Crashes out of Indian Wells in Second Round



INDIAN WELLS (Dispatches) - Stefanos Tsitsipas's hopes of taking over the world number one ranking with an Indian Wells title ended in a 7-6(0) 4-6 7-6(5) second-round loss to Australian Jordan Thompson.

Second seed Tsitsipas told reporters on Wednesday that he did not expect to make a deep run at the tournament due to his ailing shoulder and it was unclear how much he had left in the tank after he was blanked in the first set breaker.

But the Greek battled back and secured the only service break of the match in the second and pumped up the crowd ahead of the third set tiebreak.

But his overly aggressive play in the breaker, including a forehand on match point that missed the line by the slimmest of margins, was his undoing.

A beaming Thompson fired a ball high into the air in celebration after he notched his first win over Tsitsipas in three career meetings and second over a top 10 player.

"It's unreal," said Thompson.

"At a Masters 1000, in the Indian Wells Tennis Garden here. It's one of my favourite tournaments, I think a lot of players' favourite tournaments, to play. To have a win like that is incredible. I'm really happy."

Thompson said his thrilling second-round upset of second seed Tsitsipas at Indian Wells provided the latest boost in confidence after a sluggish start to the year.

Thompson struggled out of the gate when he fell in the first round of January's Australian Open and suffered early exits in Dallas and Delray in February.

To reset he entered an ATP Challenger event in Georgia that he won without dropping a set and rode that momentum into Indian Wells, where he backed up his straight sets first round win over Frenchman Gael Monfils by toppling Tsitsipas.

"A little bit of a slow start to the year," Thompson told reporters.

"Won a Challenger couple weeks ago and it was good to get those matches under my belt. I came here and got a tricky draw but have come through it.

Neymar Happy But Return Uncertain After Surgery

DOHA (Dispatches) - Doctors are still not certain when Brazilian striker Neymar will be able to return to play despite a successful ankle operation in a Qatari hospital, a Paris Saint-Germain medical chief said.

The French club said before Friday's surgery that the 31-year-old could be out for up to four months, ruling him out of the rest of this season.

"Neymar Junior was operated yesterday, it was very successful," Hakim Chalabi, PSG's medical director general told AFP.

"Right now he is very good and he is happy. He is not so painful and the surgeons who operated are very happy."

Neymar will stay at the Aspetar sports hospital in Qatar for at least two days. After a period of rest, PSG will start physiotherapy, Chalabi said.

"Later on we will evaluate a time for a return on the field. Right now it is a bit soon to talk about." The club's medical staff will consult with the surgeons after more examinations.

"He is going to be on crutches for a few days but then after he should be back to half weight lifting."

Neymar was stretched off with his latest injury in a Ligue 1 game against Lille last month. He injured the same ankle in 2018.

Chalabi said that after the operation, Neymar "should be back at a normal level but with less risk of injury."

Fitness has been a regular concern since PSG signed Neymar for a world-record €222 million (RM1.06 billion) in 2017.

He has played only 112 of PSG's 228 Ligue 1 matches since his arrival.

up to 56 points - six behind leaders Barcelona, who travel to Athletic Bilbao.

Espanyol, who remain 13th, opened the scoring in the eighth minute, as Joselu lashed



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Espanyol, who remain 13th, opened the scoring in the eighth minute, as Joselu lashed

Real claim 3-1 Comeback Win Over Espanyol

MADRID (Dispatches) - Real Madrid fought back from a goal down to claim a 3-1 victory over Espanyol at the Santiago Bernabeu, as the hosts returned to winning ways ahead of a potentially season-defining week in which they face Liverpool and Barcelona.

Second-placed Real, who scored through Vinicius Jr, Eder Militao and Marco Asensio, maintained their slim title chances by moving

the ball into the top corner past goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois following Ruben Sanchez's cross from the right flank.

Real stepped up the pressure as they sought a leveller, with Eduardo Camavinga getting a shot on target, before Vinicius showed his individual skill in the 22nd minute to cut into the box, beat two defenders and rifle in. With Espanyol pinned back in their own half, the home side took the lead six minutes from half-time as Militao scored with a bullet header after Aurelien Tchouameni put in a cross with the outside of his foot.

Real continued to press after the break and Rodrygo almost scored their third with a free-kick effort that cannoned off the cross-bar in the 75th minute.

Asensio smashed in a third in added time to wrap up the win for Real, who had dropped points in draws with rivals Atletico Madrid and Real Betis in their last two league games.

Benzema Disputes Liar Deschamps Claim Over World Cup Fitness

PARIS (Dispatches) - Karim Benzema has responded to Didier Deschamps' claim that the striker told him "he wouldn't have been ready" to play at the World Cup because of an injury by implying the France coach was a "liar".

The Real Madrid forward pulled out of the France squad with an injured left thigh on the eve of the tournament and departed their team hotel in Qatar soon afterwards.

Benzema returned to training with his club on December 10, four days before France played Morocco in the World Cup semi-finals.

"Karim told me himself that he wouldn't have been ready," Deschamps told the Parisien newspaper in an interview published on Saturday.

"When Karim got injured, our doctor accompanied him to the Aspetar clinic to undergo an MRI," said Deschamps.

"Karim passed on the results to someone who follows him in Madrid and who also gave him an opinion. When he came back to the hotel, it was already gone midnight.

"I met Karim in his room with our doctor who had come to give me the report from the scan... Karim was hurt because this World Cup meant a lot to him. He told me, 'It's over.'"

"We stayed together for about 20 minutes," added Deschamps.

"When leaving I told him, 'Karim, there's no rush. Organise your return with the team manager.' When I woke up I found out he was gone. It's his decision, he won't tell you otherwise, I understand and respect it."

Benzema, who announced his international retirement the day after France lost the World Cup final on penalties to Argentina, appeared to dispute Deschamps' version of events on social media.



Salah Misses Penalty As Bournemouth Shock Liverpool



LONDON (Dispatches) - Jurgen Klopp admitted Liverpool's top four bid had taken a "big knock" after Mohamed Salah missed a penalty in their shock 1-0 defeat at struggling Bournemouth.

Klopp's side travelled to Dean Court in high spirits after their historic 7-0 thrashing of arch rivals Manchester United last weekend.

But Liverpool's hopes of using that remarkable result as a springboard to push for a top four finish in the Premier League were given a brutal reality check on the south coast.

Philip Billing punished woeful Liverpool defending to put the struggling hosts ahead early on and Salah blew the chance to equalise when he fired wide from a second half spot-kick.

Salah became Liverpool's record scorer in the Premier League era when he netted twice against United.

But the Egypt star's failure to add to his total of 130 condemned Liverpool to a first defeat in their last six league games.

Fifth-placed Liverpool appeared to use up all their goals in the United demolition and their toothless display left them three points behind Tottenham ahead of the north Londoners' game against Nottingham Forest later on Saturday.

"There is a lot to go for but today is not the moment to talk about that," Klopp said.

"This game was a massive knock. You know how it is with knocks, you have to take them and see how big the scars are and go from there."

Apart from the damage done to Liverpool's top four bid, it was hardly ideal preparation for Wednesday's Champions League last 16 second leg at Real Madrid, where the Reds need a miracle in the Spanish capital to overturn a 5-2 deficit.