

Iran's Import of Products From the United States in the First Month of 2023 Hit \$3.1m, Registering a 36 Percent Decline as Compared To the Same Period of Last Year

IRAN NEWS

Gov't Spokesman Said That INSTEX Was a System Just on Paper and a European Fun, Adding the Europeans Developed INSTEX Just to Get Rid of The Embarrassment Caused by the U.S. Scrapping of the JCPOA

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Iran Economy Grows by 5.3% in December Quarter

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Figures by the Central Bank of Iran (CBI) show the country's economy grew by 5.3% year on year in the three calendar months to December 21, 2022.

CBI's deputy governor for economic affairs Peyman Ghorbani said that the economic growth reported by the bank for the December quarter was an increase of 0.5% compared to the year on year growth rate reported in the same quarter in 2021.

Ghorbani told the Iranian state TV that the non-oil sector of Iran's economy had also expanded by 4.5% in the three months to late December last year.

The quarterly figures marked the highest increase in Iran's gross domestic product (GDP) in the calendar year starting late March 2022, he said, adding that the country had experienced growth rates of 2.2% and 3.6% in quarters to late June and late September, respectively.

The official said Iran's oil sector was the best performer of the Iranian economy in the December quarter with a GDP expansion of 15.4%, adding that agriculture grew by 1.1% over the period, the lowest among Iranian economic sectors.

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Iran Ready to Develop Cordial Relations With Bahrain

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran says it is ready to develop relations with all regional countries under its neighborliness policy, which led to the restoration of ties with Saudi Arabia last week.

In comments on Tuesday, Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Nasser Kanaani said the Islamic Republic's neighbor-based policy sees "no exception" among regional countries, including Bahrain, which severed diplomatic ties with Iran in 2016.

"The promotion of relations with regional countries, including Bahrain, is among the [Iranian] administration's policies," Kanaani told Iran's Arabic-language television news network al-Alam TV.

Kanaani said Iran's neighborliness policy includes boosting relations with regional countries based on common interests.

"In view of a promising prospect, we can witness the realization of new conditions in relations with the regional countries, including Bahrain."

"Bahrain is not an exception," he reiterated. "Fortunately, we are witnessing good diplomatic moves in this regard as well. Parliamentary diplomacy has also been almost activated in this regard."

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IRGC Equips New Warship With Kamikaze Drones, Warns Enemies



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - The commander of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Navy says the elite military force has outfitted its new homegrown Shahid Mahdavi warship with different kinds of drones, including the kamikaze ones.

"The Shahid Mahdavi combat support vessel has been equipped with cruise missiles with a range of 300 to 750 kilometers, Sepehr-7 vertical launch drones with a flight duration of 8 hours and a range of 200 kilometers, and kamikaze drones with a range of 1,300 kilometers, and it can also carry 5 helicopters," Rear Admiral Alireza Tangsiri said during a TV program.

The remarks came a few days after the ocean-going warship joined the IRGC Navy's fleet.

The 2,100-ton vessel, which has a length of 240 meters and a width of 27 meters, is equipped with a 3D phased-array radar and highly advanced electronic warfare telecommunication systems.

Tangsiri also said the IRGC vessels will outspeed the American ones in the near future.

The commander added that the IRGC Navy's Tareq-class boats have been outfitted with missiles that have a range of 180 kilometers, adding that the boats can fire their missiles while sailing at a speed of 60 knots.

Ashura- and Zolfaqar-class boats have been equipped with Kowasr-200 and Navab missiles, respectively, he noted. Navab and Sayyad-3 missiles have been installed on the Shahid Soleimani warship.

"We have unmanned vessels that are equipped with artificial intelligence and are capable of guiding other unmanned vessels and attacking with them."

"Today, some neighboring countries have given the child-killing Zionist regime a foothold in the region. However, they should know that if they hurl a stone at us, we will respond. If our ships face a problem, the Iranian courage will not leave it unanswered."

The commander said IRGC vessels currently sail at a speed of 90 knots, equivalent to 170 km per hour, adding that the figure will reach 120 knots or 200 km per hour in near future.

He said, in order for the IRGC Navy to become an operational force, it needs equipment that can make it reach any point the fastest possible.

"We have two more Shahid Soleimani-class vessels under construction; one is the Shahid Hassan Bagheri vessel and the other is the Shahid Sayad Shirazi vessel, one of which was built by the Ministry of Defense and the other by the IRGC Navy," he added.

Iran's naval force has in recent years made great achievements in manufacturing its defense equipment and expanding its presence in international waters and high seas.

ViewPoint By: Hamid Reza Naghashian Tehran-Riyadh Agreement Shattering Zionists' Dreams

An unexpected announcement of an agreement shocked the world and above all the Zionist regime and its allies and the announcement shattered dreams of Israel for strengthening its footprint in the region and especially in the Persian Gulf.

Yes. The sudden announcement of agreement between the Islamic Republic of Iran and Saudi Arabia which happened in China and through involvement of Beijing amid some regional disputes between Tehran and Riyadh stunned and enraged the Zionists and still one can see the aftershocks of this political quake which can cement ties between Tehran and Riyadh and also strengthen the unity among Muslim world to stand against the excessive-demands of any trans-regional power.

Immediately after the announcement most of former and current Zionist officials expressed their dissatisfaction and anger about this agreement while the Zionists have been trying to normalize ties with Saudi Arabia but the Zionists never expected Tehran and Riyadh to thaw their ties and resolve their differences and it seems this agreement is encouraging other Persian Gulf states to reconsider their cold or lukewarm ties with Iran by pursuing serious and better relations. As some media outlets reported on Tuesday that Bahrain is considering resumption of ties with Iran.

On Monday a report echoed some of the after-shocks of this agreement as the United Arab Emirates (UAE) reportedly halted the purchase of advanced surface-to-air missile system from Israel amid political turmoil facing embattled Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu as well as anti-Palestinian remarks by two extremist Israeli ministers.

The Arabic-language Arabi21 online newspaper, citing a report by Israel's Channel 12 television channel, said the UAE's decision came in response to recent actions and statements by Israel's so-called national security minister Itamar Ben-Gvir and finance minister Bezalel Smotrich.

The channel quoted Israeli sources as saying that the UAE President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan has announced the freeze on the deal.

"As long as we do not receive assurances that [Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin] Netanyahu is able to control his administration, we cannot undertake common projects," Al Nahyan said.

Protests have been snowballing in the occupied territories over the past two months since Netanyahu's controversial move to reform the judiciary.

Back on September 22 last year, Reuters cited two sources as saying that Israel had approved a UAE request and would supply the Persian Gulf state with Rafael-made SPYDER mobile interceptors.

A third source said the UAE had acquired Israeli technology capable of combating drone attacks like those that struck Abu Dhabi earlier that year.

Reports say Israel agreed to provide the UAE with the Rafael-made SPYDER mobile interceptors.

It was not clear how many interceptors, which are fitted to vehicles and can defend against short to long-range threats, would be supplied, or if any had already been shipped.

Back in 2020, the UAE and Bahrain signed US-brokered agreements with Israel to normalize their ties with the regime. Some other Arab states, namely Sudan and Morocco, followed suit soon afterward.

The normalization deals have sparked widespread condemnations from the Palestinians as well as nations and human rights advocates across the globe, especially within the Muslim world.

This report comes while the Zionists have been trying to encourage Saudi Arabia for normalizing ties and even Israeli officials were very hopeful of it. But this r showed a new shift in the policy of the UAE officials who had earlier resumed ties with the Zionists.

The Zionists in recent years have tried to frighten the Persian Gulf states through Iranophobia in order to get closer to those states and to some extent they have been successful in getting closer to the rulers of those states but now that Tehran and Riyadh have announced this agreement, the other Persian Gulf states see no need to fear the Islamic Republic because Riyadh which was the major Persian Gulf country at odd with Tehran is resolving its problem and it can bring peace and prosperity for the region.

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Fragile Yemen Truce May End at Any Moment

SANAA (Dispatches) - A senior adviser to the Yemeni Information Ministry says a de facto ceasefire between the country's fighters and the invading Saudi-led coalition "may end at any moment" due to the continuation of the aggression and siege against the impoverished nation.

"As long as the aggression and blockade continue against Yemen, the ceasefire in this country may end at any moment," he added.

"Some people claim that the resolution of rifts between Saudi Arabia and Iran means the end of the war on Yemen... This perception is wrong... [as] the war situation in Yemen still persists and that the ceasefire may end at any moment."

Tofiq al-Hamiri told Sputnik that the recent restoration of diplomatic relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran should not be falsely tied to the Yemeni case.

On Friday, following days of intensive talks in Beijing, Iran and Saudi Arabia agreed to re-establish diplomatic ties and reopen embassies seven years after their relations were severed.

Analysts believe that the rapprochement between the two Middle Eastern powers could transform the region. Some experts have described the détente as a panacea for the Yemen war.

However, Hamiri emphasized that the war on Yemen will not stop except by ending the aggression and siege, along with the withdrawal of occupying forces and the country's reconstruction.

"Yemen has been subjected to aggression, siege and occupation by the United States, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. We entered this war to defend our country," he said.

"We warn the coalition of aggressors that ignoring the requests of Yemen's revolutionary leaders may make people run out of patience, and the result will be disastrous for the occupiers."

Saudi Arabia, in collaboration with its Arab allies and with arms and logistics support from the US and other Western states, launched the devastating war on Yemen in March 2015.

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Consular Services Available to 5m Iranian Diaspora

TEHRAN (IRNA)- Ministry of Foreign Affairs says it is offering consular services to approximately five million Iranians living in over 100 countries around the world.

Foreign Ministry's Deputy for Consular, Parliamentary and Iranian Expatriates' Affairs Ali-Reza Bigdeli said on Tuesday that consular services are being provided to many Iranians in countries where they have been granted citizenship. "... we (still) regard them as Iranians living abroad. The government has duties and responsibilities with regards to them" said Bigdeli.

The official made the remarks in a meeting in Tehran attended by members of the Iranian diaspora.

The two-day meeting started on Tuesday with the presence of some 150 Iranians living in 64 countries around the world.

Countries Sanctioned by U.S., Western States Urged To Shatter Those Bans

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei says those countries that have been put under unilateral sanctions by the United States and its Western allies must join hands to destroy those sanctions.

Ayatollah Khamenei made the remarks in a meeting with the visiting Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko on Monday.

Explaining on the existing common grounds between Iran and Belarus, the Leader said imposition of bullying sanctions by the United States and some other Western states on Tehran and Minsk are one of those common grounds.

"Those countries that have been sanctioned by America must destroy the weapon of sanctions through cooperation with one another and forming a common group, and we believe this is possible to do," the Leader said.

Referring to the U.S. sanctions against Iran since the victory of the Islamic Revolution and the imposition of the toughest sanctions during the past 12 years, Ayatollah Khamenei said, "Severe sanctions made Iran notice its own intrinsic capabilities and forces."

