

President Seyed Ebrahim Raisi Congratulated Bangladesh Prime Minister "Sheikh Hasina Wajed" on the Beginning of Her New Term as Prime Minister of Her Country

IRAN NEWS

Saudi Foreign Minister Faisal bin Farhan in His Phone Talks With His Iranian Counterpart Hossein Amir-Abdollahian Assessed the Relations Between Riyadh and Tehran as Expanding

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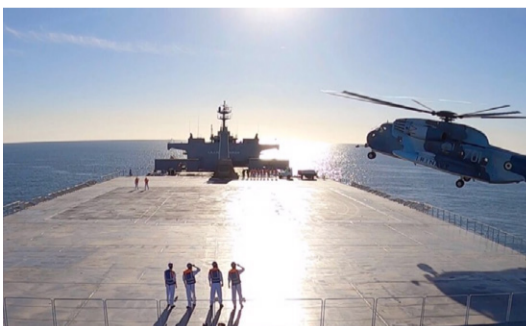
Iranian Economy Expands 4.2% in 2023

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK



TEHRAN - The World Bank, in its latest Global Economic Prospects (GEP) report released on January 9, said the Iranian economy grew by 4.2 percent in 2023, despite a sharp, long-lasting slowdown in the global economy. Based on the WB data, the economic growth of West Asian and North African countries has decreased from 5.8 percent in 2022 to 1.9 percent in 2023, indicating that Iran's gross domestic product (GDP) growth in 2023 has been more than twice the economic growth of this region. "Growth picked up in the Islamic Republic of Iran, as increases in oil production and exports more than offset weak external non-oil demand," the report said. According to the estimates of this international organization, following the global economy, Iran's economic growth is also expected to recede slightly to 3.7 percent in 2024. The Islamic Republic's GDP growth in 2022 was 3.8 percent. The economic growth of Europe and Central Asia, which decreased from 7.1 percent in 2021 to 1.2 percent in 2022, has also grown slightly to 2.7 this year however the figure is seen to fall to 2.4 percent in 2024. According to the report, global growth is projected to slow for the third year in a row—from 2.6 percent last year to 2.4 percent in 2024, almost three-quarters of a percentage point below the average of the 2010s. Developing economies are projected to grow just 3.9 percent, more than one percentage point below the average of the previous decade. "After a disappointing performance last year, low-income countries should grow 5.5 percent, weaker than previously expected. By the end of 2024, people in about one out of every four developing countries and about 40 percent of low-income countries will still be poorer than they were on the eve of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2019. In advanced economies, meanwhile, growth is set to slow to 1.2 percent this year from 1.5 percent in 2023," the WB stated. "As the world nears the midpoint of what was intended to be a transformative decade for development, the global economy is set to rack up a sorry record by the end of 2024—the slowest half-decade of GDP growth in 30 years," the entity said. By one measure, the global economy is in a better place than it was a year ago: the risk of a global recession has receded, largely because of the strength of the U.S. economy.

Iran Navy Seizes U.S. Oil Tanker in Retaliation With Court Order



TEHRAN (PressTV) - The Navy of the Islamic Republic of Iran has announced the seizure of an American oil tanker with a court order in the Sea of Oman. The United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO) identified the tanker Marshall Islands-flagged St Nicholas, saying it was boarded at about 7:30 am (0330 GMT) off Sohar in Oman and changed course towards Bandar-e-Jask in Iran. Ambrey, a British maritime risk company, said the recently renamed tanker was previously prosecuted and fined for carrying Iranian oil, which was confiscated by US authorities. "Iran has previously taken action against those it has accused of cooperating with the US," it added. The vessel had been loaded with 145,000 tonnes of crude oil in Basra, Iraq and was destined for Aliaga in Turkey via the Suez Canal, the tanker's Greece-based management company Empire Navigation said. "Following the violation of the Suez Rajan in April and the theft of Iranian oil by the United States, the oil tanker renamed St Nicholas was seized in retaliation this morning by the court order and the approval of the Ports and Shipping Organization by the strategic Navy of the Islamic Republic of Iran Army and transferred to Iranian ports," Iran's Fars news agency reported. The tanker, it said, had stolen the cargo of oil belonging to the Islamic Republic of Iran under the direction of the United States and transferred it to the country's ports and put it at the disposal of American authorities.

Iran Strongly Condemns Arbitrary U.S., British Attacks on Yemen

IRANNEWSPOLITICALDESK

TEHRAN - Iran has strongly condemned U.S. and British military attacks on Yemen, calling them an "arbitrary" action and a clear violation of the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and a violation of international laws and regulations. Yemen's Ansarullah officials said explosions hit the cities of Sana'a, Hudaydah, Sa'ada and Dhamar early Friday, with a US official announcing that American and British attacks against Yemen were carried out by airplanes, ships and submarines. In Iran's first reaction to the aggression, Foreign Ministry spokesman Nasser Kanaani stressed that the "arbitrary attacks will have no result other than fueling insecurity and instability in the region". "These military attacks are carried out in line with the continuation of the full support of the United States and the United Kingdom for the last hundred days of the Zionist regime's war crimes against the Palestinian nation and the oppressed citizens under the complete siege of the Gaza Strip," he said. "While the Zionist regime continues its attacks and war crimes in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank in Palestine, the United States and England are trying to detract the attention of the people of the world from the crimes of this fake, criminal and aggressor regime against the people of Palestine by expanding their umbrella of support for the Zionist regime," he said. Kanaani expressed his concern about the consequences of such arbitrary attacks for regional and international peace and security, calling on the international community to prevent the spread of war, instability and insecurity in the region with responsible reactions and actions. Earlier, President Joe Biden said U.S. and British forces launched airstrikes on Yemen, characterizing them a "defensive action" and pledging that he "will not hesitate" to order further attacks if needed. The attacks come as Israel's three months of a ferocious military campaign against the besieged people of Gaza is sputtering in the face of heroic resistance from Palestinian fighters. The economic costs of the invasion are also beginning to mount as operations by Yemeni armed forces in the Red Sea against Israeli ships and vessels bound for Israeli ports in solidarity with the Palestinian people are having a mark. Earlier, Iran's Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian called Yemen a part of the reality and security of the West Asian region. "Yemeni leaders, emphasizing the security of navigation, say that they will only stop the ships that are going to spread the war and send weapons to the occupied territories," he told his Norwegian counterpart Espen Barth Eide. "America's entry into direct war against civilians, women and children of Gaza is a strategic mistake," Amir-Abdollahian said in a phone conversation with Eide late Thursday. "We have warned since the beginning of the bombing and genocide in Gaza that war is not the solution, but if the killing of civilians in Gaza and the West Bank continues, the scope of the war will expand. This warning is due to our understanding of the situation in support of Palestine in the region." The Norwegian foreign minister emphasized the need for an immediate ceasefire, the withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza, the sending of humanitarian aid to Gaza, and the start of a political process based on the formation of an independent Palestinian government, as he welcomed Iran's constructive role in the region to reduce tensions. Meanwhile resistance groups across the region have roundly denounced the US and UK strikes against targets in Yemen, stating that the attacks confirm the countries' allegiance with Israel amid the bloody onslaught against Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. "We condemn in the strongest terms the blatant American-British aggression against brotherly Yemen, its security and sovereignty, as well as its freedom-loving and honorable people," Hezbollah said in a statement on Friday. It added that "the American aggression confirms once again that the US is a full partner in the tragedies and massacres committed by the Zionist enemy in Gaza and the region." Hezbollah also saluted the Yemeni nation, the Yemeni Armed Forces as well as Ansarullah resistance movement. "We affirm this act of aggression will not weaken Yemen's strength. On the contrary, it will solidify the nation's determination to confront it and defend itself, and continue to tread the path of supporting the Palestinian people," the statement read.

