

The Iranian National Tax Administration (INTA) Collected 5.5 Quadrillion Rials (About \$11 Billion) of Taxes During the Nine Months of the Current Iranian Calendar Year (March 21-December 21, 2023)

IRAN NEWS

Production of Sponge Iron in Iran Rose by 6.5 Percent During the First Nine Months of the Current Iranian Calendar Year (March 21-December 21, 2023), as Compared to the Same Period in the Past Year

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President Vows Response to Israeli Assassination of Iranian Forces in Syria



TEHRAN (Tasnim) - President Ebrahim Raisi gave an assurance that the Zionist regime's "terrorist and criminal" airstrike on Damascus that resulted in the martyrdom of five Iranian military advisers won't go unanswered. In a message of condolence on Saturday night, Raisi condemned the cowardly assassination of five of Iran's most distinguished advisers by the criminal Zionist regime. The message, released by his website, is as follows: In the Name of Allah, the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful: Once again, the criminal Zionist regime, in a terrorist act, openly violated the airspace of Syria and martyred a number of Syrian forces and five military advisers of the Islamic Republic of Iran, who were present in Syria in the guise of advisers and guarding the Ahl al-Bayt (AS) Shrines. Condemning this cowardly assassination, I condole the martyrdom of the honorable advisers of Islamic Iran, Hojatoollah Omidvar, Ali Aqazadeh, Hossein Mohammadi, Saeed Karimi and Mohammad Amin Samadi, to Imam Mahdi (AS), the Supreme Leader and Commander-in-Chief, the Iranian nation, the fighters of the resistance front, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, and the comrades and families of these high-ranking martyrs. Undoubtedly, the continuation of such terrorist and criminal actions, which indicate the growing failure of the illegitimate Zionist regime to achieve its evil goals and the depth of desperation and helplessness against the fighters of the resistance front, will not go unanswered by the Islamic Republic of Iran. The recent crimes of the usurping Zionist regime, which are taking place by violating all international treaties and human principles, under the shadow of the support of the domineering countries, America at the head of all of them, and the silence of the world assemblies, are definitely another stain on the black file of all self-proclaimed human rights advocates.



Iran Asserts Military Advisors to Forcefully Continue Anti-Terror Mission in Region

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The Foreign Minister says Iranian military advisers will continue their anti-terror mission in the region in defiance of Israel's "cowardly" assassination operations. "Iran's military advisers will strongly continue activities to fight terrorism and ensure regional security," Hossein Amir-Abdollahian said in an X post on Saturday, after five members of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) were martyred in an Israeli strike in Syria. The top Iranian diplomat paid tribute to the martyrs and wished the bereaved families peace and patience. "The Israeli regime is the main accomplice to terrorist currents and enemy number one of regional security," Amir-Abdollahian noted. "Undoubtedly, the Zionists' defeat against the will of the people of Gaza cannot be compensated by such cowardly terrorist acts." The IRGC advisers were assassinated in an Israeli airstrike on a residential building in the tightly guarded Mezzeh neighborhood, west of the Syrian capital Damascus. Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman Nasser Kanaani also said the Islamic Republic reserves the right to respond to the organized terrorism of the occupying entity at an appropriate time and place. Iran has maintained an advisory mission in Syria at the request of Damascus with the aim of helping the war-torn country vanquish the foreign-backed militants, who have been fighting against the Syrian government since 2011. Iran's advisory assistance helped Syria defeat Daesh and win back control of almost all regions from terrorists. The Tel Aviv regime has ramped up its airstrikes on Syria since early October, when the regime launched the ongoing genocidal war on the besieged Gaza Strip. More than 100 days into the brutal aggression, Israel has failed to achieve its objectives of "destroying" the Hamas resistance movement and finding Israeli captives in Gaza despite killing almost 25,000 Palestinians, mostly women and children, and injuring over 62,300 others.

Alborz Destroyer Deployment to Red Sea Not Linked With Regional Situation



TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iranian Navy Commander Rear Admiral Shahram Irani says the deployment of the Alborz destroyer to the Red Sea has nothing to do with the regional situation. Irani said the Islamic Republic does not regard the situation in the region as complicated. "The deployment of the Alborz destroyer to the Red Sea is in line with the permanent missions of the [Iranian] Navy and the escort of oil tankers of the Islamic Republic of Iran," he said. He further said the destroyer will safeguard the security of Iranian ships in the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea. According to Irani, the 96th flotilla has also been deployed to the Red Sea recently and the 97th flotilla will soon join the Iranian naval forces in the strategic region as well. Conveying a message of peace and friendship to all countries, announcing Iran's readiness for multilateral relations with different countries, and strengthening the country's defense diplomacy and naval clout are among the goals of the deployments, he added. The Alborz destroyer entered the Red Sea on January 1, amid the Yemeni armed forces' retaliatory attacks on Israeli-linked ships in support of the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. Alborz destroyer deployment to Red Sea not linked with regional situation: Navy chief Elsewhere in his remarks, Rear Admiral Irani said the country's seizure of a US-linked ship in the Sea of Oman was a response to the US theft of Iranian oil. "We will respond decisively if the rights of our people are encroached upon," he asserted. In a meeting with a number of commanders and officials of Iran's Navy in November 2022, Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei stressed the need for the Navy to bolster and maintain its presence in international waters.

Baghdad Determined to End Presence of U.S.-Led Coalition Forces



BAGHDAD (Dispatches) - The spokesman for Iraq's Joint Operations Command (JOC), Brigadier General Yahya Rasool, says the Baghdad government is determined to end the presence of foreign troops from the U.S.-led military coalition purportedly formed to fight the Takfiri Daesh terrorist group. "The Iraqi government is resolute to put an end to the deployment of foreign forces in the country. It has devised a vision plan for the next stage, which includes joint technical activities intended for the US-led coalition's departure and subsequent security and military cooperation," Rasool said. The high-ranking Iraqi security official underscored that with the presence of capable Iraqi forces, the U.S.-led military coalition in Iraq is no longer needed. Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia' al-Sudani on Thursday repeated his call for the U.S.-led coalition to depart his country, stressing that Baghdad demands the immediate withdrawal of the forces due to their destabilizing activities. "The end of the U.S.-led coalition mission is a necessity for the security and stability of Iraq," he said during a televised event at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland.

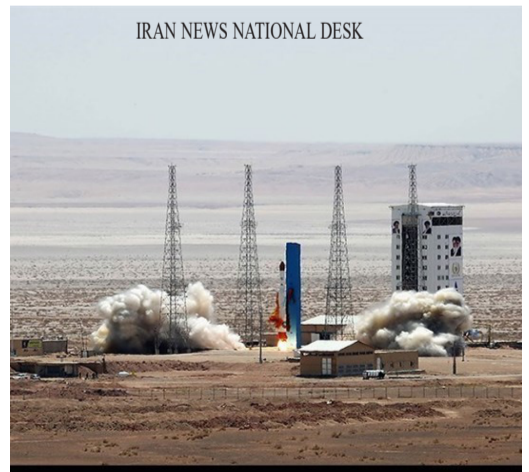
Israel's War Aims Elusive as Hamas Still Resilient



WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - U.S. intelligence agencies estimate that the death toll among Hamas fighters from Israel's ongoing aggression against the Gaza Strip falls short of the regime's goal of eliminating the Palestinian resistance group. In a classified report, the spy agencies highlighted Hamas' resilience over the past months, saying the Israeli war has killed 20 to 30 percent of members of the resistance movement, the Wall Street Journal says. "Hamas still has enough munitions to continue striking Israel and Israeli forces in Gaza for months, and that the group is attempting to reconstitute its police force in parts of Gaza City," said US officials, who confirmed the report. Israeli officials have conceded that they have not achieved their goal of obliterating Hamas despite killing thousands of civilians in the aggressive air and ground campaign on Gaza, the report added. It also cited military analysts as referring to adjusted tactics by Hamas fighters, saying they are operating in smaller groups and hiding between ambushes on Israeli troops, while individual fighters are likely taking on more tasks to pick up the slack from their martyred comrades. Israel waged the genocidal war on besieged Gaza on October 7 after Hamas carried out Operation Al-Aqsa Storm in retaliation for its intensified atrocities against the Palestinian people. However, more than three months into the offensive, the usurping regime seems stuck in the Gaza quagmire despite killing 25,105 Palestinians, mostly women and children, and injuring

more than 62,000 others. The report said that US officials have begun to scale down their expectations for the Gaza war and that they have urged Israel to shift toward more targeted operations aimed at Hamas' leadership. The U.S. estimated that Hamas had between 25,000 and 30,000 fighters before the Gaza offensive in addition to thousands of police and other forces, according to the report. The Israeli military estimated that it has killed about 9,000 out of at least 30,000 Hamas fighters in Gaza with over 1,000 during the October 7 attack, amounting to about 30 percent of the resistance group's total fighting force. Citing a senior Israeli military official, the report said as many as 16,000 Hamas fighters have been wounded and about half of those will not return to the battlefield. It further noted that the U.S. estimates between 10,500 and 11,700 resistance fighters have been injured, many of those could eventually return to the battle ground. In U.S. military doctrine, a conventional force that loses 25%-30% of its fighters would be considered combat-ineffective. But Hamas is an irregular force fighting a defensive war in a dense urban environment and has access to hundreds of miles of tunnels under Gaza. It has shown that it can still fight, said retired Army General Joseph Votel, who commanded U.S. military operations in the Middle East. Recently, the Israeli military withdrew thousands of forces from the Gaza Strip in the first significant troop pullback since the devastating war began.

Iran to Develop Satellite Carrier for Geostationary Orbit Launch



TEHRAN - Iran will, within the next three years, develop an advanced satellite carrier that will put satellites into the geostationary orbit 36,000 kilometers above Earth, a military commander said. In comments on Saturday, Commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps Aerospace Force's Space Division General Ali Jafarabadi hailed the successful launch of the homegrown 'Soraya' satellite, which was sent into a low Earth orbit (LEO) with the 'Qaem-100' satellite carrier earlier in the day. The IRGC Aerospace Force successfully put Soraya into an orbit 750 kilometers above Earth in 11 minutes with Qaem-100, a three-stage satellite carrier running on solid fuel. General Jafarabadi said while the Qaem-100 satellite carrier has come into service for the cycle of operation, the IRGC will conduct the test launch of 'Qaem-105' next year. Within the next three years, Iran will test launch the 'Qaem-120' satellite carrier, which is planned to send satellites into an orbit 36,000 kilometers above Earth, he stated. The general noted that Iran has the technical know-how to manufacture complicated solid-fuel engines that are at the cutting edge of science, saying the homegrown engines contain composite materials that withstand very high temperatures and pressures and are equipped with precision-guided nozzles. The IRGC launched the first Iranian military satellite, Noor-1, in April 2020, and Noor-II in March 2022. They were sent into orbit by the Qassed satellite carrier, designed and manufactured by the IRGC Aerospace Force.

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Iran Denies Sanctions Are Preventing Umrah Pilgrimage to Saudi Arabia

TEHRAN (IRNA) - The Civil Aviation Organization of the Islamic Republic of Iran (CAA) has rejected that sanctions are the reasons for preventing Iranian Muslims from making the Umrah pilgrimage in Saudi Arabia. CAA's spokesman Jafar Yazariou said that the technical problems preventing Iranian Muslims from making the Umrah pilgrimage in Saudi Arabia are due to some agreements between the Civil Aviation Organization of the Islamic Republic of Iran and Saudi Arabia, which are being negotiated. He expressed hope that the technical problems will soon be resolved by the two sides. The existing technical problem is not related to political, or financial issues between Tehran and Riyadh, he underlined. He added that the sanctions are not the reason for preventing Iranian Muslims from making the Umrah pilgrimage in Saudi Arabia, noting that such issues are baseless and not true. Earlier, Iran's flagship carrier Iran Air said that all flights scheduled to carry Iranian Umrah pilgrims to Saudi Arabia were canceled as Saudi authorities had not issued permissions for them.

