

TEDPIX, the Main Index of the Tehran Stock Exchange (TSE), Reportedly Dropped 8,230 Points (0.37 Percent) to 2,200,112 on Sunday in the Second Day of Iranian Calendar Week

# IRAN NEWS

If the U.S. and Israeli Regime Decide to Act Foolishly and Attack Yemen, His Country Will Surprisingly Respond, Secretary of the Supreme Political Council in Sana'a Yasser Al-Houri Has Said

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## Iranian Navy Receives New Cruise Missiles, Advanced Choppers



TEHRAN (Tasnim) - The Iranian Navy on Sunday took delivery of a range of new homegrown weapons and equipment, including strategic cruise missile systems and helicopters suitable for electronic warfare. In an event attended by Army Commander Major General Abdolrahim Mousavi, the new weapons came into service at a coastal naval base in southern Iran. The arms and equipment include the 'Talayieh' strategic cruise missile system, the Nasir cruise missile system, the Navy's first electronic warfare helicopter and the first intelligence gathering chopper, surface-to-surface missile systems, the 'Sanjar' smart loitering and suicide drone carried by the Jamaran destroyer, a multipurpose drone system used for electronic warfare, a diver detection system, and the 'Sirvan' tug boat used in ports and anchorages. In comments at the event, Iranian Navy Commander Rear Admiral Shahram Irani said Talayieh is a smart cruise missile with a range of over 1,000 kilometers that can change course during flight and select a new target before surprising it. The Nasir cruise missile with a range of over 100 kilometers has perfect destructive power and is mounted on various naval destroyers of different classes, the commander stated. On the new naval choppers, the admiral said the aircraft have been furnished with a range of electronic warfare systems, have self-protection systems, and can deceive various missiles. The advanced optical devices, intelligence gathering systems, and Identification Friend or Foe (IFF) systems installed on the copters allow them to carry out both naval combat and civilian maritime operations.

## Two U.S. Bases Targeted With Rocket Shells in Syria



DAMASCUS (Dispatches) - Two U.S. bases belonging to the American occupation forces in Syria have reportedly come under attack in the country's northeastern province of Hasakah. Lebanon's al-Mayadeen television network cited unidentified sources as saying on Sunday that the U.S. base at Kharab al-Jir Airport and the al-Malikiyah base in the northern countryside of Hasakah had been "targeted with several rocket shells." The sources provided no further information about the attack and the extent of losses. No groups or individuals have thus far claimed responsibility for the attacks on the two American military bases. The Islamic Resistance in Iraq, a coalition involving a number of anti-US groups, has recently targeted several American military bases in Iraq and Syria over Washington's unflinching support for Israel's brutal aggression against Palestinians in the besieged Gaza Strip. The Tel Aviv regime's genocidal war has since early October claimed the lives of more than 20,000 civilians in Gaza and left over 56,000 others injured. The latest attack by the Iraqi resistance coalition involved drone strikes against U.S. military facilities at al-Omar oilfield and Conoco gas plant in Syria's eastern province of Dayr al-Zawr on December 13. In a post on X social media platform days later, a correspondent for Fox News television channel announced that U.S. forces had been "attacked for the 100th time" since October 17. The attacks come amid rising anti-US sentiments across the region over Washington's support for Israel. The incessant Israeli bombardment campaign rages on in Gaza, whose resistance groups launched the large-scale Operation Al-Aqsa Storm on the occupied territories on October 7 in retaliation for the regime's decades-long atrocities against Palestinians in the besieged territory.

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK



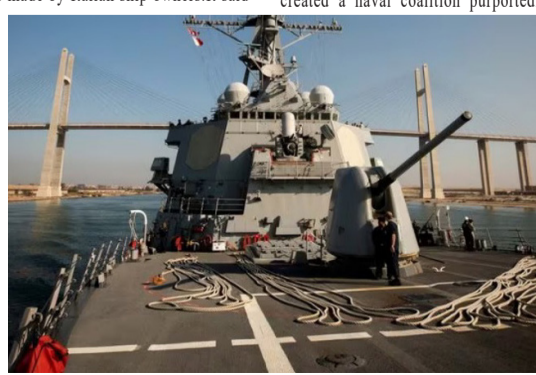
## U.S., Israel Must Stand Trial for Crimes Against Humanity in Gaza

TEHRAN (PressTV) - President Ebrahim Raisi says the United States and Israel must be tried at the International Criminal Court (ICC) for crimes against humanity during the Israeli onslaught on the besieged Gaza Strip. Addressing the Tehran International Conference on Palestine on Saturday, Raisi condemned the crimes of Israel, including massacre of women and children and the destruction of Palestinian homes in Gaza. The president slammed the unconditional support of the so-called advocates of human rights, not least the United States and certain Western countries, for the crimes against the Palestinians. "What is even more unfortunate is the ineffectiveness of all the international organizations who claim to defend human rights with regard to the incidents in Gaza." He said the horrific war crimes in Gaza stem from an unjust world order. The Iranian president stressed the need to "shape a new world order." Raisi said meetings such as the Tehran conference must go to great lengths in this regard. Pointing to the futile efforts to normalize the crimes of Israel in Gaza, Raisi reiterated the Palestinians' right to self-defense. He said the true face of the US and many Western countries was uncovered in the course of the genocidal campaign in Gaza. "They are not a party to peace but a party to war." The U.S. and its allies have vetoed any UN Security Council resolution for ceasefire in Gaza and provided the Israeli regime with weapons and financial aid, the president said. Raisi urged an immediate end to the Israeli barbarism against an "oppressed but strong" people that Palestinians are. The Iranian president also warned against Washington's scheme of the "forced displacement" of Palestinians from Gaza. He said the Americans claim to defend democracy but they are the "first and biggest violators of democracy in the world." "Americans are not to make any plan for the future of Gaza. The future of this region will be determined by its own people and its own legitimate government," Raisi stated. The global arrogant system "has no regard for ethics, law and humanity in the way of exercising its domination," the president said. Raisi said any analysis of the issue of Palestine must begin way before October 7, 2023. "The Palestinian issue should be analyzed from the date when the British occupied this land and killed and displaced the Palestinians." Raisi said the crimes of Israel are the root cause of the Hamas-led surprise Operation Al-Aqsa Storm of that October day. "Occupation, even if it lasts for 75 years, does not create legitimacy and ownership rights for the occupier." Raisi said support for the liberation of al-Quds and the oppressed yet strong people of Palestine is the Islamic Republic's definitive policy, which has always been articulated. "We believe the just solution to the Palestinian issue is to refer to the votes of the Palestinian people, including Muslims, Christians and Jews." The Iranian president slammed Washington's brazen approach towards the people of Gaza and said, "A party that is the perpetrator and accomplice of a crime cannot be a party to peace in no way." Israel has not been committed to any international agreement and has violated more than 400 statements and resolutions issued against its crimes, the president said. Raisi said the events of the recent weeks in Gaza have removed the mask from the face of hypocrisy and revealed the warmongering nature of the United States to the world. The so-called claimants of freedom and democracy showed they are the perpetrators of the biggest crimes, discrimination and crimes against humanity, he added. "In the recent events, a place called the United Nations Security Council, which is responsible for establishing peace and security in the world, has officially proved its desperation, incompetence and ineffectiveness."

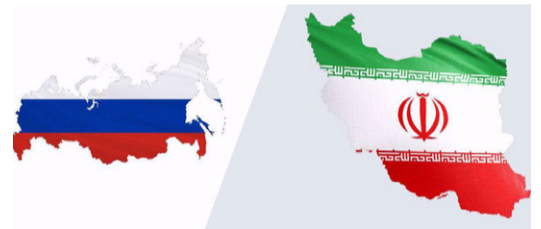
## Major Setback for U.S.-Led Naval Coalition as France, Spain and Italy Leave

LONDON (Dispatches) - In a major setback to a US-led maritime task force in the Red Sea to protect passage of Israeli-owned and Israel-bound merchant vessels, France, Spain, and Italy have officially withdrawn their participation from the coalition. The three nations have explicitly stated their commitment to operating exclusively under the command of international bodies such as the United Nations, NATO, or the European Union, choosing not to align with the United States. The French Defense Ministry announced in a statement that it supported efforts to secure freedom of navigation in the Red Sea and surrounding area and said it already operated in the region. However, it said its ships would stay under French command and did not say if it would deploy more naval forces. Italy's Defense Ministry also said it would send naval frigate Virginia Fasan to the Red Sea to protect its national interests in response to specific requests made by Italian ship owners. It said this was part of its existing operations, and was not part of the US-led naval coalition in the waterway. Moreover, Spain's Defense Ministry said it would only participate in NATO-led missions or EU-coordinated operations. "We will not participate unilaterally in the Red Sea operation," it noted. On Thursday, the Pentagon said more than 20 countries had now agreed to participate in the US-led maritime task in the Red Sea, known as so-called Operation Prosperity Guardian. The lack of details and clarity over what countries are doing has added to confusion for shipping companies, some of which have been re-routing vessels away from

the area, amid a flurry of drone and missile attacks in the Red Sea by Yemeni forces in retaliation for the Israeli war on Gaza. Pentagon chief Lloyd Austin announced the formation of the coalition - including Bahrain, Canada, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, the Seychelles, Spain and the UK - on Tuesday. On Thursday, Austin said Greece and Australia had also joined the grouping, taking it to a total of 20, but added that at least eight countries taking part have declined to be publicly named. Yemenis have declared their open support for Palestine's struggle against the Israeli occupation since the regime launched a devastating war on Gaza on October 7 after the territory's Palestinian resistance movements carried out a surprise retaliatory attack, dubbed Operation Al-Aqsa Storm, against the occupying entity. More shipping firms have decided to avoid the Red Sea although the US has created a naval coalition purportedly aimed to safeguard shipping after Yemen's retaliatory attacks on Israel-linked vessels. The relentless Israeli military campaign against Gaza has killed at least 20,258 people, most of them women and children. Another 53,688 individuals have been wounded. Reports revealed that Israeli shipping companies have already decided to reroute their vessels in fear of attacks by Yemeni forces. Yemeni forces have also launched missile and drone attacks on targets in the Israeli-occupied territories of Palestine after the occupying regime's aggression on Gaza.



## Russia Reiterates Respect for Iran's Territorial Integrity



MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russia has reiterated its full respect for Iran's territorial integrity just days after a joint Russian-Arab forum in Morocco where the United Arab Emirates repeated its claims about three Iranian islands in the Persian Gulf. Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov said on Saturday that respect for Iran's territorial integrity is a fundamental part of Russia's foreign policy. Bogdanov made the remarks in a meeting in Moscow with Iranian ambassador to Russia Kazem Jalali, according to a report by Iran's official IRNA news agency. During the meeting, Bogdanov briefed Jalali about the sixth Russian-Arab Cooperation Forum which was held on December 20 in Morocco. The senior Russian diplomat said Russia is committed to its friendly relations with Iran and sees it necessary to avoid interfering in the domestic affairs of other countries. The Iranian envoy also said in the meeting that Iran expects Russia to prevent any misuse of stances and positions that could benefit the enemies of growing relations between the two countries. The meeting came after the United Arab Emirates' Ministry of Foreign Affairs said that a statement issued at the conclusion of the joint Russian-Arab forum in Morocco had reiterated the Arab country's claim over three islands of Bu Musa, Greater Tunb and Lesser Tunb. Iran has repeatedly rejected the UAE's claims while reiterating that Tehran's sovereignty over the islands are non-negotiable. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, who led Moscow's delegation to the Morocco forum, said in a phone call with his Iranian counterpart Hossein Amir-Abdollahian late on Friday that the forum's final statement had considered Russia's full respect for Iran's territorial integrity. On Saturday Iran summoned the Russian chargé d'affaires to Tehran in protest at a recent statement issued by Russia and several Arab countries on Iran's three Persian Gulf islands of Abu Musa, the Greater Tunb, and the Lesser Tunb. The Russian diplomat was summoned by the assistant to the Iranian Foreign Ministry's director general for the Persian Gulf affairs on Saturday. The development came after the final statement of the 6th Arab-Russian Cooperation Forum, which was held in Morocco on December 20, reiterated the United Arab Emirates' baseless claims about the three Iranian islands.

## Hamas Calls Biden a Partner in Crime to Netanyahu's Massacre of Palestinians



GAZA (Dispatches) - U.S. President Joe Biden is a partner in crime to Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu's massacre of the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip, says a top Hamas official. On Saturday, Biden said he did not ask the Israeli prime minister for a ceasefire in the war between Israel and Hamas in Gaza in a telephone call between the two leaders. Izzat al-Rishq, a member of the political bureau of Hamas, on Sunday condemned Biden's remarks, which he said proved his complicity in the killing and destruction happening in the besieged Gaza. "The U.S. president's remarks were an insult to the international society and the countries that demanded an end to the aggression against Gaza," he added. Earlier, Netanyahu's office said he "expressed his appreciation" for the stance taken by the U.S. at the UN Security Council, adding that he also "made it clear that Israel will continue the war until all its goals are completed." On Friday, the Security Council passed a resolution on the Israeli onslaught on Gaza that demanded ramped-up aid deliveries to the besieged region, yet it fell short of calling for an immediate ceasefire to pause the genocide taking place there. The U.S. also opposed the demand to create a UN monitoring mechanism for aid, saying Israel would continue to have a role in inspecting deliveries. Since the onset of the war, the United States has supplied the regime with more than 10,000 tons of military equipment. Washington has also slapped its veto against all United Nations Security Council resolutions that called for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza. Meanwhile, Basem Naim, another senior official from Hamas, lamented the fact that the world has not taken any serious action against Israeli crimes.