"During the period of sanctions, many grounds for progress have been provided to Iran and our country succeeded to make eye-catching advances in various fields, including science and technology, medicine and biology, aerospace, [as well as] nuclear [science] and nano[technology]," the Leader said.

Ayatollah Khamenei emphasized, "If those countries that have been sanctioned by America make use of one another's capacities, it will have great benefit for all of them."

The Leader noted that Iran and Belarus can cooperate in many areas, including science and technology, trade, and political activities in international organizations.



Referring to the issue of the North-South Transportation Corridor, Ayatollah Khamenei said, "Launching the North-South Transportation Corridor will be to both countries' benefit and also [to benefit of] Russia and [the entire] region, and both sides must strive to get it launched."

The Leader also stressed that agreements and promises among countries must remain limited to meetings, but must enter into force through special follow-up and a specific timetable.

Ayatollah Khamenei concluded by saying that the world needs spirituality, adding, "Spirituality can serve as a driving force for [all] nations."

The Belarusian president, for his part, said his visit to Iran was aimed at opening a new chapter in the two countries' relations, vowing to follow up on all agreements between the two countries through cooperation and determination of his Iranian counterpart.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran made great advances and gained amazing experiences under sanctions and we believe that if conditions created by sanctions are used properly, they can provide an opportunity for progress," Lukashenko said.

He added that his trip to Iran was also aimed at getting acquainted with Iran's achievements in various fields.

Lukashenko concluded by saying, "We have come to know our true and false friends under the current hard international conditions and we are determined to engage in special cooperation with our true friends."

Gradual Rise in Coronavirus Infections

TEHRAN (PressTV) - An Iranian health official warned of a gradual rise in the number of infections with the coronavirus in the country, saying those who have failed to receive vaccines or booster shots account for most of the hospitalized Covid-19 patients.

Deputy Health Minister Hossein Farshidi, in an interview with ISNA, advised people to adhere to the health protocols against Covid-19.

He said the country has not yet announced an "emergency" state due to the fresh wave of infections, but will do so in case the number of patients exceeds a certain level.

He added about 15% of Iranians have not been vaccinated or failed to receive the reminder doses, urging them to complete the vaccination process as soon as possible.

On Monday, the Health Ministry reported 957 new cases of infections with coronavirus, out of whom 12 died.

Nearly 145,000 people have so far lost their lives to the respiratory disease in Iran since the coronavirus emerged in the country in early 2020.

Terror Teams Dismantled On Eve of Ancient Festival

TEHRAN (IMF) - Iran's Intelligence Ministry has announced the arrest of several teams that intended "to carry out acts of terrorism and sabotage" on the occasion of a national festival celebrated on the eve of the last Wednesday of the Iranian calendar year.

The intelligence ministry issued a statement on Monday, a day ahead of the celebrations across the country.

The statement said that several terrorist teams had been identified and arrested over the past days, including a 21-member group linked to the Mujahedin Khalq Organization (MKO) in the capital Tehran.

The MKO-lined group intended to carry out acts of sabotage, including setting fire to public property, particularly buses, in crowded areas and destroying personal property, as well as throwing hand-made grenades, the statement added.

Another MKO-linked group was dismantled in the holy city of Mashhad, while 300 hand-made grenades were discovered, the statement said, adding that the detainees had also participated in the riots that broke out in Iran in September 2022.

According to the statement, a great deal of explosives and equipment used for sabotage acts were also discovered in a western city and a northwestern province, while two workshops used for making hand-made bombs were dismantled as well.

The ministry has promised to protect the security of the Iranian people and act decisively in the face of "Zionist terrorism", but at the same time called on the Iranians to remain vigilant and report any suspicious case to the ministry.

Judiciary Spokesman Highlights Performance of Departments

TEHRAN (IP) - The Judiciary Spokesman during his weekly presser on Tuesday presented a report about the performance of the judiciary units.

The report related to the performance of the Judiciary for the realization of the year slogan designated by the Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Khamenei: "Production; Knowledge-based and Job-creating."

Regarding the leader's great amnesty, Masoud Setayeshi said that 82000 people benefited from the amnesty. More than 22000 of them included the recent unrest in Iran.

The case of the gunman attacking the embassy of the Azerbaijan Republic in Tehran is under investigation and the results will be released as soon as possible, said Iran's Judiciary Spokesman.

In response to a question about the case of attack to embassy of Azerbaijan Republic, Masoud Setayeshi told reporters on Tuesday that the Azeri side was reluctant to cooperate with Iran over the extradition of the attacker jailed.

Setayeshi called on the Azeri officials to cooperate in the case, expressing hope that the issue would be settled with regard to the negotiations underway.

The primary evidence showed that the gunmen's motivation to attack the embassy is personal, yet judicial investigations are underway to extract more about the motivation of the attack and its nature.

Setayeshi about the latest situation of the fire case in Evin prison, said: There are 40 defendants in this case. Investigations are still ongoing due to the importance of the matter. The final result will be determined in the next month.

Russia Welcomes Iran-Saudi Arabia Agreement To Restore Relations

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The Russian foreign minister has hailed a recent agreement between Iran and Saudi Arabia to restore relations after seven years of estrangement.

Sergei Lavrov made the remark in a Monday phone call with his Iranian counterpart, Hossein Amirabdollahian.

After several days of intensive negotiations hosted by China, Iran and Saudi Arabia finally clinched a deal on Friday to restore diplomatic relations and re-open embassies and missions within two months.

According to the statement, Iran and Saudi Arabia highlighted the need to respect each other's national sovereignty and refrain from interfering in the internal affairs of one another.

Iran, Saudi Arabia and China expressed their firm determination to make their utmost efforts to promote regional and international peace and security, it emphasized.

The two foreign ministers also discussed the implementation of long-term cooperation agreements signed between Tehran and Moscow.

The top Iranian and Russian diplomats also touched on the forthcoming meeting among Iran, Russia, Turkey and Syria, which is aimed at facilitating resolution of the existing problems between Syria and its northern neighbor, Turkey.

Lavrov has also called it "reasonable" for Iran to join in mediating the talks between Syria and Turkey alongside Moscow, TASS news agency reported.

Sanctions Provide Nations With Opportunity to Rely on Own Capabilities

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's first vice president says unilateral sanctions imposed by Western states on freedom-seeking nations have provided those nations with a good opportunity to rely on capabilities of their own scientists.

Mohammad Mokhber made the remark in a meeting with the visiting Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko on Monday. "The Islamic Republic of Iran has been able to break considerable grounds in the fields of science and technology by overcoming these sanctions," he added.

Mokhber noted that Iran's experience in dealing with sanctions can be used by the two countries to further expand their cooperation. Referring to the emphasis put by Iran's President Ebrahim Raeisi on the need to implement Iran-Belarus agreements as soon as possible, the Iranian first vice president said, "The North-South Transportation Corridor offers potentialities for cooperation between the two countries."

He added that the two countries must cooperate in providing necessary rail, sea and air transport facilities to further develop cargo and passenger transportation along this important corridor, "because this issue can help the two countries' private sectors become more active." He noted that the signing of a roadmap and seven documents for Tehran-Minsk cooperation in various sectors would provide a base for a new level of mutual relations.

"The joint will and strategy of the presidents of Iran and Belarus have created a suitable opportunity for expansion of all-out relations, which we should use well," Mokhber said.

Iran Supports UN Efforts to Restore Peace in War-Wracked Yemen

TEHRAN (PressTV)- Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian says the Islamic Republic supports intra-Yemeni talks to find a political solution to the crisis in the war-wracked Arab country.

In a meeting with United Nations Secretary General's Special Envoy for Yemen Hans Grundberg in Tehran on Monday, Amirabdollahian reaffirmed Tehran's support for the continuation of the ceasefire and the end of the Saudi-led blockade on Yemen.

He emphasized that Iran supports any dialogue which would help promote peace and stability in Yemen.

The top Iranian diplomat also commended efforts by the UN secretary general and his appointment of a special envoy in order to follow up on the situation in Yemen.



The UN special envoy, for his part, called for Iran's support for the world body's efforts to promote peace in Yemen.

Grundberg expressed the UN's firm determination to find a political solution to the ongoing crisis in Yemen.

Saudi Arabia and its allies launched the devastating war on Yemen in March 2015 with armed and logistical support from their Western partners, leaving

hundreds of thousands of Yemenis dead.

In the wake of a rapidly worsening humanitarian situation in Yemen, the United Nations said late last month that it needed \$4.3 billion this year to help millions of people in the war-wracked country, warning that failure to deliver the aid will put them at risk.

Top Kuwaiti Official Welcomes Iran-Saudi Resumption of Ties

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Kuwait's Deputy Foreign Minister Mansour Ayyad Al-Otaibi has welcomed a recent deal between Iran and Saudi Arabia to resume their diplomatic relations after seven years.

Al-Otaibi held talks with Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister for Political Affairs Ali Bagheri Kani in the capital Tehran on Monday.

The Kuwaiti official hailed the neighborly policy pursued by the administration of Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi, and expressed hope that the policy helps promote regional cooperation and boost stability and security in the region.

Al-Otaibi and Bagheri Kani discussed Iran-Kuwait relations and the two countries' cooperation on regional and international issues as well.

Iran and Saudi Arabia announced the resumption of their ties on March 10, 2023 under a deal brokered by China, agreeing to open embassies within two months.



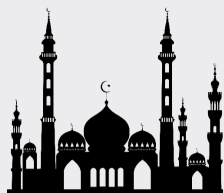
Malaysia Eying Expansion of Parliamentary Ties With Iran

TEHRAN (MNA) - The speaker of the Malaysian Parliament called for expanding parliamentary relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Johari Abdul in a meeting with the Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Kuala Lumpur Ali Asghar Mohammadi called for bolstering relations in economy, politics, science, and technology. He called for a rise in popular interactions, especially among young people, which is necessary to build the future of relations between the two countries.

Welcoming the recent agreement between Iran and Saudi Arabia to resume diplomatic relations, he stressed the need for close cooperation of Islamic countries to deal with world challenges.

For his part, the Iranian envoy hailed the Malaysian parliament in line with the expansion of the mutual ties.



PRAYER TIME

| | |
|--------------------------|-------|
| ■ Noon (Zohr) | 12:13 |
| ■ Evening (Maghreb) | 18:29 |
| ■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr) | 04:50 |
| ■ Tomorrow's Sunrise | 06:13 |

72. "But if ye turn back, (consider): no reward have I asked of you: my reward is only due from Allah, and I have been commanded to be of those who submit to Allah's will (in Islam)."
 73. They rejected Him, but We delivered him, and those with him, in the Ark, and We made them inherit (the earth), while We overwhelmed in the flood those who rejected Our Signs. Then see what was the end of those who were warned (but heeded not)! Surah 10, Jonah (72-73)

Iran, Bashkortostan Eye \$400m Trade

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Minister of Agriculture Jihad Seyed Javad Sadatinejad in the meeting with the visiting President of Republic of Bashkortostan of Russia Mr. Radiy Khabirov said that both sides can increase their trade to \$400m in the first step.