President to Visit Turkey on Wednesday



TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Turkish sources reported on Saturday that Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi is scheduled to visit Turkey on Wednesday. Earlier on January 3, president Raisi canceled his trip to Turkey in the wake of the terrorist incident in Kerman, which resulted in the martyrdom of a large number of our compatriots. Also, a planned visit by Raisi in late November was postponed due to the conflicting schedules of the two regional powers' foreign ministers, the official also said. At the time, Turkey's foreign minister was in New York as part of a "contact group" of Muslim countries on Gaza. Informed sources stated that during the president's visit to Turkey, the Iranian President would stress an effective and joint fight against all terrorist groups, especially the PKK and PJAK. The 8th meeting of the Supreme Cooperation Council will also be held with the Raisi's visit to Ankara. It is expected that within the framework of this trip, nearly 10 contracts and memorandums of understanding will be signed in the fields of culture, science, media, internal affairs, transportation, trade and economy.

Iran Refutes Two-State Solution for Palestine



TEHRAN (Tasnim) - The Iranian vice president dismissed the idea of a two-state solution to the conflict between Palestine and the Zionist regime, stressing that the Palestinian people must decide their own fate through the ballot box. Iran's First Vice President Mohammad Mokhber and Secretary General of the United Nations Antonio Guterres held a meeting on the sidelines of the 19th summit of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in Uganda's Kampala on Saturday. They talked about the pressing regional issues in the meeting, including the Gaza crisis. Pointing to the confirmations by all UN chiefs that the Israeli regime has not honored any international law and treaty, the Iranian vice president said, "The Islamic Republic, therefore, rejects a two-state solution to the issue of Palestine and believes that the only democratic solution to the issue is referring to the public votes of all Palestinian people as their right to self-determination without the others making decisions for that nation." Hailing the UN secretary general's stances against the Israeli regime's crimes in Gaza, Mokhber highlighted regional countries' serious concern about the spread of war with the continuation of the Zionist atrocities. "These bitter and dreadful incidents have hurt the feelings of the world nations. Today, international bodies are expected to play an effective role and engage more actively to stop the (Israeli) crimes in Gaza," the Iranian official added. For his part, Guterres said the UN is doing its utmost to deliver

humanitarian aid supplies to the people of Gaza, but the relentless bombardments have impeded the aid programs. He denounced the Israeli regime's plans to conquer the entire West Bank and displace its residents illegally, warning that such a plot will result in an endless crisis and the escalation of war and tensions in the Palestinian territories. Guterres also urged that Iran should be a main pillar of the Middle East and play an active role in ensuring regional peace. Meanwhile later Iran's first vice president, in a meeting with the South African Foreign Minister, appreciated the country's firm stance in supporting the people of Gaza and filing a complaint against the criminal Zionist regime in the International Court of Justice. During the Non-Aligned Movement summit on Saturday, South African Foreign Minister Naledi Pandor had a meeting with Mohammad Mokhber in Kampala. Mokhbar said in this meeting: "The capacity of independent countries will be very effective in stopping the Zionist crimes in Gaza." "While appreciating South Africa's support for Iran's membership in the BRICS and supporting the Islamic Republic in the international forums, Mokhber expressed dissatisfaction with the low level of economic relations between the two countries. The Foreign Minister of South Africa also said: South Africa is a small country but with lofty ideals, we firmly stand by the Palestinians and our priority is to convey the voice of the oppressed Palestinian nation to the world."

FM Condemns Israeli Assassination of Iranian Advisers in Syria



TEHRAN (Tasnim) - The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Iran condemned an Israeli airstrike on Damascus that killed five Iranian military advisers on Saturday, saying such intensified provocative moves reveal the Zionist regime's frustration in the battle against the resistance forces in Palestine. In a statement on Saturday evening, Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Nasser Kanaani strongly condemned the "murderous and aggressive" Israeli attack that killed several people, including five Iranian military advisers, in the Mazzeh neighborhood of Damascus. He said the repeated violation of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria and the escalation of aggressive and provocative attacks on various targets in the Arab country by the criminal and child-killing Zionist regime shows the helplessness of Tel Aviv on the battlefield against resistance forces in Gaza and the West Bank in the past hundred days and a desperate attempt by the regime to spread instability and insecurity across the region. He added that it's appropriate for governments and regional and international organizations, including the UN Security Council, to give a clear response to the aggressive, terrorist and criminal acts of the Zionist regime and condemn them decisively, the Foreign Ministry's website reported. The spokesman stressed that the military advisers of the Islamic Republic of Iran who are in Syria at the official invitation of the Syrian government have been playing an important role in helping the government, army and people of Syria in their fight against terrorism and in helping restore peace, stability and lasting security in the country in the past years. Kanaani underscored that the assassination of the Iranian military advisers by the Zionist regime clearly shows the deep and organized link between this terrorist regime and different terror and Daesh-style groups in the region. Undoubtedly, the blood of these valued martyrs will not be wasted and the Islamic Republic of Iran reserves the right to respond in kind to Israel's organized terrorism at the right time and place in addition to pursuing these aggressive and criminal acts through political, legal and international channels, he underlined.

Iran Reserves Right to Respond to Recent Terror Attacks

TEHRAN (IRNA) - The speaker of the Iranian Parliament (Majlis) Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf says that Iran and supporters of Islamic resistance reserve the right to take retaliatory action against the recent terrorist attacks. Qalibaf made the remarks in the Sunday open session of Majlis, noting that the Islamic Republic and the lovers of Islamic resistance are resolved to make the Zionist regime regret. The Zionist regime's successive defeats on the ground and their withdrawal from their hollow claims about military operations in Gaza and Hamas have led them to resort to their usual habit of terrorism, he underlined. The official added that they seek to restore their reputation which was lost in the Gaza battlefield through assassination and the irreparable failure of operation of October 7, 2023. However, assassinations can never be a cover-up of the Zionist regime's successive defeats, he further noted. The public relations office of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps has announced that during the air raid by the fighters of the aggressor and usurper Zionist regime, several Syrian forces and four military advisers of the Islamic Republic of Iran were martyred. Elsewhere in his remarks, Qalibaf termed the successful launch of the "Qaem-100" satellite carrier as a historic accomplishment for Iran's aerospace industry.

Iran Keen to Promote Political Ties With Sudan

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's First Vice President Mohammad Mokhber says the country is interested in the promotion of political ties with Sudan following the restoration of relations after seven years. Mokhber made the comment in a Saturday meeting with Sudanese acting Foreign Minister Ali al-Sadiq in Uganda's capital Kampala on the sidelines of the 19th summit of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). Tehran and Khartoum decided to restore relations to serve the two countries' interests after Iran and Saudi Arabia signed a China-brokered agreement in March 2023 to resume ties following a seven-year hiatus. Mokhber said Iran and Sudan have a common stance on the need to support the oppressed Palestinian people and called on Muslim countries to make more efforts to stop Israel's crimes in the Gaza Strip. He said the Palestinian resistance groups have succeeded in crushing the hegemony of Israel and the United States as the regime's great benefactor in the region. The Iranian official called for mounting international pressure to lift Gaza's blockade and provide immediate relief to its oppressed people. Elsewhere in his remarks, the Iranian vice president warned against plots by outsiders such as the Israeli regime to stoke unrest in Sudan. He said support for the Muslim people of Sudan and its legal government with the purpose of establishing peace and stability in the country is a principled stance taken by Iran. Sadiq, for his part, said Sudan was not interested in severing ties with Iran but it is now making efforts to boost mutual relations.

Iran Proposes Establishment of Joint Monetary Fund to Help Gazans

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iran has proposed the formation of a joint monetary fund with other countries to provide assistance to Palestinians in the Gaza Strip as the country hosted an international conference aimed at supporting the besieged territory ravaged by more than three months of war by the Israeli regime. The event, dubbed "International Humanitarian Conference to Support Palestine (Gaza)" took place in Tehran on Sunday, bringing together representatives from the Red Crescent Societies in Turkey, Qatar, Libya, Afghanistan, South Africa, and Tajikistan. Delegates from Islamic Committee of the International Crescent (ICIC), a relief institution affiliated to the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, were also in attendance. The proposal to form a joint monetary fund aimed at supporting the people of Gaza was put forward by

Head of Iran's Red Crescent Society Hossein Koulivand who addressed the conference. He argued that such a fund is needed in the wake of ineffectiveness of international bodies to send aid to Gaza, which he blamed on obstructionism of the Israeli regime as it hampers relief efforts in the besieged territory. As part of other measures to support Gazans, the Iranian official proposed using what he called humanitarian diplomacy aimed at bringing a permanent ceasefire in Gaza and presenting international courts with evidence on the regime's crimes. Mohsen Mansouri, Iran's deputy president for executive affairs, addressed the conference as well. He said that the Israeli regime has failed to achieve its goals in Gaza despite more than 100 days of bloodshed there and is now gripped in a war of attrition.



Shanghai to Host Glory of Ancient Persia Exhibition



TEHRAN (IRNA) - Deputy Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Ali Darabi has said that China's Shanghai is the next destination to host 'The Glory of Ancient Persia' exhibition. Darabi on Sunday in an interview referring to this exhibition in Beijing said that the Agricultural Bank of China is the financial sponsor of the exhibition. Iran's Deputy Minister of Cultural Heritage said that this exhibition was well received, adding that only one day after the opening ceremony, tickets to visit the Forbidden City Palace Museum were sold in advance for the next two weeks. The exhibition, dubbed "The Glory of Ancient Persia; Exhibition of Iranian cultural relics" opened on January 11, 2023, and will run for three months at the Palace Museum in the Chinese capital Beijing. The exhibition introduces Iranian culture and art from the Iron Age to the Safavid Empire through showcasing 211 artefacts, some of which date back to 3,000 years ago. A Marlik gold cup, a Sasanian glass bowl from Iran's northern region of Deilam, and the head of the Persepolis statue made of blue paste are among the works at display. Taking place at one of the world's largest museums, the exhibition is aimed at introducing the Iranian civilization and history to the Chinese people and to encourage them to visit Iran as the two countries inherit centuries of bilateral ties that are further expanding.

IRAN NEWS



Iran Rice Imports Fall by 42% This Year

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Iran's Deputy Minister of Agriculture Ahmad Khani Norouzi said on Sunday that the country's rice imports have decreased by 42% this year. Noting that Iran has been importing an average 1.4 million metric tons (mt) of the crop over the past ten years, the official said that Iran's rice imports rose to as much as 1.8 million mt in the past calendar year. He noted that the rise in Iran's last year rice imports was largely as a result of an increase in the prices of the domestically-grown rice, and the need for more rice reserves due to concerns about the consequences of the Ukraine war and increasing demand for foreign rice in the Iranian market. He put the country's annual rice output at 2.2 million mt.

Hassanzadeh Becomes New President of Iran Chamber of Commerce



TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Samad Hassanzadeh has been elected to take the helm of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines, and Agriculture (ICCIMA) for a new four-year term. The election to select the new president of ICCIMA was officially held on Sunday morning in Tehran with attendance of 412 members of the Board of Representative. Hassanzadeh secured 208 votes of the total votes cast to become the president of Iran Chamber of Commerce which is known as the country's private sector parliament. He previously served as the vice president of Iran Chamber of Commerce. Hassanzadeh was followed by Farajollah Me'mari, Ahad Azimzadeh and Mojtaba Ghiyabi with 181, 15, and 5 votes respectively. The rest three votes were announced dismissed. The elections come after the Iran Chamber of Commerce President Hossein Selahvarzi finally agreed to hold snap elections following months of controversy as a supervisory council at the Ministry of Industry, Mine, and Trade (MIMT) argued that he was not eligible to run for the June 18 elections in which he won the majority of the votes to become the president of Iran Chamber of Commerce.



Iran's 3-Month Hydropower Output Reaches 1,430 MWh

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Iran's hydroelectric power plants generated 1,430 megawatt hours (MWh) of electricity in the third quarter of the current Iranian calendar year (September 23-December 21, 2023). The generation of the mentioned amount of electricity has saved the country about \$60 million in fossil fuels while preventing environmental pollution. Hydropower, also known as water power, is the use of falling or fast-running water to generate electricity or to power machines. This is achieved by converting the gravitational potential or kinetic energy of a water source to produce power. Hydropower is a method of sustainable energy production. Hydropower is now used principally for hydroelectric power generation and is also applied as one-half of an energy storage system known as pumped-storage hydroelectricity. Hydropower is an attractive alternative to fossil fuels as it does not directly produce carbon dioxide or other atmospheric pollutants and it provides a relatively consistent source of power. Nonetheless, it has economic, sociological, and environmental downsides and requires a sufficiently energetic source of water, such as a river or elevated lake.