# IRAN NEWS



## Tehran-Beirut Amicable Ties to Pave Way for Bolstering Islamic Unity

TEHRAN (Tasnim) – Iran’s minister of labor, cooperatives and social welfare said the amicable ties between Iran and Lebanon will pave the way for strengthening Islamic unity in the international arena. Söwlat Mortazavi made the remarks in a meeting with visiting Lebanese Labor Minister Moustafa Bayram in Tehran, emphasizing that cooperation between the two countries will lay the ground for establishing unity and amity among Islamic states more than ever. Iran and Lebanon enjoy the potential to expand their cooperation in all fields, Mortazavi said, adding that suitable platforms have been provided for launching common activities, bultanews.com reported. He also called for accelerating the implementation of the agreements previously inked between the two countries. The Lebanese labor minister, for his part, said that his ministry is keen on strengthening relations with Iran’s Labor Ministry. Bayram pointed out that his country welcomes bilateral cooperation in the field of technical and vocational training services.

## U.S. Sees Own Interests as Only Benchmark for Int'l Relations



TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iran’s Deputy Foreign Minister for political affairs Ali Bagheri Kani has said the United States considers its own interests as the only benchmark for “the legitimacy of international relations”. Addressing a symposium of the Iranian and Chinese think tanks on Saturday, Bagheri Kani said strengthening Iran-China cooperation within non-Western international organizations such as BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) can fortify the ties between the two nations. The conference is underway in Tehran with a focus on the evolving world order, and the latest developments in West Asia and Persian Gulf region. More than two dozen senior executives and researchers from prominent Chinese think tanks are participating in the two-day event. Baqeri Kani said the key concepts of “wisdom, dignity, and expediency” in the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic form the foundation for strengthening relations between China and Iran. Li Wentang, chief education officer of the Central Party School of the Chinese Communist Party, highlighted the historical relations between China and Iran across various dimensions. He said that, amidst the current global transformation, Iran and China must deepen their cooperation in bilateral, regional, and international fields to effectively confront unprecedented challenges. Li called on the two nations to expand their interactions in the face of evolving global dynamics.

## U.S. Seeks to Withdraw From Engagement in Gaza war



TEHRAN (IRNA) - Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian said that there is political bickering inside the White House as to why the United States has become so attached to Israel that it is now thinking about a dignified withdrawal from the Gaza war. Amir-Abdollahian, referring to the messages of the United States and the West to Iran to control the spread of the Gaza war, said: “Today, there is political bickering inside the White House as to why the United States has become so attached to Israel that it is now considering a dignified exit from the Gaza war.” The Tehran International Conference on Palestine was held with the presence of official representatives of governments from 40 countries and representatives from non-governmental sectors, religious scholars and managers and media people from 29 countries. The main purpose of holding this meeting is to create more coordination in political and international positions to help the Palestinian people. Amir-Abdollahian, after holding the Tehran International Conference on Palestinian Developments said: “In the past 70 days, without exception, the messages of Americans and Westerners to Iran are focused on Iran controlling the scope and expansion of the war.” He added: “The supporters of the Zionist regime concluded that the continuation of the war is not the solution and this situation has challenged the prestige of the U.S.” Amir-Abdollahian further explained: “The U.S. is on the side of the Israeli regime in the war, and a complicit in its own right, and they should be tried in the international criminal court along with the Israeli political, military and security authorities, considering their behavior against the people of Gaza.” He stated: “We do not have any proxy groups in the region, and these proxy groups that the US claims are groups that act to secure their interests and national security.” Amir-Abdollahian

added: “We do not seek to expand the scope of the war, and we consider it a strategic mistake by the American politicians to provide the Israeli regime with American help with all their might in the genocide of the people of Gaza.” He added: “The solution is not to create a coalition in the Red Sea, but to stop shedding the red blood of the people of the West Bank and Gaza.” Earlier addressing the conference, Amir-Abdollahian said the United States and some of its allies are the main obstacles on the way of efforts to stop the killing of Palestinians in the besieged Gaza Strip. He censured the United Nations Security Council for failing to take an effective measure to end Israel’s hostilities in the occupied territories. He said the participants in the Tehran conference share the ultimate goal of ending the brutality of the “fake, apartheid and occupying” Israeli regime. Amir-Abdollahian said the UN Security Council has adopted a resolution for increased humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip, but it has so far failed to take any effective measure to stop the crimes of Israel. The Iranian minister urged all independent governments to pull out all the stops in support of Palestine. On Friday, the Security Council passed a resolution on the Israeli onslaught on Gaza, demanding ramped-up aid deliveries to the besieged region but stopping short of calling for an immediate halt to the genocide taking place there. The watered-down resolution demanded all sides in the conflict allow the “safe and unhindered delivery of humanitarian assistance at scale.” The Palestinian resistance movement Hamas conducted the surprise Operation Al-Aqsa Storm against the occupying entity on that October day in response to the regime’s never-ending atrocities against the Palestinians. The United States has fully supported Israel in terms of weapons and munitions since the onset of hostilities.

## Nouri's Family to Lodge Complaint at ICC Over Swedish appeals court ruling



TEHRAN (IRNA) - The head of the Iranian Parliament’s Human Rights Committee has condemned a recent ruling by a Swedish appeals court that upheld a life sentence for detained Iranian national Hamid Nouri, saying that his family will file a lawsuit in international courts over the ruling. “The family of Mr. Nouri considers it their right to not recognize the verdict issued by the Swedish National Court due to its failure to ensure compliance with legal standards, and to file a complaint against the Swedish judicial system in international courts and pursue the issue through the International Criminal Court,” Zohreh Elahian said. Last week, the Svea Court of Appeal upheld a July 2022 Stockholm District Court decision that had handed over a life sentence to Nouri over alleged human rights violations in a case brought by members of the anti-Iran terror group, the Mujahedin Khalq Organization, or MKO. The Iranian parliamentarian called the allegations unfounded, saying that the Swedish judicial system has shown that it is deeply influenced by the propaganda of the MKO terrorist group. She also lashed out at Sweden for putting Nouri in solitary confinement for 50 months based on false testimony of some MKO members in a pre-planned trial, saying that all these prove that Sweden’s claim of defending human rights is a lie. Elahian said that the Swedish government even denied Nouri his basic right of choosing a lawyer and refused to issue visas for the witnesses called in by public defenders to attend court sessions. Nouri was arrested upon arrival at Stockholm Airport in November 2019 and was immediately imprisoned. He was accused of being involved in the execution and torture of MKO members in 1988, a charge that Iran has repeatedly called politically motivated.



## President Highlights Maritime Economy Boost

TEHRAN (MNA) – President Ebrahim Raisi highlighted the imperative to activate the maritime economy, citing potential employment prospects and the region’s untapped capabilities. President Raisi emphasized the collective responsibility in leveraging all resources for enhanced productivity and efficiency. President Raisi called on all the concerned officials of the province to make their utmost efforts to increase productivity. Activation of the private sector in the cooperatives sector is one of the important issues that should be taken into serious consideration, he said. Earlier, Minister of Roads and Urban Development Mehrdad Bazrpash stressed the imperative need for strengthening Golestan’s port infrastructures, noting an acceleration in investments in the maritime sector after directives from the Leader of the Islamic Revolution, with a strategic emphasis on sea-oriented development. Pointing to the strategic position of Golestan province along the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC), the minister underscored the province’s unique potential, due to its proximity to the Republic of Turkmenistan. Iran engaged in constructive negotiations with neighboring Turkmenistan to set up the common border marketplaces and facilitate smooth transit access for Golestan province to Central Asian states.

## Iran, China Hold Think Tank Dialogue Forum



TEHRAN (Tasnim) – The first meeting of the Iran-China Think Tank Dialogue Forum was held in Tehran on Saturday. Held at the Institute for Political and International Studies (IPIS) of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Iran, the forum was attended by IPIS Head Mohammad Hassan Sheikholeslami, Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister for Political Affairs Ali Baqeri, Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister for Economic Diplomacy Mahdi Safari, and a number of researchers from Chinese think tanks. Describing Iran and China as two great civilizations, Sheikholeslami said the two nations have played a very important role in the development and promotion of science and knowledge throughout history. He noted that based on this historical background, Iran and China have always had positive and constructive relations regarding key regional and international issues. The Iranian deputy foreign minister for economic diplomacy also took the podium to hail the historical ties between Tehran and Beijing. Safari said the recent visits by the officials of Iran and China to the two countries have opened a new chapter in bilateral ties, especially in economic relations. He also noted

that the presence of Iran and China in organizations such as BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) can pave the way for deepening cooperation in other areas. Elsewhere in the meeting, Baqeri said the Iranian and Chinese officials are determined to expand bilateral relations in all fields. Explaining the three key words of wisdom, dignity and expediency in the foreign policy of Iran, Baqeri underlined that these three concepts are the basis for strengthening cooperation with China. Strengthening cooperation between Iran and China in non-Western international organizations such as BRICS and the SCO can bolster ties between Tehran and Beijing in various fields, he added. Also, Li Wentang, Vice President of the Central University of the Communist Party of China, underlined the importance of China and Iran in Asia, saying Tehran and Beijing have enjoyed good relations in various spheres for a long time. He underscored that the world is changing fundamentally and under such circumstances, Iran and China should boost their cooperation in bilateral, regional and international areas to face the new conditions.

## Iranian Art, Music Shines at International Eurasia Culture, Folklore Festival



TEHRAN (IP) - The International Festival of Eurasian Music Traditions and Folk Arts was held at the Lahouti Tajik Academic Drama Theater in Dushanbe, the capital of Tajikistan showcasing Iranian art and music. Zulfiya Davlatzoda, the Minister of Culture of Tajikistan, a group of Tajik officials and artists as well as diplomats from the Eurasian countries, and “Alireza Haghigian”, the Iranian Ambassador to Tajikistan, attended the international Eurasia Culture and Folklore Festival on Saturday. The exhibition of folk arts and handicrafts of Tajikistan and some other countries, including the Islamic Republic of Iran, was displayed at the International Eurasia Culture and Folklore Festival. The Darvag band representing Iran performed at the international Eurasia Culture and Folklore Festival and performed a piece of the story of Shahnameh’s Rostam and Sohrab Shahnameh, which was well received by the participants in the festival.

# IRAN NEWS



## South Azadegan Field Production Capacity Increased

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Iran has added 60 new wells to boost production capacity in the South Azadegan oil field, which the country shares with its neighbor Iraq, the head of the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) announced. Mohsen Khojasteh-Mehr said South Azadegan field's production capacity has seen a significant increase with the addition of 60 new wells over the past year, reaching a current production level of 120,000 barrels per day (bpd). He pointed out that development plans have been finalized for all of the country's joint fields, and programs are underway to sign a contract to develop two additional joint fields by March 20. In July 2020, a consortium of Iranian companies including Petropars signed a deal with NIOC to raise Azadegan field's output capacity to 320,000 bpd from 140,000 bpd within 30 months.

## GDP Growth Stands at 4.7% in H1



TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Iran's gross domestic product (GDP) including oil grew 4.7 percent in the first half of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21 - September 22) compared to the same period last year, according to the Central Bank of Iran (CBI). Based on the CBI data, the figure was 3.6 percent excluding oil, IRNA reported. As reported, based on the fixed prices in the Iranian year 1395 (ended on March 20, 2017), the country's GDP stood at 43.18 quadrillion rials (about \$86.36 billion) including the oil sector in the mentioned period. The World Bank in a recent report on Iran's economy dubbed "Iran Economic Monitor" said the Islamic Republic's economy has been expanding despite the sanctions and global economic conditions. According to the WB report, Iran's economy continued to grow moderately for the third consecutive year in the previous Iranian calendar year (March 2022-March 2023) and it is expected to continue this upward trend albeit at a slower pace. "Real gross domestic product (GDP) grew by 3.8 percent in 2022/23, driven by expansions in services and manufacturing. Despite sanctions, the oil sector also expanded, aided by the tighter global oil markets," the report said. Favorable weather conditions helped the agriculture sector to marginally grow after the contractions in previous years, the WB stated. "On the expenditure side, private consumption was the main driver of GDP growth. Government consumption contracted to contain the budget deficit following a sharp expansionary policy in 2021/22. Meanwhile, exports and imports both increased, and strong investment in machinery drove investments up, while construction investment marginally improved," the report read. Based on the WB data, the service sector was one of the main drivers of non-oil growth during the last two years. The sector continued its expansion in 2022/23 (2.7 percent, y/y), following a strong expansion in 2021/21 (6.5 percent). This growth was mainly driven by a rebound in "transport and storage" and "wholesale and retail" services, as well as the sustained growth of "Information and telecommunication services (ITS)".