In the meeting, Sadatinejad emphasized that the relation between the Islamic Republic of Iran and Russia is a strategic and very important and effective relation in the current world and therefore in line with this strategic policy, the ministry of agriculture seeks broadening its agro cooperation with Russia.

He noted that the trade volume of Iran with Russia in the past two years has grown by 80% and reached \$4b in 2020, adding that these exchanges in 2022 reached \$4.6b that agriculture sector accounts for 85% of it.

The minister then pointed to the cultural commonalities of Bashkortostan with Iran and said that most of population of this republic is Muslim and there are around 4,000 joint Persian words in Bashkiri language.

He added that various agro products of Iran are exported to this republic like dairy and aquatic products, fruits and vegetables, food industries products and dried fruits and there are good exchanges of trade delegations between the two states. He noted of course good exhibitions have been in both countries.

Sadatinejad further said that the ministry is interested to increase its communications in the field of exchanging trade delegations as well as holding exhibition and export volume.

He said that currently the trade volume with this republic is \$150m that some part of it is in the field of agriculture which includes Iran's export as well as importing cereals and oil from Bashkortostan.



He reiterated that in the first step the bilateral trade should increase to \$400m, adding that one of the grounds for cooperation can be attention to the forest and wood capacities of the republic in the field of supplying wood for Iran via exporting wood to Iran or producing joint products by using the capacities of factories.

He then pointed to the good capacities of this Russian republic in the fields of agro and meat and dairy, adding that since red meat in this republic is produced halal, Iran can easily import.

Then Khabirov, for his part, pointed to the long relation of Ira and Russia since the past till now, and noted that the major recent activities are planned in the roadmap that most of them will be in the field of agriculture.

He reiterated that in the past four years, they have broadened activities for halal products and of course this is a new activity and his country needs Iran's help and consultation.

He emphasized imports of Iranian agro products like fruits, vegetables and fruits. Khabirov reiterated that Bashkortostan can be a hub for Iran's food stud in the other republics of Russia because over 20m people live around this republic and it can be a big market for Iranian agro products. He noted that launch of a trade center ca be a good move for it and his country is ready to allocate the required land by removing formalities. He also announced for cooperation in extraterrestrial cultivation, adding his country is ready to offer required lands for Iranian investors.

Tehran, Minsk Agree on Permit-Free System of Road Transportation

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Belarusian Transport and Communications Minister Aleksei Avramenko met with Transport and Urban Development Minister Mehrdad Bazrpash of Iran within the framework of the official visit of Belarusian President Aleksandr Lukashenko to Iran.

The parties signed a protocol to establish a permit-free procedure for international road freight transport. "I hope that both parties will be able to ratify the protocol soon to give road carriers an opportunity to transport goods without permits as soon as 2023," Aleksei Avramenko said.

On 26 March of this year, Iran's Mahan Air is launching a regular flight from Tehran to Minsk. The flight will be operated twice a week.

Belarus is also interested in the development of transportation via the International North-South Transport Corridor.

South Pars LPG Production Up 42%



SHANA (Tehran) – The managing director of the South Pars Gas Complex (SPGC) on Monday announced a 42 percent increase in the annual production of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG).

Ahmad Bahoush added, "The LPG production has witnessed a growing trend in 1401 – the current Iranian calendar year that started on March 21, 2022 – and we managed to increase the output through implementing innovative measures by 42 percent in comparison with the volume produced in its preceding year."

He lauded the oil minister and the National Iranian Gas Company (NIGC) managing director for their unwavering support that helped SPGC produce beyond the target figure and get through this frigid and severe winter.

The oil minister and NIGC, Bahoush continued, issued strategic permits in the few past months, which paved the way for the South Pars refineries' sustainable and constant gas production.

NIGC has made every effort to minimize the problems facing the South Pars Gas Complex, concluded the CEO of SPGC.

Industry Ministry Holds Conference On Supporting Domestic Production

TEHRAN (MNA) - Industry, Mining, and Trade held a national conference on supporting Iranian goods and domestic production (dubbed HEKMAT) on Monday with the aim of promoting productivity in the industrial sector. IRIB reported.

The conference was attended by officials from the mentioned ministry as well as the representatives of companies active in various industrial sectors.

Speaking at the event, Deputy Industry Minister Sadif Beyk-Zadeh said this conference aims to provide solutions for the realization of a knowledge-based economy and promote productive employment; it also seeks to provide solutions for increasing employment and capital productivity.

Examining the role of producers and governance in supporting domestic production and Iranian goods, as well as presenting solutions for empowering national industries through export development and regional diplomacy were also said to be among the main goals of the event.

"Over the past years, about 12,000 production units were inactive across the country and 16,000 units were operating below their full capacity, however with the measures taken, 2,000 units have been revived in the current [Iranian calendar] year (ends on March 20)," Beyk-Zadeh said addressing the conference.

The official noted that the rate of reviving idle units in the country has increased by 11 percent.

At the end of the conference, some of the country's top industrial production units were honored.

IRISL Needs to Increase Its Capital



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The CEO Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Line Group (IRISL) says the group needs to increase its capital through the accumulated profits, adding that this increase of capital is carried out in the other companies of the group which is aimed at compensating the expenses and increasing the capital.

Speaking in the extraordinary General Assembly meeting of the group, Mr. Mohammad Reza Modarres Khiabani pointed to the increase of the capital in the affiliated companies of the group in the current year, adding that during the mentioned period, over 748b tomans of rise in profits has been registered in the companies. He went on to say that IRISL group bought Arvandan Shipbuilding Company for 281b tomans through its internal resources and today this company by getting order for manufacture of two 800-ton vessels has come out of the recession and passiveness and it has once again rejoined the vessel producing companies of the country.

Touching upon some of the developmental actions pf the group in the current year, Modarres Khiabani said that over 17,600 40-foot containers worth of around \$95m as well as 400 20-foot containers worth of around \$21.3m and total rial value of 3,052b tomans have been purchased to join the fleet by the group for reinforcing container fleet.

Modarres Khiabani emphasized that IRISL Group needs more forex and rial sources for broadening investment, expressed hope that ordinary annual meeting of the general assembly of the group would increase capital more than what it is today because this rise in the capital is carried out with the aim of compensating the expenses and necessity of increasing capital in the other companies of the group.

On the revenues of the group in the current year, he said that with removal of pandemic restrictions in the world, the freight rate increased in the first half of the year bur due to the decline in demand, the global rate of transport fell to one-thirds in the second half.

He also said that the group has bought three vessels from Russia to boost its activities in the Caspian Sea.

Afghanistan Seeking to Improve Economic Exchanges With Iran

ZAHEDAN (IRNA) - The caretaker of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry of Afghanistan has said that trade ties between Iran and Afghanistan should increase and there are numerous potentials to be used for that purpose.

Nooruddin Azizi made the remark in a meeting in the presence of businesses of Iran's Sistan and Baluchestan Province, noting that Afghanistan is seeking to develop trade exchanges with Iran.

According to the Afghan official, the Iranian and Afghan people have cultural, religious, and geographical commonalities.

Praising the Iranian people's good neighborliness, especially during the invasion of Afghanistan, Azizi added that the country is an independent state now.

Afghanistan has had very good trade and transit of goods with Iran via two Iranian ports of Bandar Abbas and Chabahar in previous years, and now Afghanistan demands facilitation of the exchanges, he said.

Afghanistan and Iran possess a trade worth two billion dollars, he said, noting that Kabul urges to increase the volume of trade to 10 billion dollars per annum and that the capacity is available in both countries.

The Afghan official called for collaborations between specialists from both nations in scientific and technological arenas.

Iran, Iraq Agree to Resolve Banking Issues

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Minister of Finance and Economy Ehsan Khandouzi said on Monday that Iran and Iraq have agreed to resolve their banking and forex problems.

Khandouzi made the remark in a TV interview in which he gave a briefing on his current visit to Iraq where he had attended the 5th meeting of the Joint Economic Commission of the two countries.

The Iranian minister did not go into details on how Tehran and Baghdad would resolve their banking and forex problems.

He said, at the joint economic commission meeting, it was agreed that obstacles to investment by Iranian firms are removed so that the two countries can further expand their economic relations.

Khandouzi stressed that Tehran and Baghdad are determined to develop their economic ties despite "third parties and ill-wishers" trying to prevent that.

Meanwhile he expressed Iran's readiness to accelerate the implementation of agreements with Iraq.

Khandouzi made the remarks in a meeting with Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia' Al Sudani in Baghdad. He arrived in Baghdad on Monday to take part in the Iranian-Iraqi Economic Commission.

The fifth Iran-Iraq joint economic commission kicked

off on Sunday in Baghdad and will continue until Tuesday, March 14.

As of March 21, 2022, to January 20, 2023, Iran and Iraq have about \$9 billion in trade; during the period, Iran experienced 23 percent growth in its exports to Iraq, which is worth about \$9 million.

The imports from Iraq also reduced up to 84 percent and reached \$146 million.

Khandouzi expressed hope that the high committee of bilateral relations between the two countries will soon be formed with the presence of Mr. Sudani and the Iranian First Vice President Mohammad Mokhber.

He appreciated Iraq's mediating role in regional issues, saying that Iran is ready to implement a number of the most important projects between the two countries, including the Shalamcheh-Basra railway, as soon as possible.

Meanwhile, Al Sudani called for developing cooperation mechanisms and not waiting for annual commissions.

He considered the construction of the Shalamcheh-Basra railway as a symbol of the popular and cultural connection between the two great nations of Iran and Iraq and expressed hope for launching this line soon.

He offered the Iraqi government's readiness to cooperate in the field of joint industrial settlements, saying that the private sector should be encouraged to invest in these settlements.

SEO to Facilitate Knowledge-Based Firms' Entry Into Stock Market

TEHRAN (MNA) - Head of Iran's Securities and Exchange Organization (SEO) has said the organization plans to facilitate the entry of knowledge-based companies into the stock market in the upcoming Iranian calendar year (starting on March 21).

"The financing of companies through various financial tools and accepting knowledge-based companies in the stock exchange are going to be on the agenda, and we will take measures in this regard," Majid Eshqi told IRNA outlining SEO's major programs for the next year.

"This plan includes all knowledge-based companies, such as companies based on digital economy, as well as creative, and innovation startups, on the basis of which we will have the participation of these companies in the capital market according to a memorandum of understanding we have signed with the Vice Presidency for Science and Technology," he said.

Eshqi also announced that a local stock trade portal is going to be launched next year.

Cyclone Freddy Returns Killing 70 In Malawi, Mozambique

BLANTYRE (Dispatches) - Cyclone Freddy, packing powerful winds and torrential rain, killed at least 70 people in Malawi and Mozambique on its return to southern Africa's mainland, authorities said.

More than 60 bodies were found during the day in southern Malawi where heavy downpours triggered flooding, according to the Red Cross.

"Sixty-six people have died in Malawi, 93 injured and 16 people are missing due to Tropical Cyclone Freddy," tweeted the humanitarian organization, which is helping with search and rescue operations.



