

Health Ministry Announced on Monday That the Number of Deaths From the Coronavirus Pandemic in Iran Increased to 135,276 With 236 More Iranians Killed by the Deadly Disease Over the Past 24 Hours

IRAN NEWS

Iran's Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian Has No Plans to Visit Vienna as Some Reports Had Claimed He Was Going to Join Iran's Negotiating Team in Vienna

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Iran Slams Suppressing Peaceful Protests in Canada

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Vice-President of the Judiciary for International Affairs and Secretary General of the Islamic Republic of Iran's High Council for Human Rights Kazem Gharibabadi condemned suppressing peaceful protests in Canada.

"Peaceful protesters in the so-called Land of the Free are shushed, and guess what? Nobody ever dares to talk about egregious human rights violations taking place on a daily basis in Canada. Well, the critics may have been shushed, too!," Gharibabadi wrote in his Twitter account on Monday.

The Freedom Convoy, movement in Canada started to protest against mandatory vaccination for truck drivers to pass through borders to Canada since January 29.

The Canadian police arrested 191 protestors on Sunday.

President's Landmark Visit to Doha Bolstering Ties With Friendly States



IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - President Seyed Ebrahim Raisi in his first visit to the Persian Gulf states yesterday arrived in Doha, Qatar for a landmark visit and cementing ties with friendly country, Qatar and was warmly welcomed by Emir of Qatar.

During the President's visit to Qatar, cooperation documents in different political, economic, cultural and sports fields were signed between the two countries.

During the first day of the visit of Raisi to Qatar on Monday morning, contracts in the different political, economic, cultural, sports fields were signed by the Iranian and Qatari ministers in the presence of the Emir of Qatar Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani and Raisi.

The 14 signed cooperation documents are in the fields of aviation, trade, shipping, radio and television, visa cancellation, electricity, standards, culture and education.

After the meeting and signing the cooperation documents, the Qatari Emir and the Iranian president attended a joint press conference.

"We seek change in regional relations towards interaction, cooperation and integration, Raisi said during the joint press conference," said Raisi.

Referring to the ongoing Vienna talks, the Iranian president said that the United States must prove its willingness to lift the anti-Iran sanctions.

He also said, "Today we have expanded our cooperation in the fields of economy, energy, infrastructure, culture and food security."

Iran has won in the battles against terrorism and Maximum Pressure Campaign waged by the former U.S. president, the president also noted.

Iran's capability to successfully fight terrorism brings security to the world, he said, adding that Iran extends its hand of friendship to the countries in the region for maximum interaction.

The president also said that Afghanistan's neighbors and all groups must help the country to form an inclusive national government.

Raisi also called for the lifting of the blockade on the oppressed Yemeni people, stressing that the only solution to the Yemeni crisis is intra-Yemeni talks.

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Inflation Continues Downward Trend in Iran

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Figures by the Statistical Center of Iran (SCI) shows a downward trend in the country's inflation rate continued in February.

SCI figures published on Sunday showed that Iran's annual consumer prices index (CPI) dropped by 1% in the calendar month to February 19 to stand at 41.4%.

The decline in the CPI was 1.6% for households living in the Iranian countryside where the rate was reported at 44.2% in late February, said the SCI, adding that inflation for urban households was down by one percentage point against January to 40.8%.

Highest price hikes in February were reported for vegetables, bread and grains especially rice, and sugar and sweets, said the agency, adding that the highest price rises in the non-food sector had been reported for hotel accommodation, shoes and apparel, and newspapers and magazines.

The SCI said that month-on-month inflation rate in Iran dropped by 0.3% to 2.1% in February.

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Agreement in Vienna Can Be Reached Within Hours

TEHRAN (IP) - Foreign Minister says an agreement could be reached within hours on the US return to the 2015 Iran nuclear deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

"We can reach an agreement within hours," Hossein Amir-Abdollahian said Sunday after returning from Germany.

Iran's top diplomat stated, "We have informed the Americans through intermediaries that it is their turn; it is time to see more flexibility."

The Iranian foreign minister confirmed that the Islamic Republic and the Western parties were close to reaching an agreement, but said that its finalization would depend on more flexibility on the part of the United States and Europe.

"We think that if the Western side realistically deals with what is happening at the Vienna talks today, we can reach a final agreement," Amir-Abdollahian concluded.

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Iran-Afghanistan Border Security Should Improve

ZAHEDAN (IRNA) - Chief of Staff of Iran's Armed Forces Major General Mohammad Bagheri said that Iran's eastern borders are especially sensitive and Iran-Afghanistan borders need more security.

Major General Bagheri inspected the operation units of the Offensive Mobile Brigade 158 of the Army's Ground Force and the Southeast Border Guard units during his travel to the southeastern Sistan-Baluchestan Province on Monday.

The commander told reporters, the Army of the Islamic Republic of Iran has been tasked with deploying its units to support the Border Guard.

He hailed the Brigade 158 for their good preparedness and deployment.

Bagheri also attended the opening ceremony of water supply project of the Army to 18 villages in Hirmand region of the province, singling out water as the most fundamental need of the people in this region.

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Ansari, CEO of Lamerd Special Economic Zone, stated:

Expansion of investment with the development of infrastructure in Lamerd Special Economic Zone



Lamerd Special Economic Zone has seriously used its full capacity to build infrastructure. With the efforts of the management complex, despite all the problems, with the development of infrastructure, we are witnessing the expansion of the presence of investors. Ehsan Ansari, CEO of Lamerd Special Zone, pointed to the approximate value of 20,000 billion rials in infrastructure development contracts in Lamerd Special Economic Zone. He added: "This amount of investment has been made in infrastructure projects in the region."

These projects include: construction of civil infrastructure, construction of 132 kV power transmission line, construction of customs warehouses and warehouses in the region, and installation of the second special zone weighbridge. Ansari further mentioned the new investments in the region: The investments made in Lamerd Special Economic Zone are: concluding a contract for the construction of two petro-refinery complexes with an investment volume of \$ 200 million and anticipating the presence of two more petrochemicals by the end of the year. Is. He expressed hope and said: "With the construction and creation of petrochemicals in the region, we will see a boom in production and sustainable employment." The CEO of Lamerd Special Economic Zone pointed to two important and national projects in the region and stated: Guaranteed purchase of water from a private sector investor in the form of water transfer plan from the Persian Gulf to Lamerd Special Economic Zone and its bedrock for development in the province and The country was outstanding. Also, the construction of the Lamerd-Parsian freeway to facilitate access to the Parsian port wharf can be considered as other prominent measures of the Lamerd economic zone and the Imidro organization. The approximate value of these projects is estimated at about 60,000 billion rials. Ansari in the field of social responsibilities of Lamerd Special Economic Zone and Imidro Organization, referred to the executive operations of the second axis of Lamerd to Khanj. He added: "With the participation of Imidro, the initial stages of the project of doubling the road in front of the special zone have been started, in order to reduce the risks and road accidents." He also considered the help and support of the neighboring villages affected by the floods in line with the social responsibilities of this region, he added: "After the torrential rains in Lamerd and causing damage, the people of the neighboring villages were helped." For this purpose, water supply was done from the special area to the neighboring village. The residential building for the two affected families was constructed with the benevolent action of the contractors of Lamerd Special Economic Zone. It should be noted that Lamerd Special Economic Zone is one of the complexes covered by the Organization for Development and Renovation of Mines and Mining Industries of Iran (Imidro). This region is located in the south of Fars province and adjacent to the two provinces of Hormozgan and Bushehr (Assaluyeh).



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Negotiation With U.S. Not on Agenda

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) Ali Shamkhani said, "Negotiation with U.S. is not on the agenda of Iranian team."

"Vienna Talks have been going on between Iran, P4+1 and the representative of EU, from the beginning and this path will continue unchanged until a result is reached," Shamkhani wrote in a tweet on Monday.

Negotiation with the U.S. is not on the agenda of Iranian team because it will not be the source of any progress, he added.

Outstanding Progress Made in Vienna

TEHRAN (IFP) - Foreign Ministry Spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh says there has been "considerable progress" during the Vienna talks on revival of the 2015 nuclear deal, stressing that Tehran is awaiting steps by Europe and the United States.

"What is certain is that, within the framework of the talks, all sanctions — regardless of their label — that are incompatible with the commitments of the other side and prevent [Iran's] economic benefits from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, should be removed," Khatibzadeh said in his weekly presser.

The spokesman added that the remaining topics of the negotiations, are the most difficult, most important and most serious issues that should be resolved.

Khatibzadeh also touched on the comments by the Israeli regime's prime minister on a possible agreement in Vienna, stressing that his remarks are addressed at Washington and European capitals.

"We neither pay attention to their [Israelis'] remarks, nor they are bases for our judgement," the spokesman said.

He further noted that one of the key guarantees Iran has been seeking during the negotiations in Vienna is "the quick reversibility of Iran's programs in case of any agreement in Vienna".

On the negotiations between Iran and Saudi Arabia, Khatibzadeh said Tehran has always been ready for talks with the Persian Gulf neighbor, "despite difficulties and disagreements".

He said Iran will take part in the fifth round of the negotiations if a final date is determined.

The spokesman also talked about Australia's move to insert Hamas resistance movement in its list of terror groups.