Water Transfer Plan From Sea of Oman to Southeastern Iran Progresses 23%

IRNA
Seyed Mosleh Pirkehzezanian

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - The project for transferring water from the Sea of Oman to the southeastern Sistan-Baluchestan province has reached 23 percent physical progress. A budget of \$400 million was allocated by the government in March 2016 to the project which looked also to transfer water to the eastern provinces of South Khorasan and Khorasan Razavi. The project, being implemented by the Iranian Mines and Mining Industries Development and Renovation Organization (IMIDRO), aims to boost production, expand industries and agriculture, and provide potable water to residents in arid areas. Once an efficient permanent solution, water supply schemes are now being considered the main cause of environmental depletion haunting many parts of the country leading to dried-up lakes and rivers, and poor water resources management resulting in excessive water withdrawal is also a major threat to the country's future. Another project for transferring water from the Persian Gulf to the southern Fars

province is in its pipe-laying phase. The project, which aims to supply water for drinking, agriculture, and industry in Fars province, started in February 2019. However, redistribution of water resources is inevitably involved in changes in the ecological environment and endangering nature. Experts believe that these projects entailing economic and environmental burdens are no solution to droughts, and demand the water transfer projects be dismissed due to the irreparable damages to the environment namely deforestation, wildlife habitat destruction, biodiversity degradation, improper land change use, and contaminated seawater. Changes are divided into two negative and positive impacts, including water supply in water-deficient areas, facilitating the water cycle, improving meteorological conditions in the recipient basins, mitigating ecological water shortage, repairing the damaged ecological system, and preserving the endangered wild fauna and flora.

Tehran, Manila Call for Bolstering Economic Ties



TEHRAN (MNA) - Iran's Vice President Mohammad Mokhber and Secretary of Foreign Affairs of the Philippines Enrique Manalo have urged strengthening economic ties. On the sideline of the 19th summit of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in Uganda, Mokhber met and held talks with Manalo on Saturday. Referring to the deep-rooted ties between Iran and the Philippines and marking the 60th anniversary of diplomatic relations between the two countries, Mokhber described the volume of existing trade exchanges between the two sides as insufficient and called for expanding the economic exchanges by activating the private sectors and removing the barriers. He described Iran's capacities in the fields of medicine, medical equipment, agriculture,

and petrochemicals as an appropriate platform for developing relations, adding that banking and transportation exchanges are two important challenges for economic interactions that the two countries can overcome such obstacles by creating the necessary platforms. Mokhber also urged increased international efforts and cooperation to stop the Zionist regime's atrocities in Gaza. For his part, Manalo termed the positions of the two countries very close in international arenas and expressed his country's will to develop economic ties with the Islamic Republic of Iran. Referring to the dire humanitarian situation in Gaza, he stressed that the Philippines will spare no effort to stop the war and send humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip.

\$1b of Non-Oil Products Exported to Pakistan in 2023



TEHRAN (Tasnim) - Pakistan's Ministry of Commerce statistics indicated that Iran exported about \$1 billion worth of non-oil products to the South Asian country in 2023, registering a 13-percent growth compared to a year earlier. Pakistan imported \$994 million worth of goods from Iran in 2023, the report said. The country had imported \$834 million worth of non-oil goods from Iran in 2022. Pakistan's official exports to Iran in 2023 were only \$155,000. Pakistan had exported \$21,000 worth of products to Iran in 2022. Statistics show that Pakistan's export of products to Iran has not exceeded \$200 million in recent years, and it has reached an almost zero level since 2020, registering a declining trend.

IME Witnesses 19.4% Rise in Weekly Trade



TEHRAN - Iran Mercantile Exchange (IME) last week witnessed trade of 3,908,033 ton of commodities with a total trading value of more than \$731m on its physical market. According to a report by the IME's International Affairs and PR, the exchange saw on its metals and minerals trading floor trade of 3,281,397 tons of commodities valued at nearly \$464m. On this floor the IME sold 1,480,000 tons of iron ore, 1,191,076 tons of cement, 429,975 tons of steel, 189,000 tons of sponge iron, 9,730 tons of copper, 7,650 tons of aluminum, 2,210 tons of zinc, 200 tons of molybdenum concentrate and 18 tons of precious metals concentrate. Moreover, the IME witnessed on both domestic and export rings of its oil and petrochemical trading floor 546,578 tons of commodities worth almost \$252m. Commodities traded on this floor included 160,500 tons of vacuum bottom, 158,224 tons of bitumen, 108,642 tons of polymeric products, 68,500 tons of lube cut, 33,527 tons of chemicals, 10,710 tons of sulfur, 5,807 tons of oil, 500 tons of slops wax and 320 tons of feedstocks. The IME also traded within the same week 80,058 tons of goods on its side market.

Trump Holds 16-Point Lead Over Haley in New Hampshire

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Former President Trump has a 16.4-point lead over former South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley in New Hampshire, four days before the state's Republican primary, according to a survey released Friday by Suffolk University. Although Haley has picked up major ground in recent months, the former president has a notable lead ahead of Tuesday's primary. Just more than half — 51.8 percent — of respondents said they were going to vote for him, while 35.4 percent of respondents said Haley has their vote. Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis came in third among major candidates, with 6.4 percent of respondents saying they plan to vote for him. A majority of voters said it's not likely they will change their minds about who they will vote for, the survey found. Respondents who said they were going to vote for Haley were asked whether their vote was more "FOR Haley" or "AGAINST Donald Trump." Fifty-four percent of Haley voters said they were choosing the former United Nations ambassador in opposition to Trump, while 42 percent said it was more of a vote for her.



Japan's SLIM Moon Craft Short on Power After Successful Lunar Landing



TOKYO (Dispatches) - Japan on Saturday became the fifth country to put a spacecraft on the moon, but solar power issues threatened to cut short the nation's mission to prove a "precision" landing technology and revitalise a space programme that has suffered setbacks. The Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA) said its Smart Lander for Investigating Moon (SLIM) landed the moon's surface at around 12:20 a.m. (15:20 GMT Friday), but its solar panels were not able to generate electricity, possibly because they are angled wrong. JAXA prioritised the transfer of SLIM's data to earth as the probe relied only on its battery, which would last for "a few hours" despite "life-sustaining treatments" such as turning off its heater. Hitoshi Kuninaka, the head of JAXA's research centre, told a press conference. JAXA will maintain the status quo rather than take risky actions and hopes a shift in the sunlight's angle will hit the panels in a way that can restore its functions, he added. "It takes 30 days for the solar angle to change on the moon," Kuninaka said. "So when the solar direction changes, and the light shines from a different direction, the light could end up hitting the solar cell." Signal from the SLIM was lost, data from NASA's Deep Space Network showed. It was not immediately clear whether the signal loss was temporary or a power-saving measure. Dubbed the "moon sniper", SLIM attempted to land within 100 metres (328 feet) of its target, versus the conventional accuracy of several kilometres, a technology JAXA says will become a powerful tool in future exploration of hilly moon poles seen as a potential source of oxygen, fuel and water. "Looking at the trace data, SLIM most certainly achieved a landing with 100-metre accuracy," Kuninaka said, although adding it will take about a month to verify it. The Soviet Union, the United States, China, and India are the only four countries that have successfully carried out soft landings on the moon. Japan is increasingly looking to play a bigger role in space, partnering with ally the United States to counter China. Japan is also home to several private-sector space startups and the JAXA aims to send an astronaut to the moon as part of NASA's Artemis program in the next few years. But the Japanese space agency has recently faced multiple setbacks in rocket development, including the launch failure in March of its new flagship rocket H3 that was meant to match cost-competitiveness against commercial rocket providers like SpaceX. The failure caused widespread delays in Japan's space missions, including SLIM and a joint lunar exploration with India, which in August made a historic touchdown on the moon's south pole with its Chandrayaan-3 probe.

Fighting Rages Across Gaza Where Death Toll Surges



GAZA (Dispatches) - Health officials in Hamas-run Gaza reported a surging death toll as Israeli leader Benjamin Netanyahu, who has faced increasing domestic criticism, rejected calls for "Palestinian sovereignty" after the war. While fighting raged across the besieged Gaza Strip, a strike in Syria blamed on Israel and missiles fired at US-led coalition forces in Iraq raised further fears of a wider conflagration. Gaza's health ministry reported at least 165 people killed over the previous 24 hours — more than double yesterday's figure. An AFP correspondent reported gunfire, air strikes and tank shelling, especially in southern Gaza's Khan Yunis city. In Rafah, further south near the border with Egypt, at least five people were killed in a strike that "targeted a civilian car", the health ministry said. Israel is pressing its push southwards against Hamas, after the army in early January said the militants' command structure in northern Gaza had been dismantled, leaving only isolated fighters. But Hamas reported fierce combat in north Gaza as Israel's military said troops backed by air and naval support were striking militant infrastructure throughout the Palestinian territory. Israel has vowed to destroy Hamas in response to the group's unprecedented October attacks which resulted in the deaths of about 1,140 people, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally based on official Israeli figures. Israel's relentless bombardment and ground offensive have killed at least 24,927 people in Gaza, mostly women and children, according to the Hamas government's health ministry.

The United States, which provides Israel with billions of dollars in military aid, has urged it to take more care to protect civilians, and the two sides have disagreed over Gaza's future governance. Prime Minister Netanyahu and U.S. President Joe Biden on Friday discussed the post-war future of Gaza. Biden said it was still possible Netanyahu could agree to some form of Palestinian state, after the two spoke for the first time in nearly a month. But Netanyahu's office in a statement today said "Israel must retain security control over Gaza to ensure that Gaza will no longer pose a threat to Israel, a requirement that contradicts the demand for Palestinian sovereignty." UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, speaking at the Non-Aligned Movement summit in Uganda, said the Palestinian right to statehood "must be recognised by all". "The refusal to accept a two-state solution for Israelis and Palestinians, and the denial of the right to statehood for the Palestinian people, are unacceptable," he said. The UN's UNRWA agency for Palestinian refugees says about 1.7 million people have been displaced in Gaza by the war. About one million are crowded into the Rafah area. The war has sent regional tensions soaring, with a surge in violence involving Iran-backed Hamas allies. In Gaza, the UN humanitarian agency OCHA reported just 15 bakeries operating across the narrow territory. It said water availability for drinking and domestic use "is shrinking every day". UN agencies have warned better aid access is needed urgently as famine and disease loom.

Peru President Faces Fierce Backlash in Slain Protesters' Hometown



LIMA (Dispatches) - Peruvian President Dina Boluarte faced fierce backlash from residents during a visit to the southern Andean region of Ayacucho, where 10 people were reported killed during anti-government protests in December 2022. Unverified videos shared on social media show people pushing up against security officials shouting "Dina is a murderer!" One woman, who said her husband had been killed in mid-December 2022 in protests that would go on for months, managed to evade security and shake up the president. Local media reported that she was taken away by police but not detained. The woman identified herself to reporters as Ruth Barcena and said her late husband, Leonardo Hanco, had been fatally shot during protests in December 2022. "My husband was murdered here. They killed my husband, and they want me to calm down?" Barcena shouted in the crowd. The December 2022 protests broke out after former President Pedro Castillo was ousted and arrested while illegally trying to close Congress. His vice-president, Boluarte, was rapidly sworn in but dozens died in ensuing protests, mostly in southern Peru. Boluarte has faced a constitutional complaint and probe on charges of "genocide, qualified homicide and serious injuries," charges she denies. Prime Minister Jorge Otárola condemned Saturday's protest as a "lamentable" act on X, saying it had "put in danger the head of state's integrity and this is very serious. With violence, we all lose as a country." Peru's interior ministry said it would carry out investigations to identify those responsible.