EIA Predicts Crude Oil Price Will Remain Flat in 2024-25

LONDON (Dispatches) - The U.S. Energy Information Agency (EIA) forecasts steady crude oil prices in 2024-25 due to cuts by OPEC and geopolitical tensions in the Middle East. U.S. EIA estimates show average annual crude oil prices in 2024-25 will remain the same as in 2023. Global supplies and demand for petroleum liquids will also be relatively balanced over the next two years. According to the latest estimates, crude oil prices are expected to increase from \$78 per barrel (bbl) in December 2023 to \$85/bbl in March 2024. This rise is attributed to the OPEC+ production cuts, resulting in global stock draws of 810,000 barrels per day during the first quarter of 2024. On 8 January, oil prices dropped by more than 3% due to the sharp price cuts made by Saudi Arabia—the top exporter—and a rise in OPEC output. This offset the supply concerns that resulted from escalating geopolitical tension in the Middle East. A voluntary cut of 2.2 million barrels per day was agreed upon in the most recent OPEC+ meeting on 30 November, with the reduction set to last until March 2024. These reductions are in addition to lower production targets set in June 2023 and the current voluntary cuts. In 2024, OPEC+ is expected to produce below its declared targets, according to the EIA. The price of Brent crude oil saw a fall of 3.4%, or \$2.64, and settled at \$76.12/bbl. Meanwhile, Reuters reported that US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude futures dropped by 4.1%, or \$3.04, settling at \$70.77/bbl. In the first week of 2024, both



contracts saw growth of more than 2% due to the escalation of geopolitical tension in the Middle East, citing the attacks on ships in the Red Sea by Iran-backed Houthis in Yemen. "Oil prices capped a choppy week with gains on Friday helping to give both Brent and WTI a positive start to the year," said Edward Bell, head of market economics at Emirates NBD, as reported by UAE state-owned media company The National. "Geopolitical anxiety over security of supply as well as disruptions to Libya's supply are weighing against softening demand conditions," Bell said. Saudi Arabia lowered its flagship Arab Light crude's February official selling price to Asia to its lowest level in 27 months on Sunday due to increased supply and competition from other exporters, Reuters reported. The EIA also forecasts OPEC+ crude oil production to fall from 37.1 million barrels per day in 2023 to 36.4 million in 2024, and expects OPEC+ production to increase to around 37.2 million barrels per day (b/d). But on Friday oil prices jumped over 2 percent after the US and UK carried out strikes on Houthi-controlled areas in Yemen, amid fears of an escalation of the conflict in the Middle East. Major shipping companies stopped travelling through the Suez Canal and Red Sea routes in early December after a spate of rebel attacks on vessels in the waterway, instead choosing to reroute via southern Africa. Also in this edition, the Spanish capital breaks ground on a new business district: Madrid Nuevo Norte.

UNSC Resolution 2722 Is Cover-Up for Zionists



TEHRAN (IRNA) - UN Security Council Resolution 2722 on paper aims to safeguard shipping rights in the Red Sea but in reality is a cover-up for US political objectives in backing the Zionist regime and perpetuating its atrocities against the defenseless people of Gaza. Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman says, Nasser Kanaani on Friday reacted to Resolution 2722, proposed by the United States and Japan and passed by the UN Security Council, noting that instead of taking decisive action to halt the Israeli regime's crimes, the US administration continues to fully support the regime politically, militarily, internationally, and diplomatically. Despite over three months of devastating and inhumane military attacks by the Zionist regime on the defenseless people of the Gaza Strip, and the widespread destruction of homes, urban infrastructure, services, healthcare, and sanitation, the US action to prevent the adoption of a resolution in the Security Council calling for an end to the war against Gaza hinders the implementation of the council's duties in maintaining international peace and security, he added. This contrasts with the international community's demand to end the killing of Palestinians and establish a ceasefire, he further noted. Pressuring the council's members and without considering the root cause of the crisis and tension in the region, the US passed a resolution that only in appearance focuses on the rights and freedom of maritime navigation in the Red Sea, he said. The main goal of the resolution is to legitimize the Washington-led maritime coalition to achieve specific political goals and create the necessary shield to continue the Israeli regime's war crimes in Gaza, he added.