He said Hamas now has the largest number of representatives in the Palestinian parliament and Australia's decision to stand by the "open decades-long oppression of the apartheid [Israeli] regime" is a historic move, which people will never forget.



Khatibzadeh also touched on the visit by the Iranian delegation to South Korea and their consultations for the release of blocked Iranian assets.

He said Iran is witnessing no practical step by South Korea.

"As long as funds belonging to Iranian people are frozen in South Korean banks, we will put no topic beyond this on the agenda of the two countries," he warned.

"The government of South Korea should know that we will never forget these days."

The spokesman also addressed Britain's debt to Iran, saying the British government has repeatedly showed that "one cannot be sure it implements an already-sealed agreement", even on the eve of the deadline for its implementation.

Khatibzadeh said the British government is under a clear debt that should be paid to the Iranian nation stressing that the long process has become "tiresome beyond limits".

The spokesman also said Americans have repeatedly called for direct negotiation with Iran. He said the Donald Trump administration had similar demands from Iran, which Tehran considered a worthless stunt toward his political aims.

"It is not possible that Americans get different results from a single set of policies," he stressed. "If they want to see different results, it is natural that they should act differently."

Tehran Bent on Expanding All-Out Ties With Central Asia

TEHRAN (PressTV) - President Ebrahim Raisi says the Islamic Republic welcomes the expansion of all-out relations with Central Asian countries, particularly Uzbekistan, and sets no limitation in this regard.

In a meeting with Uzbekistan's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Investments and Foreign Trade Sardor Umurzakov in Tehran on Sunday, Raeisi said the two countries have historical and cultural commonalities and great capacities to improve bilateral relations in various economic sectors, including agriculture, industry, transportation, energy, and tourism.

"Today, the political will of the two countries' presidents is based on an all-out development and deepening of relations, and we are determined to take major steps towards the prosperity and development of the two countries by activating all capacities," the Iranian president stated.

He emphasized that the common capacities of Iran and Uzbekistan can secure the interests of the two nations and other nations in the region.

Raisi also stressed the importance of enhancing cultural relations between Tehran and Tashkent given their deep-rooted historical and cultural commonalities and said it would serve as a solid ground for the expansion of bilateral cooperation in other areas.

Umurzakov, for his part, said his country set a roadmap to boost relations with Iran immediately after a meeting between the Iranian president and his Uzbek counterpart Shavkat Mirziyoyev in the Tajik capital, Dushanbe, in September.

He noted that he is heading a high-ranking economic delegation in his Tehran visit to discuss ways to finalize the roadmap.

The Uzbek deputy prime minister noted that the volume of trade exchanges between the two countries has increased 2.5 times compared to last year.

He said Tashkent is firmly determined to strengthen its relations with Tehran in various fields, including trade and economy, investment, transportation, and transit, in addition to boosting the bilateral cultural ties.

Iran, Uzbekistan to Form Joint committee to raise agricultural transaction

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Agriculture ministers of Iran and Uzbekistan in a meeting on Monday agreed to establish a joint committee to increase agricultural transaction between the two countries.

During the meeting, Iranian Agriculture Minister Javad Sadatinejad said that agricultural business between Iran and Uzbekistan saw growth last year, but this was not satisfactory to the leaders of both countries.

He named agriculture, animal husbandry, and fishery as the areas of interest for the two countries' economic interaction.

Sadatinejad said that Iran was ready to export live chickens and infant formula to Uzbekistan, organize joint exhibition to introduce products of the two countries, and also import camels from the Central Asian country.

He highlighted Uzbekistan's remoteness from open waters and said that Iran was ready to cooperate with Tashkent in exporting its agricultural products through marine routes.

The minister also said that Iran has giant companies that can help Uzbekistan in mechanization, irrigation, and drainage.

Iran has also big greenhouse construction companies that can train and develop the technology in Uzbekistan.

Sadatinejad demanded that Iran be granted the most-favored-nation status by Uzbekistan to receive the same trade advantages as 45 other countries have in business with Uzbekistan.

Elsewhere in the meeting, Uzbek Agriculture Minister Jamshid Khodjaev urged holding joint conferences on farming, horticulture, fishery, and plant protection.

He said that Deputy Prime Minister of Uzbekistan who has traveled to Iran along with a delegation would meet Iran's foreign minister later today, with Iran's most-favored-nation status being on the agenda.

The Iranian and Uzbek ministers agreed that the joint cooperation committee start working within one month.

Tehran, Caracas Call for Boost in Cooperation in New Areas

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Oil Minister Javad Owji and Venezuelan Minister of Foreign Affairs Felix Plasencia held talks in the Qatari capital on expansion of cooperation in new fields, Spanish new agency of EFE reported on Monday.

The talks were held in Doha on the sidelines of the Gas Exporting Countries Forum (GECF) Extraordinary Ministerial Meeting on February 21 and the 6th GECF Summit on February 22.

Plasencia stressed the importance of commitment to bilateral association in multiple areas.

We had a productive meeting with Javad Owji, Minister of Oil of the Islamic Republic of Iran, to whom

we reiterated Venezuela's commitment to bilateral association in multiple areas, and its importance to continue defending our strategic interests, the Venezuelan foreign minister wrote in a Twitter post.

Reportedly, Iran is among world's biggest oil producers.

The country is also among the founders of the GECF and was secretary general of the organization for two periods.

Iran, Algeria, Bolivia, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Libya, Nigeria, Qatar, Russia, Trinidad and Tobago, and Venezuela are the 11 members of the GECF while Malaysia, Norway, Iraq, Peru, Azerbaijan, and the United Arab Emirates are observers.

Tehran, Yerevan Ink MoU on Enhancing Judicial Cooperation

TEHRAN (MNA) – A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was inked in Tehran between Islamic Republic of Iran and Republic of Armenia on judicial cooperation.

This MoU was inked by Iranian Minister of Justice Amin Hossein Rahimi and his Armenian counterpart Karen Andrasyan for enhancing and broadening bilateral cooperation in judicial field.

During the meeting, Iranian Minister stated that the two countries of Iran and Armenia enjoy historical and civilizational relations and principled policy of Iran is to respect the territorial integrity and recognition of sovereignty of all countries as well as further development of relations with friendly and neighboring countries.

Iranian Minister also suggested setting up an arbitration and mediation center to facilitate activities of businessmen and economic activists of the two countries, so that possible trade and economic disputes can be dealt with more easily and quickly.

Armenian Minister of Justice, for his part, welcomed the proposal of his Iranian counterpart and emphasized the need for establishing amicable ties between the two countries.

With strengthening legal and judicial relations between the two countries, Karen Andrasyan expressed hope that a suitable platform would be provided for the development of relations in other fields.

During the meeting, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed in eleven articles with the aim of facilitating implementation of agreements on legal cooperation in civil and criminal affairs as well as extradition of offenders and transfer of convicts between the two parties.

Azerbaijan Calls for Iranian Tractor Production Line

TEHRAN (IP) - The Ambassador of the Republic of Azerbaijan to Tehran called to launch an Iranian tractor production line in his country.

Ali Alizadeh said the Azerbaijan Republic was ready to prepare the grounds for Iran to launch tractor manufacturing lines in Baku, either through investments or through cooperation.

Iran Tractor Manufacturing Company can produce 20,000 tractors, 30,000 diesel engines, 33,000 tons of forging parts, and 54,000 casting parts per year.

Alizadeh said Baku had prepared the grounds for Iranian people in business, industrialists, and investors to revive the Nagorno-Karabakh region.

The envoy also said the Azerbaijani government facilitated the visa issuance to accelerate the traffic of industrialists between Iran's Tabriz and Baku, with an airline being established between the two countries.

Ali Alizadeh made the remarks while visiting Iran's Tractor Manufacturing Industrial Group in Tabriz, the capital of Eastern Azerbaijan in northwestern Iran.

Syria, Iran Review Cooperation in Water Sector

DAMASCUS (Dispatches) - Iran's Ambassador in Damascus in a meeting with the Syrian Minister of Water Resources, reviewed areas of cooperation between the two countries regarding the water sector and ways to develop it.

Mehdi Sobhani, accompanying an economic delegation, affirmed Iran's readiness to cooperate with Syria in this field, saying that Iranian companies have experience and competence in this regard.

Pointing to the repercussions of unilateral coercive measures imposed on the Syrian people, he said that the sanctions affect the Syrian people's work in various sectors.

For his part, Tammam Raad referred to the continued cooperation between the two sides within the framework of agreements on some large projects, pointing out that technical and economic implementation mechanisms of these projects should be reviewed and facilitated as soon as possible.

Investment in Hormuzgan Petrochemical Plant Attractive for Japanese Companies



BANDARABBAS (Dispatches) - Japan's ambassador to Iran while hailing the abundance of capacities in Iran's Hormuzgan province said that making investments on solar energy, petrochemical plants, and iron mines in Hormuzgan are very attractive for the Japanese firms, and good cooperation between that province and Japan can take shape.

Ambassador Ikawa Kazutoshi reiterated in a meeting with the governor of Hormuzgan province on Sunday night that the Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA) has already had cooperation in such fields as tourism and preserving the marine environment in Hormuzgan and "we will see into the continuation of such moves".