Zelensky Says He Is Frightened by Prospect of Second Trump Presidency

KYIV (Dispatches) - Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelensky invited former U.S. president, Donald Trump, to visit Ukraine, but only on the condition that he deliver on his words to "stop the war in 24 hours". Mr Trump has repeatedly boasted that he has the ability to end the Russia-Ukraine war if he were a president, insisting that he has a good relationship with the leaders of both countries. "Yes please, Donald Trump — I invite you to Ukraine, to Kyiv," Mr Zelensky said in an interview aired on Friday evening with UK broadcaster Channel 4 News. "If you can stop the war during 24 hours, I think it will be enough to come to Kyiv, on any day I am here." The leader of the war-torn country said he was "frightened" at the prospect of Mr Trump returning to power due to his such speeches. He said his rhetoric to end the war in 24 hours sounds "very dangerous" as he will make decisions on his own as his idea to deal with the issue could mean ceding Ukrainian land to Vladimir Putin. "He will make decisions on his own without — I am not even talking about Russia — but without both sides, without us," Mr Zelensky said. "I will now talk about us. Why? Because if he says this publicly, it's a little scary. Although I've seen a lot and lot of victims, but it really stresses me out a bit. "Because it means that if his idea [of ending the war quickly], which no one has heard about, if his idea will not work for us, for our people, then he will do everything to achieve the implementation of his idea anyway. And this is what worries me a little," he added. In an interview

with CNN last year, Mr Trump said: "If I'm president, I will have that war settled in one day, 24 hours." "I'll meet with Putin. I'll meet with Zelensky. They both have weaknesses and they both have strengths. And within 24 hours that war will be settled," he said. The Ukrainian president who has maintained strong ties with Democratic leader Joe Biden has remained wary of the Republican front-runner and his allies ahead of the US presidential election amid a blockade to emergency funding for Ukraine by Republicans in Congress. During his political career, Mr Trump has over his close and friendly ties with Mr Putin and also called him "smart" for occupying "a vast, vast location, a great piece of land with a lot of people". Mr Trump who is leading Mr Biden in polls for a key battleground in election race, again made reference to the war in Ukraine during his speech after victory in the Republican Iowa caucus. He said that "Russia would not have attacked" if he was still the president as he and the Russian leader "get along very well". Speaking in Davos last week at the World Economic Forum, Mr Zelensky brushed off fears that Mr Trump's potential re-election would lead to reduced support for Ukraine. He said: "One man cannot change the whole nation". He also dismissed the idea that Mr Trump could not contain the war, saying Mr Putin "will not stop — but the question is what will the US and Trump do after this point, because in this case, it will mean that Europe lost the most useful and most strong army in Europe because we lost Ukraine".



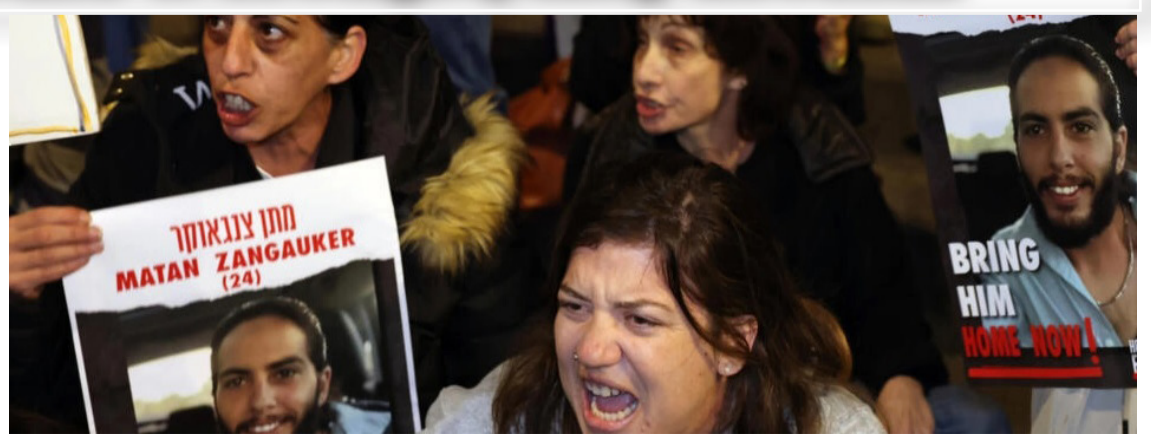
NATO Official Urges Civilians in the West to Prepare for All-Out War With Russia

LONDON (Dispatches) - Western militaries, as well as civilians, need to be prepared for an "all-out war" with Russia that may significantly affect their lives, Britain's Sky News reported on Jan. 19, citing Dutch Admiral Rob Bauer, chairman of the NATO Military Committee. "We have to realize it's not a given that we will be at peace," said Bauer. "That's why we must prepare for a conflict with Russia." He added that such preparations also included the industrial base and the population at large, noting that Sweden had done the right thing in calling on its population to prepare for war earlier in January. "There must be a realization that not everything is plannable and not everything is necessarily going to be ideal in the next 20 years," Bauer warned. The official's warning comes ahead of the launch of NATO's biggest exercise since the Cold War, as the alliance practices repelling an invasion by Russian forces. Some 90,000 troops are set to join the Steadfast Defender exercise, which will take place across Europe through May. The Russian invasion of Ukraine demonstrates that the world is now in an era when anything could happen at any time, including war, Bauer warned at the opening of a two-day meeting of national defense chiefs in Brussels, Reuters reported on Jan. 17. "Ukraine will have our support for every day that is to come, because the outcome of this war will determine the fate of the world," he said. New military threats could emerge by the end of the decade and Europe must ensure it can defend itself, Germany's defense minister Boris Pistorius told Reuters on Dec. 16. There are also fears Russia might attempt to attack Europe at the end of 2024 or the beginning of 2025, when the US will be "without a leader" as a result of presidential elections.

Israeli Protesters Demand Return of Hostages, Early Elections

TEL AVIV (Dispatches) - Thousands of people demonstrated in central Tel Aviv, calling for the return of hostages held in Gaza and early elections to oust Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Demonstrators marched through the city's Habima Square, a frequent protest site, with some carrying signs calling Netanyahu "the face of evil" and demanding "elections now". Protesters demanding the return of hostages also gathered in Haifa and outside the premier's Jerusalem residence. Netanyahu is under intense pressure to secure the return of the hostages seized by Hamas on October 7, with the militant group on Monday announcing the deaths of two more of its captives. Avi Lulu Shamriz, the father of Alon Shamriz, a hostage mistakenly killed by Israeli troops earlier in the war, told AFP in Tel Aviv Netanyahu's war cabinet was heading for disaster. "The way we're going, all the hostages are going to die. It's not too late to free them," he said. In a briefing on Saturday evening, military spokesman Daniel Hagari said troops had found a tunnel in Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip where some hostages had been kept. "We found evidence indicating the presence of hostages," he said. This evidence included paintings, including by a five-year-old captive. He said "about 20 hostages" had been held in the tunnel at different times "in difficult conditions without daylight... with little oxygen and terrible humidity". Soldiers entered the tunnel where they encountered militants and fought a battle in which "the terrorists were eliminated", Hagari said. Netanyahu's coalition has increasingly come under attack from rival politicians and critics over his handling of the war. Another protester, Yael Niv, said Israel desperately needed a new government to correct the country's course. The 50-year-old said "the

messianic elements in our government" were a major danger to Israel, as she handed out stickers urging the return of the hostages. "Eliminating Hamas is not going to happen through war and the escalation of violence," she added. Demonstrator Dor Endov, a lawyer, said the war needs to stop and hostages be brought back. "He'd really like this war to continue," Endov said of Netanyahu. "We already lost the war on 7th of October when those people were kidnapped ... We want our family, our kidnapped people back home." Netanyahu has vowed to destroy Hamas in response to the Palestinian group's unprecedented October 7 attacks which resulted in the deaths of about 1,140 people in Israel, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally based on official Israeli figures.



Survival Rate for Pancreatic Cancer Improves

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Pancreatic cancer is known as a 'silent killer' because it's usually only detected in its later stages. But there's a glimmer of good news for patients: The five-year survival rate for people with the disease has crept up to 13%, according to 2024 statistics from the American Cancer Society released Wednesday. That's more than double the 6% five-year survival rate of a decade ago, noted experts at Pancreatic Cancer Action Network (PanCAN). The organization credits the improvement to better detection and management of patients with cancers that have not spread beyond the pancreas. "We have seen better management of people who are considered high risk and better survival of those with localized disease, most likely due to the increased use and improvements in treatments available before [neoadjuvant] and after [adjuvant] surgery," Lynn Matrisian, PanCAN's chief science officer, said in an organization news release. All of this is "good news," said PanCAN President and CEO Julie Fleshman, who added that, "We are seeing more patients being diagnosed at earlier stages and they are living longer."



IRAN NEWS

Quitting Antidepressants May Lead to Emotional, Social Struggles



NEW YORK (Dispatches) - People coming off antidepressants often struggle with emotional and social turmoil, especially if they quit their meds cold turkey, a new study reports. Challenges reported by patients quitting antidepressants included feeling overwhelmed by their emotions, finding social situations less enjoyable, and feeling detached and less empathetic towards others. "Some symptoms were so severe, family and friends of the person coming off medication encouraged them to go back on it," said lead researcher Raqeeb Mahmood, a doctoral student in psychology with the University of Bath. For the study, researchers conducted interviews with 20 people who had attempted within the past year to withdraw from SSRI (selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor) antidepressants like Prozac. Stopping antidepressant therapy is known to trigger physical symptoms like restlessness, fatigue and excessive sweating. But this study, published recently in the journal Health Expectations, supports the notion that patients will also experience emotional symptoms. "From these interviews, it became clear that the lived experience of withdrawal significantly impacts individuals' well-being," Mahmood said in a university news release. "The participants emphasized that withdrawal is not just about physical side effects, but it also affected their emotional, cognitive and social functioning." Some patients found the first days or weeks of withdrawal most challenging, while other struggled several months after they started coming off antidepressants. More than half of the participants said that withdrawal negatively affected their relationships with others, noted study co-author Dr. Katherine Button, a senior lecturer in psychology at the University of Bath. For example, one study participant said, "I got snappier more easily and prone to anger outbursts over trivial things."

Driving Habits May Signal a Sleep Disorder



NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Do you drive with the window open? Sip coffee behind the wheel? Blast the car radio and sing along? Fidget and fuss in the driver's seat? These sorts of driving habits could be a sign that you're getting poor sleep because you suffer from sleep apnea, a new study suggests. Folks with sleep apnea frequently employ more than three of these strategies while driving, in an attempt to remain awake and alert, British researchers found. "Our research suggests that untreated OSA [obstructive sleep apnea] patients often use coping strategies that could be surrogate markers of sleepiness," said researcher Dr. Akshay Dwarakanath, a consultant in respiratory medicine at the Mid Yorkshire Hospitals NHS Trust. People with sleep apnea have breathing that stops and starts during the night, often causing them to repeatedly wake up. They also tend to snore loudly. "Up to one fifth of collisions on the road may be caused by fatigue or sleepiness," Dwarakanath said. "Many OSA patients drive either for personal or for professional reasons, and there is good evidence to suggest that some patients are at increased risk of collisions on the road." For this study, researchers compared 119 people with sleep apnea with 105 people without the sleep disorder. All participants answered questions about their sleepiness in general, sleepiness while driving, strategies they use to stay alert and their history of driving accidents. People with sleep apnea were more likely to use strategies to stay alert at the wheel, results show. Nearly a third of sleep apnea patients frequently used more than three such coping strategies, while none of the people with healthy sleep used more than three, the researchers said. Further, sleep apnea patients who used more than three strategies felt sleepier in general and more sleepy while driving. They also were far more likely to have experienced a crash - nearly 23%, compared to 2% of sleep apnea patients who used fewer coping strategies. Coping strategies most often cited by sleep apnea patients included: Opening the window, drinking tea or coffee, turning up the radio, singing or talking to themselves, chewing gum or eating, stopping for a walk, a nap or to splash their face with cold water, and fidgeting or exercising. The new study was published Wednesday in the journal ERJ Open Research. Dwarakanath recommends that doctors ask patients about their driving habits as one means of ferreting out undiagnosed sleep apnea. "Asking about these strategies in the clinic may help doctors identifying patients who are at risk of driving incidents and to advise appropriately," Dwarakanath said in a journal news release.