## Export of Foodstuffs, Agro Products to Africa Up 18%



TEHRAN (Dispatches) - The value of Iran's export of foodstuffs and agricultural products to Africa rose 18 percent during the first eight months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21-November 21), the director-general of the Market Study and Development Department of Rural Cooperative Organization announced. Ruhollah Latifi said that Iran exported 41,000 tons of such products worth \$28 million to the African countries in the mentioned eight-month period, which also indicates 34 percent growth in weight, year on year. He said that Iran's foodstuffs and agricultural products were exported directly to 33 African countries in the first eight months of the present year. Over the past 40 years, the Islamic Republic of Iran has never given up on its principled policy towards Africa due to political and cultural commonalities, despite the sanctions, pressure and disruptions of the West, and has always maintained itself alongside the people and countries of Africa. As reported, during the Iranian calendar years 1384 and 1385 (March 2005-March 2007), the relations between Iran and the African continent increased in terms of trade, but since 1386, the economic relations between Iran and Africa have decreased due to the economic crisis and cruel sanctions against Iran. Surveys show that in the past years, due to the lack of restoration of economic relations with Africa, the amount of trade with the countries of this continent has remained at the level of \$1.2 billion, but according to Mohammed-Sadeq Qanadzadeh, the director general of the Africa

Department of Iran's Trade Promotion Organization (TPO), facilitating the trade route with Africa is happening now and it is expected that the trade figure with this continent will reach \$10 billion in the next three years. In fact, good steps have been taken to use Africa's capacity, and Africa can be a suitable market for Iranian goods, Qanadzadeh stated. Last year, the official referred to the beginning of the 13th government's measures to develop relations with the African continent, and said: "Over the past [Iranian calendar] year 1400 (ended on March 20, 2022), a series of measures have been initiated, which were resulted in the visit of about 60 African trade delegations, active presence in the exhibitions of this continent, the opening of 10 trade centers, and the dispatch of three commercial attaches. As the result of these measures, Iran's trade with Africa experienced a 100-percent growth from \$650 million in the Iranian year 1399, and also in the first nine months of the year 1401. Iran-Africa trade was equal to the total trade of the previous year, and we also experienced a growth of about 700 percent in the export of technical and engineering services, he added. Also as announced by Ruhollah Latifi, the value of trade between Iran and Africa rose two percent in the past Iranian calendar year 1401 (ended on March 20). He put Iran-Africa annual trade at 2.545 million tons worth \$1.278 billion. Also, Africa has 65 percent of the world's arable land, 10 percent of renewable fresh water resources, and 12 percent of the world's oil reserves.

## Up to 10k Best Nurses of Iran Have Migrated



TEHRAN (IFP) - The head of the nursing council organization of Iran says "wrong policies" toward the profession has disillusioned nurses in Iran and called for those responsible for those policies to be held accountable. Mohammad Mirzabeigi said up to 10 thousand best nurses of Iran have migrated from the country. He attributed the wave of the nurses' migration to the rules and regulations that he says were not enforced properly and in line with the guidelines of the leader of Iran's Islamic Revolution and the president. Mirzabeigi added that the most important measures needed to be taken to resolve the problems faced by the nursing sector include payment of special extra salaries, employment of workforce who are completing their projects in the sector, and the proper implementation of salary rules. The Iranian health ministry has yet to comment on this.

## Domestic Companies Strike Deals Worth \$180m to Invest in Imam Khomeini Port



TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Private companies have signed investment deals and memorandums valued at 90 trillion rials (about \$180 million) to implement development projects at Imam Khomeini Port Special Economic Zone, the head of Ports and Maritime Department of southwestern Khuzestan province, where the port is located, said. Abutaleb Gerailo said the mentioned contracts have been signed in a ceremony attended by Transport and Urban Development Minister Mehرداد Bazrpash on the occasion of Transportation Week. According to the official, four of the mentioned deals worth 21.5 trillion rials (about \$43 million) were concluded between the Ports and Maritime Department of Khuzestan province and private sector investors to increase the capacity of loading and unloading of goods at the port. The construction of storage tanks for petroleum products with a capacity of 40,000 cubic meters, the construction of a light hydrocarbon production refinery, a gamma irradiation system, and Arvand petrochemical saltwater transmission lines are among the projects that the private sector is going to invest in. Gerailo stated that the completion of the commodity trading chain, the creation of value-added services, the development of the export of oil products, and the expansion of production activities in the Special Economic Zone of Imam Khomeini Port are among the goals of concluding the mentioned investment contracts. The other five investment contracts worth 68.590 trillion rials (about \$140 million) were signed to develop investment opportunities and increase the capacity of unloading and loading goods in the Imam Khomeini Port Special Economic Zone. The official further noted that the Ports and Maritime Organization (PMO) is following new policies to create specialized terminals for the loading and unloading of goods, and in this regard, the completion of four mechanized terminals for grains, container cargoes, and minerals at the special economic zone of Imam Khomeini Port have been prioritized.

## ICCIMA Ready to Boost TIR Convention



TEHRAN - President of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines, and Agriculture (ICCIMA) Hossein Selahvarzi says the Iran Chamber is ready to host the secretariat of the TIR carnet issuers of the ECO region. Selahvarzi made the remarks in a meeting in Tehran with Secretary General of the International Road Transport Union (IRU) Umberto de Pretto. He also said that the Iran Chamber of Commerce is seeking to host an international transportation meeting in 2024 with participation of regional countries, especially the Persian Gulf states. Selahvarzi said that this international meeting would seek to introduce TIR carnets as an international customs and transit document so as to be used among these countries. He also hailed the IRU efforts to solve the problems of the Iranian truck drivers for receiving visas in the European Union, adding that the Iran Chamber of Commerce stands ready to further facilitate this trend. Selahvarzi noted that the Iran Chamber of Commerce has been the

world's top issuer of TIR carnets in the world since 2021 which indicates good cooperation between the Iran Chamber of Commerce and the IRU. The IRU secretary general, for his part, referred to Iran's training of 700,000 truck drivers for using TIR carnet services, adding that Iran has been a leading country in this regard. The most significant thing about TIR carnets is that they cut the cost and time of transportation as he said that a truck which runs under TIR Convention should only be inspected at the origin and destination countries and there would be no problem on the countries along the journey, de Pretto said. He added that studies show that transportation under TIR Convention cuts time and cost of transportation by 84 and 50 percent respectively. The official also expressed regret about the suspension of Iran's green insurance as of 2024 and said that IRU will spare no effort to reduce the problems arising from this suspension.



## Digital Economy in Iran Has 2.5 Times More Development Opportunity

TEHRAN (IP) - Vice president for scientific and technology said: In Iran, the digital economy has 2.5 times more opportunity to develop, and this number can increase to 5 times in proportion to the country's population. The 24th International Exhibition of Telecommunications, Information Technology, and Digital Economy kicked off today with the presence of 160 local and foreign companies in a space of 22,000 square meters at the permanent location of Tehran International Exhibitions. Ruhollah Dehghani Firouzabadi, vice president for science and technology added at the opening ceremony of this exhibition: Thanks to the global wave of development of information technologies, the digital economy received attention in the country. Currently, the digital economy accounts for 15% of the world economy, and in Iran, this number is about 6%. Dehghani Firouzabadi also said the digital economy is a successful economic experience in the country.

### Calls for Restraint in DR Congo After Tense Vote

KINSHASA (Dispatches) - Western embassies in Democratic Republic of Congo urged restraint after leading opposition members called this week's election a "sham", some calling for it to be annulled. Five opposition leaders called in a joint statement for a protest march next Wednesday. One election officer meanwhile said late voting in a few places in the country's far east had been authorised for Sunday. In a joint statement Saturday, 12 European embassies in the capital Kinshasa, and the Canadian embassy, called for calm. "So long as the vote count is continuing, we call on all the parties involved... to show restraint," they wrote. The US embassy issued a similar call the day before. Around 44 million people in the nation of 100 million were registered to vote, with more than 100,000 candidates running for various positions. President Felix Tshisekedi, 60, is running for re-election against 18 opposition candidates.



### To Beat Trump, Nikki Haley Tries to Expand Coalition



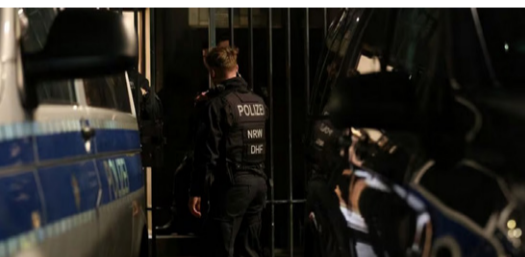
CLEAR LAKE (Dispatches) - Republican presidential contender Nikki Haley has risen in opinion polls in recent months largely on the back of college-educated, affluent, suburban professionals, many of whom have tired of Donald Trump's caustic rhetoric and legal troubles. If the former South Carolina governor is to ascend any further and have a real shot at beating Trump in the 2024 Republican nominating contest, supporters and opponents say, she must expand that coalition - and quickly. That means pulling in more voters who live in rural areas, are middle- or working-class, or lack college degrees, according to eight pollsters and strategists interviewed by Reuters. Some are affiliated with the Haley nomination effort and some are independent. Ahead of the Republican nominating kick-off in Iowa on Jan. 15, Haley has been traveling to Trump-friendly territory in the state, including a December campaign swing that took her through a deeply conservative area along its northern border. She also launched a "Farmers for Nikki" coalition in November, while her campaign and its allies have blanketed the airwaves with ads in rural areas in an effort to build her name recognition and broaden her appeal. In a barn with hand-hewn wooden beams in Spirit Lake and at a Clear Lake restaurant where a mounted bison head loomed large, Haley spoke this month about the small South Carolina town where she grew up that had only two traffic lights. "The area I grew up in was much like Iowa," Haley told an audience in the town of Sioux Center. "I grew up playing in a cotton field and in a dairy farm." She talked at length about shortcomings in the public healthcare system for America's veterans, which caters disproportionately to rural Americans. While she has stepped up her criticisms of Trump in recent months, saying that his management style is too chaotic and divisive to be effective, she did not bring up the former president much on the trail. Trump leads his Republican rivals in Iowa with about 50% support, polls show. Haley, who was U.N. ambassador under Trump, is in a close third place behind Florida Governor Ron DeSantis. Her numbers have moved up in recent weeks while DeSantis, once seen as a serious threat to Trump, has faltered. Les Hardy, a truck driver at a local chick hatchery, braved bone-cold conditions to attend Haley's town hall in Clear Lake. He arrived undecided about which candidate to back, but said he was considering Trump. After the event, Hardy said he was leaning toward Haley thanks to her straightforward answers to audience questions and what he described as her "down home" manner.

## Fighting Rages in Northern Gaza; Biden Speaks With Netanyahu

CAIRO (Dispatches) - Israel battled Hamas militants on Saturday in pursuit of its elusive goal of full control of northern Gaza after the U.N. Security Council appealed for more aid for the Palestinian enclave but stopped short of demanding a ceasefire. Thick smoke hung over the northern town of Jabalia and residents reported persistent aerial bombardment and shelling from Israeli tanks, which they said had moved further into the town. Hamas' armed wing Al Qassam Brigades said it had destroyed five Israeli tanks in the area, killing and injuring their crews, after reusing two undetonated missiles launched earlier by Israel. Reuters could not independently verify the report. Israel's chief military spokesman said that its forces had achieved almost complete operational control of northern Gaza and were preparing to expand the ground offensive to other areas in the Strip, with a focus on the south. U.S. President Joe Biden discussed the situation with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Saturday, the White House said. Israel's main ally has kept up its support while expressing concern over the growing casualty toll and humanitarian crisis in Gaza. Biden declined to detail his conversation with Netanyahu, telling reporters it was a "private conversation." But, he added: "I did not ask for a ceasefire." Biden and Netanyahu talked in detail about Israeli's military operations in Gaza including "its objectives and phasing," the need to protect civilian lives and securing the release of hostages being held captive, the White House said. U.S. officials have said they want and expect Israel soon to shift its military operations in Gaza to a lower-intensity phase during which there will be more targeted operations focused on the Hamas leadership and its infrastructure. After days of wrangling to avert a threatened U.S. veto, the U.N. Security Council on Friday passed a resolution urging steps to allow "safe, unhindered, and expanded humanitarian access" to Gaza and "conditions for a sustainable cessation" of fighting. The resolution was toned down from earlier drafts that called for an immediate end to 11 weeks of war and diluting Israeli control over aid deliveries, clearing the way for the vote in which the United States abstained. The United States and Israel oppose a ceasefire, contending it would allow the Islamist militant group to regroup and rearm. The Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) said earlier on Saturday they had fired decoy shots in the area

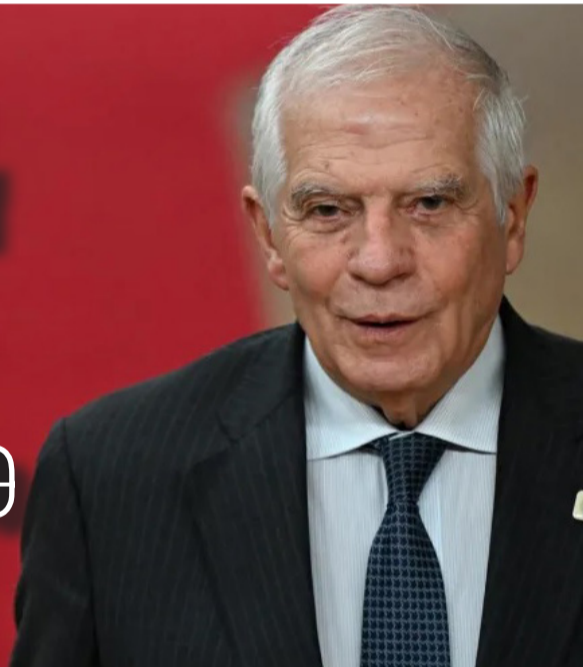
of Issa in Gaza City that lured dozens of militants from a building that served as a Hamas headquarters in the north of the enclave. "IDF ground and intelligence troops directed an IAF fighter jet to strike the building, eliminating the terrorists," it said. Later on Saturday, residents and Palestinian media reported that Israeli tanks shelled the town of Juhr ad-Deek in central Gaza. There was no immediate word on casualties. At least 201 Palestinians have been killed over the past 24 hours, taking the death toll to 20,258 during the 11-week conflict, the Palestinian health ministry said on Saturday, with thousands more bodies believed trapped under rubble. Almost all of Gaza's 2.3 million people have been displaced. Israel said on Saturday that 146 of its soldiers have been killed since it launched its ground incursion on Oct. 20 in response to an Oct. 7 rampage into Israel by Gaza's ruling Hamas militants, who killed 1,200 people and took 240 hostages back into the enclave. "We shall press ahead, for every fallen soldier, too. Until Hamas is eliminated. Until the hostages are returned," Israeli Energy Minister Israel Katz, a member of the security cabinet, posted on X. Hamas said on Saturday it had lost contact with a group it said was responsible for five of the Israeli hostages due to Israeli bombardment. An Israeli military spokesman described the statement as "psychological terrorism" from Hamas. Health officials and Hamas media said an Israeli air strike on a house in Nusseirat refugee camp in central Gaza killed three people including a journalist of Hamas' Aqsa TV channel and two relatives. Hamas' Aqsa radio later said Israeli planes had bombed and destroyed the headquarters of Aqsa TV and radio station in Gaza City. An IDF spokesperson declined to comment on Palestinian reports that Israeli forces had begun a ground offensive near Kerem Shalom, east of the Rafah Crossing into Egypt. Israel has long urged residents to leave northern areas of Gaza but its forces have also been bombarding targets in central and southern parts of the tiny coastal enclave. The Palestinian Red Crescent said on X it had evacuated several dead and wounded on Saturday after a house was shelled in Deir al-Balah in southern Gaza. Palestinian mourners attended the burial of a family of four killed in an Israeli airstrike on Khan Younis.