Ivory Coast to Host World Environment Day on June 5

ABIDJAN (Dispatches) - Ivory Coast announced Monday that it will host this year's World Environment Day on June 5 on the theme of "solutions to plastic pollution".

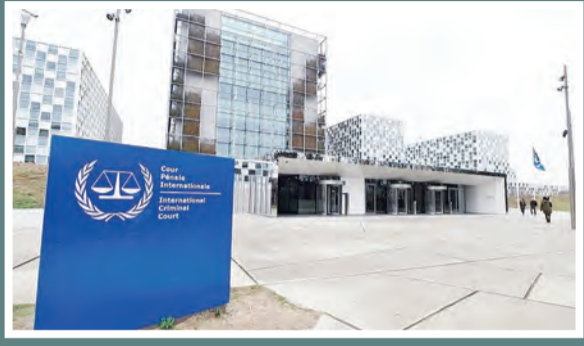
Jean-Luc Assi, the country's minister of environment and sustainable development, called plastic pollution "a menace to us all".

Organised by the United Nations, more than 150 countries will take part in the event, which this year celebrates its 50th anniversary.

The minister said the Ivorian government is committed to being "a leading example in sustainable development".



ICC Expected to Launch War Crimes Cases Against Russians Over Ukraine War



AMSTERSDAM (dispatches) - The International Criminal Court (ICC) is planning to seek the arrest of Russian officials for forcibly deporting children from Ukraine and targeting civilian infrastructure, a source said, in what would be the first international war crimes cases arising from Moscow's invasion.

The source said the arrest warrants could include the crime of genocide, and were expected to arrive in the "short term" if the court prosecutor's request was approved by a pre-trial judge at the Hague-based court.

The office of the prosecutor at the ICC declined to comment.

Russia's defense ministry did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Moscow would be certain to reject any arrest warrants against any of its officials. But an international war crimes prosecution could deepen Moscow's diplomatic isolation and make it difficult for those accused to travel abroad.

Russia denies deliberately targeting civilian infrastructure in Ukraine, saying its attacks are all intended to reduce Kyiv's ability to fight. It has not concealed a program under which it has brought thousands of Ukrainian children to Russia, but presents it as a humanitarian campaign to protect orphans and children abandoned in the conflict zone.

Kyiv says thousands of deported Ukrainian children are being adopted into Russian families, housed in Russian camps and orphanages, given Russian passports and brought up to reject Ukrainian nationality and consider themselves Russians.

The U.N. genocide convention defines "forcibly transferring children of the group to another group" as one of five acts that can be prosecuted as genocide. Asked if the ICC charges against the Russian officials could include genocide, the source said: "It looks that way."

Kyiv has conducted several war crimes prosecutions of Russian soldiers for individual incidents such as killings or rapes in occupied territory. The charges discussed by the ICC prosecutors could go higher, targeting officials responsible for policies rather than just perpetrators of acts on the ground.

On the ground, both sides described relentless fighting in and around Bakhmut, a small ruined city in eastern Ukraine that has become the main focus of a Russian winter campaign.

Near Kreminna, north of Bakhmut, Ukrainian soldiers said they were repelling intensified attacks by increasingly professional soldiers, while heavy equipment was being brought closer to the frontline by the Russians.

In a forest some 8 km (5 miles) from the front, cannons boomed, targeting enemy positions to the northeast. Distant explosions rumbled constantly in the distance, a sign of heavy fighting.

Reuters reporters saw a soldier being brought from the front with a badly wounded leg. He was stabilized in a van with a splint and painkillers before being taken to a medical center further from the front to be treated.

"Two or three weeks ago the fighting was at its peak but it has calmed down a bit," said Mykhailo Anest, a 35-year-old medic before treating the wounded soldier. "There is a lot of artillery and mortar fire."

On a bad day he would see 20 wounded troops in a single day from his battalion, he told Reuters.

The months-long fight for Bakhmut has become Europe's bloodiest infantry battle since World War Two.

Russian forces led by the Wagner private army have captured the city's eastern part but so far failed to encircle it. "All enemy attempts to capture the town are repelled by artillery, tanks, and other firepower," Ukraine's Colonel general Oleksandr Syrskyi, the commander of ground forces who has vowed not to withdraw, was quoted as saying by Ukraine's Media Military Centre. Wagner founder Yevgeny Prigozhin said on Sunday the situation was "tough, very tough".

Moscow says taking it would be a major success, opening a path to capture the rest of the surrounding Donetsk region, a central war aim.

Kyiv says it has decided not to pull out because it is inflicting huge losses on the Russian assault force which will make it easier to stage a counterattack later this year.

As the fighting ground on in eastern Ukraine, Moscow appeared on the cusp of one long-sought diplomatic breakthrough: several sources told Reuters that China's President Xi Jinping could visit Russia as soon as next week, an earlier-than-expected response to a long-standing invitation.

President Vladimir Putin has touted such a visit as a show of support, but it could be overshadowed by plans for Xi to speak by video link to Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskiy for the first time since the invasion.

Moldova Claims Facing Russian Hybrid Warfare

CHISINAU (Dispatches) - Moldova does not currently face "imminent military danger" but is subject to "hybrid warfare generated by Russia" that is designed to overthrow its government, its defense minister said.

Pro-European Moldova has repeatedly accused Moscow of plotting to violently topple its government through saboteurs disguised as anti-government protesters, claims which Russia has denied.

"There isn't an imminent military danger against Moldova at present but there are other types of dangers that affect the country's security -- hybrid warfare," Anatolie Nosatii told AFP in an interview.

Georgia Protesters Decry Brutal Treatment by Police

TBILISI (Dispatches) - Standing in the courtyard of his apartment block in Georgia's capital Tbilisi, Zurab Japaridze shows traces of injuries to his head, still visible five days after he was arrested at an anti-government rally.

Tens of thousands of Georgians took to the streets last week after parliament gave its initial backing to a controversial "foreign agent" law reminiscent of Russian legislation used to silence critics.

The bill was dropped under pressure from the youth-led protests that marked a culmination of widespread discontent over the authorities perceived backsliding on democracy and ruling party's covert collaboration with arch-foe Moscow.

More than 140 people were arrested in the aftermath of the demonstrations, with some protesters saying they were violently treated by riot police.

A video of Japaridze's arrest was widely shared on social media, showing the former lawmaker roughly seized by masked law enforcement during a rally outside parliament.

The 47-year-old leader of a small opposition party called Girchi More Freedom said he was taken with two other protesters to the courtyard of a nearby building and brutally beaten.

"Once we were inside and without cameras, they knocked us down and hit us with their feet, their fists, and also truncheons, mainly on the head," he told AFP.

Later transferred to a police station where he spent two nights in detention, he suffered from a "terrible pain in the throat", not knowing until after his release that he had the coronavirus. "I asked them for medicine but there was none," he said. "Now there will be a court hearing as if it was me who had breached the law."

Several protesters who had been arrested at the demonstrations told AFP they all face similar charges of "hooliganism" and "disobedience", punishable by a fine or up to 15 days behind bars.

One of them, Irakli Noniashvili, said he was arrested on March 8, his second day at the demonstrations during which police used tear gas and water cannon to disperse the crowds. Equipped with a helmet, ski goggles and a mask, he came face to face with riot police while trying to get rid of a tear gas grenade.

"It was so sudden that I panicked, I didn't know what to do and raised my hands. They grabbed me and took me across the street," the 34-year-old employee of the IT sector told AFP. He said a policeman suddenly started twisting his fingers. "I swore, so he just hit me in the face really hard." Noniashvili said, pointing to the injury still visible on his nose. He was held at a police station for three hours before being transferred to the city of Telavi, about 100 kilometres (60 miles) east of Tbilisi, where he spent 14 hours in detention.



North Korea Launches Missiles From Submarine

SEOUL (Dispatches) - Nuclear-armed North Korea test-fired two strategic cruise missiles from a submarine on Sunday, state news agency KCNA said on Monday, just as U.S.-South Korea military drills were due to begin.

"Strategic" is typically used to describe weapons that have a nuclear capability.

KCNA said the launch confirmed the reliability of the system and tested the underwater offensive operations of the submarine units that form part of North Korea's nuclear deterrent.

South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) said the military was on high alert and the country's intelligence agency was working with its U.S. counterpart to analyze the specifics of the launch.

On Monday, South Korean and American troops were scheduled to begin 11 days of joint drills, dubbed "Freedom Shield 23," which will be held on a scale not seen since 2017.

The drills will strengthen the allies' combined defensive posture, the two militaries have said, and will feature field exercises including amphibious landings.

UN Investigators Slam Sluggish Syria Quake Aid

GENEVA (Dispatches) - The world failed to act quickly enough in getting life-saving aid to Syrians in desperate need following last month's devastating earthquake, UN investigators said.

The Damascus government, other civil war factions, the international community and the United Nations itself hindered the delivery of urgent assistance to the quake-hit northwest, the UN Commission of Inquiry on Syria said.

They failed to secure an immediate pause in hostilities, or to facilitate life-saving aid through any available route, including for rescue teams in the crucial first week following the February 6 quake, the commission said.

The panel, which investigates and records all international human rights law violations since March 2011 in the country, said they were now probing fresh attacks since the February 6 quake -- which they branded incomprehensible.

"Syrians felt abandoned and neglected by those supposed to protect them, in the most desperate of times," the independent three-member panel said in a statement, calling for a separate investigation into these failings.

President Bashar al-Assad's government took a week to consent to cross-border aid access, said the commission, with member Hanny Megally arguing that international aid should have gone in first, even if it meant skirting around state sovereignty.

Almost 6,000 people were killed in Syria by the 7.8-magnitude tremor that struck the country and neighboring Turkey.

The UN estimates that five million people need basic shelter and non-food assistance in the quake-hit part of Syria.

Commission chair Paulo Pinheiro said Syria became an "epicentre of neglect", adding that the panel was probing multiple allegations of warring factions "deliberately obstructing humanitarian aid".

He slammed the "wholesale failure by the government and the international community, including the UN, to rapidly direct life-saving support to Syrians in the most dire need".

Polls Show Erdogan Lags Opposition by More Than 10 Points Ahead of May Vote

ANKARA (Dispatches) - New polls show the Turkish opposition's presidential candidate, Kemal Kilicdaroglu, leading against President Tayyip Erdogan by more than 10 percentage points ahead of elections on May 14 seen by many as the most consequential vote in Turkey's history.

The polls also show the opposition bloc, called the Nation Alliance, leading the parliamentary race, at least six points ahead of Erdogan's AK Party (AKP) and its allies. The pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) remains comfortably above 10%.

Erdogan faces the biggest challenge to his 20-year rule after the erosion of his popularity during a cost-of-living crisis. Victims of last month's earthquake are also reconsidering their loyalty in previous AKP strongholds.

The elections will decide not just who leads Turkey but how it is governed, where its economy is headed and what role it may play to ease conflict in Ukraine and the Middle East.

