

President Ebrahim Raisi Will Travel to Qatar in the Coming Days to Attend a Summit Meeting of the Gas Exporting Countries Forum (GECF) Which It Will Be His First Visit to Doha

# IRAN NEWS

Chairman of the Hamas Political Bureau Ismail Haniyeh in a Message Congratulated Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei on the 43rd Anniversary Of the Islamic Revolution Victory

VOL. XXVII, No. 7439 TEHRAN Price 40,000 Rials

www.irannewsdaily.com

WEDNESDAY FEBRUARY 16, 2022 - BAHMAN 27, 1400

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## West's Lack of Resolve Prolonging Vienna Talks

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's foreign minister tells the European Union's foreign policy chief that lack of resolve to achieve a good deal in the Vienna talks on the revival of the 2015 Iran deal has caused the negotiations to become unnecessarily prolonged.

Hossein Amir-Abdollahian made the remarks in a Monday phone call with Josep Borrell, during which the two diplomats discussed the latest situation of the ongoing negotiations in the Austrian capital.

During the phone call, the Iranian foreign minister thanked Borrell and his deputy, Enrique Mora, who is also the head of the joint commission on the Iran deal, which is officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), for their efforts.

"Some hasty measures, repetitive tampering with the text and lack of serious resolve for achieving a good and reliable agreement in Vienna by the Western sides have caused the negotiations to become unnecessarily protracted," Iran's top diplomat said. **See Page 7**

## U.S. Sanctions Are Crime Against Humanity

NEW YORK (PressTV) - An Iranian envoy to the United Nations has denounced as "crime against humanity" the imposition of sanctions against the nation, saying such unilateral restrictive measures have put the lives of vulnerable people at risk by hampering their access to medicine.

Zahra Ershadi, deputy permanent representative of Iran to the UN, made the remarks at the UN Commission for Social Development.

She complained that illegal sanctions have made it very difficult for vulnerable groups in countries such as Iran to access basic medical items and thus put their lives at stake.

The Iranian envoy also said that the import of medicines as well as medical equipment and hygiene products have been severely hindered by restrictions on foreign exchange resources.

The illegal measures have a direct negative impact on the lives of the most vulnerable Iranian citizens, including women, children, and patients, she said, adding that many children have died as a result of such inhumane bans. **See Page 7**

## President Says Sanctions Must Be Removed in Real Way



IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - President Ebrahim Raisi says protecting the rights of nations based on mutual respect forms the main priority of the Islamic Republic's foreign policy under the new administration.

Raisi made the remarks in a Monday meeting with visiting Irish Foreign Minister Simon Coveney in Tehran, during which the two sides discussed the available grounds for Tehran-Dublin cooperation in various sectors, including energy, science and technology, industry and agriculture.

"The main priority of the Islamic Republic of Iran's foreign policy under the new administration is to protect the interests of nations and showing mutual respect" for other countries, Iran's chief executive said.

"The issue on which we emphasize during the ongoing negotiations [on the revival of the 2015 Iran deal in Vienna] is that sanctions [imposed on Iran] must be removed in a real way and the rights of the Iranian nation must be respected," Raisi said.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Raisi pointed to cordial and constructive relations between Iran and Ireland, saying that the two countries have great capacities to strengthen and improve relations in various trade and economic fields.

He noted that making use of bilateral potentialities will be beneficial to the two countries' further development and progress. The Irish foreign minister, for his part, said his country attaches special significance to enhanced ties with Iran and believes that mutual relations currently stand at a strategic level.

Coveney noted that that Dublin seeks expansion of mutual ties in all areas and is determined to reopen its embassy in Tehran.

Ireland's foreign minister said disillusionment of the Iranian nation in the face of the U.S. government's violation of its promises is quite understandable.

Ireland believes that necessary guarantees must be given to Iran during the ongoing Vienna talks so that the agreement could be restored, Coveney emphasized.

Addressing a joint press conference with his Irish counterpart earlier in the day, Iran's Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian said it is possible to reach a good agreement on the JCPOA revival if the United States and the European signatories to the agreement -- Britain, France and Germany -- are serious about returning to full implementation of their commitments.

He added, "We believe that if the American side and the three European countries [that are signatories to the JCPOA] are serious about returning to the full implementation of their commitments as per the JCPOA, achieving a good agreement will be possible in short term."

Reflecting on the ongoing talks in the Austrian capital for the revival of the Iran deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), Iran's top diplomat said, "We are ready to reach a good agreement and do not welcome the Western side's behavior, which is based on performing shows in the negotiations."

"Instead of behaving [on the basis of] creating shock, instead of tampering with the text and instead of playing for time, the Western parties must demonstrate their true intention for returning to their full commitments under the JCPOA," Amir-Abdollahian said.

"We believe that if the American side and the three European countries [that are signatories to the JCPOA] are serious about returning to the full implementation of their commitments as per the JCPOA, achieving a good agreement will be possible in short term."

The top Iranian diplomat emphasized that the Islamic Republic will continue its efforts based on a powerful negotiation logic, adding, "Our goal is to secure the complete removal of the sanctions stipulated in the JCPOA and endorsed by the international community [through a UN Security Council resolution] in 2015."

He underscored the need for the removal of sanctions as soon as possible, saying if the participating delegates in the Vienna talks reached an agreement today that removed anti-Iran sanctions, this would better serve the Islamic Republic than an agreement tomorrow.

## Iran Trade With Russia, Ukraine Surges

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Iran has reported an increase in trade with Russia and Ukraine in the 10 months to late January as fears grow that rising tensions between the two neighboring countries could impact the flow of exports from Iran.

A Monday report by the semi-official ISNA news agency showed that the value of Iranian trade with Russia and Ukraine had reached nearly \$1.95 billion in the 10 months to January 20.

The report cited figures provided by the Iranian customs office (IRICA) showing that imports from Russia had grown over 30% year on year in March-January to reach \$1.3 billion.

Wheat shipments accounted for more than half of Iranian imports from Russia over the period as they reached a value of \$694 million, according to IRICA figures.

Iranian exports to Russia also increased by 24.6% in the 10 months to late January to \$485.7 million, said the report, adding that food and agriculture products sent from Iran to Russia over the period had risen to over \$291 million. **See Page 7**

## Direct Flights Between Iran, Venezuela To Start March 21

TEHRAN (PressTV) - A Venezuelan official says direct flights between Tehran and Caracas will start on March 21, taking Iranian tourists, businessmen, and industrialists to the Venezuelan capital and bringing them back to the Iranian capital.

Ramón Velázquez, the Venezuelan vice-minister for air transport and president of the state-owned Venezuelan airline Conviasa, made the announcement in an exclusive interview with Iran's Spanish-language news network HispanTV on Sunday.

"We are going to have long-haul flights that can directly take passengers from Tehran to Caracas and bring them back from Caracas to Tehran," he noted.

To pave the way for the development, as many as 50 Iranian tour operators are slated to travel to Venezuela on March 2 to get to know about the Latin American country's tourist attractions and other potentials. **See Page 7**

## Iran Unhappy With Amount of Water Released by Afghanistan

TEHRAN (PressTV) - An Iranian energy ministry official says the ruling Taliban group in Afghanistan have failed to release enough water from a major dam on the Helmand River to comply with terms of a treaty that dates back to nearly five decades ago.

Jabbar Vatan Fada, who serves as head of Iranian Energy Ministry's Office for Border Rivers and Joint Water Resources, said on Sunday that water released from Kamal Khan Dam in Afghanistan has not reached Iran because a bulk of the water is draining into Godzareh, an inland basin near the Iranian border in southern Afghanistan. Vatan Fada told the IRIB News that Taliban officials have declared they need to dredge parts of Helmand to facilitate the flow of water into Iran.

He said that Afghan authorities had promised to Iranian Energy Minister Ali Akbar Mehrabian in a phone call on Sunday that they will soon fix the problem.

The announcement comes nearly a month after the Taliban said that it had released water from Kamal Khan Dam for a first time in years. Iranian officials said at the time that the water released by the Taliban was aimed at Iran despite claims in Afghanistan that the decision had been made to benefit farmers in the country.

Iran is entitled to over 800 million cubic meters per year of water from Helmand, which is called Hirmand on the Iranian side of the border, based on a landmark treaty signed between the two countries in 1973.

## Tehran, Islamabad to Form Joint Working Group on Border Issues

ISLAMABAD (Dispatches) - Iran and Pakistan will form a joint working group to look after border management, including security, trade and travel issues between the two countries, the Iranian interior minister has said.

Speaking at the conclusion of a one-day visit to the Pakistani capital, Islamabad, on Monday, Iran's Interior Minister Ahmad Vahidi told Iranian state-run IRNA that both sides were also seeking to increase engagement on economic relations.

"Iran-Pakistan relations, especially in the economic field, should be stronger and broader," Vahidi said.

During the visit, Vahidi met his Pakistani counterpart Sheikh Rasheed Ahmed, Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan and the country's army chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa. **See Page 7**

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## President Felicitates Serbia on National Day

TEHRAN (IP) – President Seyed Ebrahim Raisi congratulated the arrival of the National Day of Serbia to his Serbian counterpart, Aleksandar Vučić.

Every year, Serbia celebrates February 15 as the National Day to commemorate the outbreak of the first Serbian uprising in 1804, which evolved into the Serbian Revolution against Ottoman rule.

The revolution ultimately resulted in the recognition of Serbia as a sovereign state by the Ottoman Empire. In his message, Raisi expressed satisfaction with the efforts of the officials of the two countries in recent months to strengthen and develop relations in all areas, especially in the economic field.