### Security Hiked at Cologne Cathedral for Christmas Amid Attack Threat



BERLIN (Dispatches) - German police said on Saturday they were heightening security at Cologne Cathedral following indications of an attack planned for New Year's Eve and in the wake of government warnings in recent weeks about the rising threat of Islamist violence. The police said in a statement they would use tracker dogs to check the cathedral after evening mass and then close it off. On Sunday, Christmas Eve, they would carry out a security check on all visitors, and recommended they get to services early. Police said they could not elaborate, citing the ongoing investigation. German newspaper Bild earlier reported that security authorities in Austria, Germany and Spain had received indications an Islamist group wants to carry out attacks during the Christmas and New Year festivities. In recent weeks Interior Minister Nancy Faeser has warned of the rising threat of Islamist violence in Germany and elsewhere in Europe as the Israel-Hamas war increases the risk of radicalization. Austrian police said in a statement they were increasing security on churches and Christmas markets given a heightened state of alert. "Given that terrorist actors throughout Europe are calling for attacks on Christmas events, especially around Dec. 24, the security authorities have taken the corresponding protection measures in public spaces," the police said. The Spanish Interior Ministry announced at the beginning of December a reinforcement of security measures from Dec. 18 for the Christmas holidays, with the anti-terrorism alert at level 4 or "high risk," as it has been since June 2015.

## EU Foreign Policy Chief Fears Rightwing Surge in June Elections



BRUSSELS (Dispatches) - European parliamentary elections in June could be as fateful as the U.S. presidential race, the EU foreign policy chief, Josep Borrell, has warned, saying he believes voters' fear of the unknown may lead them to back rightwing populist parties. "I am afraid of fear, I am afraid Europeans vote because they are afraid. It's scientifically proven that fear in the face of the unknown and uncertainty generates a hormone that calls for a security response. This is a fact," Borrell told the Guardian. Borrell was reviewing the current state of the European Union project at the turn of a year caught between two wars, one in Ukraine and another in Gaza. He said both conflicts threatened the future of the bloc, and in the case of Ukraine he said he feared defeat unless there was a rapid change of course. He said he saw no sign that the Russian president, Vladimir Putin, was willing to stop, or even settle for an agreement that let Russia retain eastern Ukraine. On Gaza he said Hamas was not just a military force but an idea - and, as such, it could only be defeated by better ideas, not bombs alone. Borrell's remarks come amid gains by rightwing parties across the continent, apparently driven by concerns about migration and squeezed living standards. The EU's external affairs commissioner said: "We are invaded by a media world of threats where we learn about the daily crimes of evil or war, and it creates a hormonal activity directed by fear. Parties that can play on fear in human beings and offer bad responses to good questions can attract the support from the European population." He accepted there are both real and perceived reasons to be concerned, but urged voters to back political forces that can present a lucid analysis of the situation. "If we cannot do that, I think the European elections will be as dangerous as those in the US." He said Europe still offered an

attractive model for people from around the world. "We are a magnet for hundreds of thousands of people who want to come to live in Europe. And it's easy to understand why when we compare our standard of living. We are the best combination of political freedom, economic prosperity, and social cohesion that humankind has been able to create." But he also warned that the European Union's existence was at stake in Ukraine. "Maybe this is the moment in which we have to look at the danger coming from a great power which threatens our democracy, which threatens Europe itself, not only Ukraine. And if we don't change course rapidly, if we don't mobilise all our capacities, it will let Putin win the war in Ukraine. Similarly if we are not able to stop the tragedy which is happening in Gaza, I think our project will be very much damaged." The important thing is what we can do in order to avoid Russia winning the war. What are we ready to do? Are we really ready to do everything it takes? This is the question that we have to put ourselves... "Putin cannot be satisfied with a piece of Ukraine and to let the rest of Ukraine belong to the European Union, but he cannot be satisfied with a limited territorial victory. He will not give up the war, especially not before the American election, which may present him with a much more favourable scenario. So we must prepare for a conflict of high intensity for a long time," Borrell said. "Putin has decided to continue the war until the final victory," he said. "Russia's success is dependent on bringing to the battlefield as many people as they can. They have at this time the greatest number of deaths, of casualties in the battlefield, in the presence of the human reserve. There were 150,000 people massed on the Ukrainian border in February. There are 450,000 now so three times more."



### Kosovo Says Gunmen From Serbia Are Planning More Attacks

PRISTINA (Dispatches) - Kosovo's Prime Minister Albin Kurti said that armed men supported by Serbian security agencies were being trained to launch new attacks in his country after a September assault which left four dead. Serbia denied any such plan. On September 24, a group of 80 armed men attacked Kosovo police in the quiet village of Banjska near the border with Serbia, leaving one police officer and three gunmen dead. Speaking at a news conference, Kurti said Milan Radoicic, a top Kosovo Serb politician who admitted taking part in the September gun battle, was planning further attacks. "He is now continuing preparations for other attacks in our country... he is holding regular meetings with senior officials of the Serbian secret service, BIA." Petar Petkovic, head of Serbia's government office for Kosovo, said Kurti's allegation was false. "It is an absolute lie that Belgrade is preparing an attack," he said in a statement. Kosovo's prosecution has issued arrest warrants for Radoicic and 30 others believed to be hiding in Serbia, which denied earlier allegations from Kosovo that it provided financial and practical support to Radoicic and his group. Kosovo, which has an ethnic Albanian majority, declared independence from Serbia in 2008 after a guerrilla uprising and a 1999 NATO intervention. Around five percent of the population are ethnic Serbs, of which half live in the north and refuse to recognize Kosovo independence and see Belgrade as their capital. They have often clashed with Kosovo police and international peacekeepers. NATO has sent 1,000 extra troops to the region, bringing its presence there to 4,500 peacekeepers from 27 countries.

## Russia Bars Pro-Peace Candidate From Presidential Poll

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - A Russian politician calling for peace in Ukraine hit a roadblock in her campaign Saturday, when Russia's Central Election Commission refused to accept her initial nomination by a group of supporters, citing errors in the documents submitted. Former legislator Yekaterina Duntsova is calling for peace in Ukraine and hopes to challenge President Vladimir Putin, promoting her vision of a "humane" Russia "that's peaceful, friendly and ready to cooperate with everyone on the principle of respect." On Dec. 23, the Central Election Commission refused to register my initiative group," Duntsova wrote on the Telegram messaging app. According to a Telegram channel close to Duntsova's campaign, the commission found 100 errors in her nomination papers, including mistakes in the spelling of names. "You are a young woman, you still have everything ahead of you. Any minus can always be turned into a plus," the head of Russia's Central Election Commission, Ella Pamfilova, said at the commission meeting, addressing Duntsova. Duntsova said that she would appeal the decision in Russia's Supreme Court, and appealed to the leaders of the Yabloko (Apple) political party to nominate her as a candidate, as she said she would be unable to convene a second meeting of supporters. Also on Saturday, Russian state media said that

Yabloko party founder and leader Grigory Yavlinsky would not run for the presidency, citing the party's press service. Speaking in a live interview on YouTube, once Duntsova's appeal to Yabloko became known, Yavlinsky said that he "didn't know" whether the party would consider her application. Duntsova took her first steps toward candidate status Sunday, when her run was endorsed by 500 supporters as required by Russian election law, and presented documents Wednesday to Russia's Central Election Commission to register her nomination. A number of Russian parties also announced which candidates they would be backing in the presidential election next March - which incumbent President Vladimir Putin is all but certain to win. The Russian Communist Party, the second largest party in the lower house of Parliament, the State Duma, announced after a secret ballot that it would support the nomination of Duma deputy Nikolai Kharitonov. As party leader Sergei Mironov previously said it would do, the Just Russia - For Truth party formally announced that it was supporting Putin's nomination for the presidency. Parties represented in the Duma do put forward candidates to run against Putin, but they represent only token opposition and are generally sympathetic to his agenda.



## Gazan children; main victims of Israeli regime's crimes

IP - Following the crimes against Gaza, the Israeli regime bombed al-Fakhoura school in Jabalia camp for the second time yesterday, in which at least 200 people were martyred, most of whom were children. Iran Press/ Commentary: According to all reports of human casualties and injuries published in Gaza, children are the main victims of the crimes committed by the Israeli regime. A look at the statistics proves this fact that Palestinian children are main victims of Israeli aggression. More than 12 thousand and 300 people have been martyred as a result of the attacks of the Zionist regime, of which more than 5 thousand children are among the martyrs, which means that 42 percent of the martyrs are children.

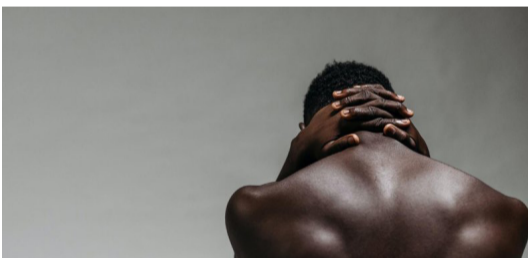


## Second-Hand Clothes Finally Take Off in Japan



TOKYO (Dispatches) - A second-hand pop-up store in Tokyo by casual clothing giant Uniqlo was a first for the Japanese firm, but also a sign that a local aversion to used garments may finally be fading. Uniqlo is a major player in an industry blamed for immense carbon emissions and other pollutants like microplastics. It has ridden a wave of consumers buying, and throwing away, ever more clothes. But in Japan, the world's third-biggest clothes market, growing awareness of the sector's huge environmental impact has yet to spark much interest in second-hand options. Uniqlo's Aya Hanada said the 10-day pop-up in the hip Harajuku district, where second-hand clothes were a third of their original price — with some dyed for a "vintage" look — showed attitudes were changing. "I think the feeling of resistance to used clothing has disappeared in Japan, mainly among young people," said the 45-year-old, who works for the firm's recycling programme. The change is in part thanks to the internet, she told AFP outside one of Uniqlo's major stores, which allows customers to access items "without having to go all the way to a second-hand clothing store." There is still a long way to go, however. In Japan, 34 per cent of discarded clothing is recycled or reused, according to the environment ministry. But this includes exports to developing countries, where the waste also often ends up in tips or is incinerated. Globally, the equivalent of a truckload of clothes is burnt or buried in landfill every second, according to the Ellen MacArthur Foundation, a charity focused on eliminating waste and pollution. JapanConsuming, a market research firm, estimates that the Japanese second-hand segment represents less than six percent of the RM\$347-billion market, albeit with strong growth in recent years. For a long time in Japan, used clothes were a small niche confined to hipsters, JapanConsuming's co-founder Michael Causton said. "Maybe compared to somewhere like France and UK where the ecological, environmental factors probably came first, in Japan, it was a fashion thing," Causton told AFP. In Japan "there is a very strong concern with hygiene, that is a fixture of Japanese culture. And that definitely was a barrier for the average consumer," he added. Alongside Fast Retailing-owned Uniqlo, which touts efforts to transform second-hand clothes into new products and also donates them to refugees and others in need, used garment specialist 2nd Street has expanded to 800 stores across Japan.