During my visit of Hormuzgan I was familiarized with the high potentials of this province in tourism and industrial fields, and I hope after the nuclear negotiations will reach an agreement and the sanctions will be terminated Japan's economic ties with Hormuzgan will increase quite noticeably, said the ambassador.

Kazutoshi said that he had surveyed Hormuzgan province's economic capacities during his visit of the province and during his visit to Shahid Rajaie Port he has noticed that that port is quite fit for greater economic activities.

He said that the appropriate geographical position of Hormuzgan province by the Persian Gulf shores, as a very important maritime location, also enables the province to establish greater shipping connections with Japan.

The governor-general of Hormuzgan, too, said in the meeting that the approach of President Raisi's government and his Foreign Ministry, and Japan's importance as a major country in the east, provides a very special status for Japan in Iranian government's strategies for expansion of bilateral cooperation.

Governor Mahdi Dusti referred to the good record of 92 years of relations between Iran and Japan, and said, "Keeping in mind the bright past of bilateral ties, we can now act for further broadening such relations."

He said that Hormuzgan province has numerous potentials and capacities and can be Japan's major destination for making investments.

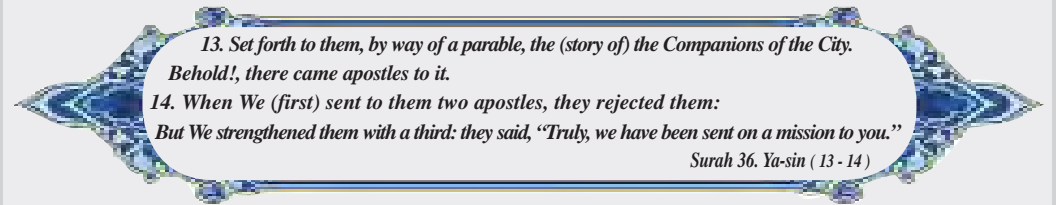
"We are eager to act rapidly in this respect and establish a joint work group to define a framework for bilateral cooperation," he added.





PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	12:17
■ Evening (Maghreb)	18:11
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	05:18
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	06:41



Tashkent Welcomes Boosting All-Out Ties With Tehran

BY: F. TAHERPOUR

TEHRAN - Uzbekistan's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Investments Sardor Umurzakov addressing the Iran-Uzbekistan Business Forum on Monday said that the trade volume between Iran and Uzbekistan was doubled in 2021 and this figure is not enough as the two countries can increase it to \$1b and Tashkent welcomes it.

Umurzakov pointed to the cultural and social commonalities of Iran and Uzbekistan which makes cooperation between the two countries easy. He added that last year the trade between the two countries was doubled and exceeded \$450b as there are more capacities to increase it to \$1b.

He went on to say that both countries can cooperate on producing joint products, adding that soon they will finalize the preferential trade agreement. He said expansion of transportation and transit of goods are of major programs of Uzbekistan which can help the trade between Iran and Uzbekistan to increase.

Umurzakov added that some 347 Iranian companies are now active in Uzbekistan and are busy in different fields. He reiterated that Iran and Uzbekistan are not rivals but their economies are complementary and for this reason they can cooperate on joint productions.

He noted that soon an Uzbek delegation led by Uzbekistan Innovative Development Minister will visit Tehran for talks on the mutual interested fields.

He said Iran and Uzbekistan can work together in the field of pharmaceutical projects as Iran has achieved considerable progress in this field. He reiterated that Iranian pharmaceutical companies can also invest or produce in six special trade zones of Uzbekistan and enjoy the facilities of the zones.

Umurzakov went on to say that agriculture and construction materials are of the other fields that Iran and Uzbekistan can cooperate.



In the forum, Vice-President on Economic Affairs Mohsen Rezaee also said that the current government is focused on expanding cooperation with neighbor states and hailed Uzbekistan for recent decisions to boost all-out ties with Tehran and said Tehran and Tashkent can connect 800m people in two regions. He said the government is working hard on easing trade and investment which will accelerate the foreign trade and investment.

Earlier in the forum, Head of Iran's chamber of commerce Gholam-Hossein Shafei reiterated that cooperation with Uzbekistan is very important for Iran, adding that recent developments in Uzbekistan have encouraged Iranians for trade in Uzbekistan.

He added that commonalities between the two countries have given a special status to Uzbekistan among Iranians.

He went on to say that Iran's geopolitical position has made the country be center of attraction in the region.

He then pointed to some fields for cooperation between Iran and Uzbekistan and called for resolving banking problems, removal of tariffs and resolving transportation and transit problems which are the major hurdles in way of boosting trade between Iran and Uzbekistan.

He added that Iran's chamber this year set up the Iran-Uzbekistan Joint Chamber to facilitate the trade between the two countries and asked Uzbekistan to launch the same chamber in Tashkent to ease trade and to resolve problems of traders in case of trade.

The high-level Uzbek economic delegations began their talks on Sunday evening in Tehran.

A memorandum of understanding of the Joint Commission in the economy, investment, customs, transportation, energy, health, science and technology, culture, tourism, and agriculture was signed.

At the beginning of the summit, Iranian Minister of Industry, Mine and Trade Reza Fatemi Amin and Uzbek Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Investment and Foreign Trade Umurzakov stressed the need to expand comprehensive cooperation.

Uzbekistan is one of the most crucial target countries for Iran's exports, and exports to the country have been growing in recent months.

Meanwhile Umurzakov in meeting with Iranian Vice-President for Science and Technology Sorena Sattari emphasized his country's readiness to develop technological cooperation with Iran.

Appreciating Iran's achievements in the field of technology, innovation and development of knowledge-based companies, He said that there is a very good opportunity for technological cooperation between the two countries and Uzbekistan are ready to interact with Iran in this field.

Referring to the establishment of the Uzbek Ministry of Innovative Development, he said that the Ministry is ready to cooperate with Iran in the field of technology.

Saying that Iran's experience can lead to the development of Uzbekistan's science and technology parks and companies and start-ups, he added that Iran and Uzbekistan can even produce joint products.

He also pointed to the creation of a roadmap on forming extensive cooperation between the two countries in the field of science and technology and suggested that an Uzbek delegation consisting of businesses and technology activists visit Iran to review all areas of the cooperation and create a roadmap in this regard.

He also invited the Iranian Vice-President for Science and Technology Sattari to his country to attend Tashkent International Investment Forum.

Iranian Delegation to Attend the 46 Asia-Pacific Nations Meeting on Food

TEHRAN (FAO) - A high-level delegation from the Islamic Republic of Iran is expected to join government Ministers and officials from 46 Asia-Pacific countries next month (8 - 11 March) to address the damage done to economies and livelihoods in the food and agriculture sectors, by the global pandemic, animal and crop diseases, and the ongoing disruption caused by the climate crisis.

Advancing the application of innovation, science and digitalization to help an agrifood systems transformation in the world's biggest and hungriest region is among the main points for consideration.

The 36th Session of the FAO Regional Conference for Asia and the Pacific (#APRC36), convened by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), will be hosted by the Government of Bangladesh, in the capital Dhaka. Her Excellency, Sheikh Hasina, Prime Minister of Bangladesh, will welcome delegates to the Conference, which is convened in Hybrid modality.

International, regional and national media may also participate, either in-person or virtually (a media registration link is here).

Implementing the new FAO strategy on dealing with climate change as well as opportunities that are emerging from applications of innovation, science and digitalization in the food and agriculture sectors to provide solutions will form a major part of the discussions.

Ultimately, the goal will be to reach a consensus that balances the needs of people, domestic animals, wildlife, biodiversity, and ecosystems through One Health approaches.

Chadormalu Co. Official Visits Cooperative Store of Industrial Complex



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Director General of Field of Managing Director and Financial Affairs and Human Investment Affairs Deputy of Chadormalu Mining and Industrial Company Eng. Farhad Azarinfar visited the consumer's cooperative store of the industrial complex of the company and called for providing more welfare facilities for the personnel of the company.

This cooperative was launched last year with the supportive approach of managers of the company and membership and share-holding of 3,200 personnel of industrial complex of the company and last month its grand store was inaugurated in the presence of the CEO of company.

In this consumer cooperative store which has been inaugurated in the town of Ardakan, many types of goods, home appliances and foodstuff required by the families are offered with the suitable prices and purchasers can buy the goods either in cash or in installment and it is open to the non-member visitors.

My Esteemed and Valuable Colleagues in Pars Petrochemical Company

Every March evoke the collective efforts of the country's elders and experts to establish one of the well-known companies in the petrochemical industry, which used their capacities and capabilities to develop and prosper the country. That little sapling is now a 23-year-old tree, growing taller and more fertile every day. Today, while celebrating the twenty-third anniversary of the establishment of our dear "Pars", this company has taken long and effective steps in the past year, by the grace of God and with the blessing of the honorable members of the board of directors and the unceasing efforts and cooperation of esteemed managers and colleagues. In solving problems and advancing the affairs of the company, it has taken valuable results and achievements, and we believe that the realization of this important task will not be possible except with the participation, cohesion and convergence, support and empathy of each of you, dear colleagues.