Iran Strongly Backs South Africa Against Israel at ICC



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran has strongly supported the "courageous" move of the South African government against Israel which faced accusations at the World Court of genocide in its war on Gaza brought by Pretoria. "The disgust and hatred toward the animalistic behavior of Netanyahu and the terrorist army of the Zionist regime in committing genocide and war crimes against the Palestinians cannot be washed away in the public opinion of the world under any title or logic," Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian wrote on X. "And now everyone is waiting for the immediate and decisive decision of the international justice to stop the killing machine of the Zionists," he added. On the first of two days of hearings at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) on Thursday, South Africa accused Israel of carrying out a genocide, saying the invasion aimed to bring about "the destruction of the population" of Gaza. Tembeka Ngcukaitobi, advocate of the High Court of South Africa, told the court that the "intent to destroy Gaza has been nurtured at the highest level", demanding that the UN's top court order an emergency suspension of the devastating campaign in the Palestinian enclave. "We strongly support the courageous action of the South African government against the apartheid and child-killing regime before the International Court of Justice (citing the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide)," Amir-Abdollahian wrote. The Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, or the Genocide Convention, is an international treaty that criminalizes genocide and obligates state parties to pursue the enforcement of its prohibition.

IRAN NEWS



Iran to Launch Int'l Maritime Environment Research Center

TEHRAN (Tasnim) – Iran's Vice President Ali Salajeqeh said that the country plans to set up an International Maritime Environment Research Center on Hormuz Island in the Hormuz Strait region. Speaking in a ceremony held to introduce the top environmental projects at the Pars Energy Special Economic Zone, Ali Salajeqeh, who also heads the Department of the Environment (DoE) stated, "Since people are living in areas of the Pars Energy Special Economic Zone, the removal of the environmental pollutants for safeguarding and protecting the health of residents of this area is essential." Studies indicate that the majority of the CEOs of the oil, gas and petrochemical companies especially Pars Energy Special Economic Zone Organization are willing to reduce the environmental pollutants in the region, he underlined. The region's environment should be protected by the people of the regional countries and Iran should be a pioneering country in this respect, Salajeqeh added, IRNA reported.

Belarusian Ambassador Visits UNESCO Sites in Southwest Iran



TEHRAN (IRNA) - Dmitry Koltsov, the ambassador of the Republic of Belarus to Iran, embarked on a visit to the southwestern province of Khuzestan, where he explored the UNESCO-designated sites of Tchogha Zanbil and Susa. During an informal tour on Thursday, the envoy and his accompanying delegation visited Haft Tappeh Archaeological Site & Museum as well. The ambassador, while exploring the Susa Museum, acknowledged the significance of the historical and cultural richness of the archaeological site. He signed the guestbook of the museum as well. Koltsov expressed admiration for the unique historical role of Susa, which stands as one of the ancient centers of civilization, being the capital of the Elamite civilization and the winter capital of the Achaemenid Empire. Similar in scale to the UNESCO-designated Persepolis, Susa saw countless invasions and sackings during its history, which spans almost 6,000 years. Various archaeological seasons in Susa have yielded a wide variety of relics, including pottery, arms, ornamental objects, metalwork, bronze articles, as well as clay tablets. Susa is also a gateway to several worthy destinations, such as Tchogha Zanbil, the ruins of Achaemenid Apadana Castle, Susa (Shush) Castle (Akropol), Prophet Danial Shrine, Museum of Susa, the archaeological mound of Haft Tappeh.

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK



Iran Exports to Turkey Reach \$3.3b in 9 Months

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Iran exported commodities valued at \$3.3 billion to Turkey during the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21-December 21, 2023), the head of the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA) announced. According to Mohammad Rezvaniyar, Turkey was the fourth top export destination of Iranian products in the mentioned nine-month period. Also, exporting commodities valued at \$5.3 billion to Iran, Turkey was Iran's third source of imports in the first nine months of the present year, the IRICA head announced. According to the latest figures released by the Turkish Statistical Institute (TURKSTAT), the trade exchanges between Iran and Turkey in the first 11 months of 2023 reached \$5.0 billion, showing a 13 percent decline compared to the same period of 2022. Iran's trade with the neighboring country stood at \$5.8 billion in January-November 2022, Tasnim News Agency reported. According to TURKSTAT, Turkey's exports to Iran from January to November 2023 reached \$3.0 billion, recording a seven percent increase compared to last year's corresponding period. Turkey exported over \$2.8 billion worth of products to

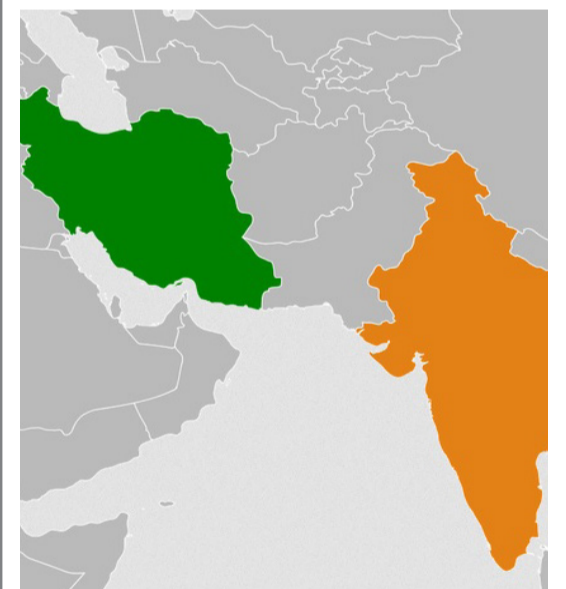
the Islamic Republic in the first 11 months of 2022. Turkey's imports from Iran however registered a 33 percent decline and fell from \$3.0 billion in January to November 2022 to \$2.0 billion in the first 11 months of 2023. The Turkish Statistical Institute reported a 42 percent increase in the country's exports to Iran in November 2023. Turkey's exports to Iran were reported to be \$290 million in November last year, while the figure has increased to \$412 million in November this year. Iran has been the 13th destination of Turkey's export goods this month. Meanwhile, Turkey's import from Iran in November 2023 reached \$182 million with a 13 percent decrease compared to the previous year. Turkey had imported \$212 million of goods from Iran in November 2022. The total trade between the two countries in the 11th month of 2023 reached \$594 million with an 18 percent growth compared to the same period of the previous year. Based on the data previously released by the Turkish Statistical Institute, the value of Iran's exports to Turkey increased by 19 percent to reach \$3.35 billion in 2022. Turkey had imported over \$2.82 billion worth of commodities from the Islamic Republic in 2021.