## Spinal Cord Stimulation May Improve Mental Health



NEW YORK (UPI) - Believe it or not, your spinal cord may be a pathway to better mood and even an end to depression, new research suggests. Investigators at the University of Cincinnati stressed that their pilot study — to see whether tweaking the spinal cord can ease depression — is in its very early stages. However, 20-minute sessions did seem to bring mental health benefits to participants, the team said. As the scientists explained it, the spinal cord serves (among other functions) as a kind of neuronal highway, transmitting information from throughout the body to the brain's mood centers. The Cincinnati researchers theorized that an informational "overload" on this pathway might overwhelm the brain, playing a role in depression. So, study lead author Dr. Francisco Romo-Nava designed a noninvasive spinal cord stimulation method that he has patented. Using this technology, he and his colleagues hoped to decrease the "noise" traveling along the spinal cord, offering some relief to an overtaxed brain. "Spinal cord stimulation is thought to help the brain modulate itself as it should by decreasing the noise or decreasing the hyperactive signaling that may be in place during a depressive syndrome," explained Romo-Nava, a research associate professor in the university's department of psychiatry and behavioral neuroscience. The current trial was small, just 20 patients diagnosed with depression. Three times a week for eight weeks, half of the patients got 20 minutes of the spinal cord stimulation therapy, while the other half got a "sham" treatment, where their spines received an electrical current that was thought to be below the threshold needed for any effect. Patients seemed fine with the level of current delivered, Romo-Nava said. "We used a current that is so small that it's about 10 times smaller than the one known to induce tissue damage," he explained in a university news release. "So, that's also pretty encouraging because there's a lot to explore in terms of what is the optimal dose and session frequency." Patients who got the real treatment did seem to have greater reductions in depressive symptoms compared to those who got the sham treatment, the researchers said. But because the study group was so small, it is just too early to draw any definite conclusions, the researchers said. Side effects included some transient skin redness at the site where the spinal cord stimulation was given, and some itching or burning sensations that only lasted as long as the treatment session. The findings were published Wednesday in Molecular Psychiatry.

## Do Electric Cars Really Produce Fewer Carbon Emissions Than Petrol or Diesel Vehicles?



LONDON (Dispatches) - There is a spectre haunting electric cars: the question of greenwashing. What if, for all the green hopes attached to zero-emissions cars, the truth is that they fail to achieve their main goal of cutting world-heating carbon emissions? Our EV mythbusters series has looked at some of the most persistent criticisms of electric cars, ranging from car fires to battery mining, range anxiety to cost concerns. This article asks: do electric cars really produce fewer carbon emissions than petrol or diesel? In the US, the Florida senator Rick Scott said there was "ample evidence to suggest that EVs are not as clean as people are being led to believe and folks deserve to know the truth". He and other Republican colleagues introduced the (suggestively named) "Directing Independent Research To Yield Carbon Assessment Regarding Electric Vehicles (DIRTY CAR EV) Act", which tried to call for analysis of the carbon footprint of vehicles. A recent article in the UK's Daily Mail reported that "the environmental benefit of electric cars may never be felt" because many electric vehicles "will never hit their mileage target as owners upgrade to newer models, leaving swathes of used electric cars sitting unwanted on garage forecourts". But it is not only the righting press. In June, the Guardian published an article by the actor Rowan Atkinson in which he said he felt "duped" by EVs' carbon claims and that the reality was "very different", citing Volvo research suggesting greenhouse gas emissions during production of an electric car are almost 70% higher than when manufacturing a petrol one. "It seems a perverse choice of hardware with which to lead the automobile's fight against the climate crisis," Atkinson wrote. Any assessment of carbon emissions associated with a product needs to look at its whole life cycle, from manufacture to scrapping (and, hopefully, recycling). Many claims about electric cars' supposedly worse environmental toll focus on manufacturing and ignore the actual use of the cars. The grain of truth in the criticism is that EVs do indeed take significantly more energy to manufacture. Battery production requires large amounts of electricity to heat ovens to bake electrode materials, and to charge and discharge the battery to prepare it for use. While electricity can be produced with zero emissions, most countries still burn carbon-heavy fossil fuels to turn generators. Analysis by the Argonne National Laboratory in Illinois, cited by the US Environmental Protection Agency, suggests that manufacturing battery cars produces about 60% more carbon emissions than their fossil fuel cousins. That means that electric cars start with a big carbon disadvantage, sometimes described as a "carbon debt". However, Eoin Devane, a senior analyst for surface transport at the Climate Change Committee, the UK government's climate science adviser, said: "If you look at the data, that 'carbon debt' is paid off within about two years of driving the vehicle." The vast majority of fossil fuel cars' carbon footprint comes in use, when exhaust pipes constantly spew carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. Transport & Environment (T&E), a campaign group, calculates that a new petrol car will produce about 27 tonnes if driven for 100,000 kilometres (62,000 miles), and 49 tonnes over 200,000km. Electric cars, by contrast, use less energy and can charge from zero-carbon sources. Just how much

greener electric cars can be in operation depends on how much renewable electricity is used in local grids. Transport & Environment has a handy online calculator that allows you to play with the grid, choosing between different countries' energy mixes and whether the battery was made in carbon-heavy China or greener Sweden. Where the lines cross indicates how many miles are needed for a battery car to win on carbon emissions. Lucien Mathieu, T&E's cars director, said that even if you choose a worst-case scenario — vehicles made and driven with electricity largely from coal — the electric car will win out after about 70,000km (about six years of driving). "The more you drive an electric car, the better it gets," he said. The picture for electric cars will improve as power from the wind and the sun replace gas and oil, reducing carbon emissions from generating electricity. Colin Walker, the head of transport at the Energy and Climate Intelligence Unit thinktank, said: "Even if you have a really dirty grid, EVs are still better for the environment. That will keep going as the grid gets cleaner and cleaner." We also need to take into account the future of the technologies. Auke Hoekstra, an energy transition researcher at the Eindhoven University of Technology, said emissions from fossil fuel cars cannot fall much further, meaning they are not a viable technology for a zero-emissions world. Yet battery development is still in relative infancy, and is likely to tip the balance further in favour of electric cars. Batteries are "a good endgame solution" for the transition to net zero, Hoekstra said. "The gasoline engine is basically going nowhere." Batteries are not the only way to get cars to net zero. You can fill them with "e-fuels" — petrol made with carbon from the air, hydrogen from water, and green electricity. That technology works and will probably be used to power classic cars long into the future. Other people advocate using the hydrogen in fuel cells to run a motor. However, in either case the energy efficiency is drastically lower than using that electricity directly, and the fuel is likely to be needed for planes, which are much harder to decarbonise. And there was an important point in Atkinson's Guardian article: replacing an old, little-used car with a brand new electric car may not make sense because of the "carbon debt". "If the vehicle is not being regularly used there is certainly a case to wait until the point you're going to replace it anyway," said the CCC's Devane. However, he and others cautioned that any calculation of relative carbon savings for individuals would be complicated. And, Hoekstra added, "not having an electric car is better for the environment" if you can rely on public transport instead. The scientific consensus is overwhelming: on any realistic like-for-like comparison a battery car will be cleaner than its petrol or diesel equivalent. Burning fossil fuels to make and drive electric cars will still cause emissions, but at a lower level than inefficient fossil fuel engines. That is true of today's grid (in richer economies, at least) but in tomorrow's grid the benefits will grow as long as countries continue to shift away from coal and gas to generate electricity. Putting batteries in cars so far appears to be the only practical way to shift the tens of millions of light vehicles sold every year towards net zero emissions.

## Ski Prices Rise But Skiers Keep Coming, for Now



ALTENMARKT (Dispatches) - In the heart of the Austrian Alps, workers at the world's leading ski maker chum out pair after pair for international clients who are undeterred by the sport's snowballing costs. Atomic — which raised prices by 5 per cent compared to last year — made record sales of €277 million (US\$303 million) in 2022 and is on course to surpass that figure this year. Austrian ski lift operators have also hiked prices this year, in line with other resorts throughout the Alps. But skiers keep coming, for now. "Now they want to have the best products, they want to have the best skis, the best boots, everything best," Atomic CEO Wolfgang Mayrhofer told AFP in an interview. Atomic — a subsidiary of Finnish firm Amer Sports, which was bought by a Chinese consortium — employs some 1,000 people and produces 550,000 pairs of skis per year. It produces skis in a factory in the small town of Altenmarkt, near Salzburg, and another one in southern Bulgaria. A pair of Atomic skis costs anywhere between several hundred to several thousand euros. The company has profited from an "outdoor sports boom" in recent years, as well as growth in the sale of helmets and other protective gear, Mayrhofer said. Atomic's clientele includes people with second homes in the Alps who drive around in "huge SUVs", as well as tourists flying in from abroad and renting skis, he said. It's not just skis that have become more expensive. On the mountains around Altenmarkt, downhill skiers are paying up to 8.5 per cent more for their lift passes this season, said Christoph Eisinger, managing director of Ski Amade, as resorts pass on high energy and other costs. A record 58,000 season passes have already been sold for the area, up from 54,000 last year. A season pass costs €70 per adult in pre-sales. On the slopes, skiers told AFP they were feeling the pinch but wanted to keep

enjoying their hobby. "I would rather save elsewhere because skiing is really our sport," German holidaymaker Andrea Mentges, 42, said as she put on her skis outside the cable car station on the 1,906-metre (6,253-foot) Planai mountain. Costs are expected to rise further as climate change means greater reliance on expensive man-made snow while low-lying ski areas get squeezed out, said Oliver Fritz, senior economist at the Austrian Institute of Economic Research (WIFO). Fritz said "last chance tourism" may be fuelling demand. "Maybe not consciously, but unconsciously, people are already aware that skiing is extremely endangered by climate change and that they should take advantage of the opportunity now," he told AFP. A study conducted by market researcher Manova, which interviewed some 3,000 respondents online in Austria, Germany and Switzerland in September, found that financial reasons and a lack of snow were the top two reasons people skied less or not at all last year. Half of the world's ski resorts are in Europe, where they generate about US\$30 billion per year in revenue and play a key role in sustaining local economies. At current rates of greenhouse gas emissions, 90 per cent of Europe's ski resorts will eventually face critical shortages of natural snow, researchers reported in the journal Nature Climate Change in August. One of Europe's largest ski areas, Ski Amade's 25 resorts in western Austria can cover 90 per cent of slopes with artificial snow as long as temperatures are near freezing levels, helping it survive ever warmer winters due to climate change. "We are constantly improving our snowmaking systems," Eisinger told AFP, adding he was "very confident to be able to ensure very good ski operations" in the next 20 to 30 years.

# IRAN NEWS



## Indian Gov't Says IMF Debt Warning a Worst Case Scenario

NEW DELHI (Reuters) - The Indian government said on Friday a warning from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) that the country's debt to GDP ratio could hit 100% was a worst-case scenario, and not a "fait accompli". The IMF, in a so-called article IV review, said India's general government debt, which includes federal and state government debt, could be 100% of GDP under adverse circumstances by fiscal 2028. India's finance ministry said this was "a worst-case scenario and is not fait accompli". India's debt to GDP ratio, which was 81% in 2022/23, may decline to below 70% in the same period under favourable circumstances, the IMF report also said, according to the ministry. "Therefore, any interpretation that the report implies that General Government debt would exceed 100% of GDP in the medium term is misconstrued," the ministry added.

## Japan Strives to Control Debt in Face of Rising Rates



TOKYO (Reuters) - Japan's finance minister said he would strive to contain the risk of runaway debt after unveiling an annual budget as speculation mounts the central bank will shift away from more than two decades of ultra-easy monetary policy. The world's third-largest economy is under pressure to restore its fiscal health after prolonged stimulus and spending worsened a national debt that is the heaviest in the industrialised world. In calculating borrowing costs, the government adopted a higher interest rates estimate - 1.9% from the current 1.1% - in the budget plan for the coming fiscal year, which would mark the first increase in 17 years. "When we return to life with interest rates, and if interest rates continue to rise to push up interest payments, that could affect fiscal management, squeezing policy outlay," Shunichi Suzuki told reporters after the government crafted the fiscal 2024/25 budget. "The government needs to minimise such risks. To achieve that, we must limit bond issuance and curb interest payments for the future through efforts such as securing stable funding sources and strike a balance in compiling budgets." The budget for the fiscal year that starts in April is estimated at 112.07 trillion yen (\$787 billion), down 2% from the current year's initial amount of 114.4 trillion yen. The budget is still above 110 trillion yen for two straight years, inflated by the cost of military outlay to deal with threats from China and North Korea and welfare costs for Japan's ageing population. The plan shows its debt dependence at 31.2%, meaning new bond sales account for one third of the budget. More than two decades of super-low interest rates have loosened fiscal discipline in a country whose public debt is more than double the size of the economy as a result of rounds of fiscal stimulus. "The bulk of spending cuts comes from reduction of COVID-led emergency reserves. Excluding such factors, spending reform made little headway," Takahide Kiuchi, economist at Nomura Research Institute, said.