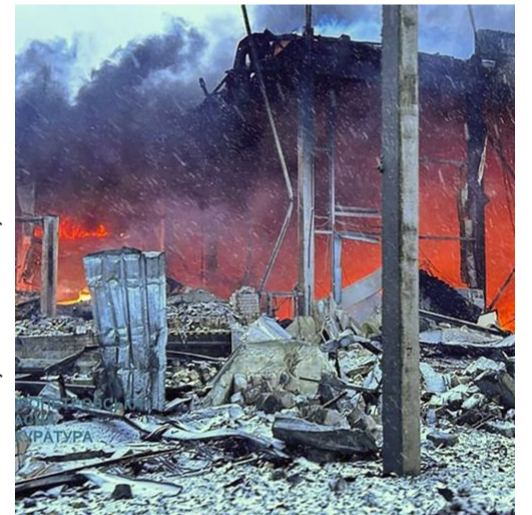
PARIS (Dispatches) - A German company is seeking to use the exposure generated by the Paris Olympics to overcome the opposition of local politicians and demonstrate that flying taxis can serve the French capital. Volocopter hopes that by being certified in Paris - which has some of the strictest regulations for over-flights - it can prove that flying taxis aren't just science fiction gimmicks. "If you can fly in Paris, you can fly in any city in the world," Volocopter's CEO Dirk Hoke told AFP. The company's "VoloCity" is a two-seat electric vertical take-off and landing aircraft that resembles a gigantic insect crowned with 18 rotors. Volocopter wants it to be the first such aircraft certified by both EASA and the FAA, the European and US civil aviation security agencies. In the meantime, the aircraft is conducting test flights to be certified to fly over Paris, which requires showing that it has the same level of safety as a commercial aircraft, which is 100 times more than that of a helicopter. Statistically, that means one accident every billion flight hours, which is longer than the lifespan of any aircraft. Hoke says he's hopeful to receive a special permit from EASA to carry out demonstration flights without paying passengers during the Olympics. Following the Olympics, VoloCity will carry out two years of test flights in the Paris region. A "learning period", Hoke says, to show that "these systems are not just fiction" and to win the public's confidence. "Noise, safety and durability are the most important criteria

for flying above a city," he explains. In September, French environmental regulators judged as "incomplete" a study on the impact of taxi flights along the Seine, noting visual and sound disturbances. Paris' municipal council issued a non-binding negative verdict on plans to build a "vertiport" near the Austerlitz tram station, with some calling the project "absurd" or an "ecological aberration." "We have to take these views seriously and respond to these concerns, because what's important to us is not just the certification, but public acceptance," he said. He insists the noise, which is 55 to 60 decibels at 75 to 100 metres, is nothing like a helicopter and is about the level of a conversation. "We will have support when people see and hear the flights and realise that they don't disturb city life," Hoke said. Volocopter needs €25 million to €30 million (RM129 million to RM154 million) for the two years of demonstration flights around Paris, and between €200 million to €300 million to prepare the next step. The current configuration, with just one seat besides the pilot, will never be profitable. But a new aircraft with four seats should be ready by late 2026, early 2027. "That's when there will be a real business case," he said. As to claims that flying taxis are elitist, Hoke recalls that the first Tesla was a two-seater electric roadster. "Everyone said that it was ridiculous, just a toy," he said. "Fifteen years later, Elon Musk has changed everything. We can do the same for aircraft, and it'll happen faster than people think."

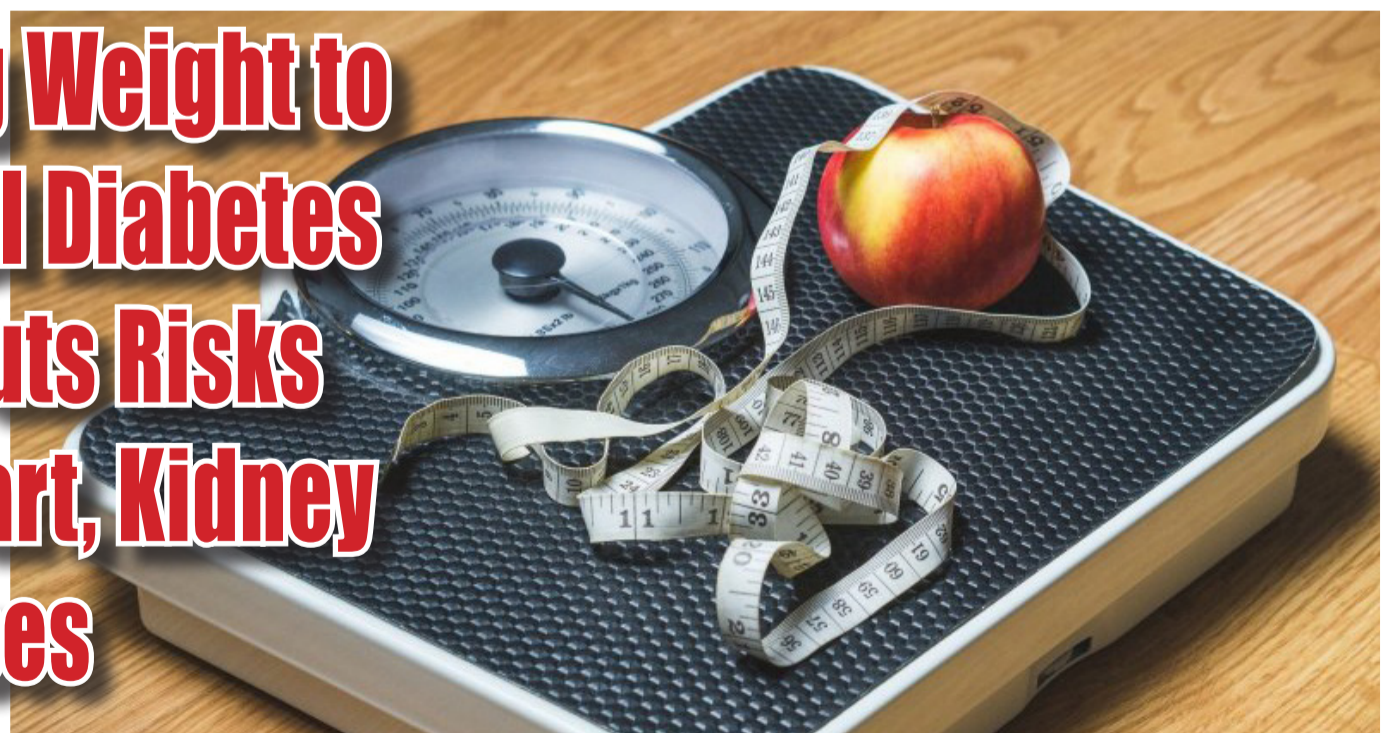
Ukraine War Increases Greenhouse Gas Emissions

KYIV (Dispatches) - A new study released Friday suggests that during a one-and-a-half year period, Russia's war on Ukraine exceeded the annual greenhouse gas emissions of European nations such as Austria, Portugal and Hungary. The research team was led by Rostyslav Bun of Ukraine's Lviv Polytechnic National University and WBS University in Poland and includes co-author Dr. Tomohiro Oda from the Universities Space Research Association. The research paper was published in the journal Science of the Total Environment. The research scientists said their paper focused on emissions processes due to wartime activities that may not be covered in official national reporting. "The sum of such 'unaccounted' for emissions of carbon dioxide, methane, and nitrous oxide for 18 months of the war in Ukraine is, by our first-order estimate, 77 MtCO₂-eq. (relative uncertainty estimated at 22 %, 95 % confidence interval)," the researchers wrote. "These emissions are greater than the annual total GHG emissions of Austria, Portugal or Hungary." Researchers said the study focused on "the latest additional emissions caused by: missile launches and projectile firings and explosions; the use of petroleum products by

military vehicles; fires at oil depots; fires in buildings and industrial infrastructure; fires in forests and on agricultural lands; and the destruction of wooden constructions." "On the one hand, in many sectors of human activity in Ukraine, emissions substantially decreased in 2022 (from public power and heat production, metallurgy, transport, the commercial and residential sectors, and others)," the study said. "At the same time, emissions related to refugees and internally displaced persons have increased, and even larger additional emissions are expected in the future because of the reconstruction of Ukraine. The study said Russia and Ukraine are both significant sources of greenhouse gas emissions and in 2020 were the 4th and 33rd largest emitting countries, respectively. They concluded by saying the increased emissions should not be considered Ukraine's responsibility and should instead be attributed to Russia, the "aggressor country." But regardless of responsibility, they wrote, these war-related untracked emissions "are currently entering the atmosphere, and the international community, scientists, and policy makers should be aware of this problem and its magnitude."



Losing Weight to Control Diabetes Also Cuts Risks for Heart, Kidney Diseases



NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Folks who drop pounds to help control their diabetes receive other substantial health benefits for all their efforts, a new study says. Substantial weight loss that led to even a short-lived remission in Type 2 diabetes also prompted a 40% lower rate in heart disease and a 33% lower rate of kidney disease, researchers report in last Thursday's issue of the journal Diabetologia. "As the first intervention study to associate remission with reduction of diabetes-related complications, this is encouraging news for those who can achieve remission from Type 2 diabetes," said lead researcher Edward Gregg, head of population health at RCSI University of Medicine and Health Sciences in Dublin. For the study, researchers tracked 5,145 overweight or obese adults with Type 2 diabetes for 12 years. About 18% of patients randomly assigned to an intensive diet and lifestyle plan wound up controlling their diabetes to the point they needed no medication and had normal blood sugar levels, which researchers considered remission. Those

patients had lower rates of heart and kidney disease than those who didn't achieve remission, researchers found. Further, the risk of heart or kidney disease declined most in people with longer-term remission. Those who experienced at least four years of remission had a 49% reduced risk of heart disease and a 55% reduced risk of kidney disease. Patients were more likely to go into remission if they hadn't had diabetes for long, had more control over their blood sugar and experienced a large magnitude of weight loss, researchers said. It's not easy to remain in remission. Only 3% of patients were still in remission by the eighth year of the study, researchers noted. But even short-lived episodes of remission were associated with lower rates of heart and kidney disease, compared with patients who never achieved remission. "While our study is also a reminder that maintenance of weight loss and remission is difficult, our findings suggests any success with remission is associated with later health benefits," Gregg said in a university news release.

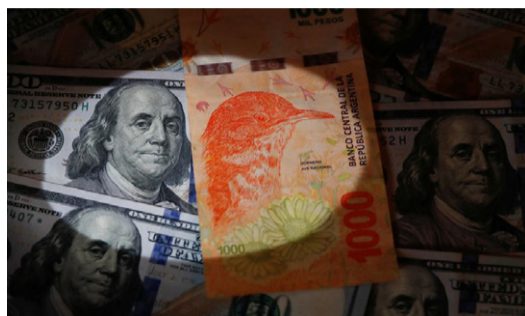
IRAN NEWS



Women in Germany Earn 18% Less Than Men, Pay Gap Remains

BERLIN (Dispatches) - The Federal Statistics Office reported that, on average, women in Germany earned 18% less than their male counterparts last year. This disparity is primarily attributed to a plateau in earnings following childbirth and the adoption of part-time employment by women. The data show that the gender pay gap in Europe's biggest economy has remained unchanged since 2020. That is down from 23% when records started in 2006. On an adjusted basis, the gender pay gap for 2023 was 6%, said the office. Women's earnings start to stagnate from the age of 30 years, the average age for women to have their first child in Germany, said the office, while men continue to earn more. "This could be because women interrupt their careers more frequently during their working lives for family reasons and work part time," said the office, adding that career advancement and pay rises are therefore less frequent.

Argentina Inflation, Widening FX Gap Revive Devaluation Chatter



BUENOS AIRES (Reuters) - Argentina's 211% inflation rate and the return to a widening gap between official and parallel exchange rates is stoking expectations of another devaluation of the peso, just over a month after its dollar value was cut in half. The South American country's peso has been sliding since the turn of the year in the popular black market and other parallel markets, which for years have diverged sharply from the official rate, which is propped up by strict capital controls. Dollars cost over 1,200 pesos in parallel markets, versus around 820 at the official exchange rate. That's a gap of nearly 50%, which has doubled in recent weeks after narrowing sharply in December when the government devalued the peso more than 50%. That widening is stirring market expectations that the government of libertarian Javier Milei may devalue again soon, especially with monthly inflation over 25% in December, well above the 2% monthly "crawling peg" weakening the peso. "If this rate of depreciation of the peso is sustained and there is no positive news on prices, expectations regarding a devaluation will increase," said Pablo Besmedrisnik, director of the consulting firm Invenómica. He added it would make more sense to devalue before the key harvest period in March-April of cash crops soy and corn, otherwise expectations of a devaluation then would encourage producers to postpone exports, hurting state coffers. Inflation at a three-decade high, demand for dollars by importers and political uncertainties this year have weighed on the peso, which had gained ground in parallel markets in the wake of the devaluation by Milei after he took office. "I would not be surprised if one of these days we wake up to another significant devaluation by the central bank," said a veteran local foreign exchange trader who asked not to be named, adding the 2% monthly crawling peg was "unsustainable". A devaluation, he said, would encourage more exports and help cut the fiscal deficit. Argentina has myriad parallel exchange rates, popular because access to the official market is strictly limited. The "CCL" rate has weakened 20% this year, the black market "blue" rate has lost 17%, while the official rate is down just 1.3%. Argentina, which has a \$44 billion program with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), has built up some \$5 billion in foreign currency reserves this year, part of economic targets with the lender, helped by the weaker official peso. Agustín Etchebarne, director at the Freedom and Progress Foundation, said that the government would likely devalue again in February-March ahead of the harvest. Argentina is the No. 3 corn exporter and one of the top processed soy suppliers. "In my opinion, they have to get out of the exchange rate trap as soon as possible and have a true single and free exchange market, or well, dollarize," he said, referring to a longer-term plan pitched by Milei to adopt the dollar. "It's clear that the 2% monthly devaluation with much higher inflation is not sustainable."