Hamedan Named Asian Capital of Tourism for 2024



TEHRAN (Dispatches) - The prestigious title of Asian Capital of Tourism for the year 2024 has been bestowed upon the city of Hamedan by the Asian Mayors Forum (AMF). This significant declaration, designating Hamedan as the focal point for tourism in Asia, was made on Wednesday by the Asian Mayors Forum (AMF), an international non-governmental organization committed to enhancing relations and collaboration among mayors and city managers across Asia. Simultaneously, Hamedan Mayor Masoud Hosseini, during a press conference, shared the news and acknowledged the commendable efforts of the Hamedan City Council in showcasing the city's tourism potential to the global audience. He commended the Municipal Tourism Headquarters for its dedicated work in promoting urban tourism, emphasizing the significant strides it has taken to highlight Hamedan's tourism potential. Expressing optimism, Hosseini conveyed his hope that through the close partnership between Hamedan's municipality and the AMF, the city would be able to showcase its tourism capacities more effectively than ever before.

Tehran Meeting to Explore Iran-India Literary Connections

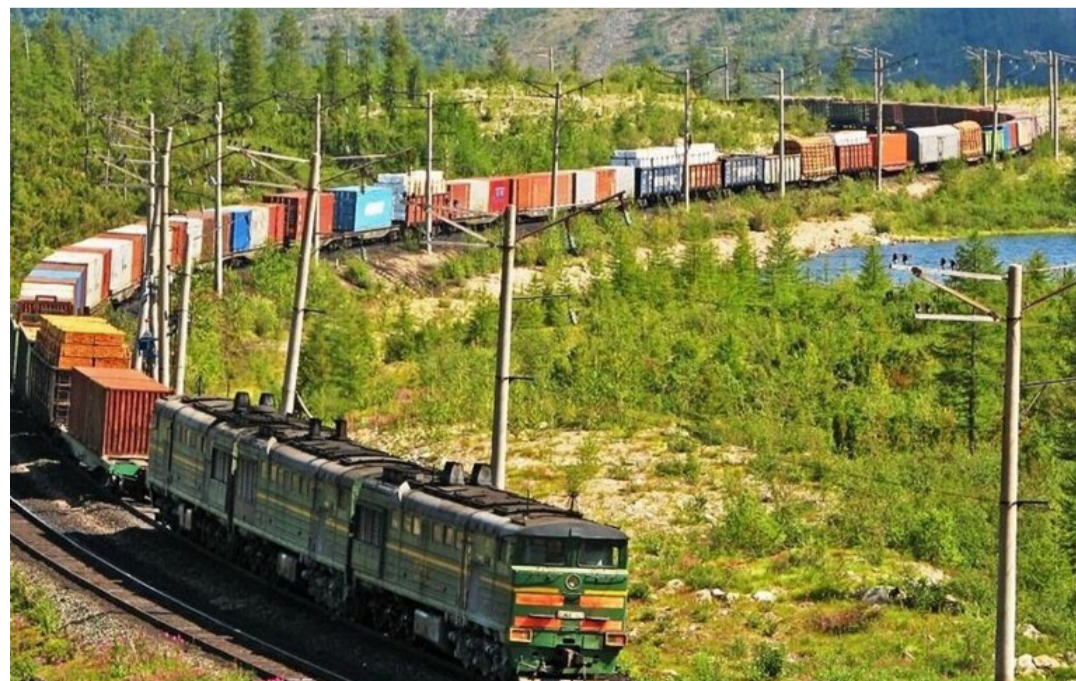


TEHRAN (Dispatches) - On Sunday, the Book City Institute in Tehran will host a session where Iranian and Indian scholars will gather to explore the literary connections between Iran and India. Iran and India share a long-standing cultural and political relationship that goes back thousands of years, encompassing a multitude of cultural ties that demand examination and acknowledgment. Notable attendees at the session will include Fathollah Mojtabai, Fatemeh Masoumeh Naseri (a professor at the University of Kashmir), Shah-Nawaz Shah (a professor at the University of Kashmir), Mohammadreza Adeli, Ehsanollah Shakrollahi, Elham Haddadi, along with a group of Persian language and literature professors from Indian and Iranian universities. Iran and India have an illustrious history of literary ties that stretch back centuries. These connections are rooted in shared cultural and historical contexts, as well as the cross-pollination of ideas and artistic influences. Persian literature, with its rich heritage, has had a significant impact on Indian literary traditions, particularly in the form of Persian poetry, which found a receptive audience among Indian intellectuals and rulers. The Mughal Empire, which ruled over much of the Indian subcontinent, was instrumental in nurturing the literary exchange between Iran and India. Persian was the official language of the Mughal court, and Persian poets and scholars were patronized and celebrated. Prominent Indian poets like Mirza Ghalib and Amir Khusrau composed their works in Persian, imbibing the poetic forms and themes that originated in Iran. This enduring literary connection between Iran and India has resulted in a fusion of cultures, where Persian and Indian elements blend seamlessly to create a distinct and vibrant literary tradition that continues to thrive.

Tehran-Baku Exchange of Goods via Rail Up 33% in 9 Months

TEHRAN (Tasnim) – The director general of Iran's North Railway Administration-2 said that the exchange of goods between Iran and the Republic of Azerbaijan registered a 33-percent growth in the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year (started March 21, 2023). While expounding on the nine months' performance of imports, exports and the transit of cargo at the Astara Border Terminal, Gholam Hossein Valadi said the exchange of non-oil products via rail between Tehran and Baku increased 33% from March 21 to December 22, 2023 compared to the same period last year. About 498,000 tons of goods were exchanged between the two countries at the Astara Border Terminal, he noted. Valadi put the weight of products exchanged between Iran and the Republic of Azerbaijan from March 21 to December 22, 2022 at 374,454 tons. The official went on to say that 152,268 tons of non-oil products were imported into

the country from the Republic of Azerbaijan via rail in the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year, showing about a 63 percent hike compared to last year's corresponding period, the website of Iran Ministry of Roads and Urban Development (MRUD) reported. More than 93,000 tons of goods had been imported into the country from the Republic of Azerbaijan from March 21 to December 22, 2022, he stated. He further noted that more than 136,000 tons of goods were exported from the country via the Astara Border Terminal through the rail network between March 21 and December 22, 2023. Cement, chemicals, tiles and food products were among the main products exported to the Republic of Azerbaijan via rail, Valadi added. In return, wood, lumber, chemicals, grains, etc. were among the most important products imported from the Republic of Azerbaijan to the country, he added.