## Foreign Arrivals in Türkiye Hit Record 46.7m Before Yearend

ANKARA (Dispatches) - The number of foreign tourists arriving in Türkiye rose to a record high as of November, official data showed, leaving the country with a month to go to build on the peak in a buoyant year for the critical industry. Foreign arrivals surged 10.82% year-over-year from January through November to 46.7 million, surpassing its pre-pandemic level of 42.9 million, the Culture and Tourism Ministry said. Combined with over 6 million Turkish citizens living abroad, the number of visitors rose to 52.74 million in the first eleven months of the year. In November alone, Türkiye attracted 2.5 million foreign tourists, falling 1% at an annualized pace, marking the first decline since the pandemic, the data showed. The figure still exceeded the pre-pandemic period level of 2.2 million in November 2019. Tourism is a critical source of revenue for Türkiye as President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and his government focus on reducing the current account deficit to tackle stubborn inflation. Last year's complete rebound from the pandemic fallout saw the number of tourists near a record, generating all-time high revenues and prompting the government to raise its annual estimates. The government anticipated a total of 60 million arrivals this year. Tourism income rose over 20% from a year ago to \$42 billion in the January-September period, according to official data. This year's momentum has been driven by an influx of holidaymakers

from Europe, particularly Germany and the United Kingdom, besides arrivals from Russia, mainly due to flight restrictions imposed by Western nations over Moscow's invasion of Ukraine. Nearly 6.1 million Russians arrived in the first 11 months to top the list among nations, up from 4.9 million last year. Germany followed closely at almost 6 million, while the United Kingdom ranked third at 3.7 million, the data showed. At 245,493, Russians made up 9.72% of all foreign visitors in November, followed by Germans at 244,005, Bulgarians at 222,884, Iranians at 203,618, and Georgians at 125,236. Istanbul welcomed 34.4% of all foreign visitors, or 16 million in the 11 months. The famed resort city of Antalya hosted 31% or 14.5 million tourists. Edirne followed with a 9.3% share or 4.4 million visitors. The January-November arrivals surpassed that of the whole of 2022, when some 44.6 million tourists arrived, an 80.3% year-over-year increase and just shy of the earlier peak of 45.1 million in 2019. Income climbed 53.4% to a record high of nearly \$46.3 billion as the lingering effects of the pandemic dissipated and Russian arrivals skyrocketed after Moscow invaded Ukraine on Feb. 24. Tourism contributes about 10% to Türkiye's gross domestic product (GDP). In addition, around 1.7 million people worked in accommodation and food services in 2022 - about 5% of total employment.

## Russia's Economic Growth to Slow in 2024



MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russia's economic growth is set to slow in 2024, hampered in particular by double-digit interest rates throughout the year as the Bank of Russia seeks to subdue stubbornly high inflation, a Reuters poll showed. Russia's gross domestic product is expected to outperform early expectations and grow 3.1% this year, the average prediction of 15 analysts and economists polled by Reuters showed, rebounding from a 2.1% contraction in 2022. But in 2024, growth, which has been boosted this year by soaring government spending, particularly on increased military production, is expected to slow to 1.1%. High interest rates are weighing on growth prospects. The Bank of Russia raised its key interest rate to 16% last week and though it said the rate hiking cycle was near completion, borrowing costs are set to remain elevated for several quarters. "The rate is now, of course, prohibitive," said German Gref, CEO of dominant lender Sberbank, planning for rates still above 10% at the end of next year. "It has sharply reduced not only corporate lending, but even consumer lending." The poll showed analysts expect rates at 12% by end-2024. "We believe the opportunity to lower the key rate will only open up in the middle of next year, when inflation will steadily slow down," said Mikhail Vasilyev, chief analyst at Sovcombank. Inflation, which the central bank targets at 4%, is seen ending this year 7.6% and slowing to 5.4% by end-2024. Soaring prices for eggs led President Vladimir Putin to issue a rare apology last week, as the country's poorest struggle with painful price increases.

## U.S. Inflation Decelerating in Boost to Economy

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - U.S. prices fell in November for the first in more than 3-1/2 years, pushing the annual increase in inflation further below 3%, and boosting financial market expectations of an interest rate cut from the Federal Reserve next March. The report from the Commerce Department on Friday also showed underlying inflation pressures continuing to subside. Cooling inflation left more income at the disposal of households, helping to underpin consumer spending and the overall economy as the year winds down. This was yet another data set showcasing the durability of the economic expansion, thanks to a resilient labor market. The economy has defied dire predictions of recession from economists and some business executives going back to late 2022. "Fed Chair (Jerome) Powell couldn't have asked for a better present this year," said Sal Guatieri, a senior economist at BMO Capital Markets in Toronto. "So far at least, the endgame is turning out better than the Fed or nearly anyone could have imagined at the start of the year. While the Fed won't rush into cutting rates, it's likely now just a matter of time." Inflation, as measured by the personal consumption expenditures (PCE) price index, fell 0.1% last month, the Commerce Department's Bureau of Economic Analysis said. That was the first monthly decline in the PCE price index since April 2020 and followed an unchanged reading in October. Food prices edged down 0.1% and energy prices dropped 2.7%. In the 12 months through November, the PCE price index increased 2.6% after rising 2.9% in October. October marked the first time since March 2021 that the annual PCE price index was below 3%. Economists polled by Reuters had forecast the PCE price index unchanged on the month and rising 2.8% year-over-year. Excluding the volatile food and energy components, the PCE price index rose 0.1% in November, matching October's gain. The so-called core PCE price index advanced 3.2% year-over-year, the smallest rise since April 2021, after increasing 3.4% in October. The Fed tracks the PCE price measures for its 2% inflation target. The government reported on Thursday that core PCE inflation increased at a 2.0% annualized rate in the third quarter. That, combined with November's mild gain, put the six-month core PCE inflation rate at 1.9%. Monthly inflation readings of 0.2% on a sustainable basis are needed to bring inflation back to the Fed's target, economists say. Financial markets saw a roughly 75% chance of a rate cut at the Fed's March 19-20 policy meeting, according to CME Group's FedWatch Tool. Subsiding inflation is brightening the mood for many Americans, with a separate report from the University of Michigan on Friday showing consumer sentiment soaring in December, reversing all declines from the previous four months. President Joe Biden, whose popularity has been hurt by unhappiness over the high cost of living, welcomed the news. "This reflects the hard work we did together to fix our supply chains and the surge of Americans into the workforce. It's remarkable progress," Biden said in a statement. Stocks on Wall Street



were trading higher. The dollar fell against basket of currencies. U.S. Treasury prices rose. The U.S. central bank held rates steady last week and policymakers signaled in new economic projections that the historic monetary policy tightening engineered over the last two years is at an end and lower borrowing costs are coming in 2024. Since March 2022, the Fed has hiked its policy rate by 525 basis points to the current 5.25%-5.50% range. With the labor market still fairly tight, wages jumped 0.6% last month, more than offsetting the drag on personal income from decreases in government aid, including food stamps, social security and Medicaid. Personal income rose 0.4%. The saving rate ticked up to 4.1% from 4.0% in the prior month, which bodes well for spending. Income at the disposal of households after accounting for inflation and taxes rose 0.4% after gaining 0.3% in October. That allowed Americans to open their wallets at the start of the holiday shopping season. Consumer spending, which accounts for more than two-thirds of U.S. economic activity, increased 0.2% last month after rising 0.1% in October. When adjusted for inflation, overall consumer spending increased 0.3% after nudging up 0.1% in October. The pick up in the so-called real consumer spending added to data this week, including single-family housing starts and building permits, in suggesting the economy was regaining speed after appearing to falter at the start of the fourth quarter. That was reinforced by a third report from the Commerce Department's Census Bureau showing orders for durable goods jumped 5.4% in November, recouping October's 5.1% drop. Though a fourth report from the Census Bureau showed new home sales plunging 12.2% to a seasonally adjusted annual rate of 590,000 units in November, a one-year low, the drop is likely temporary amid a dearth of previously owned houses on the market. Mortgage rates continue to decline from 23-year highs, which should help new home sales. Gross domestic product growth estimates for the fourth quarter range from as low as a 1.1% annualized rate to as high as a 2.8% pace. The economy grew at a 4.9% rate in the third quarter.

## Investors Favor India Over China as World's Second Biggest Economy Stutters



NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - The world's biggest sovereign wealth funds and public pension schemes are backing India over China as fears grow over Beijing's interventions in companies operating in the region. India is the most popular emerging market with investors, favoured by two-fifths of the 100 funds surveyed by the Official Monetary and Financial Institutions Forum (OMFIF), a think tank. China won the backing of less than a quarter of the managers, putting it on a par with Brazil in joint-second place. It means China risks losing out on capital from some of the most powerful investors in the world with the funds surveyed having a combined financial firepower of \$25.9 trillion (£20.5 trillion). Almost three-quarters said they are put off investing in China by the regulatory environment, with the same share blaming geopolitical factors. The biggest remaining reason to put money into China is for diversification of investments, and because the country is included in benchmark indices. This means fund managers investing in emerging market trackers have exposure to China by default, rather than making an active decision to back the nation. In contrast to previous years' surveys, not a single fund said it is investing in China with the expectation of higher relative returns, because of the increasing importance of the country in the global economy, or because it has a positive outlook for Chinese growth. At the start of 2023, economists had hoped for a strong rebound from China as authorities in Beijing belatedly ditched their strict Covid lockdown measures. But instead the property crisis has deepened and growth has disappointed, deterring investors. Craig Thorburn, a director of Future Fund, which manages Australia's wealth, said it is cutting back on investment in China. In a submission to OMFIF he said: "We reduced our exposure to China, reflecting increased intervention in market sectors and the accumulation of challenges to their economic growth model." Nikhil Sanghani at OMFIF, said large, long-term funds will not typically liquidate their investments overnight, but are now likely to make fewer new investments in China. He added: "What is interesting is the shift in tone. It is all about intentions. They are becoming more hesitant or cautious on China. It tallies up with the general mood in financial markets more broadly towards China."



## China Identifies Second Set of Projects in \$140b Spending Plan

SHANGHAI (Dispatches) - China's top planning body said on Saturday it had identified a second batch of public investment projects, including flood control and disaster relief programmes, under a bond issuance and investment plan announced in October to boost the economy. With the latest tranche, China has now earmarked more than 800 billion yuan of its 1 trillion yuan (\$140 billion) in additional government bond issuance in the fourth quarter, as it focuses on fiscal steps to shore up the flagging economy. The National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) said in a statement on Saturday it had identified 9,600 projects with planned investment of more than 560 billion yuan. China's economy, the world's second largest, is struggling to regain its footing post-COVID-19 as policymakers grapple with tepid consumer demand, weak exports, falling foreign investment and a deepening real estate crisis. The 1 trillion yuan in additional bond issuance will widen China's 2023 budget deficit ratio to around 3.8 percent from 3 percent, the state-run Xinhua news agency has said. "Construction of the projects will improve China's flood control system, emergency response mechanism and disaster relief capabilities, and better protect people's lives and property, so it is very significant," the NDRC said. The agency said it will coordinate with other government bodies to make sure that funds are allocated speedily for investment and that high standards of quality are maintained in project construction.

## EU to join US coalition patrol of Red Sea

The European Union said tonight that member countries will contribute to the US-led Red Sea patrol aimed at protecting Zionist regime shipping in the Red Sea. Iran Press/ Europe: The EU's top foreign policy official, Josep Borrell, said the union will join the US-led coalition, which was started to protect the Israeli regime ships in the Red Sea. The United Kingdom already joined the effort on Tuesday, sending its HMS Diamond, one of the Royal Navy's most advanced warships, to the region, the Independent reported.



## Study of Former Football Players Shows Brain Changes



NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Head injuries related to football might be tied to markers of dementia like brain shrinkage and decreased blood flow to the brain, a new study of former pro and college players reports. The study looked at signs of injury to the brain's white matter, called white matter hyperintensities. These are caused by reduced blood flow to white matter, which functions as the information highway connecting different parts of the brain. "Studies have shown that athletes exposed to repetitive head impacts can have increased white matter hyperintensity burden in their brains," said researcher Michael Alosco, a neuropsychologist at Boston University Chobanian & Avedisian School of Medicine. "White matter hyperintensities are easily seen on MRI as markers of injury of various causes," he continued in a news release. "We know these markers are more common as people age and with medical conditions such as high blood pressure, but these results provide initial insight that they may be related to multiple aspects of brain damage from repetitive head impacts." For the study, Alosco's team compared brain scans of 120 former pro football players and 60 former college players against 60 men who never played football and had no history of concussion.