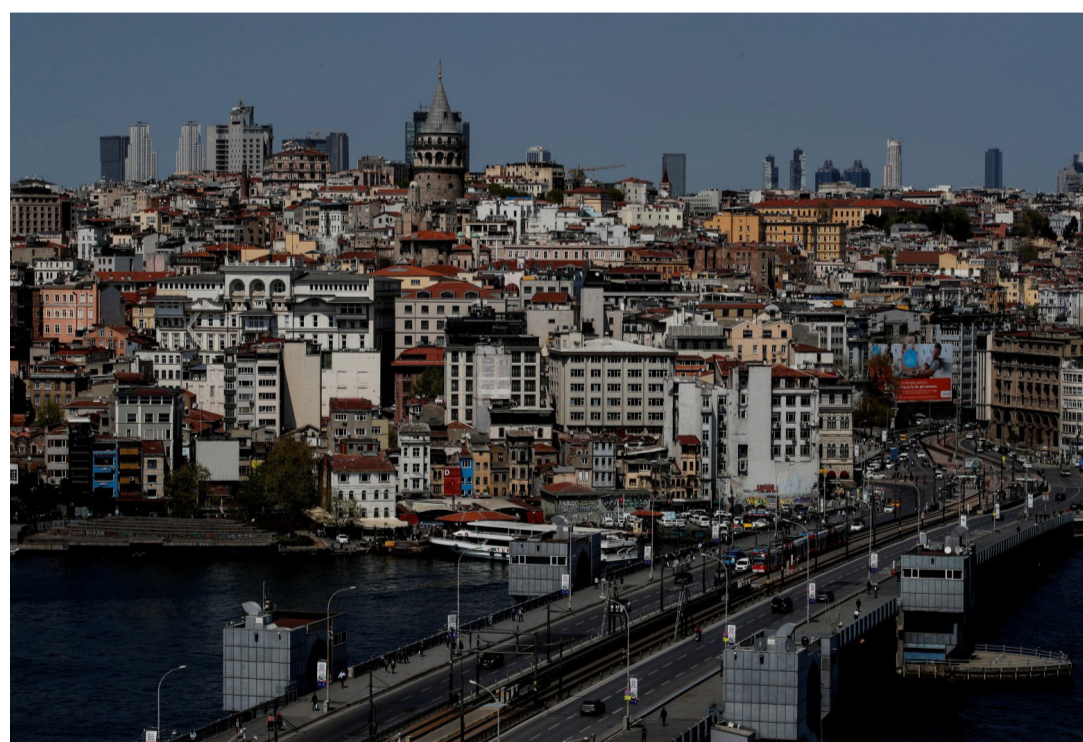
China Defies Sanctions to Make Russia Its Biggest Oil Supplier in 2023



BEIJING (Dispatches) - Russia leapfrogged Saudi Arabia to become China's top crude oil supplier in 2023, data showed, as the world's biggest crude importer defied Western sanctions to purchase vast quantities of discounted oil for its processing plants. Russia shipped a record 107.02 million metric tons of crude oil to China last year, equivalent to 2.14 million barrels per day (bpd), the Chinese customs data showed, far more than other major oil exporters such as Saudi Arabia and Iraq. Imports from Saudi Arabia, previously China's largest supplier, fell 1.8% to 85.96 million tons, as the Middle East oil giant lost market share to cheaper Russian crude. Shunned by many international buyers following Western sanctions over the Kremlin's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, Russian crude oil traded at significant discounts to international benchmarks for much of last year amid a Western-imposed price cap. Accelerating demand from Chinese and Indian refiners for the discounted oil boosted the price of Russian ESPO crude through 2023, pushing past the Group of Seven's \$60 a barrel price cap imposed in December 2022 as alternative shipping and insurance options to circumvent the sanctions proliferated. ESPO crude shipments for December delivery were priced at a discount of around 50 cents to 20 cent per barrel to the ICE Brent benchmark, versus a \$1 premium for October delivery

cargoes and a discount of \$8.50 for shipments delivered in March, according to trading sources. At the same time, Saudi Arabia raised prices for its signature Arab Light from July, pushing some refiners to look for cheaper cargoes. To support prices, Saudi Arabia and Russia, two of the world's top three oil producers, announced output and export cuts last year. Saudi Arabia is rolling over output cuts of 1 million bpd this quarter, while Russia said it would deepen its cut in exports this year to 500,000 bpd from 300,000 bpd. Chinese refiners use intermediary traders to handle the shipping and insurance of Russian crude to avoid violating the Western sanctions. Buyers also use the waters off Malaysia as a trans-shipment point for sanctioned cargoes from Iran and Venezuela. Imports tagged as originating from Malaysia climbed 53.7% last year. China reported no official shipments of Venezuelan crude in December despite an easing of U.S. sanctions on Caracas in October following a deal between President Nicolas Maduro's administration and its political opposition. Shipments to China from the U.S. last year surged 81.1% last year despite geopolitical tensions between Beijing and Washington as U.S. crude production increased. China's overall crude imports for 2023 rose to a record of 563.99 million metric tons, equivalent to 11.28 million bpd.

Turkish House Sales Fall to 9-Year Low in 2023



ANKARA (Dispatches) - House sales in Turkey in 2023 fell to the lowest level in the last nine years, official data showed Friday, as rising interest rates and inflation weighed, while the market activity is not expected to pick up until at least the last quarter of the year. Home sales declined 17.5% from a year ago to 1.23 million, the Turkish Statistical Institute (TurkStat) said. The decrease is attributed to tightening conditions, elevated housing loan interest rates, and a shift toward alternative investment avenues offering higher returns. Industry representatives suggest that the weak trend is likely to persist in the coming months due to tightening measures, with recovery expected toward the end of the year. Turkey's central bank delivered seven consecutive interest rate hikes after a new economy administration reversed years-long easing policy after President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's reelection in May. The tightening drive since June took the central bank's benchmark policy rate from 8.5% to 42.5%, as authorities sought to tame inflation, which neared 65% last month. The bank has signaled that the aggressive hikes could soon end, but it pledged to maintain tight monetary policy as long as needed. Makbule Yönel Maya, the general manager of TSKB Real Estate Appraisal, noted a sharp fall in the last quarter of 2023, which she says eventually led house sales to the lowest level in the past nine years. Maya attributed the decline to the Banking Regulation and Supervision Agency's (BDDK) restrictive regulations on housing loans for those purchasing a second home, coupled with the high interest rates hovering around 3.5% on mortgage loans. She pointed out that the decline

was also influenced by investment-oriented buyers turning to other instruments. "Deposit interest rates have had the most significant impact on investment-driven housing purchases as they started to provide attractive returns," Maya said. "The restriction of rent increase rates to 25% and the prolonged processes related to eviction cases also adversely affected investment-oriented buyers. Another contributing factor was the significant increase in housing prices." Maya expressed expectations for a subdued housing market in 2024 as well. "Considering the government's policies and tightening measures, we expect to see a calm market this year, with the best-case scenario being an uptick in activity in the last quarter," she noted. Maya also foresaw a continued weak outlook for residential property sales to foreigners, which fell 48.1% year-over-year to 35,005 units in 2023, according to the TurkStat data. They accounted for 2.9% of the overall sales. The fall is mainly attributed to the fact that the minimum investment amount required for foreigners to obtain citizenship through real estate purchases reached \$400,000 during the year, from \$250,000. Russians topped the list of foreign buyers with 10,560 houses purchased last year, still reflecting how many have sought a financial haven in the wake of Moscow's invasion of Ukraine and Western sanctions. Total sales dropped 33.4% in December compared to the previous year to 138,577 units, data showed, partly due to tightening in monetary policy and limited access to loans. The data also showed mortgage sales declined 72.3% in December from a year earlier, and 36.6% in 2023 as a whole, making up 14.5% of all sales in the year.

Top Oil and Financial Firms Made \$424b in Windfall Profits in Two Years



LONDON (Dispatches) - The biggest oil companies and the top financial institutions generated combined windfall profits of as much as \$424 billion in the two years to June 2023, a report by ActionAid and Oxfam showed this week. ActionAid and Oxfam have looked at the 200 largest companies in the world by market capitalization to estimate their windfall profits, comparing the earnings in the two years up to June 2023 with profits in the four preceding years. Of these 200 companies, 14 were in fossil fuels and 22 in the banking sector, bringing the total to 36 companies in these two sectors. Of the profits across both sectors, US\$424 billion can be considered windfall profits — profits that exceed the average from the baseline four years by over 20%, the report said. The six biggest international oil majors alone posted as much as \$219 billion in combined net profits for 2022, a new record high. Each of Exxon, Chevron, BP, Shell, Equinor, and TotalEnergies reported record profits for 2022, doubling their combined net earnings from 2021 and booking the best-ever year for Big Oil. The profits surged from around \$100 billion booked for 2021, as oil and gas prices jumped last year following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and majors raised oil and gas production to meet the growing demand for oil and limited gas supply from Russia to Europe. ActionAid and Oxfam, which presented their report in Davos, called for taxes on windfall profits that could finance climate mitigation measures. The organizations said that "climate finance could get a massive boost by applying a windfall tax on windfall profits made in recent years by some of the world's largest fossil fuels companies and the banks that finance them." "A tax of 90% on the windfall profits from the 24 months preceding July 2023 could generate as much as US\$382 billion in revenue just from these 36 companies," ActionAid and Oxfam said.

Ukraine, Moldova, Slovakia Join "Vertical Corridor" European Gas Transportation Scheme



ATHENS (Dispatches) - Ukraine, Moldova and Slovakia joined an initiative for a planned corridor to carry natural gas between Greece and countries to its north as Europe steps up efforts to diversify supply and boost energy security. Greece, Bulgaria, Romania and Hungary agreed in 2016 to develop the necessary infrastructure for the realization of the so-called Vertical Gas Corridor which would allow the bidirectional transmission of gas between the countries. "The Vertical Corridor will now unite the Trans-Balkan gas pipeline and will allow the transportation of natural gas from Greece to Moldova and underground storage facilities in Ukraine," Moldova's Energy Ministry said. The gas grid operators of Slovakia, Moldova and Ukraine, along with their Greek, Romanian, Bulgarian and Hungarian counterparts signed a memorandum of understanding on Friday to promote the necessary projects for the activation of the scheme. Greek grid operator DESFA said in a statement. "Thanks to the participation in the Vertical Corridor initiative, we expect to supply over 7 billion cubic metres of gas from Romania to Central Europe a year additionally," Dmytro Lyppa, the head of Ukraine's transit operator, was quoted as saying on the company's website. Lyppa said Ukraine was currently working with Moldova's gas operator on conditions to use additional capacities on the Trans-Balkan pipeline totalling 6 million cubic metres a day in 2024. "Working together to strengthen and increase the flexibility of the regional gas systems has emerged as a top priority," DESFA's CEO Maria Rita Galli said in the statement. The operators agreed to carry out a simultaneous binding market test for capacity allocation in July 2024 at their respective interconnection points. Greece is preparing to bring into operation a floating gas storage terminal off the northern city of Alexandroupolis, which will allow the regasification of liquefied natural gas arriving by sea to be sent north via pipeline. The Trans-Balkan pipeline has been used to transport Russian gas to the Balkans via Ukraine, Romania and Moldova but it has been running at low capacity since Gazprom diverted volumes to Turkey through the TurkStream pipeline in 2020.