Now, while congratulating the twenty-third anniversary of the establishment of Pars Petrochemical Company to all valuable colleagues, I express my gratitude for the tireless efforts of each of you dear ones, and I hope that by relying on God, redoubled efforts and empathy, we can take more effective steps in Achieve the company's plans, goals and missions. I wish you all happiness, health, prosperity and a happy ending from God Almighty.

Massoud Hassani
Managing Director

All Compartments of Saba Steel Co. Urged To Work on Materializing Production Goals

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The CEO of Persian Gulf Saba Steel Company Dr. Ehsan Dashtianeh in the meeting of council of managers of the company urged all managers and personnel of the company to implement the assigned tasks and emphasized efforts for improving the position of the company and materializing the short and long term programs of it.

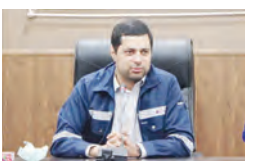
Dashtianeh pointed to the significance of production above all affairs in the company, adding that all efforts of different sections of the company should move on direction of reaching the goals of production and consequently increase of production and reaching the nominal capacities after years since the inauguration of the company.

He reiterated that immediate resolving the existing problems in the production sector and especially timely provision of required parts for improving production condition is the first item on the agenda for materializing the goals of the production.

Dashtianeh went on to say that planning and effective action for implementing developmental projects of the company is very important, adding that study of developmental projects and start of operation for development project of Saba Steel Company is one of the long term goals of the company and this issue will be on the agenda as of today.

He also called for implementing training and educational programs to empower the human resources of the company.

In the meeting every manager of different sections of the company briefed the participants of the performance of their sections and spoke out their problems and challenges.



Brazil Storm Death Toll Rises to 152

RIO DE JANEIRO (Dispatches) - The death toll from torrential rains that triggered flash floods and landslides in the scenic Brazilian city of Petropolis has risen to 152, authorities said Sunday, as the pope sent his condolences.

Rescue workers and residents searching for their missing relatives continued digging through mountains of mud and rubble in the southeastern city, which President Jair Bolsonaro said Friday looked like “scenes of war.”

Police said 165 people remain missing after Tuesday’s storm. It is unlikely any more will be found alive beneath the wreckage, authorities say.



Bukele to Propose Granting Salvadoran Citizenship to Foreign Investors

SAN SALVADOR (Dispatches) - El Salvador President Nayib Bukele said he will send Congress a proposal to grant citizenship to foreigners who invest in the Central American country as well as other initiatives to reduce government hurdles in order to attract investment projects.

Bukele did not specify whether the bills would be aimed exclusively at bitcoin-linked entrepreneurs, but during the week he referred to El Salvador as “the land of #Bitcoin freedom.”

“I’m sending 52 legal reforms to congress to remove red tape, reduce bureaucracy, create tax incentives, citizenship, in exchange for investments, new securities laws, stability contracts, etc,” Bukele said on Twitter.



Russia, Belarus Extend Military Drills; Blinken Pins Hope on Diplomacy



MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russia will extend military drills in Belarus that were due to end on Sunday, the Belarusian defense ministry announced, in a step U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said made him more worried about an imminent Russian invasion of Ukraine.

The defense ministry said the decision was taken because of military activity near the borders of Russia and Belarus as well as the situation in eastern Ukraine’s Donbass region.

Sporadic shelling across the line dividing Ukrainian government forces and Russian-backed separatists in that region increased sharply last week and continued on Sunday.

Speaking to CNN, Blinken said all signs suggested Russia was about to invade. Russia has repeatedly denied such plans. “Everything we are seeing suggests that this is dead serious, that we are on the brink of an invasion,” Blinken said, adding that the West was equally prepared if Moscow invades.

“...Until the tanks are actually rolling, and the planes are flying, we will use every opportunity and every minute we have to see if diplomacy can still dissuade President (Vladimir) Putin from carrying this forward.” read more

Putin and his French counterpart, Emmanuel Macron, agreed in a phone call on the need for a diplomatic solution to the crisis in eastern Ukraine, both governments said.

A French presidential adviser said the two agreed that a meeting of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), with representatives from Ukraine and Russia, should be held on Monday.

Poland, currently the OSCE chair, earlier said that at Ukraine’s request it was convening an extraordinary session of the council, which was dedicated to preventing armed conflict, on Monday.

Belarus did not say how long Russian troops in Belarus - estimated by NATO to number 30,000 - might now remain in the country, which lies north of Ukraine. Belarus Defence Minister Viktor Khrenin said the focus of the extended exercises was “to ensure an adequate response and de-escalation of military preparations of ill-wishers near our common borders”.

The Kremlin did not comment on the Belarus drills. The Macron adviser said that Putin had reiterated that the troops would leave Belarus after the exercises.

NATO says Russia could use the troops in Belarus as part of an invasion force to attack Ukraine. Moscow denies any such intention.

“It is not an exaggeration to say that Europe is a step away from war, which was something unimaginable not long ago,” Czech Prime Minister Petr Fiala said in a TV interview.

Mykhailo Podolyak, an adviser to the Ukrainian president’s chief of staff, told Reuters the extension of the exercises underlined that official promises from Moscow should not be taken as binding.

Police Reclaim Canada Capital After Trucker Siege Ends

OTTAWA (Dispatches) - The last big rigs were being towed Sunday out of Canada’s capital, where the streets were quiet for the first time in three weeks after a massive police operation ended a drawn-out siege over Covid health rules.

A major cleanup was underway in Ottawa’s snowy downtown, where police in riot gear faced off with trucker-led demonstrators for two full days, finally driving them out of their protest hub outside parliament.

The last few protesters stayed late into Saturday night, singing 80s protest anthems and setting off fireworks at a four-meter-high (13-foot) security fence hastily erected around the parliamentary precinct.

But the last gasp protest-turned-street-party fizzled as a deep freeze gripped the city.

Sunday morning, police were manning checkpoints restricting access to a 500-acre downtown area, while a sizeable force remained on standby to defend the ground reclaimed from the truckers.

An AFP journalist saw only a handful of protesters in the area, testing the perimeter.



Tear Gas Fired at Sudan Anti-Coup Protest as UN Expert Arrives

KHARTOUM (Dispatches) - Sudanese security forces on Sunday fired tear gas at protesters demonstrating against last year’s military coup, an AFP correspondent, as a United Nations human rights expert arrived in the country.

Thousands rallied in the capital Khartoum, carrying the Sudanese flags and posters of people killed during anti-coup demonstrations in recent months.

Security forces fired tear gas and wounded several protesters who were heading toward the presidential palace in central Khartoum, the correspondent said.

“We are ready to protest all year,” said one demonstrator, 24-year-old Thoyaba Ahmed.

Regular protests have rocked the northeast African country since army chief Abdel Fattah al-Burhan led a military takeover in October, sparking international condemnation.

The move derailed a transition painstakingly negotiated between military and civilian leaders following the 2019 ouster of president Omar al-Bashir.

“We want to rectify our country’s situation to have a good future,” demonstrator Wadah Khaled told AFP.

At least 81 people have been killed and hundreds wounded in a violent crackdown on the protests, according to an independent medics group.

“We need to make sacrifices to resolve the country’s issues,” 25-year-old demonstrator Arij Salah said.

UN human rights expert Adama Dieng meanwhile is visiting Sudan until Thursday, on a trip initially planned for last month but postponed at the request of Sudanese authorities.

“Dieng will meet with senior Sudanese government officials, representatives of civil society organizations, human rights defenders, heads of UN entities, and diplomats,” the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights said in a statement this week.

Hong Kong in “All-Out Combat” to Contain COVID Outbreak

HONG KONG (Dispatches) - Hong Kong is in “all-out combat” to contain a surge in coronavirus cases, the city’s number two official said on Sunday, with the ramping up of community isolation and treatment units helped by mainland Chinese construction teams.

Scenes of people lying outside public hospitals in the rain and chilly weather have shocked many in the global financial hub, leading to an apology from authorities. Officials have now organized facilities to shelter patients amid a drop in temperatures as healthcare facilities are overwhelmed.

Officials reported 6,067 new COVID-19 cases on Sunday, a day after the government announced that the Kai Tak Cruise Terminal would be turned into a dedicated COVID facility with 1,000 beds to mitigate overburdened public hospitals.

Hong Kong’s embattled leader Carrie Lam, who attended a ground-breaking ceremony at a construction site for nearly 10,000 COVID units at Penny’s Bay close to the city’s Disneyland resort, said the initiatives would enhance the city’s anti-epidemic capacity “within a very short period of time”.

In what was seen as a rebuke to the Hong Kong authorities’ handling of the spiralling outbreak,

Chinese President Xi Jinping said fighting the virus must now be their “overriding mission”, in comments carried in the state-backed Ta Kung Pao newspaper on Wednesday.

Hong Kong’s top civil servant, John Lee, said in a blog post on Sunday that the city’s “government has entered a state of all-out combat.”

The global financial hub’s “dynamic zero-COVID” policies, mirroring those in mainland China, have contributed to its current woes and are unsustainable, some experts say.

The city’s public hospitals have been severely stretched, struggling to cope with an influx of patients including the elderly, many of whom have resisted vaccinations.

Health official Sara Ho said on Sunday that she understood public frustration but urged patients to fully cooperate with hospital staff. Health chief Sophia Chan said the government was considering tightening social distancing rules further.