## Russia's Gas Cudgel a Big Test for European Unity

ANKARA (Dispatches) - After months of sweeping sanctions, Russia has started using its most powerful export as leverage to counterattack and hit Europe where it hurts the most. The decision to cut the flow of natural gas to two NATO members marks Russia's toughest response yet to Western sanctions imposed for its invasion of Ukraine - and is all but certain to test Europe's solidarity. The halt in gas supplies to Poland and Bulgaria on April 26 after they refused to pay in rubles and Moscow's threat to cut off other countries as well if they fail to agree to its new payment arrangement has revived Europe's supply woes. The move, denounced by European leaders as "blackmail," has exposed the continent's weakness and divisions. But whether it will further divide European Union members or will it ensure greater solidarity remains to be seen. "It's a classical divide and rule strategy," said Simone Tagliapietra, a senior fellow at the Bruegel think tank in Brussels. The decision "is unprecedented and illustrates Russia's use of gas as a geopolitical weapon," Tagliapietra told Daily Sabah. "This ultimately is a key target of Russia's decision on the ruble payment: To divide European countries and try to leverage this division," he added. The escalation follows a decree issued by Russian President Vladimir Putin last month requiring that countries Moscow deems "unfriendly" must pay for gas in rubles under a new payment scheme. The mechanism obliges buyers to deposit euros or dollars into an account at Gazprombank, which is then converted into rubles, place the proceeds in another account owned by the foreign buyer and transfer the payment in Russian currency to Gazprom. The situation has left EU member states divided over whether sanctions would be violated if they used Russia's mechanism. The difficulty for European buyers is that the decree requires buyers to also open a ruble account at Gazprombank into which their euro or dollar payments would be deposited after conversion into the Russian currency. The decree would only consider the payment to be complete after the gas-to-rubles conversion is done - a transaction that would involve Russia's central bank, which is subject to EU sanctions. EU officials, per news agencies, last week said that if EU buyers declare their payments for gas are completed once the payment has been made in euros and before it is converted into rubles, sanctions would not be breached. Officials said that opening a ruble account at Gazprombank may breach the EU sanctions. Poland and Bulgaria "had the right" to oppose the new payment mechanism and stuck to their original contracts to pay for gas, according to Maciej Zaniewicz, an energy policy analyst at the Polish Institute of International Affairs (PISM). "The contract specifically mentions the currency in which payments are made, and these are dollars or euros," Zaniewicz told Daily Sabah. Other EU countries might follow the same fate as Poland and Bulgaria, as their own payment dates will come, depending on their approach, Tagliapietra said. And this is the key issue, he noted, adding: "Will all European countries follow the EU indication to only pay in euros/dollars as indicated in the contracts? Or will some decide to go their own way, complying with the Russian request?" Russia supplies about 40% of Europe's natural gas, mostly by pipeline. Deliveries last year were around 155 billion cubic meters (bcm), 52 bcm of that via Ukraine or nearby routes. Alternative routes include the Yamal-Europe pipeline, which crosses Belarus and Poland to Germany, and Nord Stream 1, which runs under the Baltic Sea to Germany. Many European countries have cut their reliance on Russian gas in recent years and the EU has said it wants to slash imports by two-thirds this year and end its reliance on Russian supplies over five years through alternative sources, wind and solar, and conservation. "The EU countries are quite heavily dependent on Russian gas," Zaniewicz said. Plans are being prepared but he suggested an embargo on this commodity is not currently under consideration. The gas halt does not immediately put neither Poland nor Bulgaria into dire trouble, according to Tagliapietra and Zaniewicz. Poland has been preparing for this scenario for years and Bulgaria uses small quantities of gas, which can be replaced relatively easily, said Zaniewicz. Add to that the fact that the continent is heading into summer, making gas less essential for households. Also, both Poland and Bulgaria's contracts were expected to end later this year - and both countries have said they do not want to renew them. The contract with Gazprom supplies around half of Poland's annual needs - 10 bcm versus total consumption of over 20 bcm. It can cope with this thanks to liquefied natural gas (LNG) and storage being 76% full, said Tagliapietra. Supplies from Russia are to be replaced by imports from Norway through the Baltic Pipe gas pipeline, Zaniewicz noted. "It is scheduled to open in October 2022 and will reach its full capacity of 10 bcm - the same as supplies from Russia - in January 2023," he said. "Until then, Poland's demand will be ensured by imports from the LNG terminal, Germany, Lithuania and Slovakia. Poland also has a very high filling of its storage facilities," Zaniewicz added. Bulgaria consumes about 3 bcm of gas per year, about 90% of which comes from Gazprom imports via Turkey. The country also gets small quantities of gas from Azerbaijan. Bulgaria's gas storage of 550 million cubic meters is only 17.6% full, according to operator data. "As gas is predominantly used for heating (gas makes 60% of heating and only 5% of power), this is not a short-term issue," Tagliapietra said. The problem will be the next winter, he noted, but said the

country can get gas from Romania and will soon start importing 1 bcm per year from Azerbaijan via a new interconnector linking it with Greece. "Winter is the best ally of Mr. Putin. The EU cannot arrive in October 2022 unprepared," Tagliapietra stressed. Global energy systems avoided a severe crisis during the winter of 2021/22, but mostly because temperatures were far warmer than normal across most of the northern hemisphere, reducing heating demand. "We need a strong and coordinated EU response on joint gas purchasing, storage refilling, EU energy market design - and of course, smart sanctions on Russian oil and gas flows to Europe," Tagliapietra noted. Bulgaria and Poland also are transit countries for Russian gas, he said. Gazprom has clarified that in the event of "unauthorized withdrawal" of Russian gas from transit volumes to third countries, supplies for transit will be reduced by this volume. The gas cutoff and Moscow's threat that other countries could be next has sent shivers of worry through the EU, whose 27 nations have not been able yet to agree on the full embargo on Russian imports. Germany, the largest economy on the continent, and Italy are among Europe's biggest consumers of Russian natural gas. They have though been taking steps to reduce their dependence on Moscow. Berlin is looking to build LNG import terminals that would take years, and Italy has reached deals with Algeria, Azerbaijan, Angola and Congo for gas supplies. Germany previously said it could wean itself off Russian oil by the end of the year but had rejected the idea of an immediate full ban on imports. It, however, last week signaled it could join other member states as it hoped to find a way to replace Russian oil with supplies from other sources soon. "It comes as no surprise that the Kremlin uses fossil fuels to try to blackmail us," European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said last week. "Today, the Kremlin failed once again in his attempt to sow division amongst member states. The era of Russian fossil fuel in Europe is coming to an end," she stressed. Russia's move "only accelerated the process of becoming independent from Russia," Zaniewicz noted. "Russia's aim was, therefore, not to hit Poland or Bulgaria. It was to intimidate the EU not to impose an embargo on Russian oil, as in response Russia would cut off the EU's gas supply," he added. Tagliapietra said European governments now need to deploy all energy measures they have at their disposal, both on the supply and demand side, to ensure the security of supply. "Each billion cubic meter of gas not consumed, is now important," he noted. The EU has sought a united front in opposing Moscow's push to adopt its new gas payments system, but Zaniewicz said "some companies got scared and we can already see that they have agreed to pay in rubles for gas." Hungary was the first to take this decision. It is currently the only country in the EU that pursues a pro-Russian policy, including in the field of energy," he noted. "However, the peculiarity of Hungary is that it nevertheless supports successive EU sanctions against Russia. The same may be true of the sanctions on Russian oil that are currently under consideration." The EU, including Hungary, can relatively quickly replace Russian oil with supplies from other countries, he said, adding that a ban on its imports "would be very painful for Russia." On Europe's options, Zaniewicz recalled that the European Commission in early March presented a proposal for a plan to reduce dependence on Russian gas. This involves increasing imports of LNG, boosting shipments from Azerbaijan, but also increasing the production of biomethane, he said. In addition, it is planned to reduce consumption by replacing gas with renewable sources and increasing energy efficiency. In addition to the commission's plans, Zaniewicz said the EU may also increase the use of nuclear and coal power plants and use liquid fuels in some gas power plants. "However, even taking all these steps into account, if Russia were to cut off gas supplies to the EU completely, it would not be possible to replace about one-third of the gas imported from it this year. This would require a reduction in industrial use, for example," he noted. But still, Russia would suffer an even greater loss in case it stopped all flows to Europe, Zaniewicz suggested. "Revenues from gas and oil exports to the EU exceed Russia's war budget. This would be a huge blow to Russia." All in all, from a strategic perspective, he said Russia has shot itself in the foot. "While it may frighten some EU countries in the short term, it only reinforces their view that Russia is an unreliable partner in the long term," he noted. "By canceling the contract with Poland and Bulgaria, Russia has shown that no country can be sure that it will honor its commitments. By doing so, it has ruined the image it had been developing for years in the EU as a reliable gas supplier," he explained. Furthermore, he said the cutoff has given a basis for Poland and Bulgaria to seek compensation for the breach of contract through international arbitration. "Poland already has experience of winning arbitrations with Gazprom, for example, over its abuse of its monopolistic position," he noted. In the long term, Zaniewicz said Russia is eliminating itself from the European gas market. "We must remember that Europe accounts for around 70% of its gas exports. This gas cannot be sent to China, for example, because there is not enough infrastructure for this," he added. Ensuring solidarity among EU countries will now be fundamental, Tagliapietra said, especially as the continent will need to replenish its gas storage, possibly without Russian gas. "This is key to make sure Russia's divide and rule strategy fails."

## High Blood Pressure, Cholesterol Before Age 55 Can Boost Heart Disease Risk

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Having high cholesterol and high blood pressure before age 55 has a lasting impact on your risk of heart disease in later life - even if you subsequently lower your levels, new research indicates. The study was published Wednesday in PLOS One. Researchers found a consistent association between exposure to higher low-density lipoprotein - the "bad" cholesterol - and systolic blood pressure with increased odds of coronary heart disease in people age 55 or younger, 55 to 60, 61 to 65 and older than 65 years. Exposure to elevated LDL and blood pressure in early to midlife increased the risk of heart disease independent of later-life LDL and blood pressure levels. The study's lead author, Dr. Nelson Wang, a research fellow at the George Institute for Global Health and Royal Prince Alfred Hospital in Sydney, told UPI via email that "we undertook this study because we were interested in the impact of elevated cholesterol and blood pressure during young adulthood on coronary disease." He added: "It is possible that the link between these risk factors and heart disease differs according to stage of life. Therefore, we conducted a study to look at the impact of genetically mediated cholesterol and blood pressure levels on risk of coronary heart disease according to age." Researchers conducted an analysis from the UK Biobank, including 136,648 participants for LDL cholesterol, 135,431 participants for systolic blood pressure and 24,052 cases of coronary heart disease. They evaluated the effect of duration of exposure to the risk factors on the risk of coronary heart disease stratified by age. "This study provides further evidence for the cumulative risk factor hypothesis, which suggests that the risk of coronary heart disease accumulates throughout life and is proportional to the duration of exposure to high blood pressure and cholesterol," Wang said. "Therefore, we need lifelong risk factor control beginning early in life. This is because elevated blood pressure and cholesterol levels during young adulthood will increase coronary risk later in life, even if risk factors are later well controlled." Dr. Gordon Huggins, a cardiologist at Tufts Medical Center in Boston, who was not involved in the study, told UPI in a telephone interview that "essentially, you're never too young to start making improvements in your cholesterol and blood pressure because the benefits will be far greater than waiting and then relying on medications." He added that "the risk of coronary

heart disease is dependent upon the cumulative burden of risk including cholesterol and blood pressure across the lifespan." Increasing evidence suggests that atherosclerosis begins early - in the teens and 20s, and progresses to variable degrees in the 20s and 30s, Dr. Matthew Tomey, an assistant professor of medicine at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai and a cardiologist at Mount Sinai Fuster Heart Hospital in New York, told UPI via email. "Disease linked to atherosclerosis is the leading cause of death in the United States. About half of Americans between ages 45 and 84 have atherosclerosis and don't know it," Tomey said. "We need to think more about an individual's aggregate exposure to excess LDL cholesterol across the lifespan." Tomey added: "Imagine if we could do a better job controlling blood pressure and LDL-cholesterol in youth, compounding the rewards of this risk factor control over time. We could decimate incidence of cardiovascular disease, leading to longer, healthier, more active lives on a massive scale." Dr. James Cireddu, medical director of the University Hospitals of Cleveland Harrington Heart & Vascular Institute in Bedford and Richmond, Ohio, said high blood pressure and high cholesterol "are well established risk factors for coronary artery disease that can be impacted by lifestyle modification, including diet and exercise, as well medical therapy." Other important risk factors include advanced age, family history, being male, diabetes mellitus, kidney disease, smoking, obesity and inflammation," said Cireddu, who also is an assistant clinical professor at Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine in Cleveland. It has been known since the 1950s that high cholesterol and high blood pressure are risk factors for coronary heart disease, Dr. Jeffrey Anderson, an interventional cardiologist and professor of cardiovascular research at Intermountain Health in Salt Lake City, told UPI via email. As a result, the study's findings are not surprising, Anderson said, adding that this research provides additional evidence to support beginning treatment for high cholesterol and high blood pressure earlier in life, when the 10-year risk of coronary heart disease is still low. The study "also provides evidence for treatment of older individuals based on cumulative genetic risk over a lifetime rather than simply blood pressure and cholesterol levels at a later age," he said. Both young people and older adults "are relatively undertreated."



## Londoners support Gaza

LONDON (IP) - Different strata of people and supporters of Palestine in Britain came to the streets of London late on Saturday and condemned the continuation of the genocide of Palestinians in Gaza by the Zionist regime. Supporters of Palestine criticized British MPs for supporting the Israeli government, calling it against the will of the people. They accused pro-Israel MPs of betraying themselves. The participants in the 11th week of anti-Zionist protests in the UK emphasized that they would not vote for the candidates who supported the Israeli regime in the upcoming national elections. Supporters of Palestine also gathered in front of stores that supported the Zionist regime, emphasizing the boycott of these stores and Israeli goods. During the anti-Zionist demonstrations in the central streets of London, several British supporters and people called for an end to the Palestinian genocide and a permanent ceasefire in Gaza. "Israel has committed crimes against Palestinians in the past 75 years, now it is necessary to boycott Israeli goods," said the demonstrators. 204

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Public Relations Tel: (+98)(21) 44253450  
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## Rudolph Brings Christmas Gift to Steelers, Bills Maintain Push

MIAMI (Dispatches) - The Pittsburgh Steelers kept their playoff hopes alive and severely damaged the Cincinnati Bengals' chances of making the NFL post-season with a 34-11 win over their AFC North rivals. The Buffalo Bills also remain in contention in the AFC East after eking out a 24-22 win at the Los Angeles Chargers thanks to a late Tyler Bass field goal. Quarterback Mason Rudolph, making his first start of the season for Pittsburgh, threw for 290 yards and two touchdowns as he repaid head coach Mike Tomlin for his decision to promote him over Mitch Trubisky. The Steelers snapped a three-game losing streak with a form-busting victory against a Bengals team that had won their last three. With two games of the regular season remaining, both teams are now on 8-7 as they attempt to clinch a wildcard spot. The Baltimore Ravens have already secured a place in the playoffs as AFC North winners. Steelers receiver George Pickens, who had come in for some intense scrutiny after some poor blocking in last week's loss against Indianapolis, scored both touchdowns as he put up 195 yards on four receptions. Pickens got the Steelers off to a hot start when on the second play of their first possession he grabbed a pass short left from Rudolph, jinked to evade the Bengals defense and then powered away for an 86-yard score. Bengals quarterback Jake Browning, who has coped well deputising for injured starter Joe Burrow, had a tough time, throwing two interceptions in the first half, but the Steelers offense was firing on all cylinders. Calvin Austin extended the lead at the start of the second quarter with a seven-yard run and Najee Harris made it 21-0 with a three-yard rush. A 50-yard field goal from Chris Boswell sent Pittsburgh in with a 24-0 lead at the half. The Bengals needed to come out strong after the interval and they did just that with Browning finding Tee Higgins who accelerated away after the catch for an 80-yard touchdown. A successful two point conversion, with