Wolfango Piccoli, political risk advisory co-president at Teneo, said the Nation Alliance needs to present a unified front and sell the voters a plan to keep up their momentum heading into the elections.

"Simply blaming Erdogan for everything that is wrong in Turkey won't cut it. Past elections have shown that Erdogan is a phenomenal campaigner, but recent remarks suggest he has lost his popular touch and his ability to connect with voters," he told Reuters.

A poll published by Aksoy Research on Saturday and conducted on March 8 showed Kilicdaroglu, named as the opposition alliance candidate on March 6, leading against Erdogan with 55.6% support and 44.4%, respectively.

It showed the main opposition bloc garnering 44.1% of votes and the HDP at 10.3%. The AKP and its nationalist MHP allies earned 38.2% together.

A poll conducted on March 6-7 by Alf Research showed Kilicdaroglu at 55.1% and Erdogan on 44.9%. Kilicdaroglu's Republican People's Party (CHP) was the most popular with 31.8%, while the AK Party trailed with 31%.

The main opposition bloc earned 43.5% of votes, while the HDP got 11.3%, that poll showed. The AKP and the MHP together had 37.5% support.

Piar Research showed Kilicdaroglu winning with 57.1%, with Erdogan lagging on 42.9%. The CHP got 32.3%, the AKP 30.8% and the HDP 11.6%. The main opposition bloc got 46.4%, while the AKP and MHP earned 37.8%, the poll, published on March 10, showed.



Learning About Rheumatoid Arthritis



LONDON (Dispatches) - To say that neck and back pain are minor speed bumps in the process of ageing would be quite an understatement. Rheumatoid illnesses pack a cocktail of conditions that start off with one area of the body and gradually spill onto other parts, thus impacting our functionality and eventually productivity. The diseases in this area are rather intersectional, as a result, it affects gut and mental health, muscles as well as bones. Furthermore, day-to-day habits also aggravate the conditions unless necessary steps to recovery are not sought out immediately.

Professor Dr Md Mujibur Rahman, MMBS, MD, FCPS, Rheumatology Fellow, Harvard Medical School (USA), Internal Medicine and Rheumatology Specialist, Professor, Internal Medicine Department, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU), Dhaka, shares that musculoskeletal pain and symptoms are very common among patients in Bangladesh.

Some are non-specific back pain, soft tissue rheumatism like pain in the heel, shoulder, and other regions. Although they are not very serious, they do however cause distress to people. He also states that there are some symptoms in patients that are often termed as 'red flags.'

"If a person above the age of 50 experiences lower back pain accompanied by a fever, and has lost weight, they must immediately consult their medicine specialist," says Dr Rahman.

Few specific arthritic ailments often impact both men and women in our country, irrespective of age. Rheumatoid arthritis is often found in women — the patients experience pain in both small and large joints, which includes hands and feet.

Ankylosing spondylitis is a condition that affects the vertebral column. In long-standing cases, it prevents patients from standing straight as a result of developing a stooped-over posture. This is associated with lower back pain. Some arthritic conditions are often associated with skin conditions such as psoriasis leading to psoriatic arthritis.

Another disease that primarily affects women is systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE) which consists of arthritis and skin manifestation with some underlying systemic problems.

Although gout is not common in people, if it does occur, treatment should consist of a strict diet without foods that can increase the level of uric acid in the body. Osteoarthritis stems from the knees and mostly impacts the elderly. Although women are mostly affected by this, men too suffer from this condition and so do people who are lean or obese.

Lastly, fibromyalgia he says is a condition where patients experience diffuse widespread pain in the whole body running below the umbilicus (navel) and also above.

"Patients diagnosed with the condition often have anxiety, stress, or depression which results in increasing complaints."

Dr Md Mujibur explains that younger women are often at the receiving end and sometimes men suffer from this condition too.

Environment and lifestyle often play a significant role in making an illness go from bad to worse.

"Musculoskeletal pain such as osteoarthritis is often affected by habits such as frequently using the stairs and putting a lot of pressure on the knees, or gaining excess weight due to consumption of certain foods. Other factors include walking on broken and uneven footpaths and roads," Dr Rahman explains.

There are separate treatment protocols that are internationally recognised to identify if a person is actually suffering from rheumatoid arthritis, ankylosing spondylitis, or SLE to find out relevant treatments.

Volkswagen Joins E-Car Price War as Global Rivalry Heats Up



FRANKFURT (Dispatches) - German giant Volkswagen is set to follow Tesla's lead with a high-profile price drop as the battle for global dominance in the electric car segment intensifies, and local challengers race ahead in key market China.

A new version of Volkswagen's flagship ID.3 electric car model will go on sale from the end of March for just under €40,000, the VW brand announced this week.

That is a €3,000 markdown from the current ID.3 price tag, putting it on par with US rival Tesla's popular Model Y.

Industry insiders see the move as a direct response to several rounds of price-cutting by the Elon Musk-owned company in recent months, including discounts of up to 20 per cent in Europe and the United States.

In Germany, Tesla's sales soared by more than 900 per cent year-on-year in January as a result, making it the top-selling e-car in the country that month.

Although the 10-brand VW group was Europe's leading e-car manufacturer in 2022 with 352,000 vehicles sold, Tesla's audacious markdowns have forced the German firm's hand, said industry analyst Ferdinand Dudenhoeffer.

"Volkswagen sees how big the threat is from Tesla," he told AFP.

The automaker will have "no choice" but to enter "a price war" to defend its place in the hotly contested market for battery-powered vehicles, even if that means profit margins take a hit for a while.

VW group CEO Oliver Blume has so far ruled out a general price drop on all e-cars, but the topic is bound to come up when the group presents its 2022 financial results on Tuesday.

But Musk is not VW's only headache. In China, the world's largest car market, the industry's electrification has shifted into higher gear and VW is rapidly falling behind domestic competitors.

The Asian giant currently accounts for some 40 per cent of VW group sales, mostly vehicles with traditional combustion engines, giving it a market share in China of 16 per cent.

But in the electric car segment, the Volkswagen brand has eked out a market share of just 2.4 per cent, trailing Tesla at 7.8 per cent and China's BYD at 16 per cent.

A slew of other Chinese automakers such as Wuling, GAC and Chery are also outperforming VW, according to data compiled by the financial daily Handelsblatt.

Fellow German carmakers Mercedes-Benz and BMW are faring no better in China, their e-models holding a market share of less than one percent each.

"In the world's largest car market, German manufacturers have so far lagged behind local brands," industry expert Stefan Bratzel said in his annual report on electromobility.

Of the more than five million electric vehicles sold in China in 2022, VW accounted for just 155,700.

"The times when German traditional carmakers could take their market shares (in China) for granted are gone," said Gregor Sebastian, an analyst at the Mercator Institute for China Studies.

"In Germany, driving performance remains a key factor" when customers choose a new car, he said.

"But in China, where many people spend a lot of their driving time stuck in traffic jams and highly value new technologies, the car's interaction with the smartphone and overall connectivity is more important," he added.

VW's China chief Ralf Brandstaetter said the group needed to make cars "in China, for China" if it wanted to boost e-sales there — and do so faster.

"The Chinese develop a new car in two and a half years. VW takes just under four years to do that," he recently said in Germany's Sueddeutsche newspaper.



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Petronas Posts Higher Q4 Profit

KUALA LUMPUR (Dispatches) - Malaysia's state oil firm Petronas Nasional Berhad on Monday posted a 55% jump in quarterly profit on higher energy prices and bigger sales volume, but warned of moderating prices for this year due to an expected slowdown in the global economy. Petronas, as the company is known, reported a profit of 24.4 billion ringgit (\$5.44 billion) for the three-month period ending December 2022, compared with a profit of 15.7 billion ringgit in the same quarter a year ago.

For 2022, Petronas joined other oil majors in posting record financials: revenue surged 51% to 375.3 billion ringgit, while profit doubled to 101.6 billion ringgit. Energy prices rose in 2022 after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, boosting oil companies' profits. Petronas' Chief Executive Officer Tengku Muhammad Taufik said he expects prices to correct this year.



India to Discourage Foreign Trade Settlement in Chinese Yuan

NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - India has asked banks and traders to avoid using Chinese yuan to pay for Russian imports, three government officials involved in policy making and two banking sources said, because of long-running political differences with its neighbor.

India, which has emerged as a top buyer of Russian oil as well as discounted coal, would prefer the use of United Arab Emirates dirhams to settle trade, three government officials said.

One of the government officials directly involved in the matter said New Delhi is "not comfortable" with foreign trade settled in yuan but said settlement in "dirham is okay."

The second official said that India cannot allow settlement in yuan till the relations between the two countries improve.

Thousands of Indian and Chinese troops are locked in a standoff along their disputed Himalayan border since 2021, casting a shadow over the whole relationship.

The five officials did not say whether there were also economic reasons behind India's reluctance to accept yuan settlement.

Last year India's biggest cement producer UltraTech Cement used Chinese yuan for a cargo of Russian coal, which raised some concerns among officials as relationship between India and China has deteriorated after deadly border clashes in 2020 in the remote Galwan Valley of Ladakh.

The government reviewed the situation with officials of the central bank and bank executives, following the UltraTech deal, the second official said. Two banking officials, aware of the matter, said the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) is not keen on foreign trade settlement in yuan, and confirmed that the government has discouraged them from using the currency.

They also said Russia was keen on yuan settlement as it helps them in purchases of goods from China.

For Indian refiners that in recent weeks started settling some Russian oil purchases in roubles, as Reuters reported, payments have been processed in part by the State Bank of India via its nostro roubles account in Russia.

But the bulk of the trade is still in other currencies as the rouble is partially convertible and the two countries are yet to finalise a framework.

All five officials declined to be named as discussions were private. India's foreign, finance ministry and RBI did not reply to requests seeking comment.

The government expected majority of payments to Russia in dirhams in the coming months, the first official said. India has longstanding political and security ties with Russia and has refrained from condemning the Ukraine war, which Moscow calls a "special military operation".

India is also a major buyer of Russian arms.

Indian refiners, in the meanwhile, have begun paying for most of their Russian oil bought via Dubai-based traders in dirhams instead of U.S. dollars, Reuters reported last month. India's rupee is partially convertible, which means it has to be converted to U.S. dollars first before converting to any other currency, making it an unattractive reserve currency for global central banks and for settling trade.

It also makes Russia reluctant to accept payment in the Indian currency for its exports.

U.S. Wholesale and Retail Trade Sales Grow 12.4% in January 2023

KUALA LUMPUR (Dispatches) - Malaysia's wholesale and retail trade grew 12.4 per cent year-on-year (y-o-y) in January 2023 to record monthly sales value of RM135.1 billion, the Department of Statistics Malaysia (DoSM) said.

Chief statistician Datuk Seri Dr Mohd Uzir Mahidin said the increase was attributed to the retail trade sub-sector, which recorded an increase of RM10.6 billion or 21.7 per cent y-o-y to RM59.6 billion.