## Reaching Deal in Vienna Possible Right Now

**TEHRAN (IFP) - Iran's foreign ministry spokesman denies claims the Vienna talks over the revival of the Iran nuclear deal have hit an impasse, adding it is possible to reach a deal right now.**

Speaking at his weekly news briefing, Saeed Khatibzadeh said the talks are continuing and negotiating teams are engaged in consultations as before.

Khatibzadeh however said the Vienna talks move forward slowly on days when tough issues are on the agenda.

He added that the other sides have reached the point where they must take political decisions as Iran did so years ago.

"We are awaiting the West's response to Iran's initiatives", Khatibzadeh noted.

In response to the question if a deal is possible by February's end, he said if Europeans and the US respond to Iran's initiatives, a deal is made right now.

Khatibzadeh, however, said the U.S. is not trustworthy and Iran wants concrete guarantees so Washington will not be able to make a mockery of international law again.

He said all sanctions that violate the 2015 Iran nuclear deal, JCPOA, and UN Security Council Resolution 2231 must be terminated.

Elsewhere in the news briefing, Khatibzadeh condemned the U.S. move to seize Afghanistan's frozen assets as inhumane.

He said the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan cost Afghans billions of dollars in losses and destroyed their infrastructure and it's now plundering their remaining assets under a false pretext.



He also spoke about the situation in Ukraine. Khatibzadeh said Iran is concerned about mounting tension between Ukraine and Russia, adding the Eurasian region cannot afford another war.

Khatibzadeh also said the U.S. is causing tension in the region and this shows it has not learned a lesson from its destructive behavior in Afghanistan and the Middle East.

He also criticized the Pentagon spokesman's claim that the U.S. is concerned about threats from Yemen's Ansarullah movement. Khatibzadeh said the U.S. is part of the war on Yemen and supplies arms to the Saudi-led coalition, so it cannot pretend to be a well-wisher of the Yemeni people.

Khatibzadeh also referred to the issue of prisoner swap between Iran and the U.S.. He said Iran has made this a priority on humanitarian grounds.

The Foreign Ministry spokesman said it seems the U.S. has tied the prisoner exchange to the Vienna talks and is waiting for the outcome of those negotiations.

## 3,800 Iranians Imprisoned Abroad, Some in Inappropriate Conditions

TEHRAN (PressTV) - A senior Iranian Judiciary official says the country has a total of 3,800 prisoners abroad, expressing concern that some of the inmates are serving their jail terms in inappropriate conditions.

Kazem Gharibabadi, the Judiciary chief's deputy for international affairs and secretary of the country's High Council for Human Rights, made the remark in an interview published by Iran's official IRNA news agency on Monday.

Gharibabadi said a number of Iranians are in overseas prisons for their offenses or due to injustice or on political and groundless pretexts, including for circumventing illegal sanctions, and that they need to be protected.

Stressing that the duty of the administration in different sectors of the Islamic Republic is to defend the rights of such prisoners even if they are criminals, the senior Iranian Judiciary official said, "Some of these Iranian prisoners are not in good condition abroad and many problems have arisen as some of them are the heads of their families."

Gharibabadi said various sessions have been held in coordination with the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Justice to expand support for the Iranians imprisoned abroad, especially those whose families are without guardians.

He said consultations have begun with some countries in order to transfer Iranian convicts and prepare conditions for them to enjoy better services in prisons.

"In this regard we have planned for high-ranking judicial officials to travel to the countries where our compatriots face more problems so that problems can be solved more quickly through the direct interaction of judiciary systems."

Pointing to the fact that 2,000 of the 3,800 Iranian prisoners abroad are in Turkey, the Judiciary official called on Iranians to respect the laws of other countries and be a good representative of the Islamic Republic and the Iranian culture.

## Iranian, Russian FMs Exchange Views on Vienna Talks, Bilateral Ties

TEHRAN (IP) - Iran's Foreign Minister reviewed the latest round of nuclear talks in Vienna and the outcomes of the visit of the Iranian President to Moscow with his Russian counterpart on Monday.

During the phone conversation, Hossein Amirabdollahian and Sergei Lavrov exchanged views on the latest developments regarding the ongoing talks in the Austrian capital, Vienna, between Iran and the 4+1 group of countries, namely Russia, China, France, Germany, and the UK as well as the EU representative, on Iran's nuclear agreement known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) which focuses on the removal of the U.S. anti-Iran sanctions.

According to Russia's Foreign Ministry, Amirabdollahian and Lavrov also reviewed the agreements made between the two countries during the recent visit of President Ebrahim Raisi to Russia and his meeting with President Vladimir Putin.

The two sides elaborated on the remarkable progress made in this regard.

They also discussed other regional and international issues including the situation in Ukraine and the west's tantalizing measures carried out by the U.S. and its allies in waging psychological warfare and the probability of a Russian attack against Ukraine.

## Iran Opens Permanent Exhibition Center in S Korea



TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iran's permanent exhibition center was inaugurated in the Multicultural Museum of Seoul, South Korea.

Iran's Ambassador to South Korea Saeed Badamchi Shabestari made the remarks during the opening ceremony of the Multicultural Museum of Seoul, South Korea.

Referring to the significant importance of such an exhibition in South Korea, Badamchi Shabestari noted that people's attention to the history and cultural characteristics of countries will lead them to gain a better understanding of each other's characteristics, customs.

Pointing to the deep-rooted relations between Iran and South Korea, He added that there are very rich cultural commonalities between the two states.

The ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran in South Korea described the opening of the exhibition as an effective measure to better understand the South Korean people and foreign nationals residing in South Korea about Iran's culture, civilization, and amazing handicrafts.

On the sidelines of the opening ceremony, a film of Iran's economic, industrial and scientific achievements, along with images of its natural landscapes with South Korean subtitles, as well as Iranian folk music, was broadcast, which was welcomed by the attendees.

## Reliable Agreement at Vienna Talks Requires U.S. Political Will

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's top security official says whether Tehran and the P4+1 group of countries can reach a reliable agreement over the 2015 deal depends on the U.S.'s political determination.

"Vienna negotiations have reached a stage, where the outcome can be declared certainly and without the need for guesswork," Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) Ali Shamkhani wrote in a post published on his Twitter page on Monday.

"The U.S. political decision either to satisfy or dismiss requirements for the conclusion of a reliable and durable agreement based on JCPOA agreed-upon principles can replace speculation," Shamkhani added.

On Sunday, a source with knowledge of the ongoing talks in the Austrian capital of Vienna refuted rumors that the United States was expected to engage in direct talks with Iran through a session of the Joint Commission of the 2015 agreement, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

Press TV learnt the information after Western sources alleged that Vienna was to host the deal's Joint Commission, which features representatives from all the remaining members, on Monday. The diplomats further claimed that Washington would be part of the talks.

Meanwhile, Iran and the P4+1 group of countries have previously agreed that no session of the Joint Commission would be held, and negotiators would rather continue talks within the framework of bilateral and multilateral meetings.

## Amir-Abdollahian Emphasizes Considering Iran Demands in Talks

TEHRAN (MNA) – Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian emphasized the need for a collective agreement between all negotiating parties on a single text and need to take legitimate demands of Iran into consideration in Vienna talks.

He made the remarks in a telephone conversation with UK Foreign Secretary Liz Truss on Friday and stressed the need to fully consider Iran's demands in Vienna talks.

During the phone talk, the two sides exchanged their views on the latest trend of talks in Vienna, bilateral tie and some of issues of mutual concerns including situation in Afghanistan and Yemen.

While reviewing the latest situation of bilateral ties and talks which is ongoing in Austrian capital Vienna, British Foreign Secretary Liz Truss described viewpoints of London on the issue.

She said that the growing relations between Britain and Iran serve interests of both countries.

Truss also expressed hope that London would repay its dues to Iran in very near future.

Elsewhere in her remarks, Truss pointed to the cooperation of UK and UN to help suffering Afghan people and appreciated Iran's constructive role in this respect.

Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian pointed to the visit of Iran's Vice President to attend the Glasgow Climate Summit and joint webinar of Iran-UK Parliamentary Friendship Groups and assessed the trend of relations between the two countries 'positive and moving forward'.

Referring to the approaching sensitive stage of Vienna talks, Amir-Abdollahian stressed the need for seriousness and responsibility of the negotiating parties with Iran to reach an agreement.

He then stressed the need for a collective agreement between all negotiating parties on a single text and the need to take the legitimate demands of the Islamic Republic of Iran into serious consideration.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Iranian foreign minister pointed to the critical situation in Yemen and Afghanistan and emphasized the need for formation of an inclusive government in this country.

Regarding to the aggravation of humanitarian situation in Yemen, he expressed hope that UK government will fulfill its obligation to end human catastrophe caused by continuation of war and aggression in Yemen.

## Gov't Launches Massive Project to Expand Fixed Fiber Network

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The Iranian telecoms ministry has launched a major project to connect over 20 million homes and businesses to the high-speed fixed fiber network in the country.

In a ceremony on Monday, telecoms minister Issa Zarepour ordered the launch of 500,000 new fixed broadband plugs in two large cities of Mashhad in east and Qom in central Iran.

Zarepour, who took over as minister in August, had earlier said that the current Iranian administrative government is determined to finish the massive project that normally takes 10 years until its terms ends in August 2025.

"Optic fiber should reach 20 million homes and business places to ensure there is a stable, high-speed and safe network in place," the minister was quoted as saying by the official IRNA news agency.

Telecoms ministry figures show there were only 540,000 fixed fiber plugs in Iran in March 2021.

Reports and studies carried out in recent years suggest that Iran has been slow in developing its fixed internet infrastructure despite a major progress that has taken place in the country's mobile data services.

Head of Iran's telecoms regulator said on Monday that Iran will invest more in fixed fiber assets to both expand the coverage of internet in the country and to ensure it has a higher quality.