Iran Oil Industry Requires \$275b of Investment

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Iran's oil industry requires \$275 billion of investment to increase and maintain production in oil and gas fields in the next 17 years, an official with the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) said. According to Ahmad Rajabi, director of corporate planning at NIOC, the company has defined a plan to increase the country's crude oil production to 5.5 million barrels per day (bpd) by the Iranian calendar year 1410 (2031) and to maintain the mentioned production level until the Iranian calendar year 1420 (2041) for which a total investment of about \$150 billion is required. A strategic plan to increase the country's natural gas production is also defined to achieve the production of 1.5 billion cubic meters of crude gas in the horizon of 1410 and to maintain the mentioned production level until 1420 with a total investment of about \$125 billion, Rajabi said. According to the official, the Oil Ministry has invested \$600 million to increase the country's oil production to 3.6 million bpd by the end of the current Iranian calendar year (March 19) and plans are underway to attract another \$3.0 billion to boost the output to about 4.0 million by the end of the next year (late March 2025). "Since the beginning of the 13th government administration, the country's oil production has increased from about 2.1 million barrels per day to about 3.4 million barrels per day," Rajabi said.





Protesters in Libya Threaten to Shut Down Oil and Gas Facilities

TRIPOLI (Dispatches) - Protesters have threatened to shut down two oil and gas facilities near the Libyan capital Tripoli, with one group that is campaigning against corruption issuing a 72-hour ultimatum that ended on Friday. The group called the Corruption Eradication Movement said in a video statement online that it would "stop the pumping of gas from the Mellitah complex", a joint venture between Libya's National Oil Corporation (NOC) and Italy's Eni (ENI). Any halt would disrupt the supply of gas through the Greenstream pipeline between Libya and Italy. Eni declined to comment and NOC was not immediately available for comment on the latest threat. The protesters demanded the removal of NOC Chairman Farhat Bengdara over what they called "violations amounting to the level of crime". They also demanded Bengdara be prevented from concluding any oil and gas agreements.



Macron's Reshuffle Tilts French Cabinet to the Right



PARIS (Dispatches) - French President Emmanuel Macron replaced his foreign minister but maintained other key figures in their posts, in a reshuffle that tilted his cabinet to the right and leaves all the top ministries in the hands of men. The reshuffle followed the appointment this week of 34-year-old Gabriel Attal as prime minister, a move which Macron hopes will give his presidency new momentum. The secretary general of Macron's Renaissance party Stephane Sejourne, 38, was named foreign minister in place of Catherine Colonna, although other key ministers including Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin and Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire kept their posts. With Defence Minister Sebastien Lecomu also staying, this leaves all the top ministries in the hands of men, following the departure earlier this week of Elisabeth Borne as prime minister. Sejourne was in a civil partnership with Attal, France's first openly gay prime minister, but their relationship is now believed to be over. Rachida Dati, 58, a justice minister under the former presidency of Nicolas Sarkozy and member of the right-wing opposition Republicans party, was named culture minister in a surprise appointment. Sports Minister Amelie Oudea-Castera, 45, a former French tennis champion who already faces an immense task overseeing the Olympic Games this summer in Paris, will now head a new super ministry combining sports and education. Attal's former department, "What I want is action, action, action" and "results, results, results," Attal told TF1 television, praising the "energy" of his ministers who he said were "committed 200 percent to meet the expectations of the French". Attal said he'll fulfil Macron's promise to cut taxes for the middle class, though he wouldn't be tied into a timetable. The appointments appeared to mark a new shift to the right for Macron's centrist government. Eric Ciotti, leader of the Republicans party, announced that Dati would be excluded from the party following her appointment, accusing her of "placing herself outside our political family". Mayor of the Paris seventh district since 2008, Dati was in 2021 charged with corruption over consulting services to a subsidiary of Renault-Nissan, charges she has denied. Attal insisted this posed no problem, pointing to the "presumption of innocence" and praised Dati as a "woman of commitment" who "all her life fought to obtain what she wanted".

World Must Ensure Israel Abides by Any U.N. Court Ruling



GENEVA (Dispatches) - The head of Human Rights Watch praised South Africa for bringing Israel's military campaign against Gaza to the top U.N. court and said the international community would be responsible for ensuring that Israel complies with any judicial decision. South Africa demanded an emergency suspension of Israel's aerial and ground offensive in the Palestinian enclave, telling the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in The Hague that Israel was committing genocidal acts. "South Africa is providing important leadership here. It's really using this important opportunity," Tirana Hassan, executive director of Human Rights Watch, told Reuters. "If Israel does not comply with the measures or orders of the court, then it is up to the international community to ensure that they are leveraging whatever pressure that they can to encourage Israel to actually implement the measures." Human Rights Watch, which released its World Report on Thursday outlining abuses around the globe, accused Israel last night of using the starvation of civilians as a means of warfare in the Gaza Strip, which constitutes a war crime. Israel has vigorously denied the charge. "In the throes of this war, what we have seen is consistent, flagrant violations of international humanitarian law," Hassan said. "We were able to document elements of this one crime -- the crime of starvation." Hassan said that since Human Rights Watch had documented starvation in Gaza, there had been no shift in policy to suggest that Israeli authorities had abandoned the method. Facing mounting international pressure, Israel has lifted its full blockade to allow more food and medicine into the territory, though aid agencies say it is not enough. "But we need to talk about total and unfettered delivery of humanitarian

assistance," which she said included food, fuel and shelter. "We have not seen that sort of unfettered humanitarian access. That is what Human Rights Watch has been calling for." Meanwhile Israel on Friday rejected as false and "grossly distorted" accusations brought by South Africa at the U.N.'s top court that its military operation in Gaza is a state-led genocide campaign against Palestinians. Arguing it was acting to defend itself and was fighting Hamas, not the Palestinian population, Israel called on the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to dismiss the case as groundless and reject South Africa's request to order it to halt the offensive. "This is no genocide," lawyer Malcolm Shaw said. South Africa told the court on Thursday that Israel's aerial and ground offensive - which has laid waste to much of the enclave and killed almost 24,000 people, according to Gaza health authorities - aimed to bring about "the destruction of the population" of Gaza. Israel rejected the accusations, saying it respected international law and had a right to defend itself. Israel launched its war in Gaza after a cross-border rampage on Oct. 7 by militants from Hamas, which is sworn to Israel's destruction. Israeli officials said 1,200 people were killed, mainly civilians, and 240 taken hostage. "The appalling suffering of civilians, both Israeli and Palestinian, is first and foremost the result of Hamas' strategy," the Israeli foreign ministry's legal adviser, Tal Becker told the court. "If there were acts of genocide, they have been perpetrated against Israel," Becker said. "Hamas seeks genocide against Israel." The 1948 Genocide Convention, enacted in the wake of the mass murder of Jews in the Nazi Holocaust, defines genocide as "acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group".