While the city has so far ruled out a city-wide lockdown, authorities are examining mandatory testing for its 7.4 million people.

Sunday’s COVID tally was slightly higher than Saturday’s 6063 cases, and the city reported 14 deaths.



Nepal Police Teargas Protesters

KATHMANDU (Dispatches) - Police in Kathmandu fired teargas and water cannon to disperse protesters opposed to a U.S.-funded infrastructure program that was presented in parliament for ratification on Sunday, witnesses and officials in Nepal’s capital said.

Some protesters were injured in the clashes, they said.

The Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), a U.S. government aid agency, agreed in 2017 to provide \$500 million in grants to fund a 300-kilometre (187 mile) electricity transmission line and a road improvement project in Nepal.

Government officials said the grant will not have to be repaid and has no conditions attached, but opponents say the agreement would undermine Nepal’s laws and sovereignty as lawmakers would have insufficient oversight of the board directing the infrastructure project.

Despite loud protests, the Minister for Communication and Information Technology Gyanendra Bahadur Karki put forward the agreement in parliament and said the projects would benefit 24 million of Nepal’s 30 million population.

“The grant will be an important tool for the socio-economic development of the country,” Karki said in the parliament.

Major political parties, including members of the ruling coalition, are split over whether to accept or reject the U.S. grant money.

The U.S. Embassy in Nepal described the \$500 million MCC grant as “a gift from the American people and a partnership between our nations that will bring jobs and infrastructure to Nepal and improve the lives of Nepalis.”

“This project was requested by the Nepali government and the Nepali people and designed to transparently reduce poverty and grow the economy of Nepal,” the embassy said in a statement issued late on Saturday.

“Whether Nepali leaders ratify MCC is a decision for Nepal to make, as a sovereign democratic nation, and Nepal’s decision alone,” it added.

Nepal relies heavily on foreign aid, and donors coordinate development aid policy through the Nepal Development Forum, whose members include donor countries and international financial organizations.





Zaferanie Apt (\$2500)
200sq.m, 3bdrs
S/p, Sauna
J, balcony
fireplace
Fully Furn

Shanon (adviser)

Elahieh Villa (\$5000)
1000sq.m
5bdrs, S/p
S, J, & yard
yard, & pkg
Fully Furn

Parsian

Kamranieh (\$2200) 200sq.m, 3bdrs, S/p, F.F
Pasdaran (\$1600) 140sq.m, 3bdrs, S/p, F.F
Fereshteh (\$2000) 210sq.m, 3bdrs, S/p, F.F

Sa'adat abad (\$1700)
180sq.m, 3bdrs, S/pool
balcony, & Fully Furn

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Gazprom Deliveries at Lowest Level Over Last 6 Months

MUNICH (Dispatches) - Over the past six months Gazprom has delivered gas to Europe at the lowest levels it could according to its contracts, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said. “What we’ve seen over the last six months is that Gazprom has delivered always at the lowest level,” she told the Munich Security Conference. “They have to deliver by contract. They have contracts that say pay or deliver. So often they’ve chosen the payment instead of delivering gas, and the storage of Gazprom in our storage is at a 10-year low this year.”



India, UAE Eye \$100b in Annual Trade After Signing Trade Pact

NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - India and the United Arab Emirates signed a broad trade and investment pact that will eventually cut all tariffs on each other’s goods and aims to increase annual trade between the two nations to \$100 billion within five years.

The virtual signing ceremony marks the first trade deal sealed by the Persian Gulf state since it began pursuing such pacts last September in a bid to strengthen its status as a business hub.

Piyush Goyal, India’s commerce minister, told reporters the deal could create more than a million jobs for India in the next few years, particularly in labor intensive sectors such as the auto industry, plastics, leather and engineering.

Earlier, India’s Prime Minister Narendra Modi and UAE de facto ruler Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan witnessed the signing by senior officials from both nations, already major trade partners, during a virtual summit between the leaders.

“The agreement ... not only deepens our economic and trading relationship with a close partner but unlocks a new phase of global cooperation for us,” Sheikh Mohamed said in a joint statement.

The Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), as it is known, is expected to boost annual bilateral non-oil trade from \$60 billion to \$100 billion within the next three to five years, India’s Prime Minister’s office said.

“There will be a huge flow of trade and investments between both nations and it’s going to open the door for more business opportunities,” Emirati Minister State for Foreign Trade Thani Al Zeyoudi told Reuters.

The CEPA is expected to be implemented by May after the UAE cabinet approval, Goyal said.

The agreement, which was not immediately made public, eliminates 80% of tariffs on UAE and India goods, while all tariffs are to be removed within ten years, Al Zeyoudi said.

UAE commodities like aluminum, copper and petrochemicals would benefit from the removal of tariffs, he said.

The deal also covers services, investments, intellectual property, and a commitment by the UAE to create 140,000 highly skilled jobs by 2030.

India is the second largest trading partner of the UAE, where each year billions of dollars in remittances are sent home by more than three million Indians working in the Persian Gulf state.

The UAE economy ministry said by 2030 the CEPA would add \$9 billion, or 1.7%, to UAE gross domestic product, exports would increase \$7.6 billion, or 1.5%, and imports would rise to \$14.8 billion, or 3.8%.

The UAE is pursuing similar trade and investment deals with nations including Turkey and South Korea, and expects to soon finalize bilateral negotiations with Israel and Indonesia.

It has also announced a raft of regulatory and social reforms in recent years to make business and life easier in the country where most of the 10 million population are foreigners. “We’re moving from a regional to a global hub,” Al Zeyoudi said, referring to the trade deals and policy announcements.

ADB Supports Indonesia’s Energy Transition

JAKARTA (Dispatches) - The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has pledged to continue its strong support for Indonesia’s energy transition initiative through its financial facilitation.

Its president, Masatsugu Asakawa reaffirmed his commitment during a meeting with Indonesian President Joko Widodo, popularly known as Jokowi, at the Bogor Presidential Palace on Friday.

“ADB has expressed support for financing the energy transition and other financing for several ongoing projects,” Indonesian Planning Minister Suharso Monoarfa said.

The regional development bank is currently financing 14 ongoing projects, he said in a statement today, adding that Indonesia and the bank have worked together for 55 years.

ADB, on Feb 17, approved a US\$150 million loan to support the country’s green infrastructure projects to help the country reach the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

Indonesia is speeding up the clean energy transition towards net-zero emissions by 2060 through development of renewable energy, energy conservation, and use of clean energy technology. The country has launched a 16,000-hectare green industrial park in Bulungan Regency, North Kalimantan province in December last year.

Solar power plants and hydropower plants will power the park, setting the model for future green industrial parks development to support the country’s energy transition. The park, a partnership between Indonesia, China, and United Arab Emirates investors, aimed at attracting high-tech and precision companies such as solar panels, green aluminum and lithium-ion batteries.



Pakistan Gov’t Eyes People’s Gold to Increase Forex Reserves

ISLAMABAD (Dispatches) - The proposal has been discussed in the Economic Executive Council (EEC) – the body comprising all economic ministers and the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) governor, The Express Tribune newspaper reported, citing sources in the Pakistan’s Ministry of Finance.

Prime Minister Imran Khan-led government is considering a proposal to borrow gold biscuits and bars from the people to increase Pakistan’s foreign exchange reserves that remain on a sliding path despite taking over \$5b loans in the past three months from bilateral and multilateral creditors, according to a media report on Sunday.

The proposal has been discussed in the Economic Executive Council (EEC) – the body comprising all economic ministers and the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) governor, The Express Tribune newspaper reported, citing sources in the Ministry of Finance.

According to the proposal, the commercial banks will issue a negotiable discounted instrument to the gold owner and pay an interest rate on the precious metal. The commercial bank will deposit the gold with the SBP that can monetize it to increase the foreign exchange reserves –already largely built by taking expensive foreign loans.

The central bank already has 2.01 million fine troy ounces of gold reserves valued at \$3.8b, according to the SBP’s reserves position statement of December 31, 2021.

The central bank’s reserves have constantly been on a declining path and further slid to \$17b as of February 11, according to the SBP statement.

Turkey Woos Foreign Firms as Global Supply Crunch Bites

ANKARA (Dispatches) - Turkey is seizing its geographic advantage to woo companies as the skyrocketing cost of sea freight and pandemic-related disruptions to supply chains push some European companies to reduce their dependence on Asia.

President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has promoted a new slogan for exports: “Made in Turkiye,” marketing products in Turkish instead of the internationally known “Made in Turkey.”

The country’s exports reached a record \$225.4 billion (TL 3.07 trillion) last year, with a target of \$300 billion set for 2023.

“Many international companies are taking action to supply more from Turkey,” Burak Dağhoğlu, head of the presidency’s investment office, told Agence France-Presse (AFP).

He said the country offers automakers or textile companies a “competitive talent pool, sophisticated industrial competencies, well-developed services industries, perfect geographic location and state-of-the-art logistic infrastructure.”

Furniture retail company Ikea announced last year it wanted to move part of its production to Turkey.

The Italian clothing group Benetton told AFP it wants to “increase its production volumes in countries closer to Europe, including Turkey.”