Sadegh Abbasi Shokouh said that Iran aims to connect more than 80% of its households to the broadband internet with an average speed of 26 megabit per second.

Abbasi Shokouh said a 10% increase in broadband penetration rate in Iran could lead to 5.1% surge in gross domestic product (GDP) and a similar increase in workforce productivity in the country. He added that doubling the speed of broadband internet will increase Iran's GDP by another 3%.

## Iran-Syria Trade Up About 90%

TEHRAN (MNA) – Iranian Ambassador to Syrian Arab Republic said that trade volume exchanged between Iran and Syria in the past nine months registered about 90 percent hike as compared to the same period of last year.

Speaking in an interview with Syria's Al-Watan Daily, Mehdi Sobhani Iran's Ambassador to Syria said that trade volume exchange between Iran and Syria from March 21 to Dec. 22, 2021 registered a 90 percent increase as compared to the last year's corresponding period.

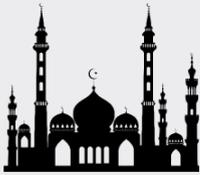
Insisting on strengthening these relations at different economic, cultural, scientific and educational levels has led to the promotion of relations between the two countries at strategic level, the envoy added.

The two countries of Iran and Syria enjoy high potentials and capabilities to enhance their bilateral trade.

Referring to Iran's full support for Syria's territorial integrity and sovereignty, he condemned illegal presence of foreign forces on Syrian soil and stressed the need for returning the seized lands to the control of legitimate Syrian government.

Earlier, Syrian deputy Foreign Minister Bashar al-Jaafari appreciated Iran's economic, political, military and security support for Syrian government in the long run of war of Syrian people against ISIL terrorist groups.





## PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	12:18
■ Evening (Maghreb)	18:05
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	05:24
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	05:48

1. Ya Sin.
2. By the Qur'an, full of Wisdom,-
3. Thou art indeed one of the apostles,
4. On a Straight Way.

Surah 36. Ya-sin (1-4)

## 20 Argentinian Companies Due In Tehran for Economic Activities

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

**TEHRAN –** Charge d'Affaires of Embassy of Argentina in Tehran Jorge Mariano Jordan in meeting with Head of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Mine and Agriculture (ICCIMA) Gholam-Hossein Shafei said that 20 Argentinian companies are to arrive in Tehran for resuming economic cooperation.

In the meeting, Shafei pointed to the economic capacities of Argentina and said Argentina is a big and vast country with collection of diversity in the fields of agriculture and industry which is strongly considered by the world. He added that although economic relations of Iran declined last year, it did not halt but there are some products from Argentina which are available in Iran's market being imported by the third party country but it is not mentioned in the official statistics related to the bilateral trade between Iran and Argentina.

He added that for example one can find Argentinian beans in Iran's market in abundance which is not imported directly from Argentina and they are imported from other countries. He reiterated that direct transportation between Iran and Argentina is the main hurdle in way of the trade.

Shafei went on to say that Iran has good cooperation with Argentina in some fields like soya, adding that in terms of diversity of products both countries can study cooperation and there is possibility for this cooperation.

He noted that he has heard some reports that one Argentinian shipping airline has announced to activate shipping between the two countries and if the report is true, it will be an important event and in case direct shipping is launched, it will boost the bilateral trade of Iran and Argentina.

He said extraterrestrial farming is a good field for cooperation and Iranians can use land in Argentina for farming and exports. He went on to say that in the future the condition may change and broadening of ties with other countries like Argentina will be possible.

Shafei noted that economic activists of the two countries do not have enough information of economic capacities of the other party for cooperation, reiterating that the exchange of information in this field would be prioritized and announced readiness of the chamber for all-out support for developing economic relations in the private sector.

Then Argentinian Charge d'Affaires Jordan, for his part, said that there is a high capacity for cooperation between Iran and Argentina, adding that commercial



relation of the two countries is very low but currently the climate for improving economic ties exists. He then confirmed Shafei's view on the exchange of information and said it needs to be completed. He stated that he has been ordered by his government to improve the condition.

Jordan went on to say that Argentina has high capacity for economic cooperation, adding that many products are produced in Argentina from agro to commercial ones which can be considered as the fields for bilateral cooperation between Tehran and Buenos Aires. He then said that major part of his mission is to improve bilateral ties and to deepen the trade between the two countries through diversifying fields of cooperation.

On the cooperation in the extraterrestrial farming, he said that Argentina has considerable amount of fertile land and this capacity has been remained unknown for the world. He said that Iran and Argentina can cooperate in this field as well as knowledge-based sciences and industry.

Jordan said that he will do his best to get in touch with associations and unions active in fields of rice, oil seed, auto parts, mobile and fintech to pave the ground for cooperation between Argentina and Iran. He reiterated that Argentina has good capacity in field of producing meat which has been unnoticed and both countries can cooperate in this field, too.

Jordan went on to say that Embassy of Argentina in Tehran is working with a small team but it tries to bring Argentinian companies to Iran. He admitted that many of them have not been in working mood with Iran but they can resume cooperation. He said that he wants to activate bilateral cooperation of 20 Argentinian companies between the two countries as he wants to be a bridge between the producers of the two states, reiterating that he is a pragmatic person and does talk.

Then Shafei hailed Jordan's decision to bring 20 Argentinian companies to Iran, saying that Iran can do the same and it will be a new opening for broadening bilateral economic cooperation.

## Tehran, Islamabad Emphasize Barter Trade

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

**TEHRAN –** Iran and Pakistan once again called for broadening economic ties and both sides emphasized barter trade during the meeting of Chairman of Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI) Capital Office Mr. Haji Qurban Ali and Secretary General of Tehran Chamber of Commerce Mr. Bahman Eshqi which was held in Tehran.

Leading a Pakistani trade delegation, Qurban Ali met Secretary General of TCCIM Mr. Eshqi and during the meeting he expressed interests of Pakistani traders for cooperation with their Iranian counterparts.

Qurban Ali termed Iran as Pakistan brother country, adding that he sincerely wants the trade ties between the two countries to remain constant and friend. He stated that they work hard and expect TCCIM to cooperate for its materialization.

He then pointed to the role of Pakistan in the mega project Kamarban-Jadeh and necessity of cooperation of Iran in this project. He said he has recently had meeting with Pakistan Ambassador to Tehran and during the meeting he has raised the issue of removing hurdles for bilateral trade. He said in the meeting the issue of removing hurdles in way of barter trade between Iran and Pakistan was put on the agenda.

Qurban Ali said the current trade volume of Iran and Pakistan stands at around \$500m, adding that Pakistan officials seek to increase the trade volume to \$5b.

Then Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of Gujranwala Chamber of Commerce of Pakistan Mr. Ahmed Lone pointed to the opportunities for cooperation between Tehran and Islamabad and emphasized necessity for defining the prioritized fields for economic cooperation. He emphasized restoring effective ties between economic activists of Iran and Pakistan and called for a list of fields from the TICCM for cooperation between the two countries.

Lone added that the two countries can start barter trade with products like rice and petrochemical products.

Then Secretary General of TCCIM Mr. Eshqi, for his part, pointed to the historic relations of Iran and Pakistan and said these two countries can improve their relations via the third party. He then said that for example through trilateral ties of Iran-Pakistan and China or Iran-Pakistan and Turkey, both countries can materialize their trade goals and this relation will have many profits.

He then called for creating a transparent data bank of trade ties, capabilities and capacities of Iran and Pakistan, noting that the connection and cooperation between Iran and Pakistan has just restricted to Sistan and Baluchestan area. He said although these two provinces in Iran and Pakistan are important provinces, they are just some part of the countries and not all of them and therefore, this monopoly and restriction should be removed and the trade between Iran and Pakistan should be expanded to other provinces.

Eshqi further said that money transfer and transportation are of the main problems for bilateral trade but mechanism of barter trade is one way to overcome problems for enhancing cooperation and chambers of the two countries can play a role in designing this mechanism.

At the end of the meetings both chambers announced readiness for improving the current level of trade between the two countries.



## Tehran, Caracas Enjoy Direct Banking Link

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

**TEHRAN –** Iran's Ambassador to Venezuela Mr. Hojjatollah Soltani says currently all Venezuelan banks are connected to Swiss banks and there is no sanction on those banks and Iran has direct banking connection with Venezuela which can boost the trade between the two countries.



Speaking at the conference on reviewing the trade capacities of Iran and Latin American states, Soltani said he believes the 13th government is one of the trade opportunities of Iran and Venezuela. He added that the 13th government attaches special attention on cooperation with non-European countries and the U.S., and it is considered a chance for reinforcing trade with other countries that the government pursues is seriously.

He went on to say that increase in the trade cooperation of Iran and Venezuela has created a positive outlook for economic cooperation between the two countries, adding that one of the opportunities for cooperation with Venezuela and Latin America is that these countries are not Iran's rival or enemies politically or economically.

Soltani emphasized that exports of goods to European countries are more difficult than to the Latin American, adding that Iranian products have stronger markets in Latin America, Central Asia and Southeast Asia.

He then pointed to the transportation beds created between Iran and Venezuela and said currently 3 ships have been chartered at Iran-Venezuela route and in case the trade cooperation between the two countries increases, the number of ships will increase.

Soltani then pointed to the banking relations of the two countries and said Tehran has currently direct relation with Venezuelan banks and Iranians can open LCs directly and send or receive banking havalas directly and transfer the havalas to the international banks.

He reiterated that in the past Venezuelan government had a Socialist approach but today it pursues open market economy and unified forex rate is dominating the market.