Tens of Thousands Protest in Poland Against Ex-Ministers' Imprisonment



WARSAW (Dispatches) - Tens of thousands of opposition supporters massed outside Poland's parliament ministers convicted of abuse of power. The march reflects mounting tensions in the country as the new pro-European Union coalition government led by Donald Tusk tries to undo the policies of the previous national Law and Justice (PiS) party administration. It also came as President Andrzej Duda, a PiS ally, said on Thursday he had started proceedings to pardon the two ministers in the last government who were jailed this week for abuse of power, escalating his own stand-off with the new government. "We have to win this great battle for a sovereign, independent Poland," PiS leader Jaroslaw Kaczynski told the crowd. A sea of red and white Polish flags stretched back from the parliament, interspersed with placards with slogans such as "Tusk-5th column" and "We survived the Russians, we'll survive Tusk". Some chanted Duda's name and "We will win!" State-run news agency PAP cited Warsaw city hall as putting the number of people in the crowd at around 35,000, while a PiS spokesman put the figure at almost 200,000. Protesters listened to speeches from PiS lawmakers before they started their march to the offices of state TV. The new government has changed the leadership of state media in what it says is a bid to restore balance to outlets that had become platforms for PiS propaganda during the party's eight-year rule. News channel TVP Info, which had subjected former EU Council President Tusk to incessant attacks since his return to domestic politics in 2021, was taken off air before returning in a much altered format. "How can people cut off the TV signal, everyone has the right to choose what they want," said Ela, 60, who declined to give her full name. "Moreover, people were arrested... I'm terrified of what's happening, that's why I came here."

Taiwan's Political Parties Rally on Eve of Pivotal Presidential Vote



TAIPEI (Dispatches) - Tens of thousands of supporters flocked to noisy, colourful rallies for Taiwan's three main political parties on Friday, as the candidates made a last push for votes in an election that China has warned could take the island closer to war. Taiwan's bustling democracy of 23 million people is separated by a narrow 180-kilometre (110-mile) strait from communist-ruled China, which claims the island as part of its territory. Saturday's election is being closely watched around the world as the winner will lead the strategically important island -- a major producer of vital semiconductors -- as it manages ties with an increasingly assertive China. Vice President Lai Ching-te, the front-runner candidate of the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), paints the election as a choice between "democracy and autocracy" -- criticising his main opponent Hou Yu-ih of the Kuomintang (KMT) for being too "pro-China". Waving flags and carrying posters, their supporters converged in two stadiums located right next to each other in New Taipei City. "We want peace, not war," blared the KMT supporters' signs, while DPP loyalists carried the party's signature green flags saying: "Choose the right people, walk the right path." In Taipei, supporters of third-party candidate Ko Wen-je gathered outside the Presidential Office on the sprawling Ketagalan Boulevard, shouting that "Taiwan's choice is Ko Wen-je". The leader of the small Taiwan People's Party (TPP), Ko has criticised his opponents for being caught up in ideological deadlock, attracting voters who say they are sick of talking about China. Beijing in recent years has maintained a near-

daily military presence around Taiwan, sending in warplanes and ships to its surroundings in "grey zone" harassment actions which fall short of outright provocation. The weeks leading up to Saturday's vote have also seen a flurry of Chinese balloons crossing the Taiwan Strait's sensitive median line, which Taipei authorities have slammed as a form of interference in the crucial poll. On Friday, Taiwan's Ministry of National Defence announced a record-high of five balloons around Taiwan the day before, with one moving directly over the island's southern tip. Beijing has never renounced the use of force to bring Taiwan under its control. All the sabre-rattling from across the Taiwan Strait means that Taiwan must build up their "self-defence to prevent the other side from bullying us", said DPP supporter Yoyo Chen. "If China yields war, I will stay in Taiwan," said the 30-year-old tailor at the DPP rally. "I will fight them even if all I have left is a broomstick." The election on the small, verdant island has drawn massive attention overseas, as Taiwan's next leader is set to determine future cross-strait relations with China in a flashpoint region that has Beijing and Washington tussling for influence. On Thursday China issued a stern warning for voters to "make the correct choice", warning them against voting for Lai. "(He) would continue to follow the evil path of provoking 'independence' and... take Taiwan... closer to war and decline," said China's Taiwan Affairs Office. In a sign of the importance Washington attaches to it, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken will hold talks with a senior Chinese official in Washington on Friday.



Ukraine Producing More Drones Than State Can Purchase

KYIV (Dispatches) - Ukrainian manufacturers have ramped up output of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) to the extent that Kyiv's current drone procurement budgets are not sufficient to buy everything being produced, Ukraine's technology minister said. Mykhailo Fedorov, a deputy prime minister who also handles the digital brief, has championed the use of drones to fight off the Russian invasion since its early days. "As of today, the market has accelerated much faster than the amount of money to buy all the UAVs," Fedorov told Ukrainian national television. "Therefore we need to increase financing and open up markets further, so that prices fall thanks to competition and localisation of part (production) begins," he said. UAVs have been widely used by both Ukraine and Russia in the 22-month war, providing armies with constant eyes in the sky and allowing them to destroy into targets hundreds of times the drone's value, such as air defence systems and advanced radars. Aerial vehicles are the most commonly used type of drone, although sea and land-borne devices are also being deployed. According to the minister, there are now about 200 companies in Ukraine making drones, and approximately 70 local firms have now signed contracts to supply drones to the state. Meanwhile Ukraine's power grid operator said on Tuesday severe winter weather left more than 1,000 towns and villages without electricity in nine regions and urged residents to conserve power as the energy system has been weakened by Russian strikes. Electricity consumption was at this week's highest levels as temperatures fell to about -15 °C in many parts of the country, grid operator Ukrrenergopro said. "The consumption level continues to grow due to the considerable drop in temperature across the country," it said on the Telegram messaging app, adding that electricity consumption in the morning was already 5.8% higher than the day before. "As of this morning due to bad weather - strong winds, ice power was cut off in 1,025 settlements."