Peter Wolters, vice-chairperson of the Netherlands-Turkey Chamber of Commerce, said the business group received “requests from the household and garden sector, textile and fashion and also yacht building industry who search for new partners in Turkey.”

Japanese electronics contractor Kaga Electronics is going to build a factory in Turkey, shifting a portion of the production from China and Southeast Asia, it also said back in December.

The company said it hopes to take advantage of Turkey’s strategic location and expand the Middle East and Europe orders. “Kaga hopes to leverage its new production base to win orders related to auto-related parts as well,” it said.

It has become extremely expensive to ship goods from Asia.

As a result of container shortages, the cost of freight between China and northern Europe has increased ninefold since February 2020, according to the Freightos Baltic Index.

While a cargo ship can take weeks to travel from Asia to Europe, Turkey is only three days away by truck.

Inflation in Asia Stays Relatively Cool

MANILA (Bloomberg) - Unlike the U.S. and Europe, moderate inflationary pressures are so far allowing central bankers in many Asian nations to hold the line on interest rates to help drive economic recoveries.

While price pressures are creeping up in India and Thailand, Asia still enjoys inflation rates that are relatively subdued compared to the rest of the world. In Japan, price growth is still too weak for the central bank to consider pulling back its stimulus measures.

In the U.S., recent figures showed a larger-than-forecast jump in prices paid to producers, while inflation across Europe is taking a bigger toll on consumers, especially for food and fuel.

Here are some of the charts that appeared on Bloomberg this week on the latest developments in the global economy:

Emerging Asia’s central banks from Indonesia to Thailand have enjoyed room to pause on monetary policy and focus on supporting growth, but pressure to shift course may be building as their global counterparts turn more hawkish and if inflationary pressures build at home.

Avocado growers in the Mexican state of Michoacan are feeling the pain of the U.S.’s decision to suspend imports of the green fruit due to security concerns.

About 20,000 tons of avocado that would have normally been exported this week from Michoacan are still hanging on trees, one producer estimates, meaning growers haven’t seen a single cent since the suspension went into effect Feb. 11.

Japan’s key inflation measure weakened last month, offering support for the Bank of Japan’s view that price growth is still too feeble to consider pulling back its stimulus measures.

The dent in price gains underscores Japan’s status as an outlier amid global inflationary pressures that are prompting central bank action overseas.

Iron ore futures in China capped their biggest weekly loss since the middle of 2019 as Beijing stepped up its campaign to cool prices. China is facing a tricky balancing act as it tries to revive economic growth and also keep inflation in check, with state media warning a new round of impending stimulus spending has handed speculators a chance to drive up iron ore prices.

In the U.S., prices paid to producers jumped in January by more than forecast, pointing to persistent inflationary pressures as companies contend with supply-chain and labor constraints.

The figures, which reflected broad increases across categories, may bolster the case for the Federal Reserve to be more aggressive on raising interest rates and shrinking its bond holdings in the coming months.

IMF Says More Work Needed For Lebanon Deal



WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - After two weeks of talks, the IMF has said it has advanced efforts to secure an aid program to help Lebanon overcome its “unprecedented and complex” economic crisis, but more work is needed.

The country will need fiscal reforms that ensure it can manage its debt load as well as measures to establish a “credible” currency system, the International Monetary Fund said in a statement at the conclusion of its virtual negotiation mission.

“During the mission, progress was made in agreeing on these necessary reform areas, although more work is needed to translate them into concrete policies,” IMF team leader Ernesto Ramirez Rigo said.

The Washington-based lender launched talks last month to pull the Middle Eastern country out of its deepening economic crisis.

In 2020, Lebanon defaulted on its sovereign debt for the first time in its history.

Its currency has lost about 90 per cent of its value on the black market and four out of five Lebanese now live below the poverty line, according to the United Nations, a situation made worse by triple-digit inflation.

Ramirez Rigo said “strong upfront actions will be necessary to start turning the economy around and rebuilding confidence.”

He also urged that “decisive action by the authorities is needed to tackle the deep-seated problem of corruption.”

But any program must include a fiscal plan that “allows the government to invest in critically-needed social spending to support the people,” he added.

IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva last week described the country’s situation as “very, very dire” and said that a comprehensive program was required.

Army Training Jet Crashes “Leaving 3 Dead”

TEHRAN (IFP) - A training jet of the Iranian Army’s Air Force has crashed in the northern city of Tabriz, reportedly killing three people. The F-5 fighter jet crashed, due to “technical faults” in its systems, near Tabriz International Airport in the northwestern side of the city.

An investigation is underway to determine the exact

cause of the incident.

According to the managing director of Tabriz Red Crescent Society, the aircraft hit the wall of an empty school upon its crash, leaving the pilots and a person, who was driving in his car, dead.

But officials of the army are yet to confirm the deaths of the pilots.



World Funds Own Destruction With \$1.8t Subsidies

LONDON (Dispatches) - The world must by 2030 slash \$1.8 trillion in annual subsidies that destroy the environment, in order to “finance a net-zero global economy”, according to a study Thursday from business groups including one founded by tycoon Richard Branson.

The report, estimating the value of damaging state subsidies, was commissioned by Branson’s nonprofit initiative The B Team and global coalition Business for Nature, which comprises academic, corporate and environmental organizations.

The vast subsidies, totalling two per cent of global gross domestic product, fund the “global destruction of nature” and governments worldwide must act, the two organizations said in a statement.

The study “finds the fossil fuel, agriculture and water industries receive more than 80 per cent of all environmentally harmful subsidies per year”, the organizations concluded.

And they called upon governments to “redirect, repurpose or eliminate” those subsidies by 2030 to help “finance a net-zero global economy”.

At least 20 nations were subsidizing the price of gasoline or petrol, sparking higher emissions of carbon and other dangerous air pollutants, the research suggested.

Beef and soy production were also stimulated by “significant” subsidy flows that are a cause of tropical rainforest loss in Brazil, the report found.

European policies on biofuel blending biofuels with motor fuel meanwhile ramped up pressure for new cropland, often at the expense of tropical biodiversity hotspots, the study added.

And illegal logging, often via corruption and favoritism over lumbering concessions, contributed to climate change, deforestation and ecosystem destruction.

“Nature is declining at an alarming rate, and we have never lived on a planet with so little biodiversity,” said Christiana Figueres, head of The B Team’s climate group.

“At least \$1.8 trillion is funding the destruction of nature and changing our climate, while creating huge risks for the very businesses who are receiving the subsidies.”

Governments across the world pay an estimated \$640 billion in support to the fossil fuel industry, contributing to climate change, air and water pollution and land subsidence, the study found.



Agriculture receives some \$520 billion in subsidies that contribute towards soil erosion, water pollution, deforestation, greenhouse gas emissions and loss of biodiversity and natural habitats, it claimed.

And another \$350 billion in subsidies for the water industry is said to help fund water pollution and risk ocean and waterway ecosystems.

Figueres said that “harmful subsidies must be redirected towards protecting the climate and nature, rather than financing our own extinction”.

The study was published one month before the next phase of the UN biodiversity summit COP15 in Geneva. The research was based on data from the International Energy Agency watchdog and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, which is a club of industrialized economies that includes wealthy G20 members.

After ECB Shock, European Firms Confront Higher Borrowing Costs



LONDON (Dispatches) - European companies hoping to fund M&A and capital expenditures on bond markets this year are facing a sudden jump in borrowing costs and wary buyers after the ECB’s shock pivot towards tighter monetary policy.

Bond issues are a key source of funding for companies and have grown in importance relative to bank loans in the euro zone, particularly since the financial crisis.

Caught out by European Central Bank President Christine Lagarde’s hawkish tone after the bank’s February meeting - which opened the door to rate hikes this year - bonds from investment-grade (IG) European firms have seen yields surge 60 basis points.

Euro credit had been less hit by January volatility stirred by the U.S. Federal Reserve’s hawkishness, with IG bonds delivering less than half the losses in the United States. ,

But those falls accelerated post-ECB and yields have more than doubled this year to as high as 1.18%, the highest since May 2020, according to BofA.

That’s still extremely low, but a sudden jump in borrowing costs is significant. If continued, it can impact companies’ ability to invest, eventually slowing economic growth, so central banks watch credit spreads carefully.

Nearly half of investors in BofA’s February credit investor survey said IG spreads rising to 150-175 bps, from around 110 bps currently, would prompt a dovish turn from the ECB.

A mergers and acquisitions boom and the need for capital investment has been seen by many as driving a rise in European corporate bond sales this year -- JPMorgan for instance expects a record 645 billion euros of IG issuance.

While moves so far are not enough to derail those expectations, Helene Jolly, head of EMEA IG corporate syndicate at Deutsche Bank, said borrowers and investors were adjusting to “the new normal”.

“Corporates have had to look at the new levels of coupons that are being required because of the rates being paid... and investors have had to think about what does this mean for me, what’s my outlook on rates now and where do I want to play,” Jolly said.

Sentiment has turned rapidly -- just 16% of European credit investors are positioned net long on IG debt, the lowest since 2019 and down from 27% in December, while corporate debt funds are holding more cash than they have in years, BofA’s survey found.