He said motor vehicles also expanded by 20.1 per cent y-o-y or RM2.5 billion to RM15.2 billion while wholesale trade went up 3.1 per cent y-o-y or RM1.8 billion to RM60.4 billion.

"However, for month-on-month (m-o-m) comparison, sales value of wholesale and retail trade declined 1.6 per cent, mainly contributed by the motor vehicles sub-sector which decreased 13.4 per cent," he said in a statement today.

Mohd Uzir said the retail trade sub-sector growth of 21.7 per cent in January 2023 was supported by retail sales in non-specialized stores which grew 24.6 per cent or RM4.5 billion to RM22.7 billion.

"For m-o-m comparison, sales of this sub-sector went up 0.2 per cent," he said.

He said the 20.1 per cent growth in the motor vehicles sub-sector was attributed to sales of motor vehicles, which increased 25 per cent or RM1.5 billion to RM7.7 billion.

"However, on a monthly basis, sales of this sub-sector decreased 13.4 per cent influenced by sales of motor vehicles, which declined 23.4 per cent," he said.

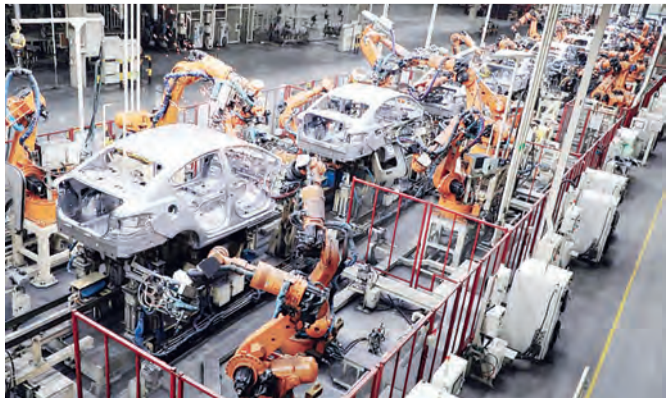
He said for wholesale trade sub-sector, the increase of 3.1 per cent was attributed to the wholesale of household goods, which registered an increase of RM1 billion or 8.6 per cent to RM12.8 billion.

Mohd Uzir said for monthly comparison, wholesale trade grew 0.1 per cent, which mainly contributed to the wholesale of household goods, which increased 4.4 per cent or RM0.5 billion to RM12.8 billion.

Additionally, he said the index of retail sale over the internet for January 2023 recorded 9.6 per cent growth y-o-y versus 10.2 per cent y-o-y growth in December 2022.

"For seasonally adjusted value, the index rose 1.3 per cent as against the previous month," he said.

He said in terms of volume index, wholesale and retail trade for January 2023 registered a y-o-y growth of 8.6 per cent attributed to retail trade, which increased 16.2 per cent.



UK Economy to Remain Weak to Late 2023

LONDON (Dispatches) - The outlook for the UK economy has improved since late last year, but economists still forecast a recession through most of 2023.

KPMG chief economist Yael Selfin told the Abta Travel Finance Conference in London: "Inflation probably peaked in the autumn and is expected to fall quickly through 2023-24, with the big rise in energy prices last year coming out [of the figures]. But food prices are still rising so it won't be plain sailing."

However, Selfin said: "We expect inflation to hover around 2% from 2024."

She added: "Real disposable income fell significantly, [but] we expect wages to continue rising quite strongly while inflation will go down. Purchasing power is expected to be restored gradually."

"The squeeze from a steep rise in interest rates is mostly done. We expect one more 0.25% rise, then a pause while the Bank of England waits to see inflation reduce."

"That is the good news. There are two pieces of bad news. One is that the impact of higher interest rates has not fully fed through yet. Second, we don't expect interest rates to go back to the level of before."

"Interest rates will remain higher, probably at 2% to 3%. A lot of mortgage holders are going to be impacted."

Selfin warned: "In the UK we're particularly exposed because the majority have fixed-rate mortgages for periods of two to five years."

"About half of households will have to re-mortgage and that has implications for the housing market. Purchasing power will rise, but a proportion will go on increased mortgages."

Swiss Regulator Monitoring Banks and Insurers After SVB Collapse

ZURICH (Dispatches) - Swiss financial regulator FINMA on Monday said it was seeking to identify any potential contagion risks for the country's banks and insurers following the collapses of Silicon Valley Bank and Signature Bank.

Shares in Swiss banks slumped along with others in the sector globally after moves by U.S. authorities to guarantee deposits of the two lenders failed to reassure investors. Credit Suisse shares hit a new low, while the

cost of insuring its debt against a default rose to an all-time high. Shares of Swiss rival UBS dropped more than 7%.

"FINMA takes note of the media reports on Silicon Valley Bank and Signature Bank in the USA and is closely monitoring the situation," FINMA said in a statement.

"FINMA is evaluating the direct and indirect exposure of the banks and insurance companies it supervises to the institutions concerned," it said. "The aim is to identify any cluster risks and potential for contagion at an early stage."

The regulator said it was in contact with various institutions which could be affected, but declined to name them or the measures it might take.

President Joe Biden pledged on Monday to do whatever was needed to address the banking crisis precipitated by the collapse of the two lenders which forced regulators to step in with emergency measures to stem contagion.

FINMA said it was also monitoring for any spill-over effects from the failure of another tech-focused U.S. bank, Silvergate Capital Corp, which said on Wednesday it was planning to wind down its operations and liquidated voluntarily.

The regulator said its supervisory activities were focused on the risk management of supervised institutions and on dealing with various scenarios.

Switzerland's Federal Department of Finance said it "takes note of the reports on US banks and the development of the stock markets" but would not be further commenting on them.

The government department also pointed to FINMA's role and said "FINMA is closely monitoring Credit Suisse as part of its supervisory activities."

The Swiss National Bank declined to comment on the effect SVB's collapse could have on Switzerland's financial sector.

In a further reflection of investor concern about Credit Suisse's outlook, the price of some of its bonds fell sharply, with some at record lows.

U.S. Stems SVB Fallout by Backing Customer Deposits

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - Silicon Valley Bank customers will have access to their deposits starting, U.S. officials said, as the federal government announced actions to shore up deposits and stem any broader financial fallout from the collapse of the tech startup-focused lender.

The boards of the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC) and the Federal Reserve, in consultation with President Joe Biden, approved the FDIC's resolution of SVB, according to a joint statement from US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen, Fed Chair Jerome Powell and FDIC Chairman Martin Gruenberg on Sunday evening.

The move will not lead to losses by American taxpayers and all depositors will be made whole, the statement said.

"Today we are taking decisive actions to protect the US economy by strengthening public confidence in our banking system," the statement said. "This step will ensure that the US banking system continues to perform its vital roles of protecting deposits and providing access to credit to households and businesses in a manner that promotes strong and sustainable economic growth."

S&P500 futures rose 1.4 per cent after the announcement.

A senior U.S. Treasury official said the firms were not being bailed out, but depositors were being protected.

SVB equity and bondholders would be wiped out, said the official, who briefed reporters after the announcement.

The Biden administration will work with Congress and financial regulators to consider additional actions to further strengthen the financial system, the official said.

The official said the economy remains in good shape but officials would continue to take steps to ensure the financial system remains strong.

The Federal Reserve also said Sunday it would make additional funding available through a new Bank Term Funding Program, which would offer loans up to one year to depository institutions, backed by Treasuries and other assets these institutions hold.

The officials also said that depositors of New York's Signature Bank, which was closed Sunday by the New York state financial regulator, would be made whole at no loss to the taxpayer.

Signature's shareholders and unsecured debtors will not be protected, and management has been removed, the officials said.

Earlier, Yellen had said she was working with banking regulators to respond after SVB became the largest bank to fail since the 2008 financial crisis.

China Chooses Continuity, Retaining Central Bank Chief



BEIJING (Dispatches) - China unexpectedly kept its central bank governor and finance minister in their posts at the annual session of the rubber-stamp parliament, prioritizing continuity as economic challenges loom at home and abroad.

President Xi Jinping, who has been installing allies in key roles in a government reshuffle as he begins a third five-year term, broke with convention to retain Yi Gang, 65, as governor of the People's Bank of China (PBOC) and Liu Kun, 66, as finance minister. Both men have reached the official retirement age of 65.

Across the slate of appointments, there were fewer changes than anticipated, with most cabinet ministers keeping their posts. However, further announcements are expected in coming weeks as China implements a reorganization of its financial regulatory structure and other government bodies.

"Opting for continuity in these critical economic roles suggests an emphasis on credibility and stability," said Mattie Bekink, China director at the Economist Intelligence Corporate Network.

"It is also perhaps a tacit acknowledgment of some of the challenges for Beijing at the moment," she said. "The real challenge for this third Xi administration is whether it will address structural imbalances in China's economy and undertake reforms necessary to ensure China's long-term competitiveness."

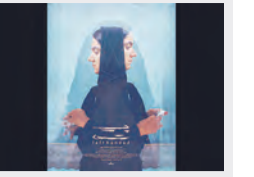
The government has set a 2023 economic growth target of around 5%, up from 3% last year, which was among the weakest performances in decades.

China's statistics bureau head, Kang Yi, told the parliamentary session on Sunday that China's economy still contains deep structural "contradictions" and "problems", according to state media.

“Left Handed” to Vie At Greek Film Festival

TEHRAN (MNA) - Produced by Fariba Arab in Chosen Image Company, the short film ‘Left Handed’ will take part in the competitive section of the Positively Different Short Film Festival in Greece. Positively Different Short Film Festival will be held from 16 – 19 March 2023. Also, awarded films will be screened simultaneously in

Athens, Istanbul, Belgrade, Nicosia, Sofia, Zagreb, and Dakar. “Maryam is thinking of a big decision and intends to do something and prepare herself for it, but ...” reads part of the story. Like other films directed by Mohammadpour, ‘Left Handed’ is also about women and society. The screenplay of the work has already won two awards at domestic festivals.



Disaster to Destination: Fukushima Woos Tourists With Snow

BANDAI (Dispatches) - Tourist Benjamin Tuffy’s family spent their winter holidays in Japan’s picture-perfect snow. But they weren’t at the country’s famed ski resorts in Hokkaido or Nagano — they picked Fukushima.

It’s a choice officials hope is becoming increasingly popular as they market the region’s snow resorts and try to shed the stigma that lingers more than a decade after the 2011 nuclear disaster.

Fukushima’s ski industry was already struggling with warm winters and a decline in domestic visitors when a tsunami triggered the worst nuclear disaster since Chernobyl.

Officials worked hard to attract foreign visitors despite the disaster, but then the pandemic struck and border closures kept tourists away for more than two years.

Tourism resumed normally in October, and Fukushima is again aggressively promoting its attractions, including at industry expos in Sydney and Melbourne.

Tuffy, a 40-year-old Australian, chose the region’s Bandai Resort for a holiday along with his wife and two children.

He told AFP that the resort’s location, about 100 kilometres (62 miles) from the coast, had helped assuage any concerns.