Trump Tangles With Judge as New York Civil Fraud Trial Wraps Up

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Donald Trump accused the New York judge in his civil fraud trial of "having your own agenda" - and the judge told his lawyer to control his client - as a months-long case that could hobble the former U.S. president's business empire came to an end. During a contentious final day of the trial in Manhattan, Trump once again tangled with Justice Arthur Engoron, who is considering what penalties to impose after earlier finding that Trump's company inflated his net worth to win better financing terms. The judge, deciding the case without a jury, said he hoped to issue a ruling by Jan. 31. "You have your own agenda. I understand that you can't listen for more than one minute," Trump told Engoron in court, as he denied wrongdoing and repeated claims of political persecution. Trump's legal team and the office of New York Attorney General Letitia James delivered closing arguments in a case accusing him of inflating his net worth to dupe banks. Kevin Wallace, a lawyer from her office, said Trump's company issued false financial statements every year between 2011 and 2021. "Fraud was central to the operation of the Trump Organization's activities," Wallace told the judge. James is seeking nearly \$370 million and a lifetime ban on Trump from the state's real-estate industry. Andrew

Amer, an attorney for the state, said Trump's financial statements from before he became president clearly showed he was responsible for their contents. "The buck stopped with him," Amer said. Trump, who served as president from 2017-2021, is now the frontrunner for the Republican nomination to challenge Democratic President Joe Biden in the November U.S. election. Republican voters in Iowa and New Hampshire will be the first to decide their preferred party nominee this month. The closing arguments took place in an atmosphere of heightened security after media outlets reported a bomb threat at Engoron's suburban home. The judge has been a frequent target of Trump's criticism, and the two clashed repeatedly on Thursday. "Please control your client," the judge at one point told Trump's lawyer, Christopher Kise. Engoron earlier reacted skeptically to Kise's argument that Trump should not be penalized for allegedly manipulating the value of his properties because lenders and insurers that did business with him still turned a profit. "There does not have to be any evidence of harm," Engoron said. Trump separately has pleaded not guilty in four criminal prosecutions, including two charging him with unlawfully trying to overturn his 2020 election loss to Biden. All could go to trial before the election.





Barcelona to Face Real Madrid in Super Cup Final

RIYADH (Dispatches) - Robert Lewandowski and Lamine Yamal scored second-half goals to give Barcelona a 2-0 win over Osasuna in a dour Spanish Super Cup semi-final in Saudi Arabia. Barca set up a dream showpiece clash on Sunday with Real Madrid, who had beaten city rivals Atletico Madrid in a breathtaking 5-3 derby earlier in the week. It will be a re-match from last year's final, which Barca won 3-1. Barcelona dominated possession in a dismal first half but were bereft of ideas and barely threatened their opponents. Lewandowski could have done better in a couple of half-chances that were denied by a confident Osasuna goalkeeper Sergio Herrera, but it was not until the 59th minute that Barca came to life and managed to break the deadlock. Ilkay Gundogan picked out Lewandowski with a through-ball and the striker scored from close-range. However, Osasuna players were left fuming and complained to the referee that Barcelona defender Andreas Christensen had fouled Jose Arnaiz before starting the counter-attack, but a VAR check confirmed the goal. "We felt we were wronged, because the refereeing criteria was very different during the whole match. The foul was clear," Osasuna manager Jagoba Arrasate told Movistar Plus. "Watching live it looked like a foul, to be honest, but the replay shows that there was nothing..." Barcelona manager Xavi Hernandez said. "Sometimes the referee works to our advantage, sometimes he works against us... However, I don't think he was decisive in today's outcome." After Lewandowski's goal, Xavi brought Joao Felix off the bench and the Portuguese forward added impetus. Barca seemed to lack up-front, forcing goalkeeper Herrera to make a couple of fine saves to keep

Osasuna alive. Joao Felix created a quick counter and provided the assist to Yamal who blasted low in to the net to secure the win and set-up an El Clasico in the final. "You don't play finals, you win them. We want to compete against an opponent who I saw very well in the other semi-final," Xavi said. "However, there are no favourites, it's an El Clasico. Hopefully the final will go our way like last year. We are the reigning champions and at least we will enjoy it." Meanwhile on Wednesday, an own goal by defender Stefan Savic and a strike by Brahim Diaz late in extra time gave Real Madrid a 5-3 comeback win over city rivals Atletico in a rip-roaring Spanish Super Cup semi-final in Riyadh. The rivalry, the comeback and the stakes combined to make this arguably the best match of the Spanish season, with two fearless sides battling for 120 minutes in a breathtaking derby. "It was spectacular, but we don't enjoy matches like this," Real manager Carlo Ancelotti told Movistar Plus. "The wear and tear has been tremendous. Because we are two very strong teams who have given everything." Atletico, who inflicted Real's only loss of the season in September, started the game on top with Brazilian winger Samuel Lino almost opening the scoring with a curling strike that was saved by goalkeeper Kepa Arrizabalaga. However, there was nothing Kepa could do when Antoine Griezmann lifted his corner into the box and defender Mario Hermoso sent a towering header flying past the keeper to give his side the lead in the seventh minute. Real fought back through an Antonio Rudiger header from a Luka Modric corner in the 20th minute and a Ferland Mendy close-range strike, before Griezmann worked his magic in the 37th minute with a brilliant long-range strike.