Soltani emphasized that all Venezuelan banks are connected to the SWIFT and there is no sanctions against them. He said Iran has had successful experience in exports to Venezuela and it can enhance the level of economic cooperation with Venezuela. He admitted that countries like China, India and Turkey are main rivals of Iran in Venezuela. He reiterated that transport of a 40-foot container to Venezuela by chartered ship from Iran is very cheaper than from China and Turkey to Venezuela.

He said that currently Iran's goods like wood, petroleum coke and iron scraps have good customers in Venezuela and Iran can take advantage of it. He said China does not want to lose Venezuela's market and Venezuelans are keen to cooperate with Iran because Iranian goods are cheaper for them.

Soltani admitted that one of the main challenges ahead of trade between Tehran and Caracas is the sudden changes in the exports regulations and it disheartens Iranian exporters. He stated that lack of strong companies and trade holdings in Iran is another challenge because Venezuela needs a range of different goods and it is difficult to talk with different companies on different goods, and Venezuela seeks finding a trade holding in Iran.

## Conference on Steelmaking & Continuous Casting Postponed for 2 Weeks

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

**TEHRAN –** The public relations of Hormozgan Steel Company (HOSCO) in a statement announced the postponement of the 2nd International Conference on Steelmaking and Continuous Casting for two weeks.



The company in its statement hailed considerable welcome of different scientific and executive sectors for participating in the conference and said due to the spike in the Omicron in the country and in order to protect the health of participants in the conference for better holding of this big scientific event, the policy-making council of the conference decided to postpone the conference for two weeks.

The statement reiterated that those who have so far failed to register for attending the conference have time to register because the deadline for registration has been extended till Sunday, February 20.

The conference was actually to be held on February 22-23 in Bandar Abbas and it has now been rescheduled to March 8-9 and the venue of the conference will be Bandar Abbas.

## A Trade Delegation From Lahore to Visit TCCIM

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

**TEHRAN –** A trade delegation from Lahore Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LCCI) of Pakistan on Sunday will attend a meeting with Iranian economic activists at Tehran Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Mine (TCCIM).

According to the public relations of the TCCIM, the Pakistani delegation on Sunday attend the meeting with Iranian economic activists upon the invitation of the head of the TCCIM.

In March 2020, TCCIM dispatched a good-will delegation to Pakistan and during the visit it had good talks with Pakistan's state and private officials in Lahore and Karachi and now upon the invitation of Tehran chamber, LCCI dispatches its trade delegation.

## COMSTECH, MSTF Sign Agreement for Joint Young Scientists' Fellowship Program

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

**TEHRAN -** COMSTECH and MSTF entered into an agreement for joint COMSTECH and MSTF young scientists' fellowship program.



COMSTECH the Ministerial Standing Committee on Scientific and Technological Cooperation of the OIC and Mustafa(PBUH) Science and Technology Foundation (MSTF) signed an agreement to nurture the young generation and build their capacity in the production of science, technology, and innovation in line with the values and needs of the Islamic society.

According to this agreement, COMSTECH and MSTF are to run a program to support the fellowship of young scientists with the cooperation of prestigious scientific and research institutes and research centers of reputable companies in Islamic countries.

Through this agreement, COMSTECH and MSTF are aimed at exchanging new scientific and research findings through networking, streamlining, and strengthening international relations to help develop science and technology in the Islamic world; Deepening and institutionalizing communications, scientific collaborations, and international knowledge exchange between researchers of the Islamic world and prestigious scientific and technological centers and research centers of reputable companies; Developing scientific achievements, improving the quality of researchers' studies, and expanding border of knowledge; and so on.

The program intends to support eligible young scholars and technologists under 45, those holding master's degrees, and faculty members applying for the short-term (6-12 months) fellowships. At least 50% of the total fellowships may be granted to young scholars of the OIC least developed countries and 50% to young women scholars.

## French Police Kill man Who Attacked With Knife

PARIS (Dispatches) - Police on Monday morning killed a man who attacked them with a knife at Paris' Gare du Nord station, French transport minister Jean-Baptiste Djebbari told RMC radio.

The incident was not thought to be terrorist-related, the minister said.

"The person who attacked them died on the spot," Djebbari said, adding that two police officers had received minor injuries.



## Hungary's Ruling Fidesz Leads Opposition by Two Points

BUDAPEST (Dispatches) - Hungary's governing Fidesz party gained a two-point lead this month over the united opposition in the campaign for the April 3 election, according to an opinion poll by Zavecz Research published by news site Telex on Monday.

For the first time since taking power in a 2010 landslide win, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán will face a united front of opposition parties in parliamentary elections.

The opposition alliance includes the Democratic Coalition, the Socialists, liberals and the formerly far-right, and now center-right, Jobbik.



## US, UK Leaders Agree Window for Diplomacy Remains Over Ukraine



LONDON (Dispatches) - British Prime Minister Boris Johnson and US President Joe Biden agreed in a call yesterday that a "crucial window for diplomacy" remained over the crisis in Ukraine, Johnson's office said.

The discussion, the latest among world leaders focused on the crisis in Ukraine, comes after U.S. intelligence officials warned an invasion by Moscow into its western neighbor could be days away.

"They agreed there remained a crucial window for diplomacy and for Russia to step back from its threats towards Ukraine," a Downing Street spokesman added of the call between the transatlantic allies. "The leaders emphasized that any further incursion into Ukraine would result in a protracted crisis for Russia, with far reaching damage for both Russia and the world."

They also stressed that diplomatic discussions with Russia remained "the first priority", and welcomed talks that have already taken place between Russia and NATO allies, according to the spokesman.

"They agreed that Western allies must remain united in the face of Russian threats, including imposing a significant package of sanctions should Russian aggression escalate," he added.

"They also reiterated the need for European countries to reduce their dependence on Russian gas, a move which, more than any other, would strike at the heart of Russia's strategic interests." The White House said the two leaders "reviewed ongoing diplomatic and deterrence efforts in response to Russia's continued military build-up on Ukraine's borders and reaffirmed their support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity".

"They discussed efforts to reinforce the defensive posture on NATO's eastern flank and underlined the continued close coordination among Allies and partners, including on readiness to impose severe consequences on Russia should it choose further military escalation," it added.

Russia has massed more than 100,000 troops near its Ukrainian border and in neighboring Belarus, where they have been doing joint exercises.

Earlier yesterday, Johnson urged Russian President Vladimir Putin to step back from "the edge of a precipice", calling the situation "very, very dangerous".

The British leader said he had no plans to visit Moscow, but that he would be discussing the crisis with "various leaders" soon.

Meanwhile in London, Foreign Secretary Liz Truss later chaired a meeting of the government's emergency "COBR" committee, to discuss British nationals who may end up stuck in Ukraine in the event of hostilities.

The government is urging all Britons to leave the country by commercial flights, but says it is maintaining a "core" diplomatic presence in Kyiv.

"We are doing everything possible to prevent a Russian invasion in Ukraine, while also preparing for the worst," Truss tweeted after the meeting.

The prime minister was also to receive a security briefing from intelligence chiefs.

## Turkey, UAE Boost Strained Ties With 13 Deals

ABU DHABI (Dispatches) - Turkey and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) have signed 13 cooperation agreements in various sectors as President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan visited the Persian Gulf country on Monday amid the normalization process between the two regional powers.

The bilateral agreements signed during Erdoğan's visit to the UAE, the first in a decade as the two countries are mending ties strained by years of animosity in a pivot toward economic partnership.

Agreements on the defense industry, health, climate change, industry, technology, trade, economy, culture, agriculture, trade, economy, youth, transportation, disaster management, meteorology, communication and archive were signed during the meeting between the Turkish and UAE delegation chaired jointly by Erdoğan and Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan (MBZ).

Turkish sources had said they were expected to agree to officially begin negotiations for a trade and economic agreement, as well as sign a letter of intent to start meetings on cooperation in the defense industry.



## U.S.-Canada Bridge Reopens After Police Clear Protesters

WINDSOR (Dispatches) - North America's busiest trade link reopened for traffic late Sunday evening, ending a six-day blockade, Canada Border Services Agency said, after Canadian police cleared the protesters fighting to end COVID-19 restrictions.

Canadian police made several arrests on Sunday and cleared protesters and vehicles that occupied the Ambassador Bridge in Windsor, Ontario, after a court order on Friday. The blockade had choked the supply chain for Detroit's carmakers, forcing Ford Motor Co, the second-largest U.S. automaker, General Motors Co and Toyota Motor Corp to cut production.

The bridge carries about \$360 million a day in two-way cargoes - 25% of the value of all U.S.-Canada goods trade.

A Windsor Police official told reporters that 20 to 30 arrests had been made. Police also seized vehicles within the demonstration area, according to an earlier statement.

Police stepped up their presence on Sunday with more than 50 vehicles, including cruisers, buses and an armored car, as the number of protesters dropped to around 45 from roughly 100 on Saturday. Windsor Police tweeted "there will be zero tolerance for illegal activity".

In Ottawa, counter protests started blocking vehicles trying to join the protests on Sunday, with residents losing patience over the three-week-old demonstrations.

In the western Canadian province of British Columbia, the Pacific highway border crossing in Surrey was temporarily closed on Sunday afternoon, for a second day, by a group of about 200 protesters, according to a Reuters photographer on the scene. A small group of protesters gathered on U.S. side of the border, blocking incoming vehicles.

Police officers hold a line, on the road leading to the Ambassador Bridge, which connects Detroit and Windsor, after clearing demonstrators,

during a protest against coronavirus disease (COVID-19) vaccine mandates, in Windsor, Ontario, Canada February 13, 2022. REUTERS/Carlos Osorio

## Sudanese Protester Killed In Crackdown on Anti-Coup Rallies

KHARTOUM (Dispatches) - Sudanese security forces shot dead a protester as they cracked down on thousands marching against last year's military coup and the arrest of several pro-democracy activists, medics said.