Rising Geopolitical Risk Puts Oil Prices on Course for a Weekly Gain

LONDON (Dispatches) - Crude oil prices were set to close with a gain this week as the risk of escalation in the Middle East remains elevated, OPEC expects strong oil demand this year, and U.S. inventories fall. Propped up by these factors, the benchmark made some gains earlier this week, tempered, however, by the International Energy Agency's latest oil market report that predicted solid supply this year, even as the IEA revised its demand projection upwards. The gains led some commentators to suggest oil could close this week at the highest in three weeks — yet another illustration of how tough the market environment has become for oil bulls despite an abundance of otherwise bullish events. However, these have been offset by now chronic worry about economic growth, specifically in China, and central bank monetary policy. Even the substantial production outage in North Dakota this week failed to have any palpable impact on prices — until the Energy Information Administration released its inventory report. "It could be the US crude stock draws that finally forced the market to price in the Bakken outages and, by extension, ascribe a bit more risk premium to the Middle East crisis too," Vandana Hari from Vanda Insights told Bloomberg. She noted that if there was "an incident [in the Red Sea] that causes major damage to life and property, at sea or on land, may become the tipping point." "The turmoil in the Mideast has kicked up freight and insurance rates appreciably but (has) not yet affected total global oil supply other than delaying shipments toward Europe and other regions," Jim Ritterbusch, the president of Ritterbusch and Associates, told Reuters. These delays, however, are causing higher costs, and the diversion of traffic from the Red Sea will drive higher fuel demand for the longer journey around Africa. This additional demand has yet to be factored in by oil traders.

Exposure Therapy for One Phobia May Also Improve Other Fears

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Folks who use exposure therapy to overcome one phobia can find themselves less afraid of other things, according to the results of a study published recently in the journal *Translational Psychiatry*. It's very often the case that people prone to phobias often develop more than one, said lead researcher Iris Kodzaga, a doctoral student with Ruhr University Bochum's Department of Behavioral and Clinical Neuroscience. "Anxiety rarely comes alone," Kodzaga said in a university news release. "Patients who suffer from one fear often subsequently develop another." Exposure therapy has proven to be the most effective treatment against phobias, researchers said. By confronting a fear-inducing situation under the supervision of a therapist, patients learn to overcome their fear. However, it has been long assumed that a person with multiple fears would require multiple rounds of exposure therapy, with each round targeting a different phobia, Kodzaga noted.



IRAN NEWS

UK Retail Sales Slump Points to New Risk of Recession



LONDON (Dispatches) - British retailers suffered the biggest drop in sales for almost three years during December, raising the risk that the economy slipped into recession late last year, official data showed. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) said people doing Christmas shopping earlier than usual - especially for food - contributed to retail sales volumes shrinking 3.2% between December and November. It was the biggest monthly drop since January 2021 and left the level of sales at its lowest ebb since May 2020. The reading was worse than all forecasts in a Reuters poll of economists which had pointed to a 0.5% fall. Compared with a year earlier, retail sales excluding fuel were 2.1% lower in volume terms and up 2.3% in cash terms, the smallest annual increase since December 2022. While chiming with other downturn retail surveys from the Confederation of British Industry and British Retail Consortium, Friday's data looked at odds with some positive Christmas trading reports from Britain's largest supermarkets. The pound weakened slightly against the U.S. dollar and euro and British government bond prices rose in response to the data. British stocks rose on hopes the data could prompt earlier interest rate cuts from the Bank of England. Retail sales are likely to subtract 0.04 percentage points from British economic output in the fourth quarter, the ONS said, which could be the difference between a negative reading and a flat reading for the economy. The economy contracted 0.1% in the third quarter. While many economists regard the definition of recession as two quarters of contraction as arbitrary, it would have major political implications for Prime Minister Rishi Sunak in what is due to be an election year. With his Conservative Party lagging far behind the opposition Labour Party in opinion polls, Sunak's pitch to voters is based on the idea that Britain is moving in the right direction - which a recession diagnosis would undermine. Finance minister Jeremy Hunt, speaking in Davos on Thursday, said he wanted to move in the direction of cutting taxes ahead of a crucial annual budget that Conservatives hope will revive their fortunes.

Heard in Davos: What We Learned From the WEF in 2024



DAVOS (Reuters) - World leaders and business executives left the freezing temperatures of the Swiss mountain resort of Davos after a week of high-stakes meetings about key world issues. Gaza dominated the agenda of the World Economic Forum (WEF), but leaders failed to produce clear details on any practical pathway to Palestinian statehood, or a ceasefire between Israel and Gaza's Palestinian militant group Hamas. The war is slowing down the economy of the entire region, said Qatar's finance minister. The head of the Palestine Investment Fund estimated at least \$15 billion would be needed to rebuild houses in Gaza alone. Arab states said they would not fund reconstruction unless there was a lasting peace. "We agree that regional peace includes peace for Israel, but that could only happen through peace for the Palestinians through a Palestinian state," Saudi foreign minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan told a WEF panel. Attacks by Yemen's Houthi group on ships in the Red Sea would drive the cost of goods from Asia to Europe much higher, logistics giant DP World said. CEOs at Davos said they were gaming out alternative supply routes. Yemen's vice president and Iran's foreign minister said the attacks would not stop until Israel ended the war in Gaza. "If it's in the short term, tankers might be available ... But if it's longer term, it might be a problem," said Amin Nasser, CEO of oil giant Saudi Aramco. Premier Li Qiang told Davos China's economy was open for business and highlighted its potential for foreign investment, but investors remained cautious amid sluggish post-pandemic recovery and tensions with the United States. Asked how helpful a closed-door lunch with Li was, one CEO said "medium", underscoring the scepticism about China's charm offensive. "I'm glad that people are all talking," JPMorgan CEO Jamie Dimon after the Li lunch. Talk of AI rippled through Davos meeting rooms and panels, its promise touted on signs and its security risks invoked by China's premier. While conversations included how to regulate the burgeoning technology and how to apply it to scientific discovery, the question of how to monetize it persisted. "Everyone's

like, yeah, I can build these cool demos," said Cloudflare CEO Matthew Prince, "but where's the real value?" Argentina's newly-elected President Javier Milei made his debut with a speech on the main Davos stage - and then quickly sat down with the International Monetary Fund's managing director Kristalina Georgieva to discuss his plan to navigate his country's debt maze. Ghana will re-engage with its international bondholders as the country seeks to build on momentum in debt restructuring. "Free enterprise capitalism is the only tool we have to end hunger and poverty," said Milei. Heads of global banks warned of inflationary pressures from increased shipping costs and the possibility of oil price rises. Bank executives fear the market is mispricing interest rate cuts, and that geopolitical risks could cause volatility. "It's a big year in general with many elections around the world which could change potentially the way fiscal stimulus is handled around the globe," said Sumi Harford, President Asset Management and Group Executive Board Lead for Sustainability and Impact at UBS. Consolidation of European banks was discussed behind closed doors, but executives say cross-border mergers are difficult to achieve without uniform regulation across the region. Selective mergers of national players were seen as more likely. While several panels focused on the end of fossil fuels, the head of Aramco told Reuters demand for oil would not peak any time soon. The number of energy executives in Davos was smaller than in years past. Oil bosses from Shell, TotalEnergies and Aramco met on the sidelines to discuss how to help decarbonise industries they supply, three industry sources said. With other crises jostling for attention, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy put Ukraine on the Davos agenda early. Talks with more than 80 national security advisers from around the world led to Switzerland offering to host peace talks. Zelenskyy also met with Wall Street's Jamie Dimon and other bank leaders to seek financing for Ukraine's reconstruction.

OECD Employment Rate Remains at Record High in Q3 of 2023

PARIS (Dispatches) - OECD employment and labour force participation rates stabilized at 70.1% and 73.8% in the third quarter of 2023, the highest levels recorded since the start of the series in 2005 and 2008, respectively. Both indicators were at or near their record highs in 9 of the 38 OECD countries, including France, Italy, and Japan. Record highs in both the OECD employment and participation rates were achieved for women and men. The employment rate exceeded 70% in almost two-thirds of OECD countries. However, the employment rate declined in 20 OECD countries in the third quarter of 2023, compared with declines in 17 OECD countries in the previous quarter. The largest declines were observed in Costa Rica, Iceland, and Finland. Türkiye remained the OECD country with the lowest employment rate, at 53.9%. In November 2023, the OECD unemployment rate remained at its record low (4.8%) for the ninth consecutive month and was broadly stable at record lows in the European Union (5.9%) and the euro area (6.4%). The unemployment rate was unchanged in November in 20 OECD countries with available data, while 7 countries registered drops and another 6 countries recorded increases in the unemployment rate. The December 2023 unemployment rate remained stable in both Canada and the United States at 5.8% and 3.7%, respectively. The OECD unemployment rate for men has remained below 5.0% since March 2022. It has been stable for women at 5.0% for five months in a row. The OECD youth unemployment rate (workers aged 15-24) was broadly stable the last two months, though 6.7 percentage points higher than the unemployment rate for workers aged 25 and above.



What Does Red Sea Disruption Mean for Europe's Economy?

LONDON (Dispatches) - Weeks of attacks by Houthi militants on vessels in the Red Sea have disrupted shipping in the Suez Canal, the fastest sea route between Asia and Europe carrying 12% of global container traffic. For the European economy, already skirting a mild recession as it tries to shake off high inflation, prolonged disruption would be a new risk to its outlook and could derail plans by central banks to start cutting interest rates this year. Here are some factors that policymakers are considering as they assess the situation and its implications. In macroeconomic terms, small to negligible. While Germany's Economy Ministry stressed it was monitoring the situation, it said this week that the only noticeable impact on output so far had been a few cases of stretched delivery times. Bank of England chief Andrew Bailey concurred, telling a parliamentary hearing it "hasn't actually had the effect that I sort of feared it might", while acknowledging the uncertainties remained real. No impact from the attacks has yet turned up in Europe's main economic indicators - including December inflation numbers, which ticked up slightly across the region on a mix of largely expected statistical effects, some one-offs and some pressure on prices for services. That might change - watch next Wednesday's preliminary PMI readings for activity in European economies in January, and Feb. 1's first estimate of euro zone inflation for the same month. ECB President Christine Lagarde may well broach the subject in her news conference after next Thursday's rate-setting meeting. The main reason is probably that the global economy as a whole is still performing below par, which means there is plenty of slack in the system. Take oil prices, the most obvious channel through which Middle East troubles could hit economies in Europe and beyond. They haven't taken off yet because, as International Energy Agency executive director Fatih Birol told Reuters this week, supplies are solid and demand growth is slowing. "I don't expect a major change in the oil price because we have an ample amount of oil coming in the market," he said. German logistics giant DHL said it still had available air freight capacity - not an option for everyone - because the global economy was "not really pumping yet".



Tougher EU Money Laundering Rules Target Crypto and Oligarchs' Favorite Toys

BRUSSELS (Dispatches) - The European Union agreed tougher anti-money laundering rules for cryptoassets and dealers in luxury cars and yachts, warning that oligarchs and criminals could no longer hide in the 27-country bloc. Representatives of EU states and the European Parliament reached a deal on the new framework in negotiations that concluded in the early hours. "It is a good day for EU citizens and businesses, but bad day for oligarchs and terrorists," said Eero Heinaluoma, one of lawmakers who took part. The EU has long had anti-money laundering rules, but they were applied differently in each member state, making it easier for cross-border crime to flourish. Danske Bank's admission in 2018 that suspicious payments totalling 200 billion euros (\$218 billion) from Russia and elsewhere flowed through a branch in Estonia highlighted the need to improve cross-border cooperation. The deal introduces a single EU rulebook for tackling money laundering across the bloc, completing a package that included a new EU anti-money laundering authority (AMLA) agreed last month. The latest deal gives AMLA, whose location has yet to be decided, powers to intervene if a member state is too slow in tackling money laundering. It also broadens the scope of anti-money laundering rules to include cryptoassets, luxury goods traders, football clubs and agents, and "golden" visas granted by some EU states in return for investment in property. The aim is to check where funds for purchases come from and whether the purchaser is subject to EU sanctions. Cryptoasset service providers must make checks on customers who carry out transactions worth 1,000 euros or more and report suspicious activity. Cross-border cryptoasset firms must make additional checks. Traders of luxury goods, precious metals, jewellers and goldsmiths will also have to make checks on customers. Member states can add professional football clubs and agents from 2029. There will also be an EU-wide maximum limit of 10,000 euros for cash payments, making it harder for criminals to launder money, the statement said. Firms under the scope of the new rules will have to identify and verify people who carry out occasional transactions in cash between 3,000 and 10,000 euros.