“You have some distance, you’ve got mountains and you’ve got range, you’ve got a lot of clean air and clean life over here,” he said as he removed his snowboarding gear.

“We are aware, but we’re not concerned. It was more like understanding the situation.”

It has been 12 years since the three reactors at the Fukushima Daiichi plant went into meltdown after an earthquake-triggered tsunami that left 18,500 dead or missing.

Evacuation orders were once in place for a 20-kilometre (12-mile) radius around the plant, but most of the prefecture was never affected by radiation.

And after extensive decontamination, just 2.4 per cent of the region remains off-limits.

But “Fukushima’s popularity remains low among foreign tourists, 43rd among 47 prefectures in Japan”, said Go Morimoto, managing director of the Bandai Resort.

In pre-Covid 2019, nearly 50 per cent of inbound tourists visited Tokyo, 30 per cent went to Kyoto and 8 per cent visited far northern Hokkaido, according to the Japan National Tourism Organization.

Just 0.3 per cent went to Fukushima, which is only 90 minutes from Tokyo by bullet train.

The US investment fund that once owned the Bandai Resort decided to sell in 2015, convinced “it was simply unlikely that tourism would make a comeback”, Morimoto said.

Still, inspired by the success of snow destinations like Nagano’s Hakuba and Niseko in Hokkaido, Fukushima has tried to promote its plentiful white stuff.

“Japan’s powder snow, popularly known as ‘Japow’ is a world-class tourism resource,” said Morimoto.

“Niseko and Hakuba have benefitted from it, but Fukushima, not so much, despite the potential.”

It was the main draw for Anne Cathcart, 68, on her third trip to Fukushima. But she acknowledged some reservations before her first visit.

“I thought ‘Ermm Fukushima? I’ve heard of that, the nuclear disaster’,” the Australian said.

But she found the region’s snow “so amazing”, that she has been back multiple times.



“It’s never disappointed,” she said.

The influx is a welcome relief for locals like Miwako Abe, who has run a souvenir shop for around three decades in Ouchijuku, an ancient rest stop for travellers.

“At one point I didn’t know what to do, because we didn’t see anyone at all here,” the 59-year-old said as tourists snapped selfies by a row of traditional thatched houses under heavy snow.

The area is particularly popular with tourists from areas of Asia with little or no snow. “I see more people from Taiwan... They buy stamps at my shop and send postcards,” Abe said.

It is something of a vindication for regional authorities in a battle they waged to keep alive a small railway running through a picturesque gorge.

The Tadami line was badly affected by torrential rains just four months after the nuclear disaster.

But a report suggested just 49 people a day were using the flood-affected part of the route before the disaster, and operator JR East planned to scrap it.

Local authorities were convinced it could draw tourists and agreed on a scheme to invest if JR East kept the route.

It reopened in full only last October and has been flooded with Instagram-savvy visitors, said Tetsuya Sato of the Yanaizu Tourism Association.

“As soon as the line resumed, the carriages were full of passengers, even on weekdays,” said Sato, whose association website is now available in English, Chinese and Thai.

“We never expected this trend, but we are so happy.”

Tehran-Riyadh...

FROM PAGE 1

We hope this agreement to come into effect very soon and both countries resume their diplomatic ties which is very crucial for easing tensions and problems.

Of course this move can encourage all Muslim countries to unite for standing against the enemies

of Islam and especially against the Zionists who have always been trying to seed the sow of rift and conflicts in the region to make most of it.

Many countries especially the independent and peace-seeking ones have backed this move and they hope the agreement between Tehran and Riyadh would resolve many crisis in the region and eventually in the world.

The Islamic Republic of Iran has always supported cooperation and friendship with the neighboring and regional countries based on the mutual interests and the agreement can turn into a turning point in the political development in the region which is important for all of states in the region.

The agreement also showed the world that the West is not the only party which can broker peace and this time China has taken initiative to bring Tehran and Riyadh closer together which has been warmly welcomed and proved the world that it can be a great actor in restoring peace and the West is not the only party which claims it is able to bring peace among the nations.

Now the countdown has started for the resumption of diplomatic ties, something which makes the Zionists feel the heat of the hell and definitely they will resort to any means to ruin this tie and Tehran and Riyadh should be well aware of any Zionist plot which is aimed at Iranophobia and normalization of ties with the Persian Gulf states.

Now the Zionists do not sleep well at nights because any moment they can witness an initiative from the Islamic Republic which will spoil their sleep.



Iran Economy Grows...

FROM PAGE 1

Ghorbani said Iran’s economic growth rate in the three quarters to late December was 3.7%, adding that the non-oil sector of the economy had expanded by 3.2% over the same period.

The CBI uses fixed prices reported in 2016 as a baseline for its GDP calculations. The price of US dollar in the Iranian market was nearly 37,300 rials in late 2016 while its current price is around 450,000 rials.

The figures come days after data by the Statistical Center of Iran showed that the Iranian economy grew by 3.3% in the three quarters to late December last year.

Iran Ready to...

FROM PAGE 1

On January 4, 2016, Bahrain followed Saudi Arabia’s decision by severing diplomatic relations with Iran, after Iranian protesters, enraged by the execution of prominent Shia cleric Sheikh Nimr Baqir al-Nimr by the Saudi government, stormed its diplomatic mission in Iran.

On Friday, after several days of intensive negotiations hosted by China, Iran and Saudi Arabia finally clinched a deal to restore diplomatic relations and re-open embassies and missions within two months.

In a joint statement, Iran and Saudi Arabia highlighted the need to respect each other’s national sovereignty and refrain from interfering in the internal affairs of one another.

Iran, Saudi Arabia and China also expressed their firm determination to make their utmost efforts to promote regional and international peace and security. Bahraini Parliament Speaker Ahmed Al Musallam said on Sunday that Manama is open to improving bilateral relations with Iran.

As a start of mending relations, Al Musallam said, there have been talks of reopening air routes between the two countries.

Ozone Pollution Linked to Increased Heart Disease



PARIS (Dispatches) - Ozone air pollution is linked to a higher rate of hospitalizations for heart diseases, according to a large study released today, the latest warning of the health dangers posed by greenhouse gases.

While a layer of ozone in the upper atmosphere helps block harmful ultraviolet (UV) radiation from reaching Earth, at ground level it is a major component of the smog polluting most big cities.

Scientists have warned that a different kind of air pollution, fine particulate matter known as PM2.5, causes 8.8 million premature deaths a year, but ozone’s full impact on health is still becoming clear.

Ozone is created in the atmosphere by a chemical reaction when two pollutants, often emitted by cars or industry, combine in the presence of sunlight, and has been shown to interfere with plant photosynthesis and growth.

The new study said it was the first to evaluate the risk of hospitalization for heart disease when ozone levels rise above the World Health Organization’s daily guideline of 100 micrograms per cubic meter of air.

For the study, published in the European Heart Journal, a team of China-led researchers looked at data on hospital admissions from 2015 to 2017 in 70 Chinese cities collected for health insurance purposes.

The data covered 258 million people across 70 cities, representing roughly 18 per cent of China’s population. The researchers compared the hospitalizations to air quality data tracked in real-time across the cities.

It found that — independent of other pollutants — ozone was associated with more than three per cent of hospitalizations for coronary heart disease, heart failure and stroke.

Also, each increase of 10 micrograms of ozone per cubic meter of air was linked to a 0.75 per cent rise in hospitalizations for heart attacks, and to a 0.40 per cent increase for stroke.

Berlin Fair Marks Tourism’s Return, Defying Inflation

BERLIN (Dispatches) - The Berlin tourism industry fair this week celebrated its comeback from the dark days of the coronavirus pandemic with a strong demand that has so far defied high inflation figures.

The industry gathering returned after a three-year hiatus enforced by the pandemic crisis, with 5,500 exhibitors from 161 countries descending on the German capital.

“Travel is back!” Julia Simpson, the head of the World Travel and Tourism Council said during the fair.

In 2022, the World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) registered an increase in international arrivals of almost 900 million compared with the previous year.

In total, arrivals stood at 67 percent of their pre-pandemic level, with the figure reaching as high as 80 percent in Europe.

“We are already at a similar level to 2019” in some countries, said UNWTO Europe director Alessandra Priante.

“The savings made by a whole section of the population during the pandemic lockdowns have yet to be fully spent and are flowing into the sector,” said Clemens Fuest, head of the economic think tank Ifo Institute.

China’s abandonment at the end of last year of its zero-COVID-19 policy, which strictly regulated travel in and out of the country, has been another boon.

Before the pandemic, Chinese travelers represented 15% of all tourists.

The atmosphere at the fair was celebratory with delegates from central Asia and Pacific islands parading through the aisles in traditional garb to promote their region.

“Our clients have all come back,” Lukas Knauber, 23, a German spa hotel worker, told Agence France-Presse (AFP).

The upturn in fortunes has continued despite painfully high inflation in many parts of the world. Consumer prices in the eurozone rose at an 8.5% pace in February and look set to remain elevated.

But the positive trend may not carry forward very far.

“In 2023, many consumers were able to say I’m going even if I have lost spending power. But in 2024 that will probably not be the case,” said Fuest.

Consumer behavior is already changing because of inflation. In Germany, more and more holidaymakers are “booking early in the year to benefit from



discounts”, the German tourism industry group DRV said in early March.

One in two clients at travel giant Tui is choosing the all-inclusive option, in order to have a better grip on their expenditure, according to Stefan Baumert, the group’s lead for Germany.

In the cruise industry, “55% of customers say they want to spend less money or travel less far,” according to Markus Stumpe, CEO of the website CruiseWatch.

“The sector will have to adapt its offers and prices to this new context,” Fuest said.

At the fair in Berlin, the startup Room Price Genius is showing software that allows small hotels to estimate the ideal price for a room.

Not just consumers, but the sector itself is reeling from rising costs, especially for energy.

To limit the sector’s impact on the environment, people will also have to “pay more”, according to Soeren Hartmann, head of the German federal tourism organization BTW.

Rising global temperatures are having a major impact on much-loved holiday destinations as winter snows fail to materialize and summer heat waves become more frequent.

According to a study published in the scientific journal Nature, tourism represented eight percent of global emissions in 2018.

“The climate transition is the biggest challenge facing tourism,” Katharina Schlossar, 22, a hotel worker in Bavaria told AFP.

Fragile Yemen...

FROM PAGE 1

The objective was to crush the popular Ansarullah resistance movement, which has been running state affairs in the absence of a functional government in Yemen and reinstall the Riyadh-friendly regime of Abd Rabbuh Mansour Hadi.

While the Saudi-led coalition has failed to achieve any of its objectives, the war has killed hundreds of thousands of Yemenis and spawned the world’s worst humanitarian crisis.

A UN-mediated ceasefire between Ansarullah and the self-proclaimed Yemeni regime, which is supported by Saudi Arabia, broke down last October six months after it went into effect. Nevertheless, tensions have eased and casualties have decreased as important elements of the truce still remain in place.