Regular mass protests have rocked the troubled northeast African nation since an October 25 military takeover led by army chief Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, and the death on Monday takes the number killed to at least 80.

The power grab derailed a fragile power-sharing agreement between the army and civilians negotiated after the 2019 ouster of longtime autocrat Omar al-Bashir.

On Monday, thousands rallied in the capital Khartoum and its twin city of Omdurman, AFP reporters said, while protests also took place in the eastern city of Port Sudan and in the western Darfur region, according to witnesses.

In Khartoum, protests had begun with crowds waving national flags and carrying red balloons -- as the rallies coincided with Valentine's Day.

"Today is the nation's love day," one banner read. Some shouted slogans demanding the authorities release activists who have been arrested, while others carried pictures of protesters killed.

"We are demanding the release of resistance committee members and politicians who were unjustly arrested,

and some of whom are facing fabricated charges," protester Khaled Mohamed told AFP.

But as crowds tried to approach the presidential palace, security forces fired volleys of tear gas canisters.

One protester was killed after he was shot in "the neck and chest by live rounds by coup forces," the independent Central Committee of Sudan Doctors said.

Tear gas was also fired at protesters in Omdurman and North Khartoum, witnesses said.

While Sudan has repeatedly denied opening fire on protesters, Human Rights Watch has quoted witnesses detailing how the security forces have used both "live ammunition" and fired tear gas canisters "directly" at crowds, a tactic that can be deadly at close-quarters.

The authorities have also arrested scores of activists accused of belonging to the "resistance committees" who have been instrumental in organizing protests.

"The number of people detained arbitrarily and without criminal charges has exceeded 100," the Sudanese Professionals Association (SPA) said Monday.

The SPA, which also calls for anti-coup protests, said the detainees are aged between 16 and 60.

In Khartoum's Soba prison, detainees launched a hunger strike to protest against prison conditions, the Central Committee of Sudan Doctors said.



## Turkmenistan Leader's Son To Run for President

ASHGABAT (Dispatches) - The son of Turkmenistan's leader Gurbanguly Berdimukhamedov has been nominated to run for president next month, state media said Monday, after the president said he would step down and authorities called a snap vote.

"At the extraordinary congress of the Democratic Party of Turkmenistan held in Ashgabat, the deputy chairman of the cabinet of ministers of the country, Serdar Berdimukhamedov, was nominated as a presidential candidate," the state television announcer said.

The Central Asian country on the Caspian Sea is one of the world's most secretive states and little is known about how the regime makes day-to-day decisions. The country has never held a competitive vote, and the younger Berdimukhamedov will almost certainly face no real opponents in the snap March 12 vote.

The gas-rich former Soviet republic has no free media, honors its leaders with ostentatious gold statues and has not admitted any coronavirus cases since the outbreak of the pandemic.

Berdimukhamedov senior, who is the country's president, chair of the cabinet and senate chief, has been the regime's decision-maker for the last 15 years.

His pastimes -- including horse riding, mass cycling, composing songs and authoring books -- have made him a curiosity across the world on social media, which are blocked in Turkmenistan.

In a historic speech in parliament on Friday, 64-year-old Berdimukhamedov said he had reached "a difficult decision" about his leadership because of his age, adding that the country needed "young leaders".

Berdimukhamedov junior is currently the second most powerful government official with a broad influence over the economy as deputy chair of the cabinet. Having turned 40 last year, he is now eligible to run for president.

The state television announcer said that he "delivered a speech to the congress delegates, which ended with a vote. The congress participants unanimously supported the candidacy of Serdar Berdimukhamedov for the post of President of Turkmenistan".

Last year Serdar Berdimukhamedov boosted his international profile with a four-day visit to Russia and by holding talks in the capital Ashgabat with Wang Yi, the foreign minister of Turkmenistan's top trade partner China.

Gurbanguly Berdimukhamedov has said he wishes to remain in politics in his role as chairman of parliament's upper chamber.



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## Philippine Peso Being Dragged to Lowest Since 2019

MANILA (Dispatches) - Headwinds are growing for the Philippine peso even after it fell near the bottom of emerging Asia's currency ranking this month.

The peso has managed to avoid weakening past 51.50 per dollar several times this year partly due to intervention by Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas. It's still lost 0.7% in February and analysts expect a further drop this year as the Federal Reserve embarks on an aggressive rate hike trajectory while the BSP maintains a dovish stance. "The peso is primed for some weakness in the coming months," says Michael Ricafort, chief economist at Rizal Commercial Banking Corp. in Manila. He sees the currency ending the year at 52-52.50 per dollar levels last seen in 2019.



## FDI in Turkey Hits \$14.2b in 2021 To Exceed Pre-Pandemic Levels

ANKARA (Dispatches) - A significant increase in the flow of foreign investments was witnessed in Turkey in 2021, in a rebound that even exceeded levels prior to the coronavirus pandemic, a senior official said.

Foreign direct investments (FDI) surged 81% year-over-year last year to \$14.2 billion, said Burak Dağlıoğlu, the head of Presidency Investment Office. "This figure is above the FDI inflows that came to our country since 2016," Dağlıoğlu told Anadolu Agency (AA).

The figure is up from around \$8 billion in FDI in 2020, marked by a global economic fallout from the pandemic. Dağlıoğlu said investments had dropped 18% in 2020, compared to a 35% decline on the global level.

Global FDI slipped to around \$929 billion in 2020, according to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD).

But the flows strongly rebounded to an estimated \$1.65 trillion in 2021, a 77% year-over-year surge, UNCTAD said last month.

Turkey seems to have also surpassed the annual average of FDI inflow in the years before the outbreak, Dağlıoğlu said.

The country last year particularly came to the fore as many companies announced plans to move part of their production to Turkey to minimize problems with global supply chains and increased shipping costs.

Straddling Europe and the Middle East, Turkey says it is well placed to benefit from changes to global supply chains. And its strategic location and strong manufacturing base are seen as a plus.

The disruptions to the global economy during the pandemic upset supply chains across continents, leaving the world short of a plethora of goods and services from car parts and microchips to container vessels that transport goods across the seas.

"Our country is strengthening its position in global supply chains and international investors are increasing their assets in Turkey," said Dağlıoğlu.

Some 60% of the FDI in 2021 came from Europe, he noted, with Asia accounting for 24% and Americas for 16%.

The United Kingdom was Turkey's number one investor last year, he noted, followed by the United States, the Netherlands, Switzerland, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Germany, Luxembourg, South Korea, Japan and Ireland.

"Wholesale and retail trade, manufacturing industry, information and communication technologies, financial services and transportation-storage activities were among the sectors that received the most investment," Dağlıoğlu said.

"The wholesale and retail trade sector consisted of investments in our successful technology startups operating in this area," he added. "Looking at the sub-divisions of manufacturing, which is another important sector in investments, we see that the production of transportation vehicles, chemicals, computers, electronics and optical equipment, food and beverage products stood out."

Mergers and acquisitions (M&A) in Turkey totaled TL 42.6 billion in 2021 in addition to the seven privatization transactions that totaled TL 95 billion, the Competition Board (RK) said last month.

## Malaysia's GDP Likely to Reach 6.1% in 2022

KUALA LUMPUR (Dispatches) - Malaysia's gross domestic product (GDP) is projected to rebound by 3.0 percentage points to 6.1 per cent year-on-year in 2022 on the back of favorable external conditions, with the full economic reopening by major economies giving the growth momentum an added boost.

Public Investment Bank Bhd said the growth trajectory would also be driven by the lag impact of massive fiscal stimulus spending, supported by the still-accommodative interest rate environment.

It added that the strong push will come from the bold decision to fully reopen international borders, which will be key to reviving the tourism sector that has borne the brunt of the health crisis over the last two years.

However, this could be tempered by the emergence of a more infectious COVID-19 variant which could cause rapid transmission and therefore, a loss in productivity and output.

"Persistent challenges in the manufacturing sector, like the shortage in raw material and labor, could also affect output," said the investment bank.

It added that economic prospects are expected to improve following the better handling of Covid-19 and vaccination coverage of more than 90 per cent of the adult population. On the monetary policy, Public Investment Bank expects to see normalization in the benchmark interest rate only in the second half of 2022, with the overnight policy rate (OPR) likely to be adjusted by 50 basis points to 2.25 per cent.

The consumer price index is projected to remain steady at 2.4 per cent in 2022, thanks to full economic reopenings that will push employment and wages, and subsequently, demand for goods and services.



## Europe's Banks Fund Oil and Gas Expansion Despite IEA Warning

PARIS (Dispatches) - European banks are providing billions of dollars of funding to expand oil and gas production, a report on Monday showed, despite International Energy Agency guidance against new facilities in order to slow global warming.

During 2021, twenty five of the region's leading banks collectively provided US\$55 billion (RM230.4 billion) to energy companies planning to expand oil and gas production, responsible investment non-profit ShareAction said in the report.

Although that marked a fall from the US\$106 billion lent in 2020 and US\$83 billion in 2019, it was higher than the US\$49 billion and US\$50 billion lent in 2018 and 2017, respectively.

An IEA report in May said there should be no investment in new oil and gas fields in order to have a 50 per cent chance of capping global warming at 1.5 degrees Celsius above the pre-industrial average.

The financing comes despite 24 of the banks themselves pledging to decarbonise their loan portfolios, the report said, adding that HSBC, Barclays and BNP Paribas were among the biggest providers of finance in 2021.

ShareAction said it was calling on investors to demand the banks implement policies to restrict finance for oil and gas expansion and back climate-related shareholder resolutions in the upcoming season for annual general meetings.

"Last year shareholders were instrumental in pushing banks to adopt or strengthen restrictions on coal finance," said Kelly Shields, Senior Officer for Banking Standards at ShareAction.