Huetter Takes Super-G Lead as Goggia Crashes Out



ALTENMARKT (Dispatches) - Austrian Cornelia Huetter scored a home victory at Altenmarkt-Zauchensee to move to the top of the women's World Cup super-G standings. On a morning when many leading skiers struggled to hold their lines, Huetter, skiing eighth, delivered a smooth run and a fast finish to cross the line in 1 minute 13.26 seconds for her fifth World Cup victory and fourth in the super-G. "I can find in every run something to get better, but I think it was close to perfect," said Huetter, who is the first Austrian woman to win a World Cup race on home snow in seven years. "It's nice to see the green lights in the finish and for sure when you're in Austria it's on the top. I've never done that before (winning a World Cup race at home). It's the first time and I hope I can feel that in the next races too." Norwegian Kaisa Vickhoff Lie skied two slots later and finished 0.09sec slower than Huetter. "I'm getting closer and closer but it's OK to lose behind an Austrian in Austria. Then everyone's happy," said Lie. Swiss veteran Kara Gut-Berahmi was third at 0.21 seconds. Italian Sofia Goggia, who started the day top of the super-G standings, came roaring out on the course but lacked the necessary control and slid off. Her compatriot Federica Brignone was fourth and has now been overtaken at the top of the discipline standings by Huetter, who has shown tremendous consistency all season having finished in the top four in all four previous speed races, with two podiums. The top two in the overall standings did not race on Friday. Mikaela Shiffrin, who is top on 929 points, is skipping the Austrian stage to nurse a cold and slalom specialist Petra Vlhova, second on 722, stayed away. The women continue on Saturday with a downhill and Sunday with a second super-G.

Liverpool Come Back to Beat Fulham 2-1 in League Cup

LIVERPOOL (Dispatches) - Curtis Jones and Cody Gakpo scored three minutes apart as Liverpool fought back from a goal down to beat Fulham 2-1 in the first leg of their League Cup semi-final at a chilly Anfield on Wednesday. Fulham took a first-half lead with a goal from Willian and then sat back and looked to hit Liverpool on the break, frustrating Jurgen Klopp's side until the 68th minute when Jones and then Gakpo struck in quick succession. "It's the mentality in the group, in the club, just keep going and it doesn't matter what happens and we showed that again today," Gakpo told Sky Sports. "If you have that mentality a lot of things can happen." Fulham threatened to hand the record nine-time League Cup winners their first home defeat across all competitions this season after Willian scored in the 19th minute. Capitalising on Virgil van Dijk's poor clearance, the Brazilian slotted home from the edge of the six-yard box between keeper Caoimhin Kelleher's legs. "It wasn't our best game we ever played. I told the boys we are human beings," Klopp said. Premier League-leading Liverpool dominated possession and finally got the better of Fulham's well-organised back line when Jones netted, his shot from 25 metres out taking a big deflection off the back of Tosin Adarabioyo. Substitute Gakpo, who has scored in all four of his League Cup games for Liverpool, fired the home team in front in the 71st, tapping in Darwin Nunez's cross at the near post to send fans home happy after they extended their remarkable home record this season to 14 victories and two draws. "In the first half it was tough, we had all the ball but couldn't find the back of the net and in the second half we changed that around," Jones told Sky Sports. "The fans are leaving with smiles on their faces so I'm happy." Klopp's side had 21 shots to Fulham's six, and the addition of Gakpo and Nunez in the second half made all the difference. "(Jones) got a very important goal to get us back in the game and after that I felt we really dominated, not only with possession but creating chances and then the second so I was happy," Gakpo said.



Beal Scores 37 as Suns Roll Past Lakers



NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Bradley Beal scored a season-high 37 points, Devin Booker added 31 and the visiting Phoenix Suns used a fast start to earn a 127-109 victory over the Los Angeles Lakers. Kevin Durant scored 18 points and Jusuf Nurkic added nine points and 12 rebounds as the Suns defeated the Lakers for the first time in four tries this season. The teams will play one more time, Feb. 25 at Phoenix. Beal went 8 of 10 from 3-point range, 14 of 21 overall and scored 26 points in the second half as the Suns won for the sixth time in their last nine games. D'Angelo Russell scored 19 points and Max Christie added 14 for the Lakers, who lost for the fifth time in their last seven games. They entered Friday having won consecutive games for the first time in a month. Anthony Davis and LeBron James were held to 13 and 10 points, respectively, as the Lakers fell to 2-3 during a stretch when they play 10 of 11 games at home. The Suns meant business early, scoring the first six points of the game and taking a 24-14 lead just over six minutes into the contest. Phoenix led 36-25 after one quarter and was up 66-52 at halftime as Booker entered the break 9-of-16 from the floor with 23 points. The Suns led by 17 in the first half and took their first 20-point lead at 80-60 with 7:30 remaining in the third quarter on three free throws from Booker. Phoenix used a 14-1 run in the third quarter to take an 88-61 lead and were never threatened from there. The Suns were up 31 with two minutes left in the third and entered the final period with a 105-78 advantage. The Suns allowed the Lakers to shoot 50 percent, one game after the Clippers shot 62.4 percent against Phoenix in a 138-111 defeat on Monday.

Draper Sets Up Adelaide Final With Lehecka

ADELAIDE (Dispatches) - Jiri Lehecka dismantled third seed Sebastian Korda 6-2, 6-1 to reach the Adelaide International final, while Jelena Ostapenko battled into the women's decider. Lehecka completely dominated proceedings against the American at Memorial Drive, racing through the match in just 73 minutes as he builds towards the Australian Open. The Czech seventh seed will play Briton Jack Draper, who put out Russian eighth seed Alexander Bublik 7-6 (7/2), 6-4. "It would mean a lot to win the title," 2023 Adelaide semi-finalist Draper said, who reached his only tour final in Sofia in November. "I made my first one back at the end of last season. I hope I can get over the line tomorrow." Against Korda, a mistake-free Lehecka telegraphed his intentions from the start with a serve to love then broke in the second game. Korda, son of 1998 Australian Open champion Petr Korda, was unable to mount any resistance as the 22-year-old Czech surged into only his second career final. "I'm a bit surprised that it went this well," Lehecka said. "But I did all I could to make it happen. I'm happy to be looking at a place in the final. I did good work in the off-season and it's working well." "But there is one more step so we will see tomorrow," added Lehecka, whose ranking will improve to a career-best 26. In the women's semi-finals, sixth seed Ostapenko beat Russia's Ekaterina Alexandrova 6-2, 7-6 (7/3), a victory that will propel the Latvian back into the top 10 for the first time in six years when the new rankings are released on Monday. Currently ranked 12, the former French Open champion will vie for the title against with Russian, Daria Kasatkina, who earned a walkover win when American second seed Jessica Pegula withdrew with illness. "She can serve big and was hitting great," Ostapenko said of Alexandrova. "But I was just trying to play my game. I'm glad I won in two sets. I've been trying to play more aggressive. It's something we've been working on. I'm feeling good and looking forward to the final." Ostapenko is bidding for a seventh career trophy.