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Dominant Djokovic Sweeps Into Australian Open Quarters



MELBOURNE (Dispatches) - Novak Djokovic's relentless march towards a record 25th Grand Slam title gathered pace as he outclassed 20th seed Adrian Mannarino to reach the quarter-finals of the Australian Open. The Serbian ran rings around his French opponent on Rod Laver Arena, winning 6-0, 6-0, 6-3 and underlining his status as red-hot favourite to lift an 11th title at Melbourne Park. "I really wanted to lose that game in the third set because the tension was building up so much in the stadium," he joked, referring to the possibility of winning without losing a game. "I just needed to get that out of the way and re-focus." The world number one is into the last eight of a Grand Slam for the 58th time, equalling Roger Federer's men's record as he maintains an iron grip on the game. He has now won 32 consecutive matches at the Australian Open, not tasting defeat since he lost against South Korea's Chung Hyeon in 2018. The 10-time champion did not compete in 2022 due to his coronavirus vaccination status. Mannarino, whose opening three matches all went to five sets, has enjoyed a late-career resurgence, winning three titles last year, at Newport, Astana and Sofia. But he was made to look ordinary by the top seed, who never took his foot off the pedal. Djokovic shrugged off two break points on his serve in the opening game before breaking himself for a 2-0 lead. He repeated the feat twice more in an utterly dominant performance, which was played under the roof due to a shower, winning 28 points to his opponent's 12. Mannarino could not get on the board in the second set either and was

broken three more times as Djokovic threatened to sweep to victory without losing a single game. The Frenchman briefly held up Djokovic's charge, holding serve three times in the third set, but that only delayed the inevitable as the top seed served it out. Djokovic, 36, started his 2024 Australian Open campaign slowly, struggling with a virus and dropping sets in his first two matches, but his level has since soared. The Serb, a year older than his opponent, said he had played "great from the first point to the last". "The last couple of days have been really good," he added. "It's going in a positive direction." Djokovic will meet either seventh seed Stefanos Tsitsipas or American 12th seed Taylor Fritz for a place in the semi-finals. Meanwhile world number one Iga Swiatek joined the rapid exit of top-10 women's seeds from the Australian Open as Carlos Alcaraz sent a chilling warning to his rivals. Poland's Swiatek came into the third-round match against Czech teenager Linda Noskova on an 18-match unbeaten run, targeting a first title at Melbourne Park. But the tournament is turning into a graveyard for the stars and the 22-year-old four-time major winner lost her way after winning the first set, going down 3-6, 6-3, 6-4. A crestfallen Swiatek said she felt the match was under control until she was broken in the second set. "I feel like I did really everything I could in pre-season to improve some stuff that I wanted to," she said. "Then I came here and I wasn't playing kind of natural anymore." Noskova, playing in her first Australian Open, said she was "speechless".

Purdy Leads 49ers Past Packers, Ravens Down Texans



WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - The San Francisco 49ers overturned a fourth-quarter deficit to beat an inspired Green Bay squad 24-21 in the NFL playoffs on Saturday, returning to the NFC Championship game for the third straight season. In the AFC, quarterback Lamar Jackson rushed for two touchdowns and threw for two more to leave the Baltimore Ravens one win away from the Super Bowl thanks to a 34-10 home victory over the Houston Texans. The top-seeded 49ers were staring at defeat to the seventh-seeded Packers until quarterback Brock Purdy led a 69-yard drive that culminated in Christian McCaffrey's game-winning touchdown with just over a minute remaining. The Green Bay Packers, who had upset the Dallas Cowboys in the first round, were left to rue two crucial errors - a missed 41-yard field goal attempt from Anders Carlson in the fourth quarter and an interception thrown by Jordan Love on their final possession. Purdy saved his best for last as the 49ers ended Green Bay's dreams, with the quarterback keeping his cool throughout the crucial 12-play drive. "It's like calm down, go through reads, take what they give you and put this game together. We needed it. The season was on the line," said Purdy. San Francisco had led 7-6 at half-time thanks to a 32-yard touchdown pass from Purdy to George Kittle but Love shined in a thrilling third quarter. First, facing intense pressure, he floated a pass to Bo Melton, wide open in the end zone, and after a 39-yard McCaffrey rushing score kept the 49ers in touch, Love connected with Tucker Kraft on a two-yard pass and a successful two-point conversion made it 21-14 Packers. Jake Moody's 52-yard field goal brought the Niners within striking distance before Purdy's perfectly executed drive set up the impressive McCaffrey for his second rushing score. Green Bay had one last possession but Love's calmness departed him at the worst moment with an ill-judged pass towards Christian Watson picked off by Dre Greenlaw to seal the victory.

Lillard's 45 Points Spark Bucks to Win

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - Damian Lillard scored a season-high 45 points and Giannis Antetokounmpo added 31 to lead the Milwaukee Bucks over NBA doormat Detroit 141-135. Lillard, who arrived from Portland in a pre-season trade, had 11 assists and made 12-of-22 shots from the floor, 5-of-11 from 3-point range, and hit all 16 of his free throw attempts. "When the game started, I felt like I had a good warm-up, a good rhythm to the game," Lillard said. "Saw a couple shots go in and I just felt good." Lillard became the first player in Bucks history with 40 or more points, 10 or more assists and five 3-pointers in a single game and did so three nights after Milwaukee was thumped 135-95 at Cleveland. "I knew it was an important game. I picked my spots. I moved the ball when I needed to move it. I attacked when I needed to attack," Lillard said. "I've been slowly getting back to how I play more naturally and tonight was one of those nights." Greek star Antetokounmpo added 10 rebounds, nine assists, two steals and a blocked shot for visiting Milwaukee, which improved to 29-13, three games behind Boston for the Eastern Conference lead. Alec Burks scored 33 points off the bench, hitting 7-of-14 3-point shots, to lead Detroit, which fell to a league-worst 4-38. Reigning NBA Most Valuable Player Joel Embiid had his 20th consecutive game since mid-November with at least 30 points, scoring 33 while grabbing 10 rebounds for Philadelphia in a 97-89 victory at Charlotte. The Cameroonian star sank 11-of-23 shots from the floor and 11-of-12 from the free throw line with five assists and three blocked shots for the 76ers. Miles Bridges led the Hornets with 25 points and 11 rebounds. Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored a game-high 33 points to power the Oklahoma City Thunder over Minnesota 102-97, lifting the visitors (29-13) within a game of the host Timberwolves (30-12) for the Western Conference lead. An "SGA"



3-pointer with 74 seconds remaining gave the Thunder a 96-94 lead. Rudy Gobert sank a free throw for Minnesota but Jalen Williams made four free throws in the final 15 seconds to seal Oklahoma City's victory. Jalen Brunson scored a game-high 38 points while Julius Randle added a triple double with 18 points, 16 rebounds and 10 assists to lead the host New York Knicks over Toronto 126-100. French rookie star Victor Wembanyama scored a game-high 24 points, pulled down eight rebounds, blocked six shots and passed off four assists to spark the San Antonio Spurs over host Washington 131-127. The 20-year-old, 7-foot-4 (2.24m) center was the top pick in last year's NBA Draft and his seven points led a closing 22-6 run over the final five minutes by the Spurs (8-34) to defeat the Wizards (7-34) in a matchup of the NBA's second- and third-worst clubs. "His whole game was fantastic," Spurs coach Gregg Popovich said of Wembanyama. "His rebounding, his shot - it ain't pretty but it goes in more than most of our guys. He does a hell of a job in a lot of ways at both ends of the court." Turkish center Alperen Sengun had game highs of 37 points and 14 rebounds to spark the Houston Rockets over visiting Utah 127-126 in overtime. Sengun's two free throws with 20 seconds remaining sent the game into overtime at 115-115 and his 3-point play with 52 seconds left in overtime lifted the Rockets level at 126-126. Jabari Smith put Houston ahead with a free throw and Utah's Jordan Clarkson, who led the Jazz with 33 points, missed a jumper on the final shot to give the Rockets the victory. Donovan Mitchell and reserve Sam Merrill each scored 18 points to lead the Cleveland Cavaliers over host Atlanta 116-95. DeMar DeRozan scored 18 points and Ayo Dosunmu added 20 off the bench to lead Chicago in a 125-96 home victory over Memphis.

Pakistan Skipper Relieved After Beating New Zealand in Fifth T20



CHRISTCHURCH (Dispatches) - Pakistan captain Shaheen Shah Afridi said it was "very important" his team avoided a whitewash series loss to New Zealand after winning the fifth and final Twenty20 International by 42 runs on Sunday. The Black Caps capitulated for 92 in the face of some quality Pakistan spin bowling, having been favoured to chase down the tourists' 134-8. Pakistan lost the five-match series 4-1 but Shaheen was pleased his first stint as captain had ended on a winning note, after being outplayed through the first four games. He said the series was primarily seen as a chance to build towards the T20 World Cup in June but it would have been a setback to lose five from five. "Today's game was very important for us. We needed that as a unit to step forward," Shaheen said. "In the first four games, there were a lot of collapses, as a fielding unit, as a batting unit, but I think today we played as a team and we needed that win." "It's not easy for any team to come here. And I think our mind is on the World Cup. We're just checking out every spot for every player and giving chances to youngsters." Part-time off-spinner Ifthikhar Ahmed was handed the ball for the first time in the series and produced career-best figures of 3-24 against a weakened New Zealand batting lineup, who scored their second-lowest T20 total on home soil. Only opener Finn Allen (22) and Glenn Phillips (26) passed 20 as Pakistan claimed the last eight wickets for 39 runs. Left-arm spinner Mohammad Nawaz (2-18) was effective with the new ball, while Shaheen claimed 2-20. New Zealand were missing three of their first-choice batters: Kane Williamson (knee injury), Devon Conway (Covid-19) and Daryl Mitchell (rested). Captain Mitchell Santner said their poor chase exposed some chinks. "We've looked pretty good batting first and defending but, looking at today, we may need a bit of work chasing," he said. "In a chase like that, we talk about taking it as deep as we can and we didn't do that. But all in all a pretty good series. There were good signs, different guys stepping up at different times and that's what you want."

FIFA's Infantino Condemns Abhorrent Racism During Games in Italy, England

LONDON (Dispatches) - FIFA president Gianni Infantino called for worldwide stadium bans for fans and "automatic forfeits" for teams whose supporters hurl "abhorrent" abuse following racist incidents in Italy and England on Saturday. The head of the world governing body said there was no place for discrimination of any kind in football or broader society. "The events that took place in Udine and Sheffield on Saturday are totally abhorrent and completely unacceptable," he said in a statement. "The players affected by Saturday's events have my undivided support." Fans aimed monkey chants at AC Milan and France goalkeeper Mike Maignan during Milan's dramatic 3-2 win at Udinese, with the game temporarily halted. Coventry midfielder Kasey Palmer accused Sheffield Wednesday fans of doing the same towards him during their English Championship clash, which his team won 2-1. "We need all the relevant stakeholders to take action, starting with education in schools so that future generations understand that this is not part of football or society," Infantino said. "As well as the three-step process (match stopped, match re-stopped, match abandoned), we have to implement an automatic forfeit for the team whose fans have committed racism and caused the match to be abandoned as well as worldwide stadium bans and criminal charges for racists. "FIFA and football shows full solidarity to victims of racism and any form of discrimination. Once and for

all: No to racism! No to any form of discrimination!" At Udinese, referee Fabio Maresca stopped play during the first half and a livid Maignan stormed down the tunnel with his teammates. "They're ignorant people... You can be booed or whistled when you're away from home, that's normal, but what happened today has no place in football," Maignan told Sky Sports. Play resumed after about five minutes. Italy, a country governed by a coalition led by the far-right Brothers of Italy party, is rife with fascist football fan groups, in particular among the hardcore "ultras" who make most of the atmosphere at stadiums. Last week Lazio were hit with a one-match stand closure after supporters directed monkey chants at Romelu Lukaku during their team's Italian Cup win over local rivals Roma. In Sheffield, Palmer labelled the abuse "abhorrent and wholly unacceptable", with the match paused as the referee spoke to both managers on the touchline. In a statement, Sheffield Wednesday said they were "shocked and saddened by the racist gesture from the stands reported by Sky Blues player Kasey Palmer". "Both clubs roundly condemn any form of discrimination and abuse, and underline that there is no place for this kind of behaviour in football or our wider society," it added. "We will work together with the relevant authorities and anyone proven to be culpable will face the strictest possible sanctions from both Sheffield Wednesday and the law."