## India Cuts Tax on Crude Palm Oil Imports

MUMBAI (Dispatches) - India has cut its tax on crude palm oil (CPO) imports to 5% from 7.5%, the government said in a notification, as the world's biggest edible oil importer tries to rein in local prices of the commodity and help domestic refiners and consumers.

The reduction in the tax, known as the Agriculture Infrastructure and Development Cess (AIDC), will widen the gap between the CPO and refined palm oil import duties,

effectively making it cheaper for Indian refiners to import CPO, industry officials told Reuters.

The tax cut came into effect on Sunday.

"After the reduction in AIDC, the import tax difference between CPO and refined palm oil would widen to 8.25%," said B.V. Mehta, executive director of Mumbai-based Solvent Extractors' Association of India (SEA).

"This will help Indian refiners, but government needs to increase the difference further to 11% to encourage local refining."

In a separate notification, the government also said it would extend a reduction in a separate, basic customs duty on edible oils until Sept. 30. The tax reduction had been due to expire on March 31.

India imports more than two-thirds of its edible oil needs and has been struggling to contain a rally in local oil prices over the last few months.

The country imports palm oil mainly from top producers Indonesia and Malaysia, while other oils, such as soy and sunflower, come from Argentina, Brazil, Ukraine and Russia.

Refined palm oil imports accounted for nearly half of India's total palm oil imports in the past few months, said Sandeep Bajoria, chief executive of Sunvin Group, a vegetable oil brokerage and consultancy firm.

"The share of refined palm oil could come down to 20% with the revision in the tax structure," Bajoria said.

Indian refiners have been asking New Delhi to change the import duty structure as the overseas buying of refined palm oil was cheaper than CPO due to higher taxes imposed by producing countries on exports of CPO.

Mindful of an electorate that is highly sensitive to food price inflation, India's government in the past few months tried to rein in domestic prices by reducing import taxes, imposing stockpile limits and suspending futures trading in edible oils and oilseeds.

## Pakistan Has One of Lowest Trade-to-GDP Ratios in World

ISLAMABAD (Dispatches) - Pakistan exhibits one of the lowest trade-to-GDP ratios in the world showing at just 30 per cent. However, it is not all doom and gloom and the country has a lot of room for improvement, according to the Asian Development Bank (ADB).

One viable strategy that Pakistan can adopt to boost its growth is to further open its economy to trade. At just 30pc, Pakistan exhibits one of the lowest trade-to-GDP ratios in the world, even when taking its size into account, the ADB says in its report titled 'Pakistan's Economy and Trade in the Age of Global Value Chains'.

This indicates great potential for improvement. Studies have affirmed numerous benefits to economic openness, including opportunities for specialization, access to wider markets, the inflow of know-how, and the formalization of the economy.

Existing patterns indicate that Pakistan's trade is currently oriented to the United States, Europe, and China. It specializes in textiles, though some of its agricultural products are sold to the Middle East. Interestingly, it does not have a significant trading relationship with its proximate neighbors in South Asia. The only economy for which it is a major market is its northern neighbor Afghanistan, the report points out.

While the vast majority of its export products fall under the textiles grouping, formal measures of export concentration suggest that Pakistan's exports basket is relatively more diversified, especially compared with other major textile exporters like Bangladesh and Cambodia. However, its exports are less diversified than India.

The report used statistics from 2019 since 2020 was an unusual year [owing to Covid-19] portraying a snapshot of economic openness across various levels of GDP for 166 countries and economies with available data, and for economic openness of Pakistan, it says it is less

open than India and Bangladesh. It is only more open than Ethiopia, Brazil and Sudan.

The ADB says Pakistan is a relatively large country, however its trade openness remains remarkably low. Citing example, it says countries that have GDPs comparable to that of Pakistan but with much higher trade-to-GDP include the Philippines, the Netherlands, and Viet Nam. India's GDP is almost 10 times larger than Pakistan's, yet trade plays a greater role in its economy, according to the report.

Pakistan has historically experienced uneven growth and remains among the least open economies in the world, even after taking its relatively large size into account.

What it does export is dominated by textile products and rice, though a formal measure of concentration suggests that its exports basket is on the whole quite diversified.

The dominance of textile products in Pakistan's exports raises the issue of diversification — or potentially the lack of it. Concentrating too much on only a few sectors or products poses risks to an economy since shocks to the dominant sector can more easily cause an economy-wide recession.

Pakistan can adopt to boost its growth to further open its economy to trade. Benefits to economic openness include opportunities for specialization, access to wider markets, and the inflow of investments, technology, and know-how. There is also evidence that trade promotes the reallocation of labor from the informal to the formal sector.

## Farmers Vow to Block Greece's Highways To Protest Energy Prices



ATHENS (Dispatches) - Farmers in Greece say they are determined to shut down the country's major highways in protest of surging energy costs.

At a gathering south of the city of Larissa in central Greece, they decided Sunday to demand a meeting with Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis.

As all of Europe is facing rising energy costs, Greek farmers are demanding subsidies to reduce their fuel costs and an end to the electricity price adjustment cost, which reflects changes in the price of oil and natural gas imports.

Greece has among the highest taxes on fuel in the 27-nation European Union, accounting for about two-thirds of the price.

"Diesel costs about 1.60 euros (per liter), while in other European countries it is 70 cents," Asterios Tsikritsis, president of the farmers' union in the city of Tirnavos, north of Larissa, told The Associated Press (AP).

Greek farmers have already been blocking a major road connecting Larissa to the city of Kozani to the northwest for about 10 days. On Sunday, they spilled milk on the road as part of their protest.

"At present, it is questionable whether us and our flocks will survive," said Argiris Bairachtaris, president of the Tirnavos animal farmers' union.

## Iran, UNAMA Discuss Iran-Afghanistan Transit Ties

TEHRAN (MNA) – The representative of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) met with Iran Deputy Transport Minister to discuss strengthening of transport and transit ties of Afghanistan with the neighboring countries. The rail, port and maritime cooperation with Iran is critical for the flow of trade and transit in Afghanistan. Diplomatic supports and

follow-ups of UNAMA from international organizations and domestic authorities in Afghanistan would ease freight transport and transit to Afghanistan through Iran. To this end, Chabahar Port has a key role for Afghanistan in its trade transactions. Chabahar Port as the only ocean port in Iran completes the eastern corridor within Iran and link the Indian Ocean to the CIS countries.



## \$100 Oil Threatens to Compound World Economy's Inflation Shock

LONDON (Dispatches) - Oil's surge toward \$100 a barrel for the first time since 2014 is threatening to deal a double-blow to the world economy by further denting growth prospects and driving up inflation.

That's a worrying combination for the U.S. Federal Reserve and fellow central banks as they seek to contain the strongest price pressures in decades without derailing recoveries from the pandemic. Group of 20 finance chiefs meet virtually this week for the first time this year with inflation among their top concerns.

While energy exporters stand to benefit from the boom and oil's influence on economies isn't what it once was, much of the world will take a hit as companies and consumers find their bills rising and spending power squeezed by costlier food, transportation and heating.

According to Bloomberg Economics' Shok model, a climb in crude to \$100 by the end of this month from around \$70 at the end of 2021 would lift inflation by about half a percentage point in the U.S. and Europe in the second half of the year.

More broadly, JPMorgan Chase & Co. warns a run-up to \$150 a barrel would almost stall the global expansion and send inflation spiraling to over 7%, more than three times the rate targeted by most monetary policy makers.

"The oil shock feeds into what is now a broader inflation problem," said long-time Fed official Peter Hooper, who's now global head of economic research for Deutsche Bank AG. "There's a decent chance of a significant slowing of global growth" as a result.

Oil is about 50% higher than a year ago, part of a broader rally in commodity prices that's swept up natural gas too. Among the drivers: A post-lockdown resurgence in worldwide demand, geopolitical tensions ignited by oil giant Russia and strained supply chains. Prospects for a renewed Iranian nuclear deal have at times cooled the market.

Still, the rise has been piercing. Just two years ago, oil prices plunged briefly below zero. Fossil fuels — oil, as well as coal and natural gas — provide more than 80% of the global economy's energy. And the cost of a typical basket of them is now up more than 50% from a year ago, according to Gavekal Research Ltd., a consultancy.

The energy crunch also compounds the ongoing squeeze in global supply chains, which drove up costs and delayed raw materials and finished goods.

Vivian Lau, who runs a global logistics company based in Hong Kong, said her customers are already closely watching rising fuel costs.

"The price of oil is definitely a concern," said Lau, vice chair and group chief executive officer of Pacific Air Holdings. "The increase is happening at a time when air freight prices are already very high."

Economists are war gaming scenarios from here.

Goldman Sachs Group Inc., which sees oil at \$100 in the third quarter, estimates a 50% increase lifts headline inflation by an average of 60 basis points, with emerging economies hit most.

The International Monetary Fund recently raised its forecast for global consumer prices to an average 3.9% in advanced economies this year, up from 2.3%, and 5.9% in emerging and developing nations.

"With inflation currently at multi-decade highs and uncertainty surrounding the inflation outlook already unprecedented, the last thing the recovering global economy needs is another leg higher in energy prices," HSBC economists Janet Henry and James Pomeroy wrote in a Feb. 4 report. "Yet that is what it is getting."

China, the world's biggest oil importer and goods exporter, has so far enjoyed benign inflation. But it's economy remains vulnerable as producers are already juggling high input costs and concerns over energy shortages.



With price pressures proving more tenacious than earlier expected, central bankers are now prioritizing inflation fighting over demand support. U.S. consumer prices surprising to a four-decade high sent shocks through the system, increasing bets the Fed will raise rates seven times this year, a faster pace than earlier expected.