Browning's shovel pass collected by Joe Mixon reduced the deficit to 16. But the Steelers responded immediately and it was Pickens who delivered again -- Rudolph found him wide left and the speedy receiver powered home for a 66 yard score to make 31-8. The Bengals could only manage a field goal at the close of the third and the Steelers managed out the game well with a Boswell 30-yard field goal rounding off an impressive display. The Steelers travel to Seattle on New Year's Eve before ending their season against the Ravens. The Bengals face Super Bowl champions Kansas City next and then close out the regular season at home to the AFC North's other wildcard contender, the 9-5 Cleveland Browns. The Bills (9-6) have resurrected their season thanks to three straight wins but they were made to work hard for victory at SoFi Stadium by a much improved Chargers. The Chargers fired their coach Brandon Staley after last week's 63-21 defeat to Las Vegas but the first game in charge for interim head coach Giff Smith produced instant improvement. Quarterback Easton Stick snuck in a one yard rush at the start of the second quarter to put the Chargers 10-0 up but they trailed by four at the half after Bills quarterback Josh Allen found Gabe Davis with a 57 yard touchdown pass and then rushed in a two yard score himself. A Cameron Dicker field goal put the Chargers back in front only for Allen to again rush in from short yardage and make it 21-13. But the Chargers edged ahead in the fourth thanks to three field goals from Dicker before a 13 play, 64 yard drive ended with Bass's field goal with 28 seconds left. Ed Oliver sacked Stick for a loss of nine on the first play and the Bills held on for a vital victory. The Bills face the New England Patriots next week before a visit to AFC East leaders Miami on the final day -- a game which, if Miami slip up against Dallas on Sunday and then at the Ravens, could yet be a divisional decider.

## Thiem, Raducanu Headline Australian Open Qualifying Field



LONDON (Dispatches) - Former U.S. Open champions Dominic Thiem and Emma Raducanu will headline the qualifying field for the Australian Open as they look to reignite their careers in 2024 following struggles with injuries. Thiem broke the Grand Slam stranglehold of Roger Federer, Rafa Nadal and Novak Djokovic by winning the 2020 U.S. Open but a wrist injury the following year sidelined him for months, while a series of other fitness issues saw his ranking slide to number 352. The 30-year-old Austrian, now ranked 98th, won his first match at a Grand Slam since 2021 in New York in August before crashing out in the second round. Thiem, who made the Melbourne Park final in 2020, can still gain direct entry into the main draw of the tournament if one player pulls out. Raducanu missed out on an Australian Open wildcard and will now have to take a similar path as her run 2021 Flushing Meadows run when she became the first player in the Open Era to win a major after beginning in the qualifying rounds. The 21-year-old Briton, who is now ranked number 299, will gear up for the first Grand Slam of the year by playing at the Auckland Classic having fought her way back to fitness following operations on both wrists and an ankle in May. Raducanu is five spots outside the main draw cut-off. The qualifying tournament will begin on Jan. 8 while the main draw is from Jan. 14-28.

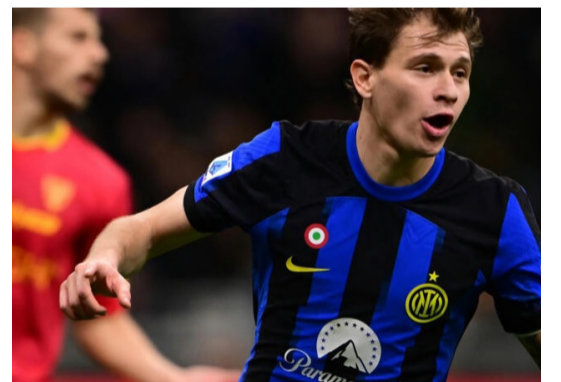
## Arsenal Hold Liverpool to Seal Top Spot at Christmas

LIVERPOOL (Dispatches) - Arsenal ensured they will spend Christmas Day on top of the Premier League as they held title rivals Liverpool to a pulsating 1-1 draw at Anfield. Mikel Arteta's side took an early lead through Gabriel Magalhaes, but Mohamed Salah hauled Liverpool level before the interval. A draw was arguably the right result after both sides flexed their muscles to show why they have emerged as the leading contenders to win the title. Chasing a first title since 2004, Arsenal sit one point clear of second placed Liverpool heading into the festive period. The team that has topped the Premier League at Christmas has gone on to win the title in six of the past 10 seasons, but the draw on Merseyside was also a boost to the chasing pack. Third placed Aston Villa are level on points with Liverpool, fourth placed Tottenham are three points further back, while champions Manchester City are six points adrift of the leaders with a game in hand. Liverpool are unbeaten in their past 11 games against Arsenal at Anfield. However, coming a week after their goalless stalemate against Manchester United, this was another frustrating result for Jurgen Klopp's team. "Oh my god, how strong are they? The good news is we are good as well," Klopp said. "We pass instead of shoot, four or five times we do that, it's a lesson. But generally the game is great." Arsenal weren't completely satisfied either. Last season they led 2-0 at Liverpool but ended up drawing 2-2, a result that started their collapse in the title race. Their failure to hold on this time should not have such a damaging impact, but it was still a missed opportunity. "Proud of the performance but the final pass went astray a few times. That's where the frustration lies," Arsenal forward Bukayo Saka said. Klopp had urged Liverpool fans to give Arsenal the "proper Anfield experience" after saying he was unhappy with the atmosphere during Wednesday's 5-1 rout of West Ham in the League Cup. But Arteta was well aware of the maelstrom lying in wait, likening the visceral Anfield experience to being thrown around in a "washing machine". Responding to Klopp, the Liverpool faithful bellowed their "You'll never walk alone" anthem as loudly as ever before kick-off, but Arsenal took just 30 seconds to show they were unfazed. A flowing move cut open the Liverpool defence and ended with Gabriel Jesus's shot deflecting just over it. It was a warning and Arsenal took the lead after only four minutes. Martin Odegaard delivered a perfect free-kick into the Liverpool area and Gabriel rose to thump his header past Alisson Becker from eight yards. The Brazilian defender celebrated by cupping his hands in his ears in front of the Kop. Anfield was stunned but not silenced. Falling behind was nothing new to Liverpool, who had trailed in eight other Premier League games this season and only lost one of them. Salah took it upon himself to ensure

Liverpool weren't left to rue that debatable decision as the Egyptian conjured a superb 29th minute equalizer. Trent Alexander-Arnold's raking pass picked out Salah down the right flank and he glided away from Oleksandr Zinchenko into the area before smashing a fierce strike past David Raya at his near post.



## Leaders Inter Keep Juve at bay



MILAN (Dispatches) - Inter Milan maintained their four-point lead at the top of Serie A with Saturday's 2-0 win over Lecce, as Napoli crashed to a 2-0 defeat at Roma which the troubled champions finished with nine men. Yann Bissek's first goal in Italy just before half-time at the San Siro and a late finish from Nicolo Barella were enough for Inter to bounce back from cup defeat to Bologna midweek and keep closest challengers Juventus at bay. "We came into the game off the back of a result which made us unhappy because we played well in the cup," said Inzaghi. "It was important to win and that wasn't guaranteed after Wednesday's game, so I'm really happy." The 23-year-old Bissek has had a bumpy start to life at Inter but his header from Hakan Calhanoglu's pinpoint free-kick capped a fine performance at centre-back and sent Inter on the way to a fourth straight league win. Inter are hunting a 20th league title and look in good shape to do that after beating 12th-placed Lecce without injured star striker Lautaro Martinez. Marko Arnautovic's underwhelming display up front highlighted how much Inter's attack relies on 17-goal Martinez, and their unusual impotency allowed Lecce to stay in the game until Barella doubled the hosts' lead in the 78th minute. Arnautovic was surrounded by teammates following that strike as it was his deft flick that sent Barella clean through to net his second of the season and end the match as a contest. "They know I am in a difficult spell," said Arnautovic, who also missed a couple of decent opportunities. "I am close to getting back to my best. They can see it, they talk to me every day, but it's not been easy." Dusan Vlahovic kept Juve just about in touch by heading home the decisive goal in a 2-1 win at Frosinone. Serbia striker Vlahovic, who has had a tricky season, is on six league goals after netting the winner with nine minutes remaining after Jaime Baez had equalised for the hosts following Kenan Yildiz's opener early in his first Juve start. "A striker is obviously not happy when they don't score, or not consistently, but I work hard every day to give something to the team," Vlahovic told DAZN. Napoli fell a whopping 17 points behind Inter after the latest defeat of a disastrous season as Roma reignited their bid for a top four spot. Substitute Lorenzo Pellegrini lashed in the opener in 76th minute of a ill-tempered, scrappy encounter at the Stadio Olimpico -- which featured 13 bookings and two red cards -- before Romelu Lukaku capped the win deep in stoppage time. Jose Mourinho's Roma moved into sixth spot above Napoli, whose star striker Victor Osimhen was one of the two players sent off on the day he signed a long-awaited contract extension until 2026. "We needed to make it a happy Christmas for the fans," said Mourinho to DAZN. "We played very well eleven against eleven, had two great chances early on and were always in control." Roma travel to Juve next weekend and will be boosted by a deserved win which took them to within three points of high-flying Bologna, who will be fourth at Christmas after beating Atalanta 1-0.

## Pistons Slump to Record-Equalling 26th NBA Defeat

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - The Detroit Pistons matched an NBA single-season mark for futility, slumping to a 26th straight defeat in a 126-115 loss to the Nets in Brooklyn. As reigning champions Denver and Eastern Conference contenders Boston and Milwaukee posted comfortable victories, the Pistons matched the league's longest single-season losing streak -- set by the 2010-11 Cleveland Cavaliers and the 2013-14 Philadelphia 76ers. Detroit, an iconic franchise that won NBA titles in 1989, 1990 and 2004 -- hasn't won since October 28. Mikal Bridges scored 29 points with six rebounds and seven assists to lead the Nets -- who had seven players score in double figures. Jaden Ivey scored 23 points and Cade Cunningham added 22 for the Pistons, who coughed up 14 turnovers leading to 22 Nets points. Brooklyn out-scored Detroit 62-42 in the paint and held an 18-9 edge in second-chance points and never trailed after the first quarter. Detroit will try to turn the tables when they play the Nets in Brooklyn again on Tuesday, when a defeat would land them with the single-season record -- and put them one away from matching the longest losing streak ever, the 28-game slide of the 76ers that spanned the 2014-15 and 2015-16 seasons. Pistons owner Tom Gores acknowledged the frustration of fans on Friday in a Zoom call with reporters. Nevertheless, Gores branded frustrated fans' calls to "sell the team" that rang out in Detroit on Thursday "ridiculous." As the Pistons remained mired in misery, Giannis Antetokounmpo scored 28 points to lead Milwaukee to a 130-111 victory over the Knicks in New York, stretching the Bucks' winning streak to seven games. The Greek star added seven rebounds and seven assists while Bobby Portis came off the bench to deliver 23 points and a team-high 11 rebounds for the Bucks, who improved to 22-7. Jalen Brunson scored a game-high 36 points and Julius Randle added 26 for the Knicks, who will try to snap a nine-game losing

streak against the Bucks in their Christmas holiday rematch on Monday, also at Madison Square Garden. Khris Middleton added 20 points for the Bucks, who out-rebounded the Knicks 53-40. The Bucks remained second in the Eastern Conference behind the Boston Celtics, who improved to an NBA-best 22-6 with a 145-108 victory over the Clippers in Los Angeles. Jayson Tatum returned from a one-game injury absence to score 30 points and Jaylen Brown added 24 for Boston, who ended the Clippers' six-game home winning streak. In Charlotte, the Nuggets used a dominant third quarter to take control and held on for a 102-95 victory over the Hornets. Michael Porter Jr. scored 22 points, Nikola Jokic had 18 points, 10 rebounds and nine assists before fouling out late and Denver out-scored the Hornets 30-9 in the third period on the way to a fourth straight win. Jamal Murray added 20 points and 12 rebounds for the Nuggets, who trailed by six at halftime but opened the third quarter on a 25-1 run, the Hornets unable to make a basket until the final minute of the period. Miles Bridges scored 22 points to lead the Hornets, P.J. Washington added 20 off the bench but the Hornets dropped their seventh straight. The Houston Rockets, fueled by a career-high 37 points and 11 rebounds from Alperen Sengun, edged the Pelicans 106-104 in New Orleans. Zion Williamson scored 28 points and Brandon Ingram added 19 for the Pelicans, who led by as many as six in the fourth quarter but were hurt by a pair of late turnovers. The Memphis Grizzlies improved to 3-0 since Ja Morant's return from a 25-game suspension, beating the Hawks 125-119 in Atlanta. Desmond Bane scored 37 points and Morant added 30 with 11 assists for the Grizzlies, who withstood a 30-point, 13-assist double-double from Atlanta's Trae Young. It was Young's seventh straight game with at least 30 points and 10 assists, tying Oscar Robertson for the longest such streak.