Hakimi Named in Morocco Squad

RABAT (Dispatches) - Paris Saint-Germain defender Achraf Hakimi, charged with rape in France, was called into the Morocco squad for friendly games against Brazil and Peru.

One of the stars of Morocco's historic charge to the semi-finals of the World Cup last year, Hakimi was charged earlier this month with allegedly raping a 24-year-old woman.

Hakimi allegedly paid for his accuser to travel to his home on February 25 in the Paris suburb of Boulogne-Billancourt while his wife and children were away on holiday.

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Scheffler Returns To World No.1

MIAMI (Dispatches) - American Scottie Scheffler returned to number one in the world rankings after winning The Players Championship at TPC Sawgrass by five strokes.

Scheffler ran away with the US PGA Tour showdown at Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida, after making five straight birdies between the eighth and 12th holes while his top rival fell away.

The defending Masters champion will replace Spain's Jon Rahm atop the rankings on Monday. Rahm withdrew from the event due to illness.

Medvedev Rolls On At Indian Wells

INDIAN WELLS (dispatches) - Daniil Medvedev, no fan of the slow hard courts of Indian Wells, nevertheless came out on top in a back and forth battle with Ilya Ivashka on Sunday to push his ATP win streak to 16 matches.

Medvedev, the world number six who is coming off three straight titles at Rotterdam, Doha and Dubai, said his 6-2, 3-6, 6-1 third-round victory over 85th-ranked Ivashka was a "matter of a few points."

"Always tricky to play here," said Medvedev, a former world number one whose best showing in the California desert was the round of 16 in 2021.

"(It's) tough to make anything during the rallies, so just have to kind of see who puts more balls in court. If you lose a little momentum you lose a set."

Medvedev was clearly frustrated at the end of the second set, grumbling to the referee that he would be "as slow as the court" in taking a bathroom break.

He managed to pull himself together, however, to take a 5-0 lead in the third.

Serving to prolong the match, Ivashka went down 0-40, but reeled off three straight points and held serve with an ace to force Medvedev to serve it out.

"I missed less. That's the only thing you can do. You cannot do more," Medvedev said. "It was a matter of a few points."

"Second and third sets for me they were kind of the same, the score is completely different. It's just who plays better the most important points — break points, 30-all. I managed to do better in the third set."

Medvedev lined up a fourth-round meeting with Germany's Alexander Zverev, the former world number two who is seeded 12th as he works his way back from the torn ankle ligaments that ended his 2022 campaign at the French Open.

Zverev said he felt fortunate to come out with a 7-5, 1-6, 7-5 victory over Finland's Emil Ruusuvuori, who Zverev judged "the much better player" in the third set.

Meanwhile Chilean qualifier Cristian Garin shocked third-seeded Casper Ruud 6-4, 7-6 (7/2) to reach the fourth round at Indian Wells as in-form Briton Cameron Norrie survived a scare.



Garin's attacking game paid off as he dispatched world number four Ruud in just under two hours.

Tenth-seeded Norrie, who reached the final in Buenos Aires and lifted the trophy in Rio de Janeiro last month, was down a set and 4-1 to Japanese qualifier Taro Daniel before rallying for a 6-7 (5/7), 7-5, 6-2 victory.

Garin, ranked 97th in the world, earned his first hard court victory over a top-10 player and continued his impressive form in the California desert, where he hasn't dropped a set in qualifying or main draw matches at the ATP and WTA combined event.

"The way I played today I'm so happy," the 26-year-old said. "I was aggressive the whole match. His 39 winners were too much for Ruud, who had hoped a quick victory over Diego Schwartzman in his second-round opener would mark a turnaround in a season where he hadn't advanced past the second round in three prior tournaments."

A two-time Grand Slam finalist in 2022, the 24-year-old Norwegian fell to Jenson Brooksby in the second round of the Australian Open.

Australian Open champion Aryna Sabalenka of Belarus was due to cap the action on Stadium Court against Ukrainian qualifier Lesia Tsurenko.



Ten Hag Bemoans Erratic Refs

MANCHESTER (Dispatches) - Erik ten Hag criticized "inconsistent" officials after Casemiro's second red card this season forced Manchester United to settle for a 0-0 draw against struggling Southampton.

Casemiro was sent off in the 34th minute at Old Trafford after initially being booked for his high challenge on Southampton's Carlos Alcaraz.

VAR official Andre Marriner advised Anthony Taylor to review the Brazil midfielder's foul on the pitchside monitor and the referee upgrading the offence to a red card.

Having bounced back from their 7-0 humiliation at Liverpool last weekend by beating Real Betis in the Europa League on Thursday, United had to dig deep to avoid a shock defeat against bottom of the table Southampton.

United manager ten Hag was furious with the decision to send off Casemiro, who was also dismissed against Crystal Palace in February, and complained about penalty calls that didn't go his team's way.

"Well, what I think is the inconsistency (means) players don't know any more what is the policy," Ten Hag said.

Pegula Fights Her Way Into Indian Wells Fourth Round

INDIAN WELLS (Dispatches) - American Jessica Pegula still finds it "weird" to think of herself as the world's number three player, but she doesn't feel any particular pressure to live up to the ranking.

The American said her ability to compartmentalize keeps her focused on each match -- just as it helps her take it point by point in the kind of comeback win she needed Sunday to reach the fourth round of the Indian Wells combined WTA and ATP Masters 1000 hard court tournament.

"That was definitely a battle today," Pegula said after rallying for a 3-6, 6-4, 7-5 victory over Anastasia Potapova, who lifted the WTA trophy in Linz last month.

"I just felt like I started off a little slow," Pegula said. "She had some confidence, obviously going for a lot of her shots. She just won a tournament as well."

"So I'm just glad I was able to work my way back into the match and ended up playing much better than how I started."

It marked the second straight match that Pegula had to come from a set down to win.

While she had to make a concentrated effort to fire herself up in chilly, late-night conditions against Camila Giorgi, Pegula said that against Potapova she just tried to stick to her game plan.

"I just tried to stay calm and focused on what I was trying to do, especially on my service games," she said. "I felt like I could break her. I was going to get chances."

Pegula, whose two WTA titles include Guadalajara last year, has reached the quarter-finals of four of the last five Grand Slams, but has yet to break through to the final four of a major.

She said finding herself ranked among the world's top players may have ramped up the pressure "at first," but it hasn't changed her approach.

"I'm good at just thinking one match at a time. I think that has helped where I haven't felt really too much pressure as being top five," she said.

"It's weird. It's weird to think that I'm like three in the world. I don't even like to say it. I guess it's a good thing."

Seoul to Bid for 2036 Olympic Games



Committee (IOC) in 2021, before Brisbane was named as host city.

"I think the strategy for 2032 was doomed to failure because of unpredictable inter-Korean relations," Oh said in an interview.

The 2032 joint bid had sought to build on the Pyeongchang Winter Olympics hosted in the South in 2018, during which athletes from both Koreas marched under a unified flag

SEOUL (Dispatches) - Seoul will pursue a bid for the 2036 Summer Games without reviving efforts to co-host an Olympics with the North Korean capital of Pyongyang, Seoul Mayor Oh Se-hoon told Reuters.

Amid hopes for better relations with the nuclear-armed North, Seoul sent a proposal for co-hosting the 2032 Olympics with Pyongyang to the International Olympic

at the opening ceremony and fielded a combined women's ice hockey team.

IOC President Thomas Bach welcomed the joint bid at the time as a "historic initiative".

But relations have since soured again, and North Korea has tested a record number of ballistic missiles in the past year.

Pyongyang routinely trades threats with Seoul and its allies in Washington, where officials say North Korea may be preparing to resume nuclear weapons testing for the first time since 2017.

Oh said Seoul would remain flexible to the idea of holding a few events in the Demilitarised Zone (DMZ) or Pyongyang if relations improved enough by that time.

An official with the Korean Sport and Olympic Committee (KSOC) said it had not received formal statements of intent from either Seoul or the southern city of Busan on a 2036 bid.

It would be up to the individual cities in consultation with the national government to decide whether to jointly host with Pyongyang, the official added, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss ongoing deliberations.

India Extend Test Dominance Over Australia With Series Win

AHMEDABAD (Dispatches) - India won their fourth series in a row against Australia after a fourth and final Test lit up by an epic 186 by Virat Kohli ended in a draw in Ahmedabad.

The hosts won the series 2-1 and the world's two top-ranked teams will do battle again on June 7-11 at The Oval in the World Test Championship final.

Even before the players shook hands on day five, India knew they had reached the WTC decider thanks to New Zealand's thrilling last-ball win over Sri Lanka earlier in the day.

It will be India's second successive WTC final, having lost the inaugural edition to New Zealand in 2021.

Australia reached 175-2 in their second innings in the final session of play at the world's biggest cricket stadium when the players of both teams called it a day.

"We do understand the importance of this series and the opposition. Lot of hard work has gone into this," India skipper Rohit Sharma said.

Coach Rahul Dravid told broadcaster Star Sports: "It was a really hard-fought series, there were moments where we were put under extreme pressure by a really good cricket team and we responded."

India similarly lifted the Border-Gavaskar Trophy at home in 2017 and then beat the Australians in their own back yard in 2018-19 and 2020-21, each time 2-1.

Travis Head (90) and Marnus Labuschagne (63 not out) snuffed out India's push for a victory on the final day with a stand of 139 after nightwatchman Matthew Kuhnemann fell early for six.

The left-handed Head, capping a successful series after being left out of the first Test, missed out on his century after being bowled by Axar Patel.



Man City Reign Will Be Defined by Champions League

LONDON (Dispatches) - Pep Guardiola admits his Manchester City reign will be defined by success in the Champions League no matter how many times his side win the Premier League.

City were to face Bundesliga high-flyers Leipzig in the second leg of their Champions League last-16 tie looking to advance to the quarter-finals for a sixth successive season.

Guardiola's men were held to a 1-1 draw in the first leg, but are fancied to progress in front of their own fans at the Etihad Stadium.

For Guardiola, the quest to end City's wait to win Europe's elite club competition for the first time is both a source of frustration and inspiration.

The 52-year-old has lifted the Premier League four times, while also winning four League Cups and one FA Cup during his remarkably successful seven years in Manchester.

Yet for all his domestic glory with City, it is the Champions League that remains the holy grail. Guardiola won the Champions League twice as Barcelona boss, in 2009 and 2011, but failed to repeat that success in his three years with Bayern Munich.

City lost to Chelsea in the 2021 final but have also endured a series of agonising exits from the knockout stages, with last season's astonishing late collapse against Real Madrid in the semi-finals an especially bitter blow.

Asked if his time at City would be judged solely on his European achievements, Guardiola told reporters: "Yes. It doesn't mean I agree with that but absolutely we will be judged by this competition."

However, he believes City's gradual progress from outsiders to established members of Europe's elite under his leadership deserves more respect.

"Since day one when I arrived, sitting here for the first time, they (the media) asked me 'Are you here to win the Champions League?'" he said.