U.S. Sanctions on Russian Banks West’s Most Potent Economic Threat

LONDON (Dispatches) - For NATO members, the most powerful measure against Russia were it to invade Ukraine would be U.S. sanctions cutting off Russian state banks from the dollar according to Russian executives, bankers, and former senior U.S. sanctions officials.

The United States has warned that Russia could invade as early as this week. Moscow denies it has such plans but says the West needs to take its concerns about NATO expansion seriously.

Washington, and its allies in Europe, are finalizing an extensive package of sanctions if Russia were to launch an invasion according to U.S. and European officials.

The U.S. package would expand a technology export ban to include any goods made with U.S. components or software, as well as proposed sanctions against specific Russian billionaires. But sanctions experts say more than any other measure, aggressive action against Russia’s state banks would hit its economy the hardest.

“Banking sanctions are the most impactful measure the U.S. can carry out in the short term,” said Brian O’Toole, a former senior advisor to the director of the Office of Foreign Assets Control or OFAC in the U.S. Treasury Department, which designs and manages the implementation of sanctions.

Proposed sanctions against Russian banks would bar them from making any transactions in U.S. dollars, essentially freezing any dollar-denominated assets or liabilities held by the banks at home and abroad.

Russian Finance Minister Anton Siluanov said sanctions against Russian banks would be “unpleasant” and lead to a spike in volatility, but said the state would make sure that all deposits with banks and all transactions, including in foreign currencies, were secured. Russia’s abundant hard currency reserves – now at \$635bn – would help shield against the potential blow, he said.

When asked about possible sanctions on Russian state banks, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told Reuters that Russia was “preparing for unpredictable actions” from the United States “by hedging against any risks.”

He said: “We could get the impression that all this information noise and all these claims that Russia is about to attack Ukraine are being made to further contain Russia and to create a reason to impose further sanctions - and so they are speaking about these hellish sanctions.”

Elina Ribakova, deputy chief economist at the Institute of International Finance in Washington said even though Russia has enough reserves, the potential measures “could cause a run on deposits. It will definitely have a strong impact on the domestic financial system. It will raise the risk of financial instability including a widening of spreads and a sell-off of the rouble.”

U.S. sanctions far outweigh the power of any other jurisdiction because the White House can potentially impose secondary sanctions on any foreign banks continuing to deal with these institutions, said O’Toole and Tom Keatinge, finance and security expert at the Royal United Services Institute, a London-based think tank. The White House did not answer requests for comment about secondary sanctions.

Shares in banking giant Sberbank and smaller rival VTB have both fallen in the past week on the prospect of sanctions, although recovered some losses after Russia said on Tuesday that some troops stationed near borders with Ukraine were returning to base after completing drills

Sberbank holds nearly half of Russia’s 21 trillion roubles in deposits and together with state lenders VTB, Gazprombank, and Rosselkhozbank accounts for nearly 60% of the nation’s banking assets.

Sberbank, VTB and the Russian Central Bank declined to comment. Gazprombank and Rosselkhozbank did not respond to requests for comment.

“Taking out Sberbank would have massive ramifications,” O’Toole added.

The nature of the sanctions would likely hinge on the scale of a Russian invasion.

A Russian invasion limited to an incursion into the rebel-held Donbass region of east Ukraine for example, might mean the United States staggered its targeting of the Russian state banks in order to maintain further deterrence, potentially keeping Sberbank until last, said Daniel Fried, a former State Department coordinator for sanctions policy in the Obama administration.

But “if the Kremlin goes in big, so could we, and we might go in heavy in any case,” Fried said.

Sanctions on banks would be partly aimed at forcing Russia’s central bank to dig into its hard currency reserves in order to bail out the banks and keep them afloat, O’Toole and Fried both said. The central bank declined to comment on hard currency reserves and sanctions.

Vietnam’s Economy to Grow at 6.7% in 2022

HANOI (Dispatches) - Vietnam’s economy is predicted to bounce back strongly, growing at 6.7 per cent this year and 7.0 per cent in 2023, according to Standard Chartered Bank.

The global economy, meanwhile, has been forecast to grow at a 4.4 per cent rate this year, said Edward Lee, chief economist for ASEAN and South Asia at Standard Chartered Bank, against the 5.8 percent growth rate in 2021.

High base effects, tighter monetary and fiscal policies, global supply-chain disruptions, and elevated inflation are expected to moderate the recovery momentum, following a strong bounce earlier in 2021 driven by initial vaccine rollouts and government stimuli were contributing factors.

Vietnam’s economic recovery should kick into high gear by the end of the first quarter of 2022, gaining momentum for the rest of the year as well as for the medium-term growth, said Tim Leelahaphan, economist for Vietnam and Thailand at Standard Chartered Bank.

Leelahaphan said he expected the South East Asian country to remain a key part of the global supply chain as rising wages in China, US-China trade tensions have compelled companies to relocate their production centers out of China or to opt for a China+1 strategy.

As this diversification process continues over the medium term, Vietnam has a strong appeal to become an alternative manufacturing base.

Ben Hung, CEO for Asia at Standard Chartered Bank added: “The future of sustainability and our journey towards net-zero require joint efforts and collective action.

“Vietnam is an important market in Standard Chartered’s Asia footprint and we are committed to investing in the country to help finance its sustainable development and secure greater economic prosperity.

President...

FROM PAGE 1

Emir of Qatar, for his part, said that the agreements signed with Iran increase cooperation between Iran and Qatar, attaching great importance to the role of joint committees in enhancing bilateral ties.

The Emir also further stressed the need for cessation of the Israeli regime’s aggression on the Palestinians, emphasizing that the Palestinians have the right to self-determination.

On the ongoing Vienna talks, Al-Thani said that his country hopes that an agreement will be concluded that will meet the demands of all parties and guarantee the rights of all countries to peaceful use of nuclear energy.

The Emir of Qatar gave his country’s national football kit to Raisi after congratulating Iran on qualifying for the 2022 world cup in Qatar as the first Asian country.

The president will also attend a meeting with Iranians living in Qatar this evening, as well as with Qatari and Iranian businessmen, and the two countries’ high-level delegations will discuss the most important bilateral issues.

Raisi and his accompanying delegation arrived in Doha on Monday morning to meet with high-ranking Qatari officials and attend the 6th Summit Meeting of the Gas Exporting Countries Forum (GECF) in Doha.

During the meeting, Emir of Qatar gifted the president with a kit of Qatar’s national soccer team.

Inflation Continues...

FROM PAGE 1

It said the point-to-point inflation rate declined by 0.5% from January to 35.4% in late February. The measure, frequently used SCI reports over the past years, reflects the price increases compared to the single month to late February of 2021.

The figures come against a backdrop of statements by Iranian authorities suggesting an administrative government that came to office in August have managed to control rising prices in the country.

The downward trend in the Iranian inflation rate started in October when the annual CPI dropped slightly to 45.4% as per figures by the SCI.

The government hopes the trend will continue in the upcoming months with a stronger rial and better crude oil exports.

Agreement in Vienna...

FROM PAGE 1

Negotiations in Vienna have progressed due to the initiatives of the Iranian negotiating team. Still, President Joe Biden’s reluctance to compensate for the former US administration’s illegal actions has cast doubt on Washington’s seriousness in returning to the JCPOA and has prolonged the negotiation process.

The Islamic Republic of Iran, as a responsible country, has repeatedly stated that, given that the United States has violated the JCPOA agreement, it is Washington that must return to the agreement by lifting sanctions. The implementation of US commitments needs to be verified.

Iran-Afghanistan...

FROM PAGE 1

He said that the Army recognized it as its duty to render to people any services they need via its engineering, health and transportation equipment and human resources.

The commander also promised that the Army would equip Hirman Hospital and provide it with the necessary equipment. The Iranian government is trying its best through diplomatic communications to secure the water right of Hirmand River, Bagheri underlined.

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Bautista Agut Captures 10th Career Title

DOHA (Dispatches) - Roberto Bautista Agut captured his 10th career title by defeating reigning champion Nikoloz Basilashvili in the Qatar Open final.

The world number 16 from Spain triumphed 6-3, 6-4 to avenge his loss to the Georgian in last year's Doha championship match. "I am very happy. It has been a while since I lifted a trophy. I have been working very hard to reach another final and to get the chance to win another title," said the 33-year-old whose last title came at the same event in 2019.

Beijing Closes Curtain On Winter Games

BEIJING (Dispatches) - Beijing doused its Olympic flame on Sunday night, closing a Games that will be remembered for the extremes of its anti-COVID-19 measures and outrage over the doping scandal that enveloped 15-year-old Russian skating sensation Kamila Valieva.

Chinese President Xi Jinping was on hand for the snowflake-themed ceremony at the Bird's Nest stadium, where International Olympic Committee President Thomas Bach described the Beijing Games as "truly exceptional" before declaring them closed.

The Beijing Games, contained inside a "closed loop", were the second Olympics in six months to be deprived by COVID-19 of much of its festivity.

They were also stalked by politics, with several countries staging a diplomatic boycott over China's human rights record, and the specter of invasion of Ukraine by Russia, with President Vladimir Putin attending the opening ceremony in a show of solidarity against the West with Xi.

Still, China was spared any embarrassing protests by competitors over its treatment of the Uyghur Muslim minority or anything else, and the thousands of foreign journalists on hand were stuck inside the closed-loop, unable to report more widely.