Bank of England Governor Andrew Bailey this month partly justified the decision to raise U.K. interest rates by pointing to a "squeeze from energy prices." European Central Bank President Christine Lagarde said recently that officials will "carefully examine" how energy prices will impact the economy as they signal a shift toward tightening. The Reserve Bank of India on Thursday also flagged oil prices as a risk.

To be sure, the world economy is no longer the oil guzzler it was during previous decades, especially the 1970s, and alternative energy offers some buffer. Other pandemic-era insulators include swelling household savings and higher wages amid a tight labor market. In the U.S. the emergence of the shale oil industry means its economy is less vulnerable to fuel shocks: While consumers are paying more for gasoline, domestic producers are earning more.

Mark Zandi, chief economist for Moody's Analytics, estimates that each \$10 per barrel increase shaves 0.1 percentage point off of economic growth the following year. That compares with a 0.3 to 0.4 point blow prior to the fracking revolution.

Other oil producers will have reason to celebrate, too. Russia's budget, for example, could reap more than \$65 billion in extra revenue this year, helping buffer the Kremlin against possible sanctions over Ukraine. Other emerging market producers would benefit, as would Canada and Middle Eastern economies.

But for most consumers, and central bankers, much rides on how fast and how far energy goes, particularly if economies lose momentum globally.

"A continued rapid rise can raise risks of recession-like conditions in some countries, especially if fiscal policy is also tightening notably," said Priyanka Kishore of Oxford Economics Ltd., which estimates that every \$10 per barrel increase in oil eats around 0.2 percentage points from world growth.

"Hopefully," she said, "this is not the straw that breaks the camels back."

### West's Lack of...

FROM PAGE 1

Pointing to "serious efforts" by Iran's chief negotiator Ali Bagheri Kani during the ongoing talks with the P4+1 group of countries in Vienna and "realistic" initiatives offered by the Iranian negotiating team, Amir-Abdollahian emphasized that any proposal offered by the other parties must take Tehran's legitimate rights and demands into consideration.

"We will never back down from our red lines, which are based on logic and realism," he said.

The senior EU official, for his part, hailed great efforts made so far by the negotiating teams of Iran and the P4+1 group of countries to salvage the JCPOA.

He said the Vienna talks have reached a sensitive stage and all the participants must show flexibility and take the existing possibilities and limitations into account to help advance the negotiations.

Amir-Abdollahian and Borrell agreed to continue close consultations to advance the Vienna talks, saying that the overall course of negotiations has been positive.

### U.S. Sanctions Are...

FROM PAGE 1

"As our president stated in his address to the UNGA session, unilateral sanctions against the Iranian people, particularly sanctions on medicine and humanitarian items, are criminal acts on par with crimes committed against humanity. Those who sanction countries should not go unpunished for such heinous crimes," Ershadi asserted.

"As the representative of a country whose people are subjected to the most brutal form of economic terrorism and illegitimate unilateral coercive measures by the United States, I call for the complete and immediate lifting of all unilateral coercive measures including sanctions in order to ensure the full achievement of economic and social development and enable the targeted countries to repair their economies while guaranteeing the well-being of their people in the aftermath of the pandemic."

She further noted that despite the sanctions, the Iranian government has managed to provide poor and vulnerable people with special financial packages and social and economic rehabilitation programs, in addition to devising economic support measures, especially for small businesses.

The government, she said, has also prepared medical treatment programs for about 4 million legal and illegal Afghan refugees.

### Direct Flights...

FROM PAGE 1

Velázquez added that the flight was to last for nearly 13 hours and was scheduled to take off from the Iranian capital in the evening.

Iran and Venezuela started exchanging direct cargo flights in 2019, carrying "medicines as well as industrial and technological products," he said.

According to the official, these flights not only help enable the commercial exchange of products between the two countries but also strengthen relations in the tourist and cultural spheres, where the "true union and strength" of the two peoples are rooted.

Iran and Venezuela have been cooperating closely, despite the United States sanctions targeting both countries.

Starting in 2020, Iran has so far sent several massive shipments of gasoline to Venezuela, whose oil industry has been hit hard by the American sanctions.

Velázquez told Hispan TV that Iran was an example for Venezuela "for everything it has done in the 43 years" since the 1979 victory of its Islamic Revolution.

Iran is as well "an example for [all] the countries that have been sanctioned of how a country, regardless of the sanctions' pressure, can develop, grow, and show the world that sanctions can be defeated, when there exists the desire and will to do the things that are right for one's country," he concluded.

### Tehran, Islamabad...

FROM PAGE 1

The Iranian diplomat was accompanied by Iran's Ambassador to Pakistan, Mohammad Ali Hosseini, Commander of the Iranian Border Guards, Brigadier General Ahmad Ali Goudarzi, and Iranian military attaché Colonel Mostafa Ghanbarpour.

Pakistan and Iran share a border of roughly 750km (466 miles) located in Pakistan's southwest and Iran's southeast. The border has been the site of sporadic skirmishes, with border patrols on both sides targeted. In 2018, at least 14 Iranian security personnel, including intelligence officials belonging to Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, were abducted along the border, increasing tension between the two countries.

Armed group Jaish al-Adl, affiliated with al-Qaeda, claimed responsibility for those abductions.

Five of those soldiers were released the same year. Four were rescued by Pakistani security forces in 2019. In 2021, Iran said it had rescued two more of the soldiers. According to a statement from the Pakistan prime minister's office, issues of developing border markets and "a convergence of views" on the situation in Afghanistan were also discussed.

"[Pakistani PM Khan] stressed early completion and operationalization of the border sustenance markets, for economic uplift of the people living on both sides of the border," the statement said. It added that PM Khan "expressed satisfaction over convergence of views regarding a peaceful and stable Afghanistan and underscored the importance of close coordination between the two countries."

"The prime minister also stressed the need for urgent actions by the international community to prevent humanitarian crisis and economic meltdown in Afghanistan and measures to enhance practical engagement, strengthen stability, and counter terrorism."

Vahidi's talks with Pakistani army chief touched upon similar subjects, according to a Pakistani military statement. "[General Bajwa] said that enhanced cooperation between the two brotherly neighbors is vital for peace and stability in the region," said the statement. "Terming Pak-Iran Border as border of peace and friendship, [the army chief] highlighted the need to put in collective efforts to deny any space or liberty of action to be exploited by miscreants along Pak-Iran Border."

### Iran Trade With...

FROM PAGE 1

IRICA figures showed that Iranian imports from Ukraine, which mostly included wheat and other agrifood goods, increased nearly 106% in value terms year on year in January to reach nearly \$112 million.

Iranian exports to Ukraine rose 40.3% between March last year and January this year to \$50.8 million, said the report, adding that agrifood was responsible for a bulk of shipments sent from Iran to Ukraine over the period.

The figures come as Iranian authorities fear that deterioration of security on the border between Russia and Ukraine could affect a growing trend in trade between Iran and the two countries, especially with Russia.

Iran's trade with Russia started to jump in late 2019 after Iran reached preferential trade arrangements with a Russia-led bloc of Eurasian economies.

Meanwhile Head of Trade Promotion Organization of Iran (TPOI) announced the growing trend of Iran's export of products to the regional and Asian countries in the 13th government under President Raisi.

Alireza Peyman-Pak said on Monday that the unprecedented export growth of the country to the countries including Russia, Turkey, Iraq and Southeast Asian countries increased in the current year since the new administration of President Raisi came to power in June.

While expounding on the salient programs of the 13th government, he pointed to holding specialized exhibitions and bilateral trade events with neighboring states as the main policies of the 13th government in the field of foreign trade.

Elsewhere in his remarks, the TPOI chief announced the inauguration of the largest stadium in Iraq constructed by expert Iranian engineers in the coming week.

Turning to the expansion of trade and economic ties with Syria, he said, "It is scheduled that Iran will get access lucrative market of North African countries via Syria."

He further noted that Iran's export of products to neighboring Turkey has become doubled which is solid evidence of Iran's success in doing business with this country.

**First Announcement**

## Tender invitation

**Invitation to public tender for Tertiary dodecyl mercaptan(TDM) // 141300KG**



TABRIZ PETROCHEMICAL COMPANY (PLC)

Tabriz petrochemical company intends to procure its required quantity of Tertiary dodecyl mercaptan(TDM) for ABS production plant from reputable & reliable producer and supplier of said product.

Interested suppliers should submit their request to below email in order to get tender documents until February 27.

Deadline for submission of offers for tender is: March 10, 2022

Email: Mr.ghorbani@tpco.ir

Phone No.: +98-21-88737355-Int 109

Tender	No	Quantity
Tertiary dodecyl mercaptan(TDM)	PVS-0041063	141300 kg

**Public Relations of Tabriz Petrochemical Company ( Public Stock )**

**First turn published: February 16, 2022**

**Second turn published: February 21, 2022**

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## Trippier Faces Spell On Sidelines

LONDON (Dispatches) - Kieran Trippier has been ruled out of Newcastle's "upcoming fixtures" after fracturing a bone in his foot during a 1-0 win over Aston Villa at the weekend, the club said.

The England full-back has been impressive for Eddie Howe's side since joining the Magpies from Atletico Madrid in the January transfer window, scoring twice in a three-match winning run that has lifted them out of the relegation zone.

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http://www.irannewsdaily.com

**E-Mail Address:**  
info@irannewsdaily.com  
**ISSN 1024-6053**  
**P.O. Box:** 15875-8551  
**Address:** No 13, Pajouhesh St., Golestan II St, Golestan St.Marzadaran Blvd., Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran  
**Printed by:**Honar Sarzmin Sabz  
**Distributed by:**  
Cities of Iran Cultural and Artistic Institute  
**Managing Director:** Fereydoon Taherpour Asl

## Araujo Injury Blow for Barca

BARCELONA (Dispatches) - Barcelona's Uruguayan international defender Ronald Araujo suffered a calf injury during the La Liga side's 2-2 draw against Espanyol, the Catalan club confirmed.