Sunday night's ceremony was capped by a 90-second fireworks display that spelled out "one world, one family," followed by a rendition of "Auld Lang Syne".

During the ceremony, Bach praised Beijing's organisers and made a call for unity as well as universal access to COVID-19 vaccines.

"You embraced each other, even if your countries are divided by conflict," he said. "The unifying power of the Olympic Games is stronger than the forces that want to divide us: you give peace a chance."

Bach was seated next to Xi during the opening ceremony, with space between them.

On one side of the stadium, which was roughly half full, red Chinese lanterns projected a glow as Olympic athletes entered en masse to "Ode to Joy", dancing and taking selfies.

The Chinese team drew cheers that grew louder when San Francisco-born freestyle skier Eileen Gu, who won two golds and a silver for China, was shown on-screen.

Xi and his wife, Peng Liyuan, joined in the applause, and Xi was later shown looking through binoculars at the spectacle of athletes walking across the illuminated LED-screen floor of the vast stadium.

Later, a group of 365 people bade farewell with a glowing green willow twig,



enacting a traditional Chinese gesture of regret over parting.

Beijing's tightly sealed bubble prevented the spread of the novel coronavirus at the Olympics or into the community, vindicating a zero-COVID policy that has isolated China inside what are nearly closed borders that shows no sign of easing.

However, many athletes had their Olympic dreams dashed by positive tests that prevented them from competing.

Dozens saw their preparations disrupted by enforced isolation, leading team officials and athletes to demand improved conditions including better food, internet, training equipment and more space.

On the snow, the 18-year-old Gu delivered on the hype generated by her dozens of endorsement deals making her the youthful face of the Games even as her success raised questions about nationality and privilege.

Gu's performance is a boon for the development of snow sports in China. Xi hopes that hosting the Games will get 300 million people involved in winter sports.

China's nine gold medals exceeded expectations, putting it in third place, while winter sports powerhouse Norway, with a population of just 5.5 million, won a record 16.

While Xi delivered a spectacle for a Chinese public that was unable to attend - tickets were not sold and many connected with the Olympics through the unexpected mania for panda mascot Bing Dwen Dwen - millions of Americans tuned out, with TV viewership reported to be far lower than during the 2018 Pyeongchang Games.

The biggest legacy of the Beijing Olympics will be the controversy surrounding Valieva, who stumbled under pressure in her final skate, and the outrage directed towards Russian sports officials and the country's history of doping, which meant its athletes could not compete under Russia's flag.

Valieva failed a doping test at her national championships in December but the result was only revealed on Feb. 8, a day after she helped the Russian Olympic Committee (ROC) win the team event. She was nonetheless allowed to participate in the singles but finished fourth, her error-strewn performance prompting a harsh reaction from her coach Eteri Tutberidze that the IOC's Bach later said he found "chilling".



LIVERPOOL (Dispatches) - Mohamed Salah said he was proud to score his 150th goal for Liverpool as the Egypt forward helped inspire a 3-1 win against Norwich.

Jürgen Klopp's side were stunned when Milot Rashica's deflected strike put Norwich ahead early in the second half at Anfield.

But Liverpool drew level through Sadio Mané's overhead kick before taking the lead through Salah's landmark effort.

Salah is only the 10th player to reach 150 goals for Liverpool and the second fastest to the milestone after Roger Hunt.

Luis Díaz scored his first Liverpool goal in his fourth appearance since his January move from Porto to wrap up a win that kept the pressure on Premier League leaders Manchester City.

Salah has scored 25 in 30 appearances this season, including 17 in 23 league matches, while the Reds have won their last eight games in all competitions.

"It feels great. I'm always proud to score for this club and the most important thing is to win games which is what we did today," Salah said.

"What we can do is focus on each game and that's the most important thing.

"We know when you fight with City, City most of the time they win games so all we can do is focus on ourselves and see what happens at the end of the season."

Klopp was asked to name his favorite Salah goal and gave a long list in reply, underlining the Egyptian's enduring value to Liverpool.

Man Utd Survive Leeds Storm to Tighten Grip On Top Four

LONDON (Dispatches) - Ralf Rangnick said Manchester United's fightback from blowing another half-time lead to beat Leeds 4-2 was the "best possible response" his side could give to reports of dressing room unrest.

Stories that Cristiano Ronaldo was set to replace Harry Maguire as United captain for the rest of the season were dismissed as "nonsense" by Rangnick this week.

Maguire responded by opening the scoring on 34 minutes before Bruno Fernandes added a second on the stroke of half-time.

Lost leads have been a feature of Rangnick's interim spell in charge and United were punished for another slow start to a second half as Rodrigo's fortunate cross and substitute Raphinha brought Leeds level.

This time, United bounced back to find a winner when Fred smashed in 20 minutes from time before Anthony Elanga sealed the points late on.

"Today it was important not only that we won the game but the way we reacted. That was the best possible response the team could give," said Rangnick.

"A game like this one today you can only win as a team."

On their first league visit to Elland Road in front of a capacity crowd in 19 years, the visitors were met with a hostile atmosphere and a tricky pitch in incessant rain.

United managed to weather the first Leeds storm to take control of the first half.

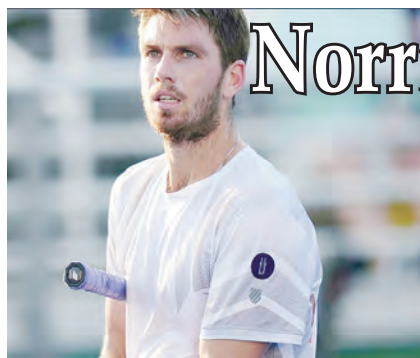
Ostapenko Wins Dubai Title

DUBAI (Dispatches) - Jelena Ostapenko capped a statement week in Dubai by lifting her first hard-court title since 2019 with a dominant 6-0, 6-4 victory over Veronika Kudermetova in the final.

The former French Open champion needed just 64 minutes to overcome Russian world number 31 Kudermetova and capture the fifth singles trophy of her career.

It was a first meeting between the pair, and a first Dubai final between two unseeded players since 2016.

Norrie Advances to ATP Delray Beach Final



"I was really happy with my level," Norrie said. "I played complete games on my serves and in my sets. He's really tricky and comes forward but I was happy

DELRAY BEACH (Dispatches) - British top seed Cameron Norrie defeated U.S. fourth seed Tommy Paul 6-3, 6-3 to reach the ATP Delray Beach Open final.

The 26-year-old left-hander dispatched Paul in 76 minutes to book a date in Sunday's final against the later winner between US second seed Reilly Opelka and Australian John Millman.

I came through on my serve."

World number 13 Norrie, a semi-final loser last year at the Florida venue, saved both the break points he faced.

Norrie captured the opening set in 39 minutes when Paul sent a backhand long and took his match point chance with a sharp crosscourt backhand that forced a forehand volley into the net by Paul.

Norrie, 2-5 in ATP finals, seeks a third tour title after hoisting trophies last year at Indian Wells and Los Cabos.

Opelka, 24, won his third career ATP title last week at Dallas after crowns at New York in 2019 and Delray Beach in 2020.

Millman, 32, won his first ATP title at the 2020 Astana Open in Kazakhstan.

Karl-Anthony Towns Wins NBA 3-Point Shooting Contest

CLEVELAND (Dispatches) - In another sign how basketball has evolved, especially in the NBA, a 6-foot-11 big man won the NBA's 3-point contest.

With 3-point legends Reggie Miller, Ray Allen and Steph Curry watching, Minnesota's Karl-Anthony Towns won the event, besting Atlanta's Trae Young and Los Angeles Clippers' Luke Kennard in the finals.

Towns scored a record 29 points in the final round, making 18 of his first 22 shots, including nine of his first 10, 4-of-5 on his money-ball rack (worth two points each instead of one) and one Mt. Dew shot from deep range.

"I said it on Timberwolves Twitter, I said it everywhere — the only way I'm going to lose this is if someone outshoots me. I ain't going to beat myself out here," Towns said. "I'm up there with the best-shooting big man of all-time."

Towns went up against the game's best 3-point shooters, but this was an opportunity he has relished.

"I've been asking the NBA to let me do this," Towns said as walked into the interview room holding the trophy.



LeBron Can't Explain Scoring in His Strangest NBA Season

CLEVELAND (Dispatches) - LeBron James says injuries and Covid-19 protocols are making this his "strangest" NBA season and he can't explain why he's on pace for his best scoring average since 2010.

The 37-year-old superstar playmaker for the Los Angeles Lakers spoke Saturday on the eve of the 71st NBA All-Star Game at Cleveland, a half hour drive from James's hometown of Akron.

James ranks third in the NBA in scoring at 29.1 points a game, half a point a game behind leader Joel Embiid of Philadelphia.

He's on pace for his top-scoring campaign since averaging 29.7 a game in 2009-10, the seventh and final season of his first stint with the Cleveland Cavaliers.

"I can't explain the groove that I'm in right now offensively. I guess just playing some good basketball," James said. "Just trying to be efficient. I'm not just out there jacking up a bunch of shots."

"I work on my craft. I'm trying to see ways that I can continue to stay in great rhythm and ways I can continue to get better. Even at my age, I'm never satisfied."