Araujo was substituted at half-time yesterday after taking a knock to his left foot and was replaced by Eric Garcia, who made his comeback after five weeks out with a right thigh injury, and was responsible for Barcelona conceding a second goal.

# Rams Down Bengals In Super Bowl Thriller

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - Cooper Kupp scored two touchdowns and Aaron Donald spearheaded a fearsome defensive display as the Los Angeles Rams defeated the Cincinnati Bengals 23-20 to win the Super Bowl.

Kupp scored a decisive touchdown with 1min 25sec remaining to give the Rams the lead at SoFi Stadium before Donald grabbed the Rams' record-breaking eighth sack of Bengals quarterback Joe Burrow to seal a blockbuster victory.

Donald's sack of Burrow was the dramatic final act of a gripping contest between the star-studded Rams and the Bengals, whose bid to win a first-ever Vince Lombardi Trophy fell agonizingly short. "I'm just so happy," said Rams defensive star Donald. "I wanted this so bad. I dreamed this."

"One play and we're world champs," Donald added of his crucial late sack of Burrow. "Any way to get to him. We made it."

Wide receiver Kupp was named Super Bowl MVP three years after missing the Rams last appearance in a Super Bowl through injury.

"It is unbelievable," Kupp said. "To be able to experience this with my family. It has been such a fun ride. Up and down but fun."

Rams quarterback Matthew Stafford, meanwhile, paid tribute to his team's never-say-die approach. "I'm so proud of this team," Stafford said. "There are so many guys on our team that deserve this, so many guys who gave their heart and soul to this team."

"That game today is the story of our season. It's up and down it's tough. We're a tough team. We showed up late and got it done."

The Bengals had stormed into a 20-13 lead early in the second half after a controversial Tee Higgins touchdown and an Evan McPherson field goal.

Higgins raced for a 75-yard score but replays showed he grabbed Rams' safety Jalen Ramsey's facemask before breaking clear -- an infringement that should have led to a penalty.

But the Rams, who had struggled to build momentum on offense after a game-ending injury to Odell Beckham Jr., clawed their way back into the game thanks to their rampant defense led by Donald.



Burrow was sacked repeatedly at key moments to prevent the Bengals from extending their lead. Matt Gay's field goal pulled the Rams back to 20-16 heading into the fourth quarter. Stafford then led a 15-play, 79-yard drive that benefited from three crucial Bengals penalties near the goal line before Kupp plucked a one-yard pass in the end zone for the go-ahead touchdown.

"Stafford and Kupp came to life," said Rams head coach Sean McVay -- who becomes the youngest ever head coach to win the Super Bowl at the age of 36. "Our best players shined the brightest when they had to and that's why we got it done."

Kupp and Beckham had both scored early touchdowns to give the Rams a 13-3 lead in the second quarter before the Bengals battled back into the contest.

The defeat was brutal on Bengals quarterback Burrow, the 25-year-old rising star who has helped transform Cincinnati's fortunes this season.

Burrow finished with 263 passing yards and one touchdown but was buffeted all night and sacked eight times, a record for a Super Bowl.

Stafford, meanwhile, finished with 283 yards and two touchdowns with two interceptions.

It was the Rams second franchise Super Bowl victory and their first since returning to Los Angeles from St. Louis in 2016. Their previous win came in 2000.

It was the third Super Bowl defeat in as many appearances for the Bengals, who also dropped the title contest in 1982 and 1989.

Sunday's showstopping finale was a fitting end to one of the most gripping NFL post-seasons in years.

With Los Angeles basking in a February heatwave, a 70,000-capacity crowd packed with Hollywood celebrities were given a show-stopping halftime show led by icons Snoop Dogg, Dr.Dre, Eminem and Mary J. Blige.



## Opelka Capture ATP Dallas Open Title

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - Reilly Opelka captured his third career ATP title, defeating fellow American Jenson Brooksby 7-6 (7/5), 7-6 (7/3) to win the Dallas Open final.

World number 23 Opelka blasted 16 aces past Brooksby in taking the crown.

Opelka's prior ATP titles came at the 2019 New York Open and 2020 Delray Beach Open. He lost his only other final last August at the Canadian Open.

Brooksby, a 21-year-old Californian ranked a career high 54th, lost his only prior career ATP final last July on Newport grass.

Opelka, 24, faced only one break point in the tournament.

Brooksby saved three set points in the first tiebreaker but then sent a crosscourt backhand wide to surrender the opening set after 52 minutes.

In the second set, Brooksby overcame three double faults and four break points to hold in the 11th game for a 6-5 lead, denying breaks on three service winners and a forehand winner.

In the final tie-breaker, Opelka jumped ahead 3-0 and 6-3 before converting his first match point with a backhand volley winner.

## Kontaveit Claims Sixth Career Title

SAINT PETERSBURG (Dispatches) - Estonia's Anett Kontaveit claimed her sixth career title with a gruelling 5-7, 7-6 (7/4), 7-5 victory over top seeded Maria Sakkari in the St. Petersburg final.

Victory allowed Kontaveit to become just the sixth woman since 1990 to win 20 straight indoor matches.

Kontaveit needed almost three hours to take victory, recovering from a break down in both the second and third sets.

Of her six titles, five have come in the last seven months.

During her indoor dominance, she collected three trophies last year in Ostrava, Moscow and Cluj-Napoca.

She also reached the top 10 for the first time and was runner-up to Garbine Muguruza at the WTA Finals.



# Russian Skater Valieva Cleared to Continue at Olympics

BEIJING (Dispatches) - Russian teenage figure skating sensation Kamila Valieva was cleared by the Court of Arbitration for Sport to continue competing in the Beijing Olympics despite failing a doping test.

CAS said it had rejected appeals by the International Olympic Committee, the World Anti-Doping Agency and the International Skating Union to have the suspension of the 15-year-old reinstated.

The prodigious Valieva is now able to take

part in the singles event that begins on Tuesday, just a day after the top sports court released its decision.

She will be favorite to win that competition.

CAS cited "exceptional circumstances" for its decision, including her status as a "protected person" -- in other words, a minor.

Matthieu Reeb, CAS director general, said in a news conference that a suspension would have caused "serious damage".

Valieva tested positive during the Russian championships on December 25 for the banned substance trimetazidine.

It is used to treat angina and vertigo but is on WADA's prohibited list because it can increase blood flow efficiency and help endurance.

## Ruud Wins Seventh Career Title

BUENOS AIRES (Dispatches) - Norway's Casper Ruud won his seventh career title and sixth on clay with a 5-7, 6-2, 6-3 victory over Diego Schwartzman in the Argentina Open final.

Top seed Ruud was the champion in the Argentine capital in 2020 while second-seeded Schwartzman succeeded him last year.

Ruud's record at the event now stands at 9-0.

The 23-year-old's two clay titles in Argentina add to those in Kitzbuhel, Gstaad, Bastad and Geneva in 2021.

He won his only hardcourt event at San Diego, also last year.

## Sterling's Future at Man City To Be Decided by Club

MANCHESTER (Dispatches) - Manchester City manager Pep Guardiola praised the "outstanding" contribution of forward Raheem Sterling this season, adding that any decision over the England international's future will be taken by the club.

Sterling scored a hat-trick in Premier League win at Norwich City as the champions extended their unbeaten run in all competitions to 12 games.

## UEFA to Reward Fans With 30,000 Free Tickets for Finals

LONDON (Dispatches) - UEFA will offer 30,000 tickets to fans of teams taking part in this season's European finals as a way to thank them for their support during the Covid-19 pandemic, president Aleksander Ceferin said.

The Champions League finalists will each receive 5,000 tickets and a total of 8,000 tickets will be handed out for the Europa League final. The finals of the Europa Conference League and Women's Champions League will each have 6,000 tickets available.

UEFA said that clubs can use the tickets to reward loyal supporters but they must not be given to sponsors, partners or club officials.

"Football fans are the lifeblood of the game and we thought it would be a nice way to recognize the difficulties they have experienced over the last two years and how they nevertheless still managed to support their teams," Ceferin said.

The pandemic has had a considerable impact on European clubs, who lost €7 billion across two seasons due to matches being played behind closed doors and a decrease in transfer revenue, according to a study published by UEFA this month.



## Brazil, Argentina Ordered to Play World Cup Abandoned Qualifier

PARIS (Dispatches) - FIFA ordered Brazil and Argentina to replay a World Cup qualifying match halted in Sao Paulo in September over alleged Covid-19 quarantine breaches by the visitors.

Brazilian health officials stormed the pitch seven minutes into the clash on September 5 between the South American giants at Sao Paulo's Neo Quimica Arena, stopping the match and triggering a melee involving team officials and players.

"After a thorough investigation of the various factual elements and in light of the applicable regulations, the FIFA Disciplinary Committee has decided that the match should be replayed on a date and at a location to be decided by FIFA," said a statement from world soccer's governing body on Monday.

The two nations are undefeated in South American qualifying and are sure to finish in the top two places in the 10-team group, although both have three games to play, including the rematch. The top four teams qualify automatically for the World Cup in Qatar.

Hours before the on-pitch drama in September, Brazil's National Health Surveillance Agency (ANVISA) said four Argentine players based at English clubs at the time should be placed in "immediate quarantine" for breaching Covid-19 protocols.

According to ANVISA, the Premier League players -- Cristian Romero and then club-mate Giovanni Lo Celso of Tottenham, and Aston Villa's Emiliano Martinez and Emiliano Buendia -- provided "false information" upon entering Brazil.

